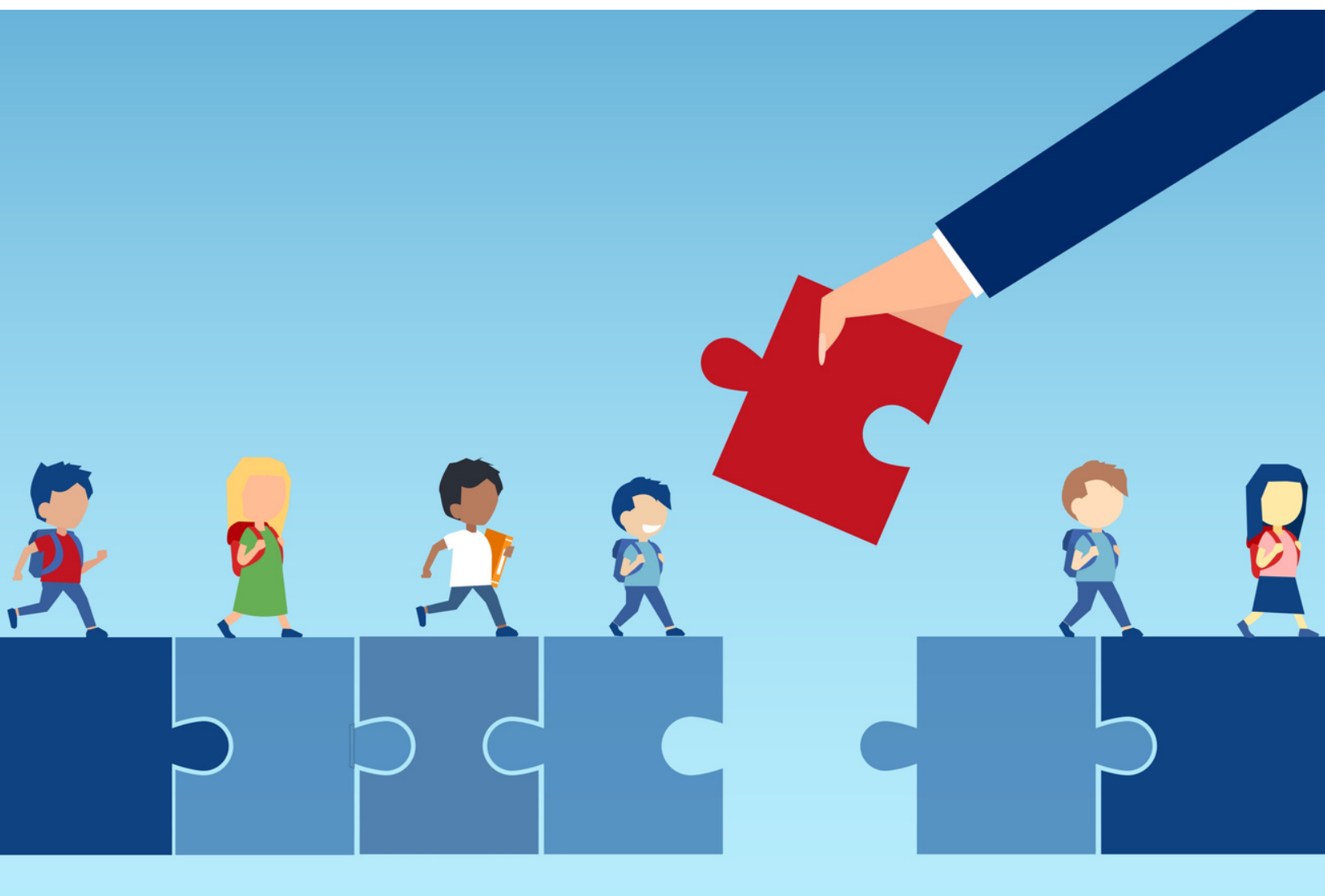


# Standing in the Gap:

A SURVEY OF MIDDLE LEVEL MUSIC EDUCATION IN  
THE UNITED STATES AND ITS TERRITORIES  
(2020-2021)



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2020-2022 NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR MUSIC  
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EDUCATION RESEARCH GRANT



**RUTGERS**

Mason Gross School  
of the Arts



National Association  
for Music Education

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*While this study was funded by both NAFME and the Rutgers Research Council, the views presented herein are solely those of the authors.*

QUESTIONS RELATED TO THIS RESEARCH STUDY MAY BE ADDRESSED TO:  
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# Table of Contents

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Acknowledgments.....	v
Abstract .....	vii
Introduction.....	1
A Focus on Middle Level Music Education and Middle Level Music Teachers.....	3
Purpose, Questions Guiding the Study, and Overview of Methods.....	6
Respondent Population.....	9
Research Question 1: Music Learning Opportunities Available to 5th–8th Grade Students.....	10
Research Question 2: Demographic Profile of Middle Level Music Teachers.....	19
Research Question 3: Middle Level Music Teachers' Perceived Preparation for Teaching Middle Level Students.....	28
Recommendations.....	34
Conclusion.....	37
References.....	39
Appendix A.....	43



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## Abstract

For at least the past century, music educators have advocated for the right of all students to receive music learning at school. Recent discourse has transformed this mission into a discussion of access, equity, and inclusion for all students across K-12 as well as a concern for diversifying the teaching force prepared to teach music education. While all students deserve access to quality music education and qualified music teachers prepared to teach them, there are some gaps in the field's knowledge of how this mission is enacted across the United States. One such gap in knowledge is focused on middle level or 5th-8th grade music learning, a critical period in both student and program development. This survey of public and public charter schools, conducted in 2020-2021, was designed to collect demographic data on available music learning opportunities and the music teachers who work at the surveyed schools. The findings from this study provide a national demographic portrait of available music learning opportunities, the impact of COVID-19 on music learning availability, the teaching responsibilities, demographics, and perceived preparation of those who teach 5th-8th grade music learning. Based on our findings, we offer five suggestions for consideration by music teachers, music teacher educators, school administrators, music researchers, and music advocates.





# Introduction

A major part of the National Association for Music Education's (NAfME) mission is to ensure access to music education for all students in the United States. According to the NAfME website, "Since 1907, NAfME has worked to ensure that every student has access to a well-balanced, comprehensive, and high-quality program of music instruction taught by qualified teachers" (NAfME, 2022). In 1922, when Karl Gehrkins became president of the then Music Supervisors National Conference (the organization that would eventually be renamed NAfME in 2011), he "coined the phrase 'Music for Every Child, Every Child for Music,' which the Conference took as its slogan" (Munkittrick, 2013, p. 22). Throughout the decades, leaders in music education have worked through NAfME to uphold Gehrkins' legacy, advocating for the recognition of music learning as an essential subject in schools and working to ensure all students have access to quality music learning and qualified music teachers. Two examples from the turn of the 21st century demonstrate the relevance of this advocacy for today. First, the authors of the *Housewright Declaration: Vision 2020*, written in 1999 as a vision for music education in the year 2020, identified two relevant statements of agreement: 1) the right of all people "to participate fully in the best music experiences possible" and 2) that "time must be allotted for formal music study at all levels of instruction such that a comprehensive, sequential, and standards-based program of music instruction is made available" (Madsen, 2020, pp. 205–206). The Housewright Declaration also articulated important competencies for music educators, including knowledge of

technology and diverse musics, which help to define a qualified music educator. Second, in the 2015 Every Student Succeeds Act, the current (as of 2022) U.S. federal law for K-12 education, music was finally named as one of the many subjects that contribute to a student's well-rounded education.

These advocacy efforts made by leaders in music education over the last century have propelled music education in the United States forward and provided access to quality music instruction and qualified music teachers for many students. Yet, questions remain regarding which students and teachers or what music learning experiences are included or excluded from this advocacy. As we pause in 2022 to consider a century of advocacy for equitable music education across the nation, we must acknowledge that even before the COVID-19 pandemic, some school communities were underserved in music education and that some age groups were less emphasized in preservice preparation. The transition to virtual learning during the pandemic dramatically shifted the conversation about equity, access, and inclusion in music education, but many inequities preceded the issues that emerged during COVID-19. No contributor to the Vision 2020 Housewright Declaration in 1999 could have foreseen the shifts in priority and other changes in music education that occurred during the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years, the impacts of which the field is just beginning to understand (see Hash, 2021; Shaw & Mayo, 2022). Thus, we contextualize the results of our study, collected during the 2020-2021 school year, within the emerging literature regarding changes in access, equity, and inclusion tied to the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the broader century of music education advocacy focused on quality music learning experiences and excellent music teachers for all K-12 students.

# A Focus on Middle Level Music Education and Middle Level Music Teachers

In music education, 5th–8th grade is a pivotal time for student participation in music learning. The transition from required elementary general music to self-selected ensemble or other music learning participation typically (although not exclusively) occurs in fifth or sixth grade, often before or concurrent with a student's transition from one school building to another. This transition to new forms of musical learning available at school coincides with important developmental changes and cultural identity formation that all young adolescents experience between the ages of 10–15. Cognitive scientists have shown that during young adolescence (approximately ages 10–15), brain development occurs nearly as rapidly as in infancy and when a subject or topic is not included in a student's experience, the brain prunes these neural connections to make way for other connections that the individual has prioritized (Kuhn, 2009). Thus, students for whom music learning is optional at school may cease to develop their ability to think and express themselves in musical ways if they do not continue in music electives or in music learning outside school. Participation and retention in music learning from grades 5–8 is not only important for the vertical success of programs across a school district, but also to ensure the well-rounded development of the young adolescent at this critical period of development.

In alignment with the field of middle level education (Bishop & Harrison, 2021), we define “middle level” as learning that occurs in fifth, sixth, seventh, or eighth grade, regardless of the school building students attend. One major challenge of past research is that much of it has examined only those schools specifically identified as “middle

schools” or those exclusively serving grades five through eight in any combination (see McEwin & Greene, 2011). Yet young adolescents across the United States and its territories are educated in school buildings of many configurations. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, in 2018–2019, 5th–8th grade students were educated in 71,523 public and public charter schools (NCES, 2019). Of these schools, 28,017 were K–5 schools, 17,907 served grades K–8, 15,133 served only middle level grades, and 10,466 served a combination of other grade level configurations such as K–12 or 7–12.

The vision for music education advocated throughout the last century encompassed all forms of musical knowing and doing at all grade levels. Yet the knowledge the field currently possesses regarding the enactment of this vision varies greatly depending on the age of the students involved. Historically, music education research has left a gap between elementary (Abril & Gault, 2006; Miksza & Gault, 2014) and high school music education learning (Elpus, 2015b; Elpus & Abril, 2011; Miksza, 2007) or subsumed middle level learning under the umbrella of “secondary” education (see Abril & Gault, 2008; Give a Note, 2017; NCES, 2016). Recently, scholarship focused exclusively on middle level music education has begun to fill this gap, with a particular focus on the demographics of students who enroll in music at the middle level (Alegrado & Winsler, 2020; Elpus, 2022). In a 2022 study, Elpus reported that “64% of 2016 eighth graders were enrolled in some form of performance or nonperformance (‘general’) music course” and that 34% were “enrolled in one or more of the ensemble courses (band, choir, or orchestra)” (p. 255). While as a field we now

know some details regarding the demographics of students who enroll in middle level music learning, we know very little about what music learning opportunities are available to middle level students across various grade levels and school configurations or whether schools require students to participate in music learning during the middle level grades.

As discussed above, qualified music teachers are essential to ensuring students have access to quality music learning experiences. Recent research has raised important questions about the absence of diversity in the preservice and inservice music educator population (see Austin, 2021; DeLorenzo & Silverman, 2016). In 2015, Elpus (2015a) reported that 86.02% of preservice candidates who took the Praxis II music exam (a common certification exam in many states) between 2008 and 2012 identified as white, English was the first language of 95.17%, and 56.03% were female (reported on a binary). Other music education researchers have investigated the relationship between demographic characteristics and music teacher retention (see Hancock, 2008; Robison & Russell, 2022). While racial, ethnic, or gender demographic data about a music teacher does not provide a complete picture of a specific music teacher's identity or life experience, this data does raise questions about who teaches music, how they are prepared and supported, their readiness to work with diverse student populations, and whether the voices of minority music educators are represented in scholarship.

In the broader field of middle level education, there is an emphasis on specifically preparing teachers in preservice for the unique needs of middle level learners (DeMink-Carthew & Bishop, 2017; Howell et al., 2018; Jagla et al., 2018). This emphasis has led to the development of university preservice preparation programs and middle level teaching

certifications in some states (Faulkner et al., 2017; Howell et al., 2016). However, these programs, designed to ensure teachers are adequately prepared for the unique needs of middle level learners, are typically only available to math, science, language arts, and social studies teachers. Most preservice programs and licensures in music education are (pre)K-12 focused (May et al., 2017). While there are many reasons for the (pre)K-12 focus in music education, this broad emphasis raises questions about the preparation of music teachers to meet the specific developmental and cultural needs of young adolescents in grades 5-8. As the United States faces a major teacher and substitute teacher shortage in 2022, due at least in part to the COVID-19 pandemic, these questions of teacher diversity and preparation are essential as the field (re)considers its longstanding mission to ensure that all students have equitable access to music education.

## **Purpose, Questions Guiding the Study, and Overview of Methods**

One way to assess the success of the last century of music education advocacy is to examine existing practices. The focus of the present study was on music learning at the middle level. In particular, our purpose was to fill the gap in the music education scholarship related to music learning at the middle level by collecting demographic data from schools serving grades 5-8. Specifically, we hoped to better understand the music learning opportunities available to middle level students at public and public charter schools throughout the U.S. and its territories, regardless of the location or grade configuration of the

school a student attended. A secondary purpose was to develop a demographic profile of music educators who teach 5th–8th grade music and their perceived preparation for teaching middle level music education.

In our research, we were guided by three research questions:

- 1. What musical learning experiences are available to students in fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth grade and in what configurations?**
- 2. What is the demographic profile of music teachers teaching middle level music?**
- 3. How do music teachers teaching middle level music perceive their preparation for teaching middle level students?**

To answer these research questions, we designed a survey instrument that was divided into four sections: music learning available at the school, music learning taught by the responding teacher, the teacher's current teaching position, and music teacher respondent demographics. Prior to sending, the survey instrument was tested and revised using both pilot testing and cognitive interviews (Groves et al., 2009). An important emphasis in our study was to be as inclusive as possible of all public and public charter schools that serve grades 5–8. While some existing studies survey music teachers belonging to one or more professional organizations (such as NAfME, American Choral Directors Association, or a state music educators association (MEA)), we chose to select survey respondents based on a stratified

random sample of schools listed in the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2019) “Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey Data 2018–2019 Preliminary Directory” (the most recent directory available when research began). Any school listed in this directory that served at least one grade of fifth, sixth, seventh, or eighth was included in our population of possible schools to survey. Importantly, this included schools located in the U.S. territories, schools designated as part of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and schools that served specific student populations such as special education or juvenile justice centers.

In order to ensure that we selected schools proportionally from across the United States and its territories, schools were organized into 4 regional categories (Midwest, Northeast, South, and West) and 4 grade level categories (K–5, K–8, Middle Level, and Other). In doing so, we collected data on middle level learning as it occurred at named middle schools, but also elementary, K–8, junior highs, high schools, and K–12 schools, among other school building configurations. These regional and grade level categories enabled us to develop a 16-cell stratified random sample of 10,727 schools (15% of schools in each region/grade level combination) to which the survey was distributed. One music teacher in each school received the survey electronically or in hard copy between November 2020 and January 2021. To account for nonresponse bias, we weighted our collected data to align with the original stratification of the schools in the sample. A detailed description of the survey research and data analysis is found in Appendix A.



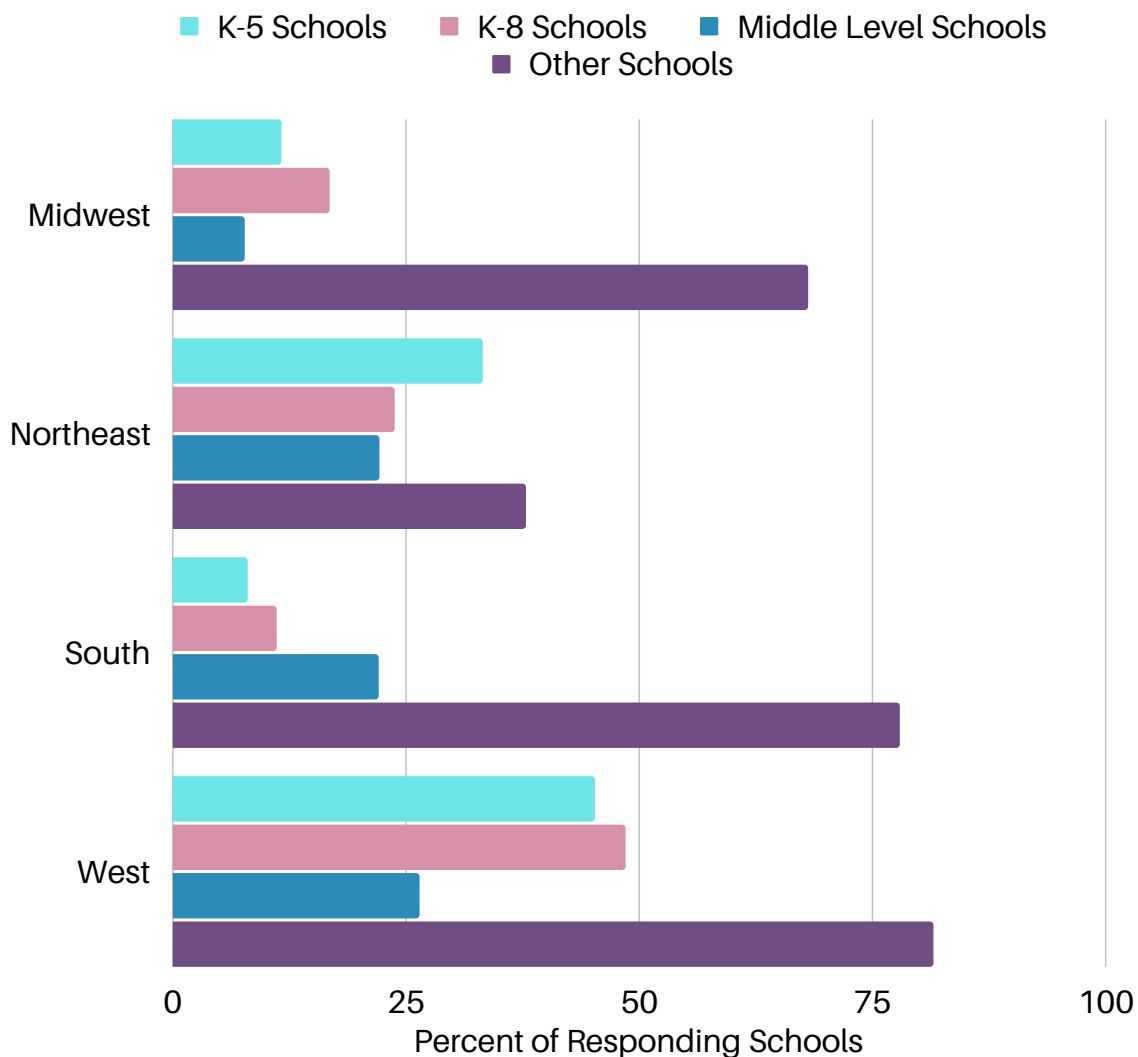
# SURVEY RESULTS

## Respondent Population

In total, 2,749 schools responded to the survey (25.63% overall response rate). There were 32 schools that, when completing the survey, reported a change to their school community in 2020–2021 whereby they no longer served 5th–8th grades. These schools were eliminated from further analysis. Overall, the respondents to the survey were music teachers working in the responding school. However, it is important to understand two exceptions to the music teacher identity of the survey respondents: 1) responding schools with no music program provided this information through another member of school staff and 2) twelve respondents who completed paper surveys were principals responding on behalf of their school about the music offerings available, and thus these twelve individuals did not complete the music teacher demographic section of the survey. Our weighting procedure ensures that the sample of responding schools is representative of the population of schools serving grades 5–8 that we originally organized within the 4 geographic regions and the 4 grade level categories. Given the design of our study, we present overall weighted percentages and compare weighted percentages across the 16-strata developed from the 4 geographic regions and 4 grade level categories. The results we present can be considered nationally representative within these specific design parameters, but cannot be discussed with any meaning at the state, territory, or local level.

## Research Question 1: Music Learning Opportunities Available to 5th-8th Grade Students

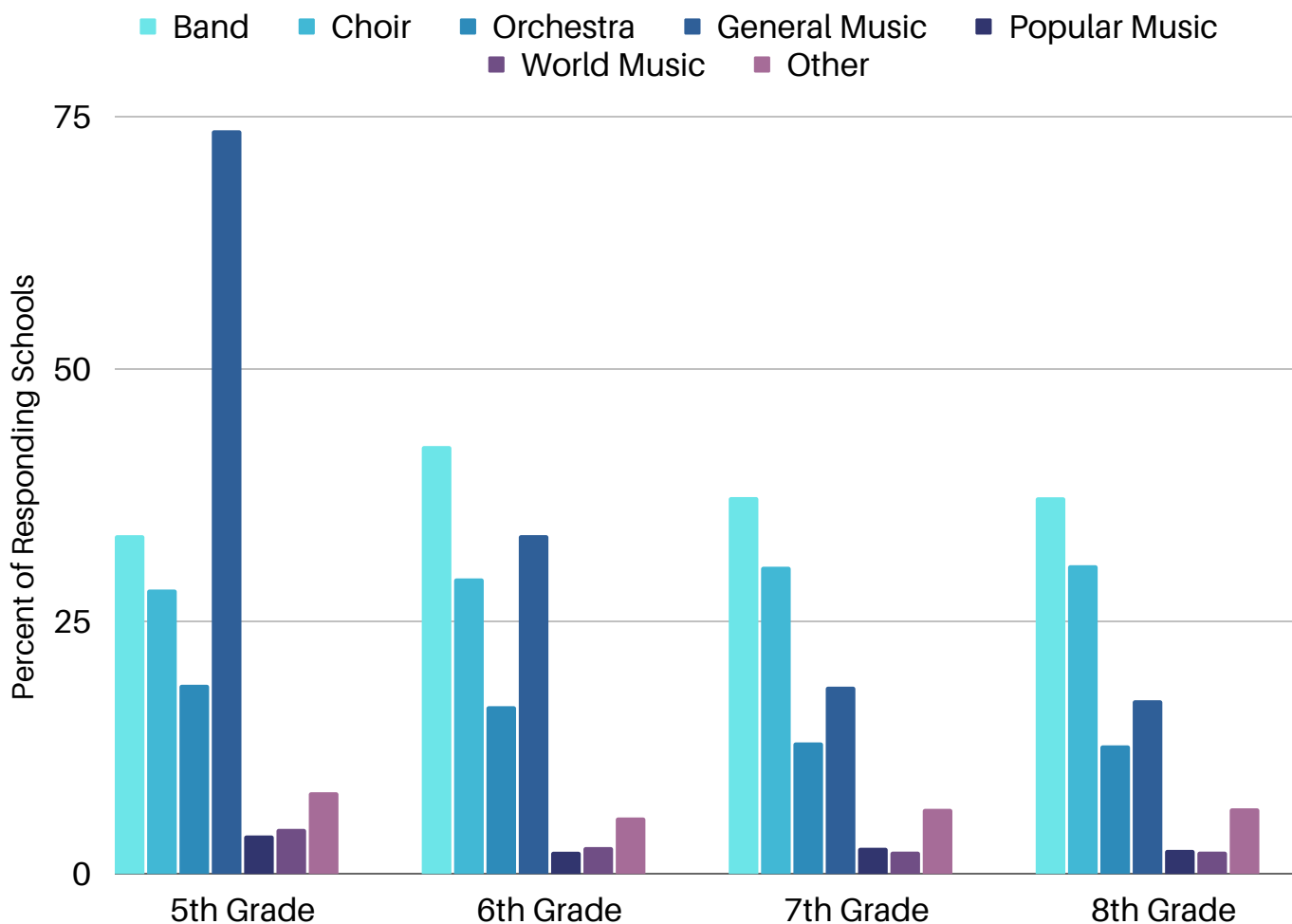
Of the responding schools, **29.52%** did not offer any music learning opportunities for grades 5-8 during 2020-2021. Figure 1 below shows the percentage of responding schools that did not offer any music learning broken down by the four geographic regions and the four school grade level configurations.



*Figure 1: Percent of Schools Offering No Middle Level Music Learning in 2020-2021*

## Music Learning Opportunities Available by Grade Level

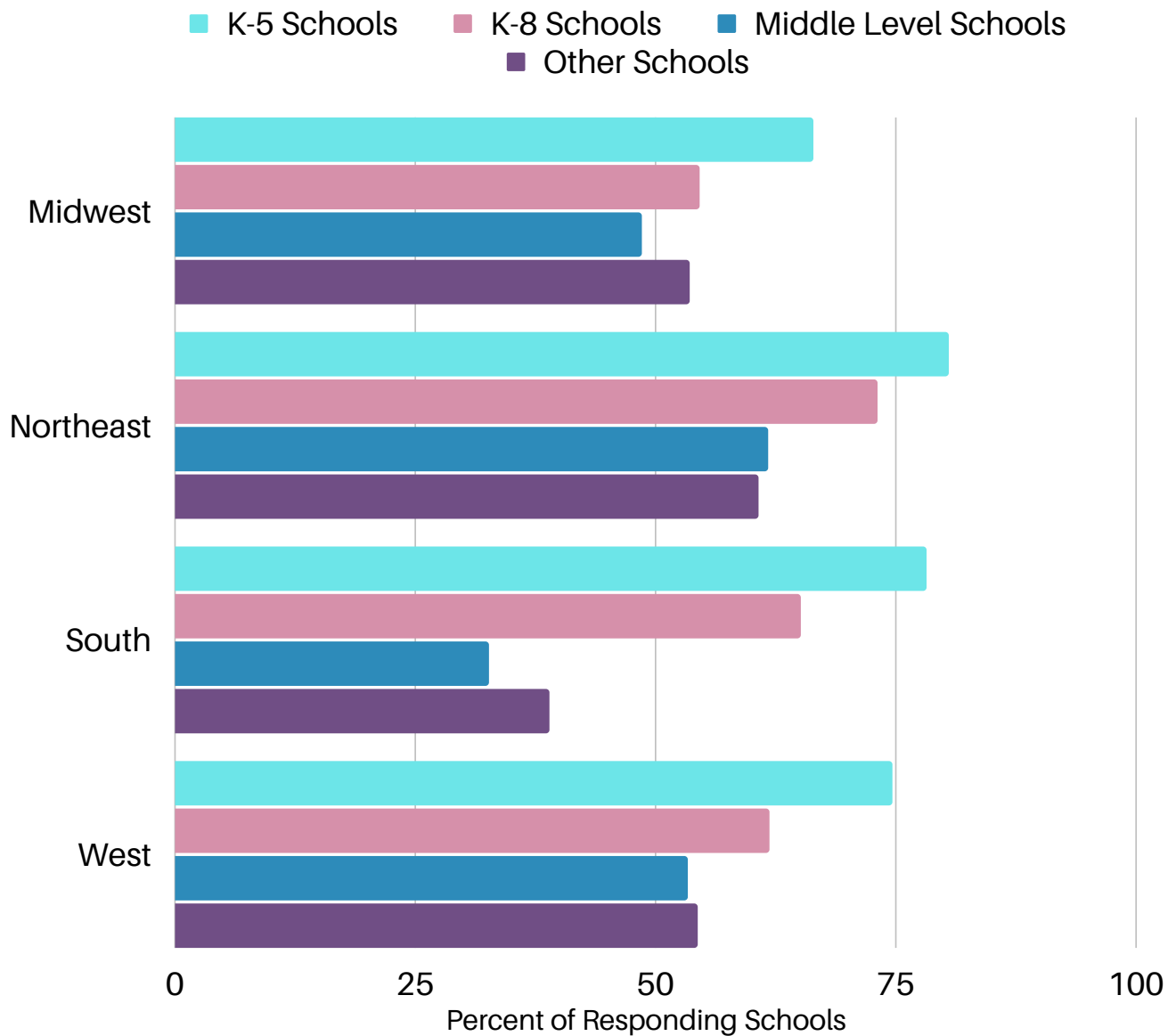
Nearly three-fourths of responding schools offered music learning opportunities for fifth through eighth grade students in 2020–2021. Choir was the only music offering that increased in availability as students aged while general music and orchestra both declined in availability. For those schools offering "other" music learning opportunities, these varied based on grade level. For example, fifth grade students were offered music learning opportunities such as Orff Ensembles and Recorder while eighth grade students were offered music learning opportunities such as Musical Theatre and Guitar.



*Figure 2: Available Music Opportunities by Grade Level*

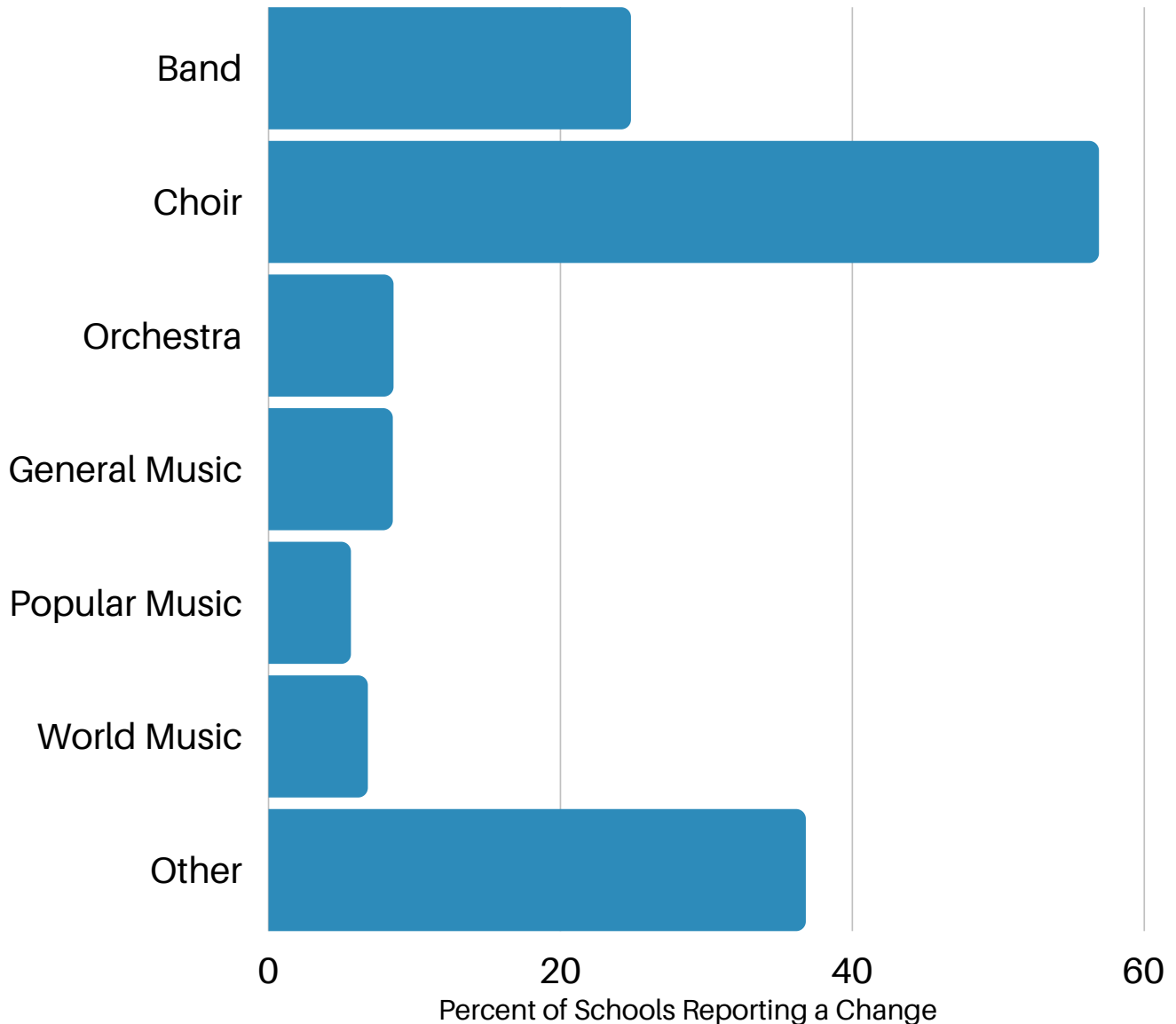
## Impact of COVID-19 on 2020-2021 Music Learning Opportunities

Of the responding schools that offered 5th–8th grade music learning in 2020–2021, **63.3%** reported a change to their "normal" music offerings due to COVID-19 pandemic-related restrictions.



*Figure 3: Reported Changes in Music Learning Opportunities due to COVID-19 Restrictions*

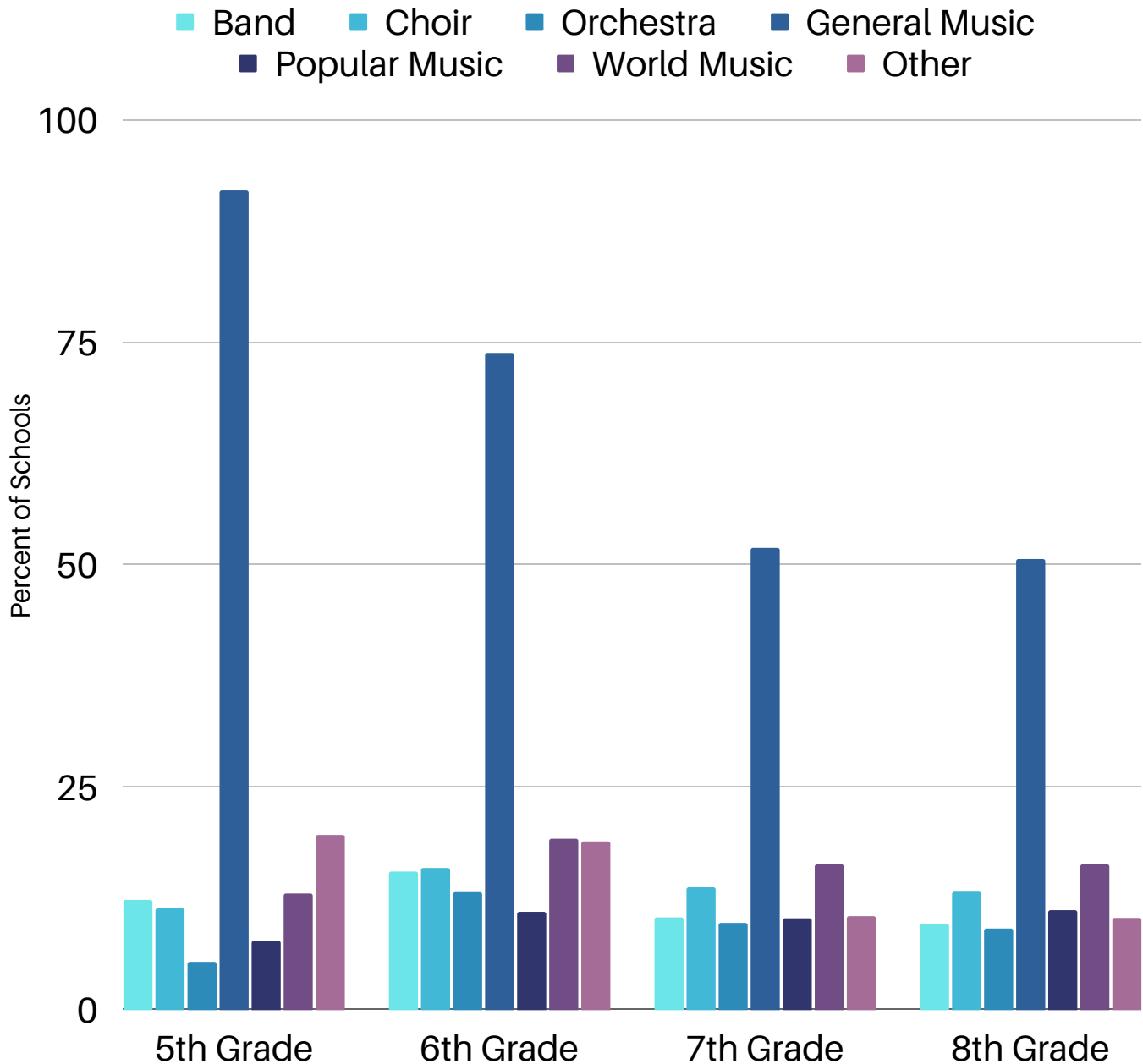
After schools reported a change to their music learning opportunities due to COVID-19 restrictions, they were asked *which* music learning opportunities were affected by these school or district restrictions. The music learning experience that was most often cancelled or suspended in 2020-2021 was choir.



*Figure 4: Music Learning Opportunities that were Cancelled or Suspended in 2020-2021 due to COVID-19 Restrictions*

## 2020-2021 Required Music Learning Opportunities

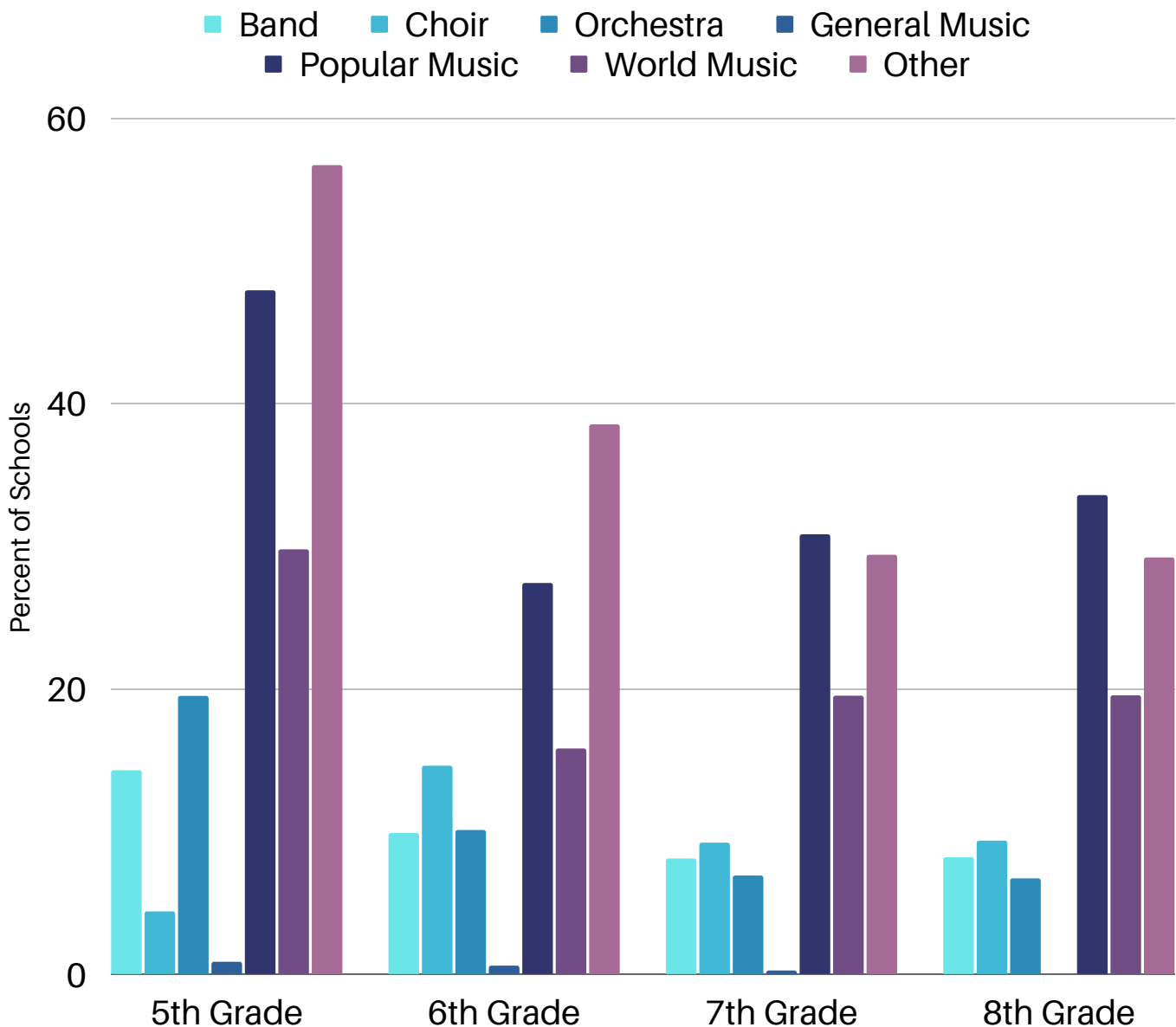
One form of access to music learning is whether a school designates a particular learning opportunity as required or elective. The percentage of schools that required students to enroll in music learning decreased as students move through the middle level years.



*Figure 5: Percent of Schools Offering a Music Learning Opportunity Who Also Required Students to Enroll*

## Music Learning Opportunities Scheduled ONLY Before or After School in 2020-2021

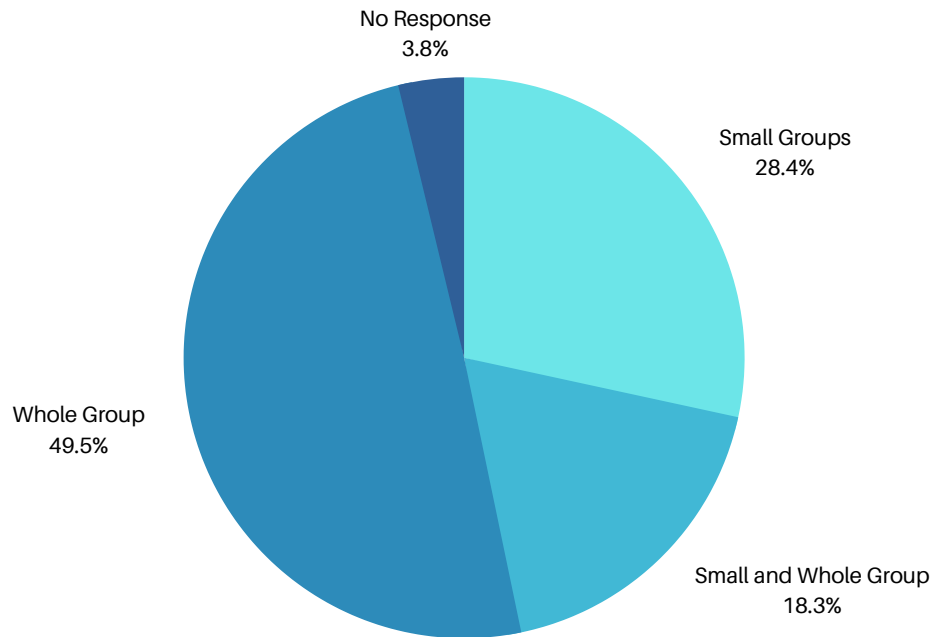
Another form of student access to music learning opportunities is whether the particular experience is available within the school day schedule or only accessible before or after school. The percentage of schools that included music learning within the school day improved across the middle level years, but not all music learning opportunities had instructional time within the regular school day.



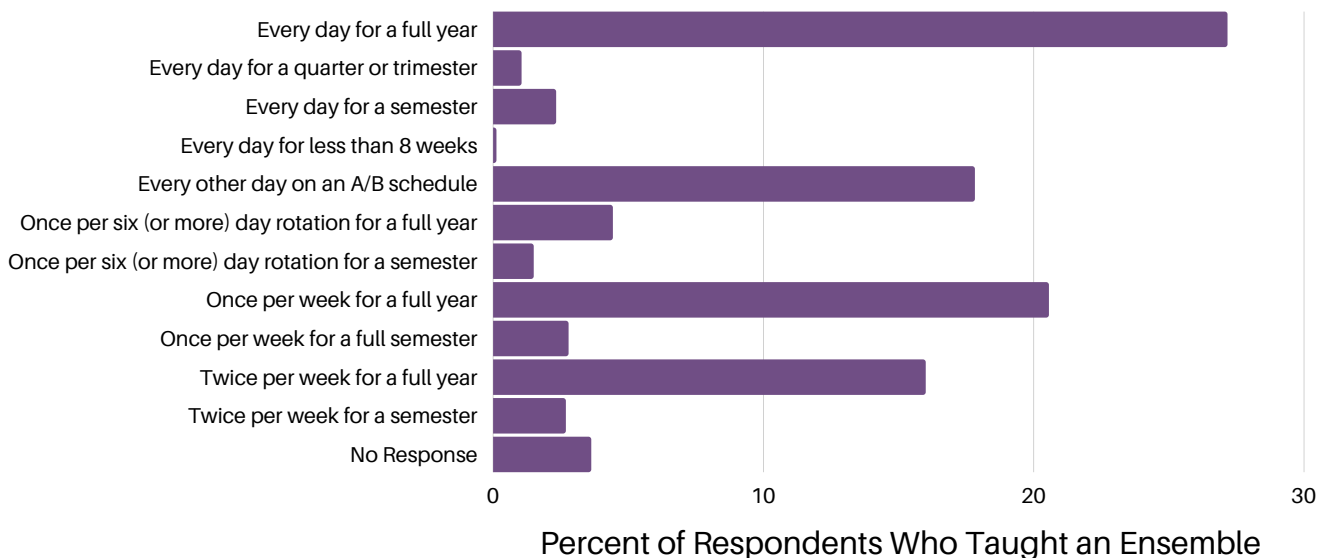
*Figure 6: Music Learning Opportunities that were Only Available Before or After School*

## Ensembles Scheduled Within the School Day

Music teacher respondents who taught at least one middle level ensemble class in 2020-2021 were asked to identify how students attended these classes and how these classes were scheduled when they occurred *within* the school day.



**Figure 7: Organization of Ensemble Classes**  
(percent of respondents who taught an ensemble)

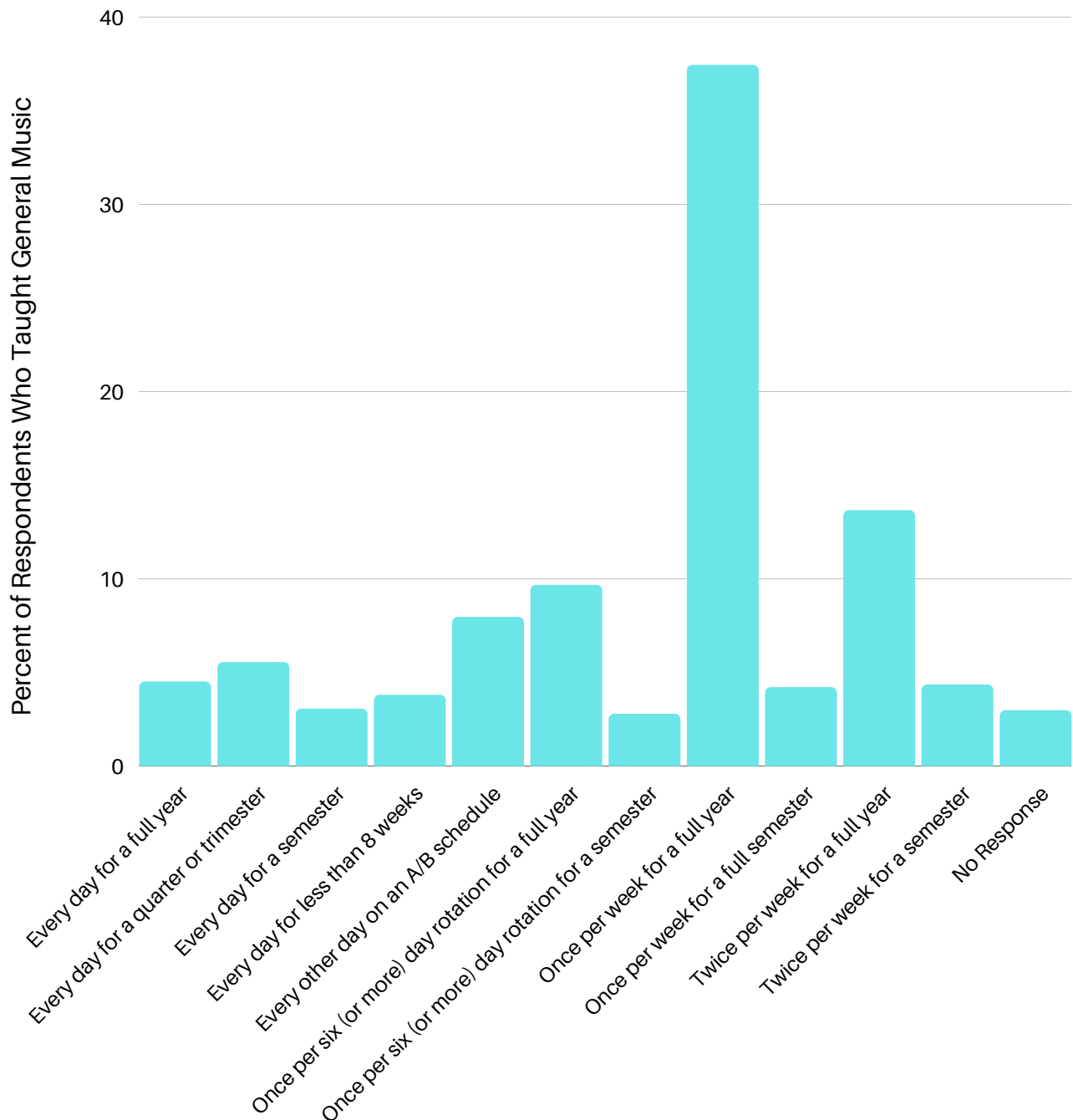


**Figure 8: Scheduling of Ensemble Classes**



## General Music Scheduled Within the School Day

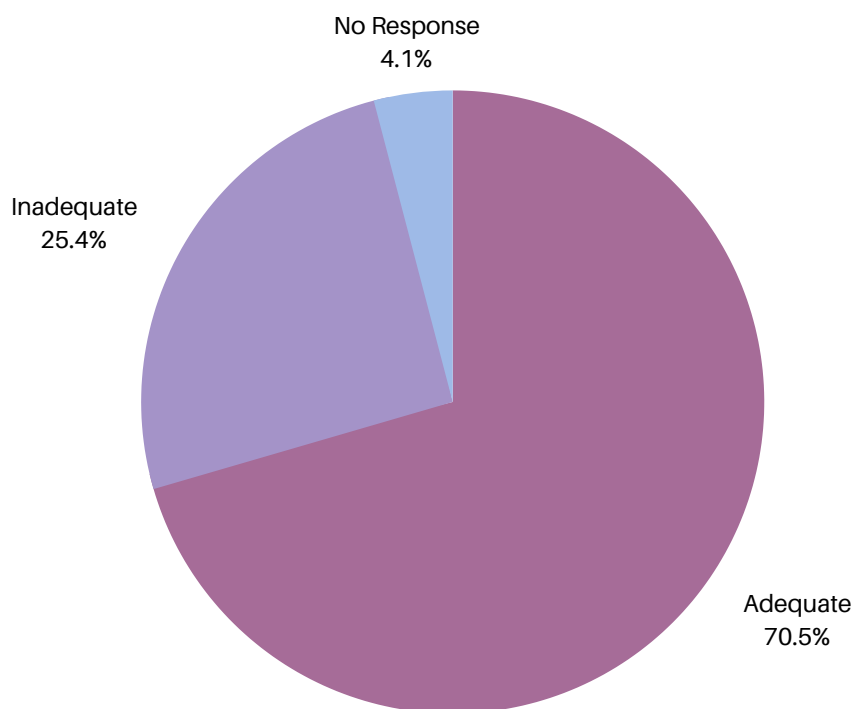
Music teacher respondents who taught at least one middle level general music class in 2020–2021 were asked to identify how these classes were scheduled within the school year.



*Figure 9: Scheduling of General Music Classes*

## Classroom Spaces for Music Learning

In addition to the specifics about how their music classes were scheduled, music teacher respondents also provided details regarding their 2020–2021 classroom space(s). Of the respondents to the question, 66.27% reported having their own classroom while 12.26% reported traveling from classroom to classroom within a school building. In addition, 9.06% shared their classroom with another music teacher, 2.82% shared their classroom with a non-music teacher, and 5.58% reported teaching in a multi-purpose room such as the gym or cafeteria.



*Figure 10: Adequacy of Classroom Space for Music Learning  
(percent of respondents)*

At least 70% of those who taught band, choir, orchestra, and general music reported their music classroom as adequate for their assigned music content. While most music teachers felt their music teaching space was adequate, 65.33% of those who traveled from room to room and 63.64% of those assigned to a multi-purpose space reported that their classroom space was inadequate for the music curriculum they were assigned to teach.

## Research Question 2: Demographic Profile of Middle Level Music Teachers

### Music Teacher Respondents' Demographics

One way to better understand a student's access to middle level music education is to create a demographic portrait of those who teach middle level music education, including career-related characteristics such as higher education and professional memberships. The age of the music teacher respondents ranged from 19–76 and the average age was 41.12 ( $SD = 12.49$ ). In addition, respondents reported their years of experience ranging from 1–51 with an average of 14.51 ( $SD = 10.36$ ) years of experience. Of the respondents, 64.05% identified as women, 29.73% identified as men, 0.05% identified as non-binary, 0.24% as trans\*, and 1.31% preferred not to answer.

### Race and Ethnicity

Our survey asked the music teacher respondents to identify their race and ethnicity using the standard race and ethnicity options used by the U.S. census. Only 6.11% of the music teacher respondents identified their ethnicity as Hispanic. Respondents who identified as bi-racial or multi-racial (2.88%) could select more than one option.

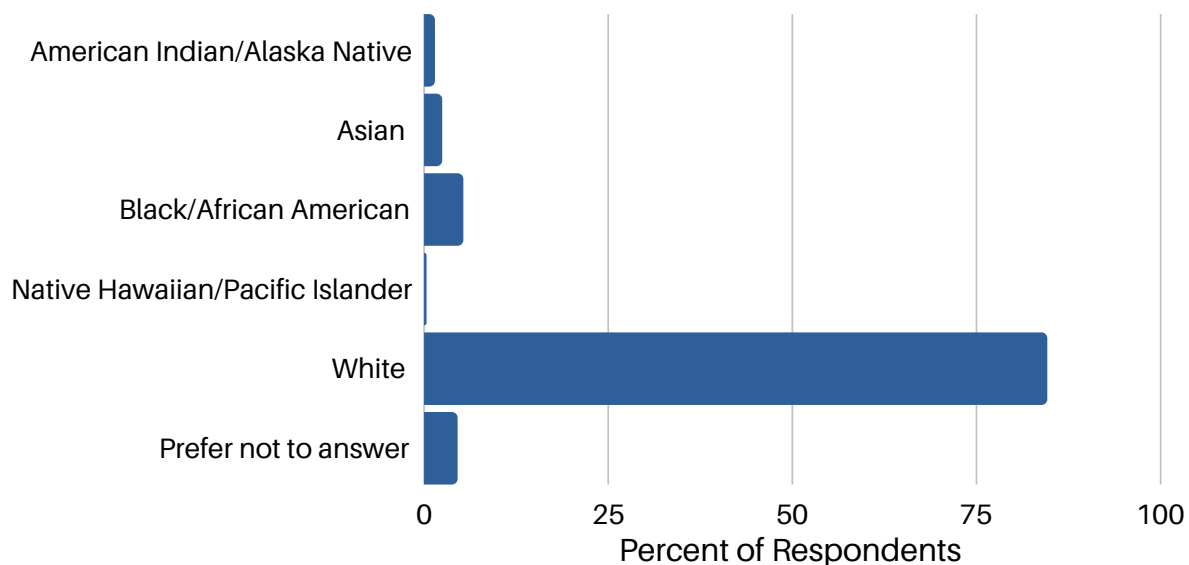


Figure 11: Music Teacher Respondents' Race

## Highest Degree and Route to Certification

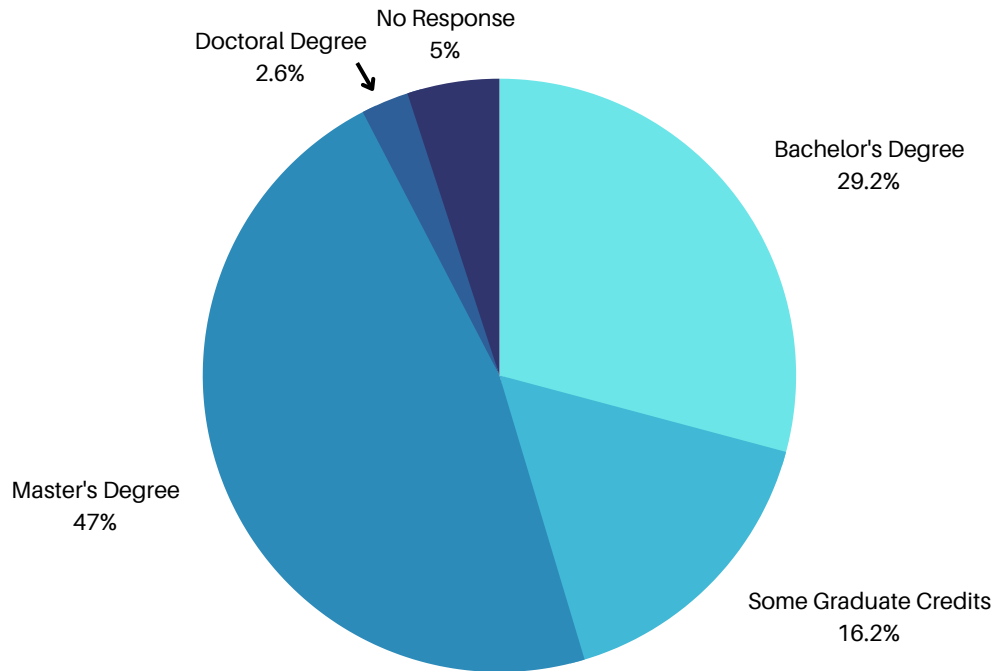


Figure 12: Highest Degree Earned  
(percent of respondents)

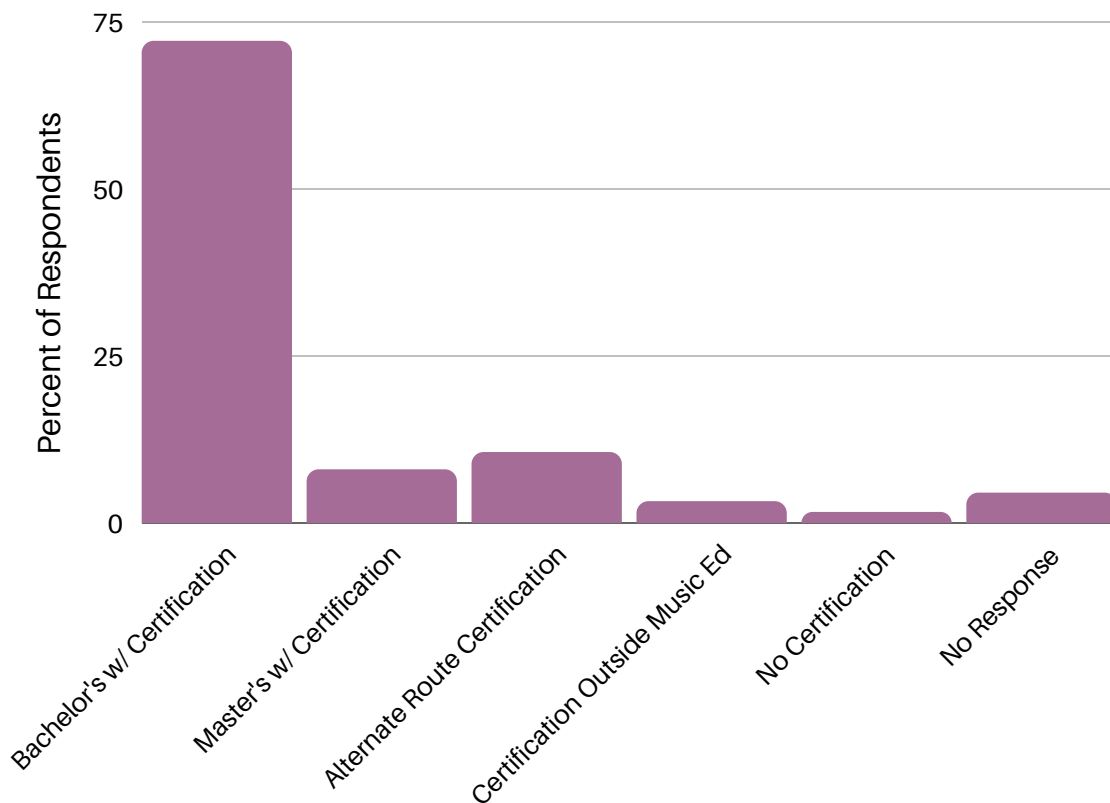


Figure 13: Attainment of Certification

## Membership in Professional Organizations

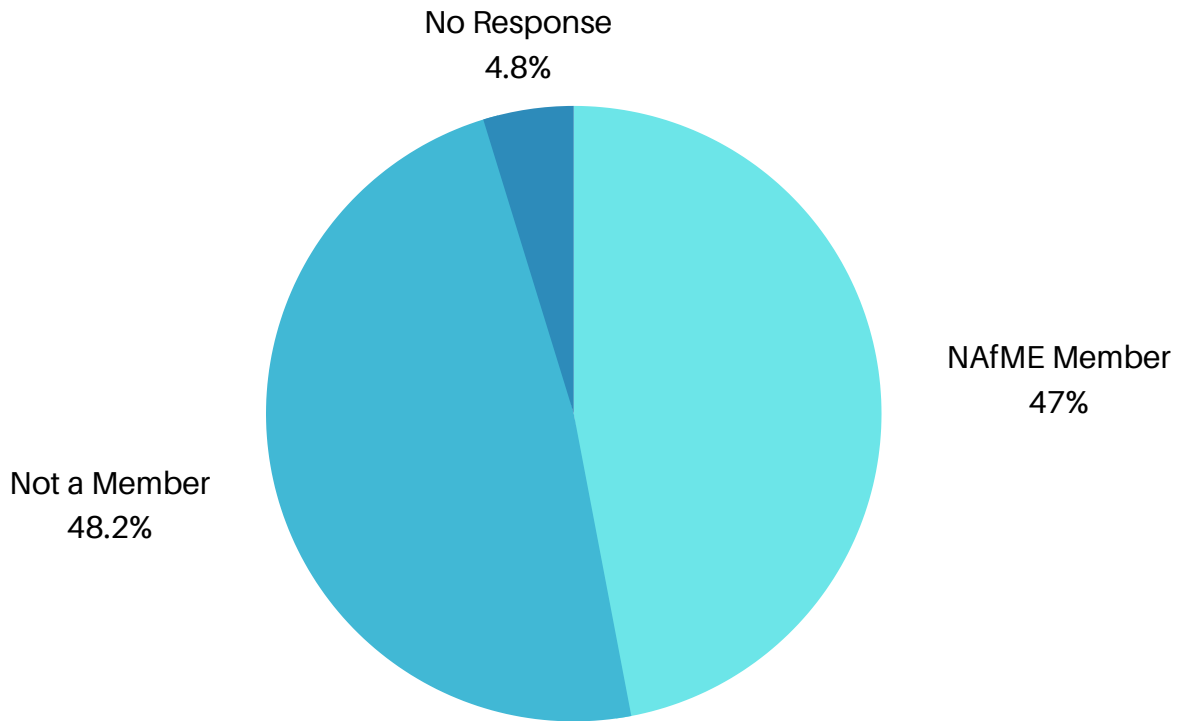


Figure 14: Percent of Music Teacher Respondents Who Were Current Members of NAfME

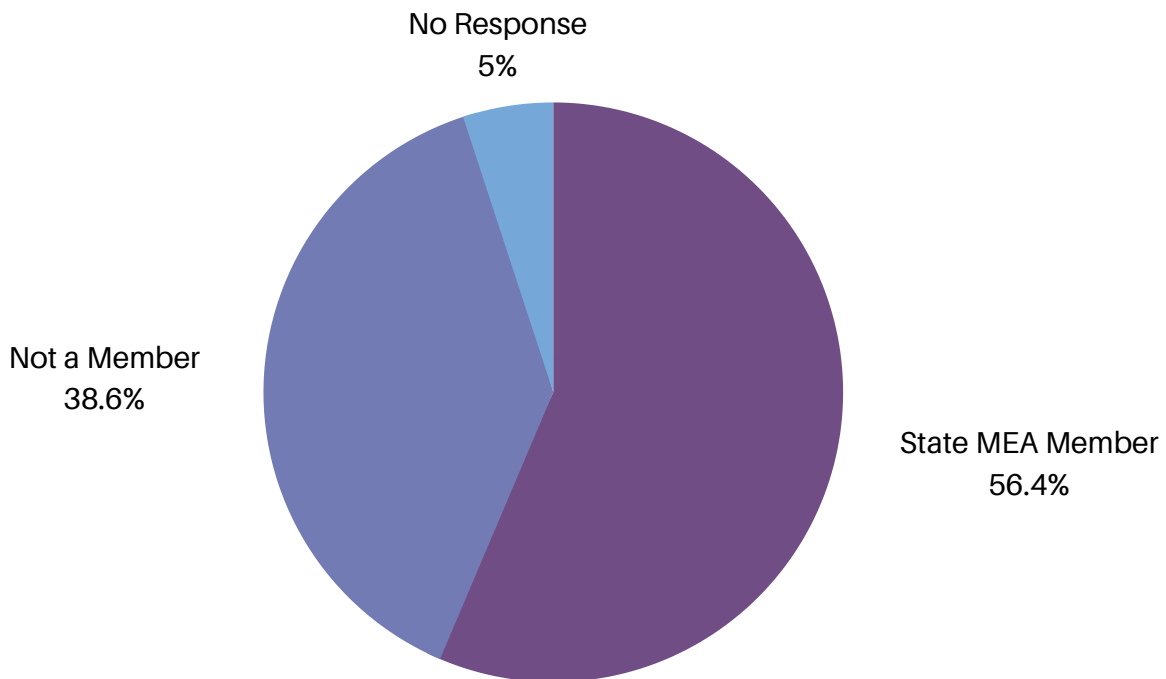


Figure 15: Percent of Music Teacher Respondents Who Were Current Members of their State Music Educators Association

Respondents also reported membership in the common national music education organizations listed in Table 1. When selecting from these options, a respondent could choose "other" (8.59%) and then provide the name of the organization to which they belonged. Some of the "other" music organizations mentioned most frequently included: 1) another state MEA beyond their current state of residence, particularly Texas Music Educators Association, 2) a state level band masters association, 3) the Feierabend Association for Music Education (FAME), 4) the Gordon Institute for Music Learning, 5) an instrument-specific international organization, 4) Women Band Directors International, 5) a state- or national-level jazz organization, and 6) a religious denomination's organization of church musicians. In addition, respondents could select "none" (55.01%) to indicate that they belonged to no organization listed, including an "other" unlisted organization. Of the 55.01% of respondents who reported no membership in any of the common national organizations, 36.43% of these respondents also reported no current membership in NAfME and 27.15% reported no current membership in their state MEA.

*Table 1: Respondents' Reported Membership in National Music Education Associations*

<b>National Organizations Listed on the Survey</b>	<b>Percent of Teacher Membership</b>
American Bandmasters Association	2.33%
American Choral Directors Association	7.90%
American Orff-Schulwerk Association	8.28%
American String Teachers Association	2.99%
Dalcroze	0.21%
Organization of American Kodály Educators	3.94%
Suzuki	0.74%

## Primary Instrument

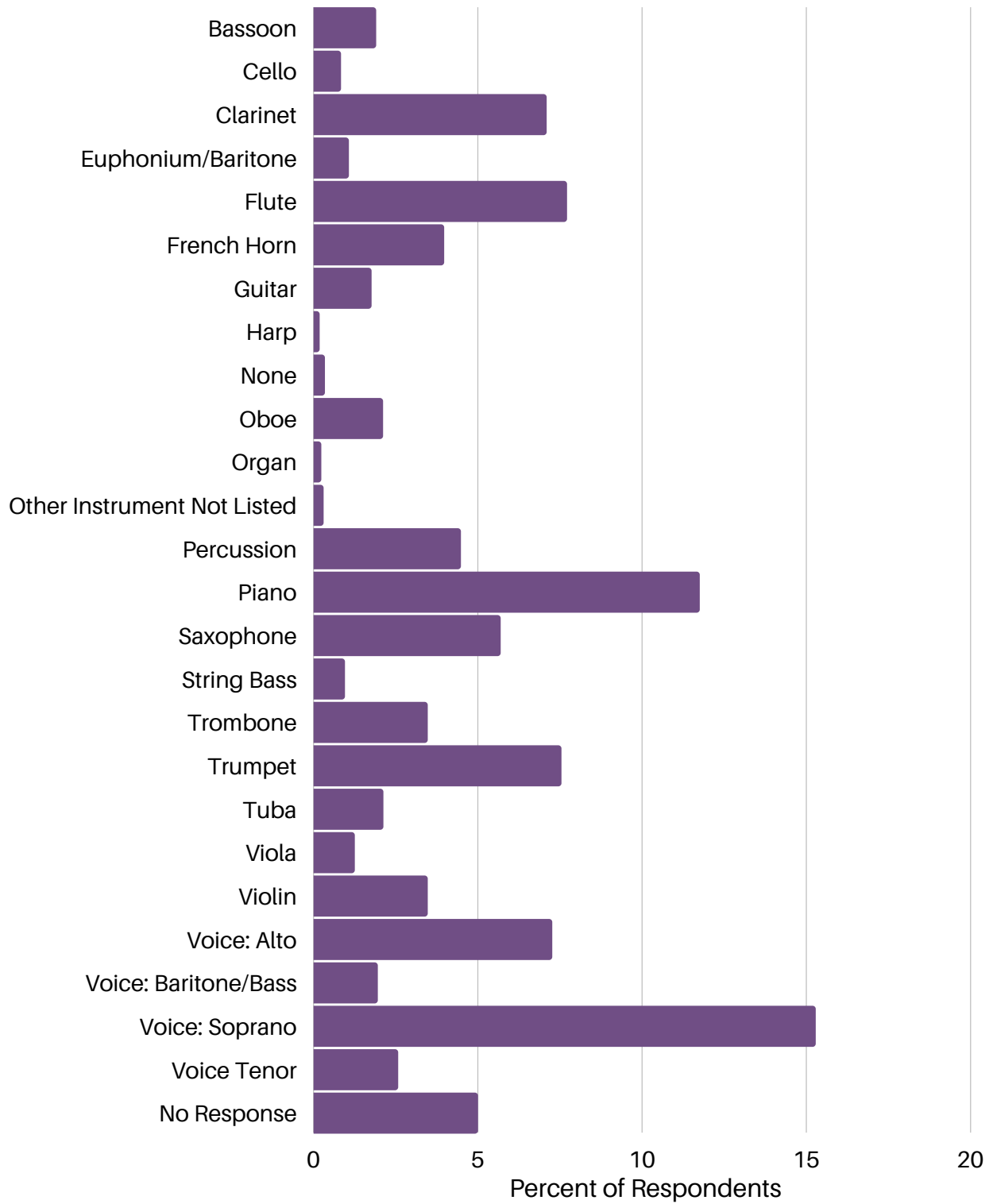
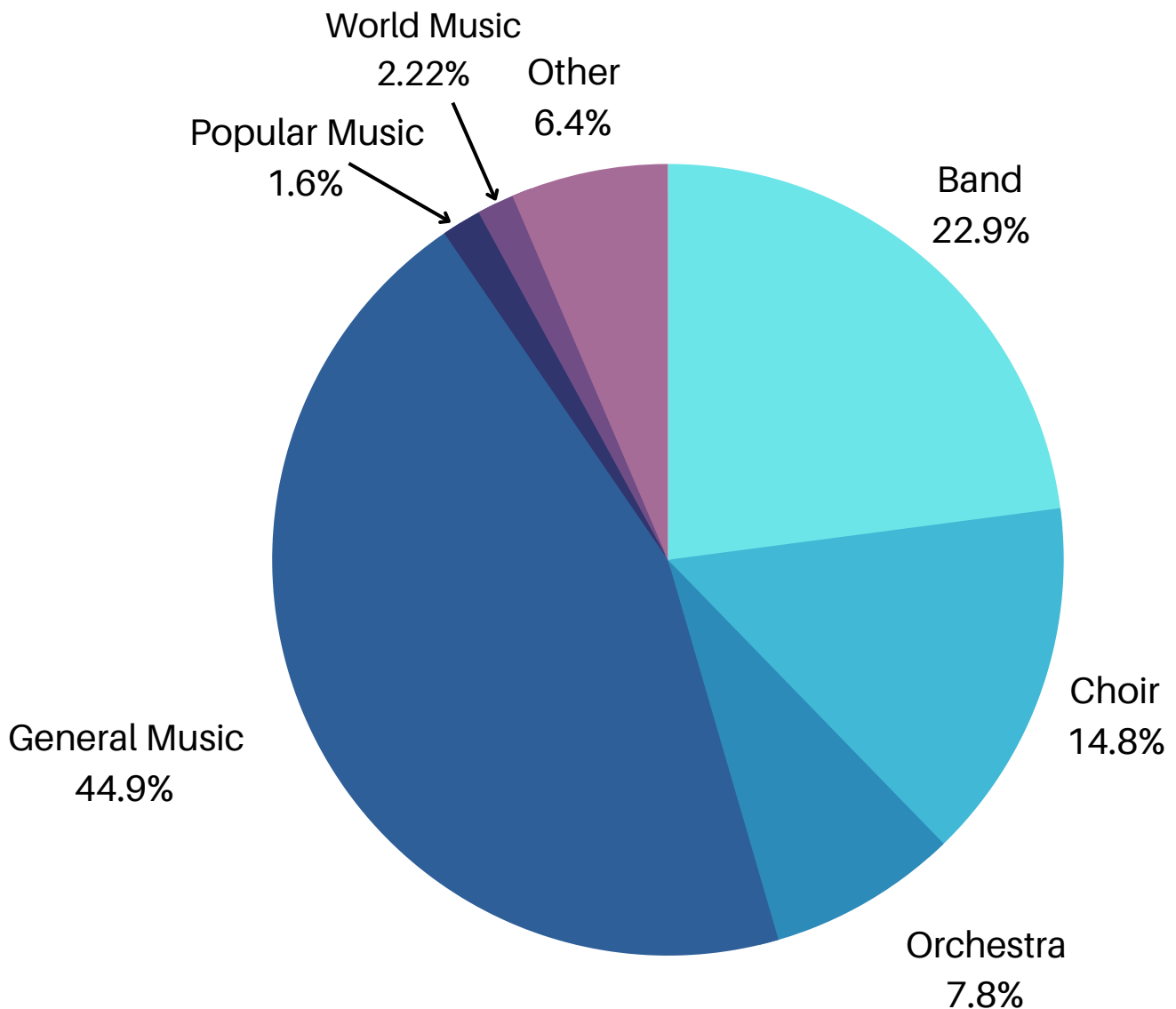


Figure 16: Respondents' Primary Instrument

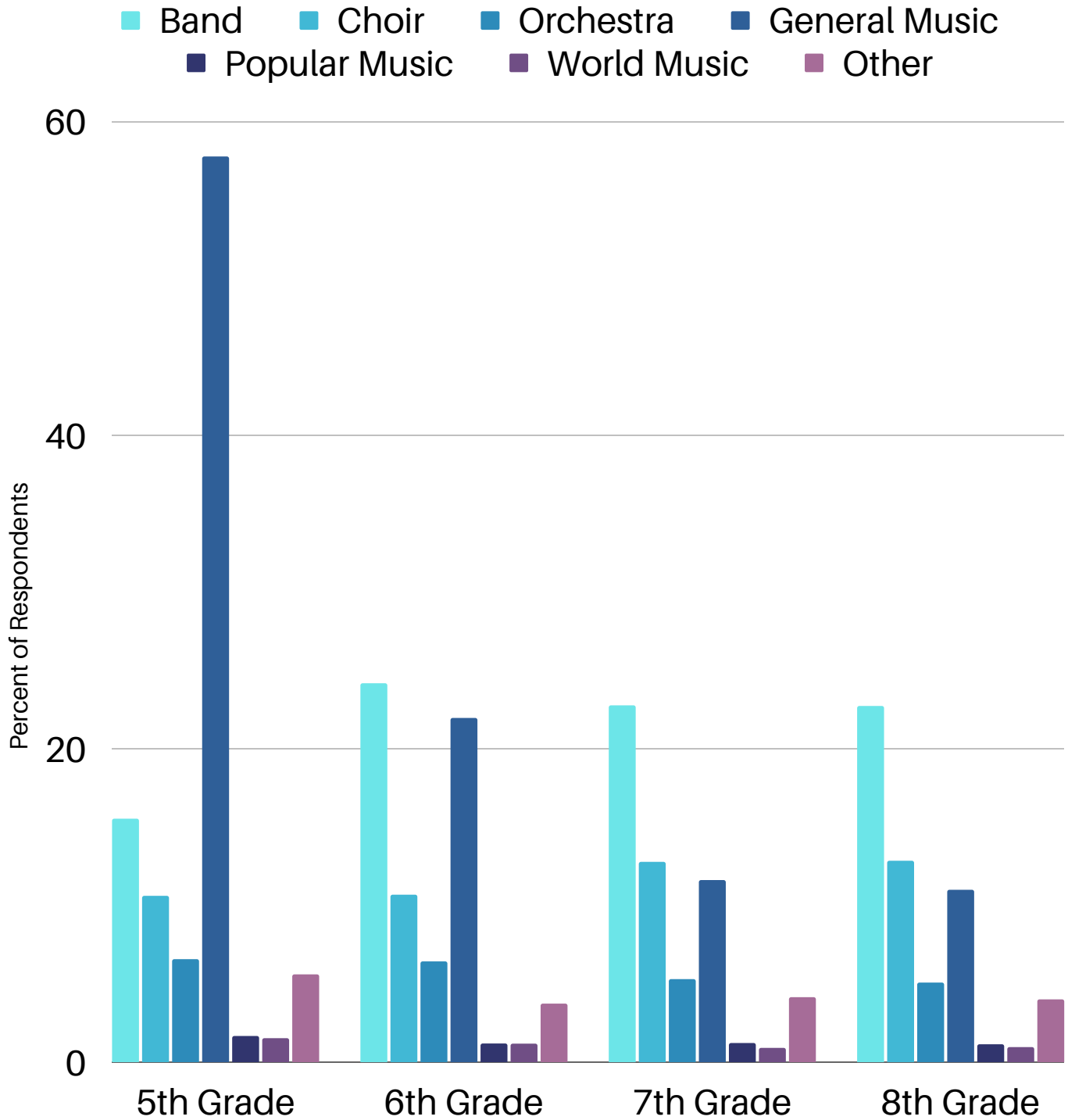
## Respondents' 2020-2021 Teaching Responsibilities

Of the music teacher respondents, **88.2%** reported holding a full-time position within their school or district in 2020-2021. These respondents also provided additional details about the middle level music content and middle level grades they were assigned to teach during 2020-2021.



*Figure 17: Percent of Respondents who Taught at Least One Middle Level Grade of the Music Learning Opportunity*





*Figure 18: Respondents' 2020-2021 Teaching Responsibilities by Middle Level Grade*

## Teaching Responsibilities Beyond Middle Level

Music teacher respondents reported whether their 2020–2021 teaching responsibilities extended beyond grades 5–8. Only 15.67% of responding teachers reported *only* teaching grades 5–8, while 65.66% also taught at least one elementary (PreK–4) grade and 18.34% taught at least one high school grade (9–12).

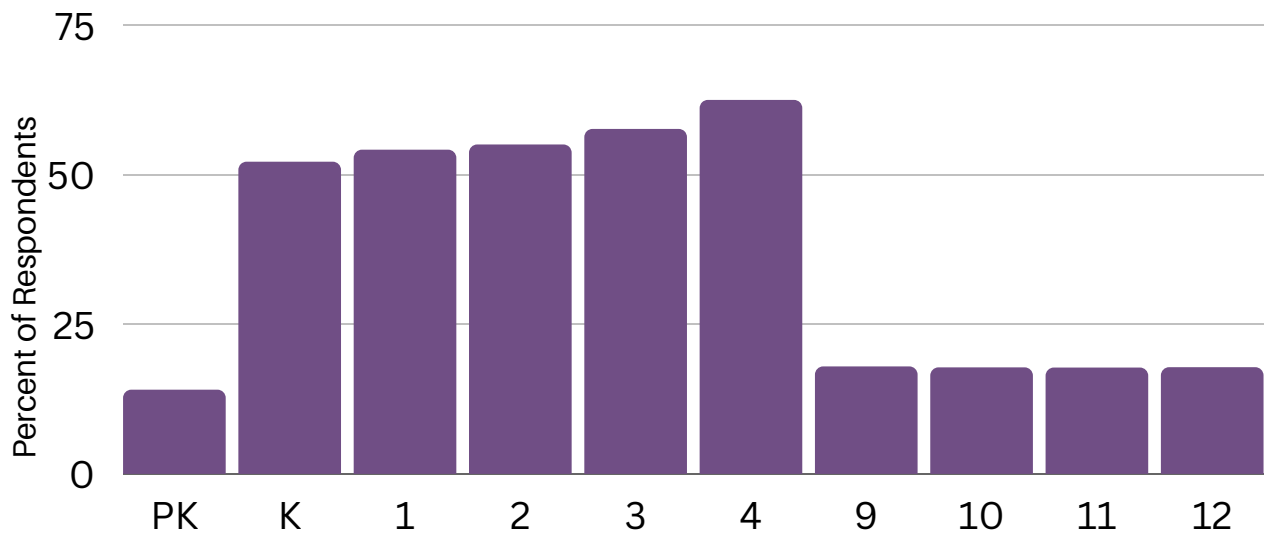


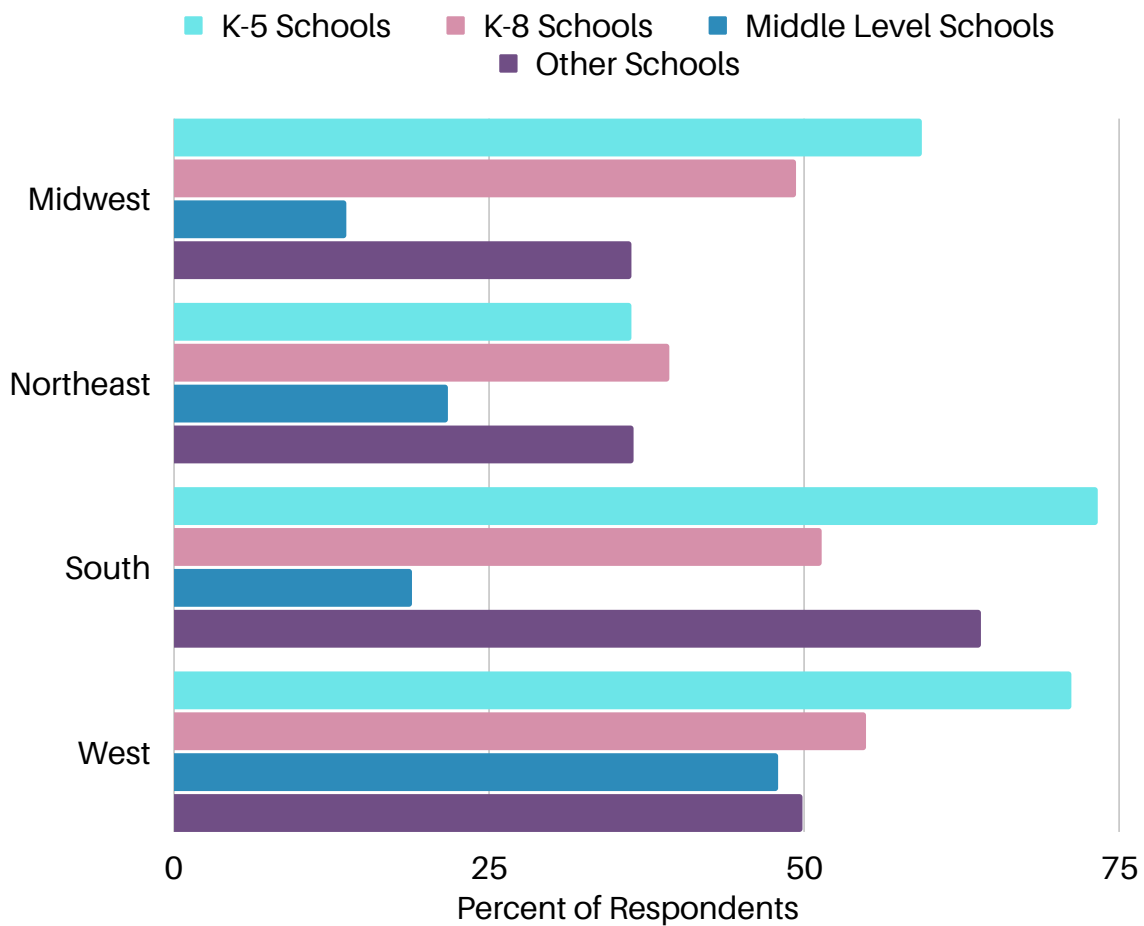
Figure 19: Grade Levels (beyond 5–8) Taught by Respondents in 2020–2021

## Teaching Responsibilities Beyond the School Surveyed

Music teacher respondents to the survey were asked to focus only on the music learning that occurred at the school selected for participation in our survey. However, they were also asked if their 2020–2021 position involved teaching at another school in the district. Over a third (34.58%) of respondents reported working at more than one school within their district. Of the music teachers who taught in more than one school, 58.58% taught only middle level grades at all schools where they taught.

## Working Alone or With Other Music Teachers

Of the respondents, 49.76% reported that they were the only music teacher who worked at the school surveyed. In the Midwest, Northeast, and South, less than 22% of music teachers who worked at a school serving only middle level grades reported being the sole music teacher at their school, whereas in K-5 and K-8 schools, a higher rate of teachers reported being the only music teacher at their school.



*Figure 20: Percent of Respondents who Reported being the Only Music Teacher at their School*

For those schools where the respondent reported working with other music teachers, the average number of additional music teachers at a school (in addition to the survey respondent) was **3.89** ( $SD = 2.06$ ). The number of additional music teachers at a school ranged from 1 (43.75%) to 15 (0.05%).

# Research Question 3: Middle Level Music Teachers' Perceived Preparation for Teaching Middle Level Students

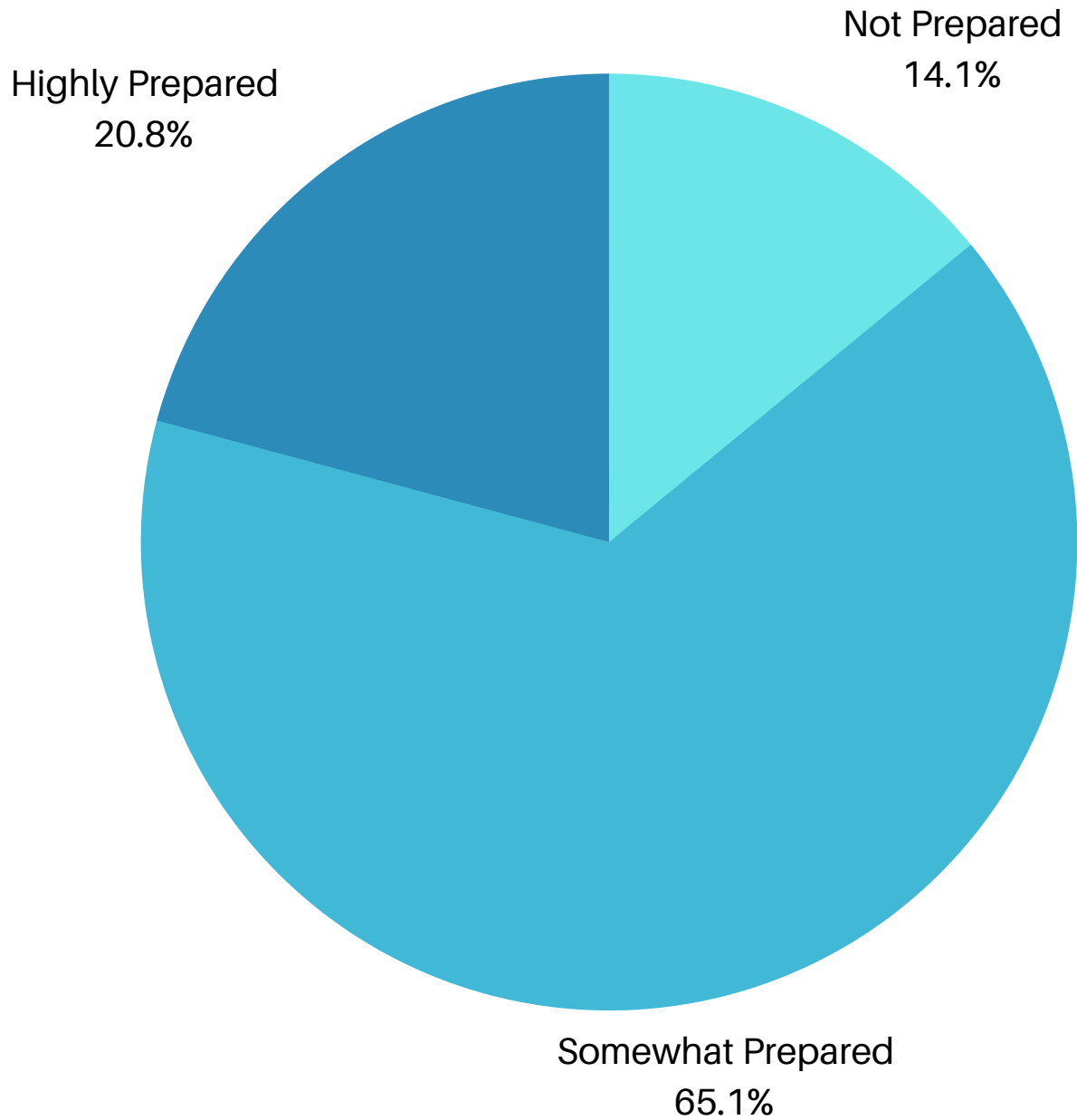
## Early Career Interests

Respondents also shared their interest in teaching middle level students and their preferred grade and music content area when they began teaching. When the music teacher respondents began their careers, 20.46% reported being “not interested,” 46.78% reported being “somewhat interested,” and 28.45% reported being “highly interested” in teaching middle level students. Just under a quarter of the respondents (23.49%) reported that their preferred grade level at the beginning of their career was 5th–8th grade, 32.98% selected 9th–12th grade, and 28.12% selected K–4. When they began teaching, 40.17% of respondents most wanted to teach band, 17.58% choir, 27.41% general music, 6.42% orchestra, and less than 10% popular or world music ensembles.

## Future Aspirations for Middle Level Teaching

When asked about their future career hopes, 56.29% of respondents wanted to remain their current position, regardless of its current grade configuration. Only 4.99% of respondents who taught multiple grade levels wanted to obtain an exclusively 5th–8th grade position. In addition, less than 10% of respondents selected each of the following options for their future career: 1) a future career involving only elementary students, 2) a future career involving only high school students, 3) a move to a K–12 administrative position, 4) leaving teaching to pursue graduate school, or 5) leaving teaching to pursue interests outside of education. However, over 12% of respondents reported not knowing what they hoped for in their future career.

## Preservice Preparation for Middle Level Music Teaching



*Figure 21: Music Teacher Respondents' Perceived Preparation for Middle Level Teaching at the Start of Their Careers (percent of respondents)*

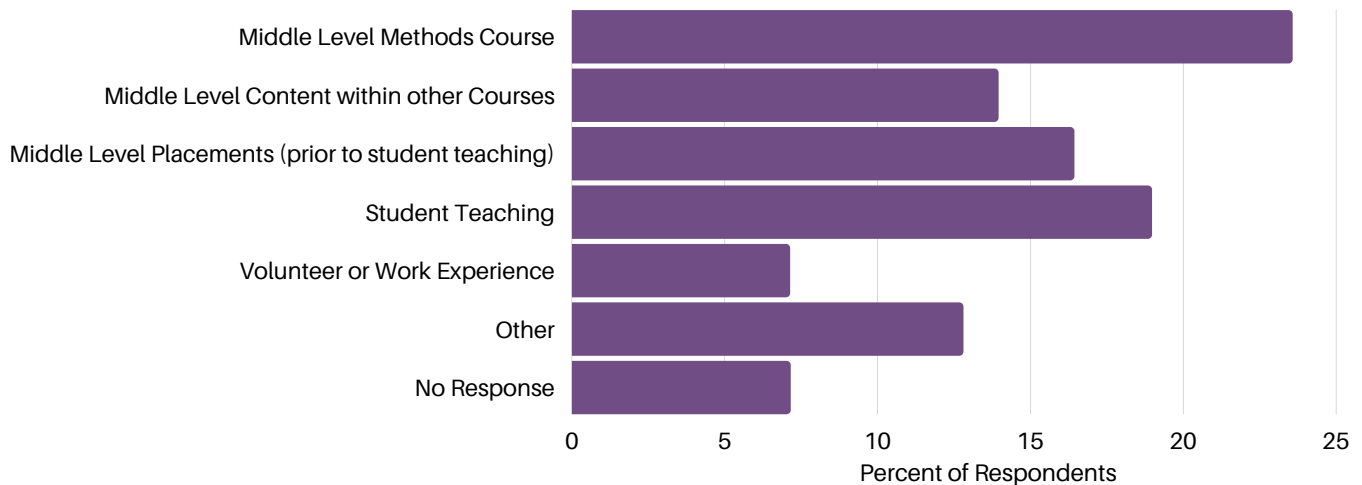
Music teachers who reported feeling highly prepared (20.80%) to teach middle level students when they began teaching were asked to select those aspect(s) of their preservice experience that helped them feel highly prepared. These music teacher respondents could select multiple answer choices. Experiences respondents reported as "other" included:

1. Experience teaching private lessons, substituting, working at camps, or leading ensembles at their place of worship
2. Professional development certifications such as Kodály, Orff, and Suzuki
3. Mentorship from a more experienced colleague

*Table 2: Preservice Experiences that Highly Prepared Respondents Reported Helped them Feel Highly Prepared*

<b>Preservice Experiences</b>	<b>Percent of Highly Prepared Respondents</b>
A Middle Level Methods Course	62.93%
Middle Level Content within other Courses	69.37%
Middle Level Placements (prior to student teaching)	71.13%
Middle Level Student Teaching	80.80%
Volunteer or Work Experience	70.60%
Other	49.71%

The music teacher respondents who reported feeling "somewhat prepared" or "not prepared" were asked to identify the preservice experience that they felt would have *best* enabled them to feel highly prepared. The two options most frequently identified were a methods course devoted to middle-level music and student teaching at the middle level.

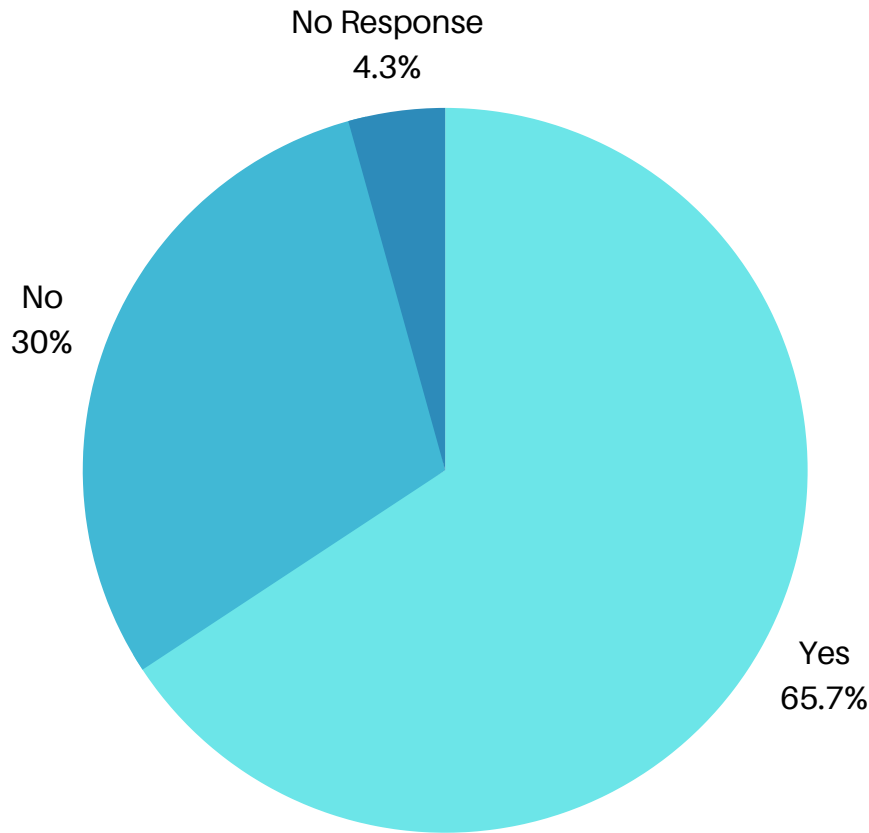


*Figure 22: Preservice Experiences that Underprepared Respondents Reported Would Have Helped Them Feel Highly Prepared*

Similar to those who felt highly prepared, those who did not feel fully prepared to teach middle level music identified numerous "other" preservice experiences that would have helped them feel highly prepared. Many of these items focused on hands-on opportunities such as more teaching experience, work with middle level students, a longer student teaching, more knowledge of secondary instruments and ensemble administration, experience with diverse learners, and experience with middle level general music. Other things that respondents mentioned included:

1. A course devoted to middle level development, philosophy, and classroom management
2. Mentorship during the first few years of teaching
3. Professional development certifications
4. Access to a district or other prescribed curriculum

## Inservice Middle Level Professional Development



*Figure 23: Music Teacher Respondents' Pursuit of Middle Level Focused Professional Development  
(percent of respondents)*

Over half of the music teacher respondents reported pursuing inservice professional development they identified as focused on middle level learning. Respondents reported pursuing topics such as brain development and the changing voice, while others reported topics such as classroom management, motivation and engagement, recruitment, social emotional learning, and inclusive learning. Still other respondents focused on music-specific topics such as instruments, rehearsal techniques, modern band, and world music drumming.



## Awareness of the Field of Middle Level Education

Music teacher respondents were asked whether they were aware of two aspects of the broader field of middle level education. The Association for Middle Level Education (AMLE) is the leading organization for middle level education in the United States. Like NAFME, the organization's role is one of both advocacy and professional development.

**4.49%**

Music teacher respondents who reported awareness of the Association for Middle Level Education

Music teacher respondents who reported awareness of the *This We Believe: Keys to Educating Young Adolescents*

**2.53%**

*This We Believe: Keys to Educating Young Adolescents* (TWB) is considered the leading statement of principles to guide middle level education. This document was published in 2010 and updated in 2021 (after this survey was distributed). The new name of the document is *The Successful Middle School: This We Believe* (see Bishop & Harrison, 2021; NMSA, 2010).

**Less Than 6%**

Music teacher respondents who reported pursuing middle level focused inservice professional development who were aware of AMLE or TWB.

# Recommendations Based On the Results

Based on the findings from this survey, we offer five recommendations for NAFME, music teachers and music teacher educators, and music education researchers.

## 1. A Follow-up Survey in 3-5 Years

We recommend that music education researchers conduct a similar survey of schools serving middle level learners in 3-5 years. This is the first study of its kind focused on 5th-8th grade music learning and only shows student access to music learning opportunities available during the 2020-2021 school year. Given that our data collection coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic and many music learning opportunities were curtailed, a replicate study would provide important data regarding the changes made in music education at the middle level in the aftermath of the pandemic. This study provides an initial baseline of middle level music education data upon which future studies focused on middle level learning might build, but can offer little data about middle level music learning prior to 2020-2021.

## 2. Focus Groups or Interviews to Investigate the Merits of Virtual Learning Resources for Underserved School Communities

Nearly 30% percent of responding schools reported offering no music learning during 2020-2021. The students most significantly affected by this lack of access to music learning are those who attended schools identified as "other" in this study. Our "other" schools designation included K-12, 6-12, and 8-12 schools, some of which served special education, incarcerated, or rural student populations.

Given what the COVID-19 pandemic has taught the field about teaching music online, perhaps this knowledge can be applied to efforts to better serve these school communities through accessible virtual music learning resources. Underserved communities know best what they need to thrive and thus future research using focus groups or interviews might provide context to guide the development of appropriate virtual (or other accessible) resources for middle level music learning. Once research illuminates what music learning resources are most needed in these underserved schools, perhaps preservice teachers could, with guidance, develop appropriate resources and thereby enhance their knowledge and skills in middle level music education.

### **3. Targeted Professional Development Focused on Middle Level Philosophy or Young Adolescent Development**

While over half of the respondents to this survey reported pursuing professional development that they identified as focused on middle level learners, the content reported rarely focused on middle level philosophy or young adolescent development (beyond the obvious physical aspects that impact music making such as the voice change). In addition, very few music teacher respondents reported awareness of leading professional development resources in the field of middle level education that might augment their knowledge in middle level philosophy and young adolescent development. Music teachers are encouraged to consult with their colleagues and principals about membership in the Association for Middle Level Education (or attendance at the annual conference) and read the short text *The Successful Middle School: This We Believe* (Bishop & Harrison, 2021). Leaders in the field who are planning music education professional development conferences should consider including a thematic focus

on the middle level learner and seek out expert presenters who can augment music teachers' growth in this area of perceived weakness.

#### **4. Research How Music Education Preservice Programs Address Middle Level Music Learning**

Over 75% percent of music teacher respondents to this survey reported leaving their preservice programs feeling underprepared to teach middle level learners. Future research is needed to better understand what is and is not being taught in preservice programs about middle level music teaching, middle level philosophy, and young adolescent development. Research might investigate which preservice music education programs offer or require a methods course devoted to middle level music education, embed middle level content into various courses across the program, require an early program placement or student teaching experience in middle level grades, or provide other learning opportunities related to middle level students. Those preservice music education programs in states with middle level licensure or located at universities with a named middle level preservice program might work to develop partnerships with their campus departments of education or local middle level schools. Music education programs with middle level state or campus level resources may be particularly well situated to provide needed preservice preparation for middle level music educators.

#### **5. Outreach to Music Teachers who Choose Not to Participate in NAfME or Their State MEA.**

Finally, over half of the music educators who responded to this survey were not members of NAfME and over 40% were not members of their state music educators association. Outreach to these music teachers is needed to determine their professional development needs and

experiences as well as how these organizations might better serve their needs. In addition, future music education research involving only those music teachers who are members of one of these music education organizations should be considered in light of these findings. Responses to our survey suggest that research involving music educators who are members of NAfME or a state MEA represents only a subset of the total music educator population in the country or the specified state. Future research might also examine whether this finding holds true for music educators who teach elementary or high school music. While there are many valid reasons why a music teacher might choose not to pursue membership in one of these organizations, future research might investigate whether these music teachers, 50% of whom work as the only teacher in their school, are isolated and in need of professional development or colleagues with whom to consult and work to improve their practice.

## Conclusion

In this study, we sought to fill part of a gap in the music education scholarship on access to music learning opportunities for students in grades 5–8. In doing so, we also sought to develop a demographic profile of the music teachers who teach music at the middle level. While our study was originally planned before the COVID-19 pandemic, the timing of our data collection in 2020–2021 contextualizes our study within this unprecedented time in global education. Our findings provide an initial portrait of the enactment of Karl Gehrkins’ vision for music education, specifically at the middle level. These data show that more schools provide access to music learning for middle level students than do not, but that certain student populations remain underserved. While availability of music learning

experiences is one measure of the enactment of Gehrkens' vision, the lack of perceived preparation of music teachers for teaching middle level learners suggests that some work is needed to ensure that middle level students have access to music teachers qualified to meet their young adolescent needs. We invite future researchers, music educators, and other interested parties to join us by filling the gap in the music education scholarship with robust studies of middle level music learning. The more knowledge the field gains about music learning for 5th–8th grade students, the better and more equitably these students can be served through music education.

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## Appendix A: Data Collection and Analysis

This study was a 2020–2021 national survey of schools serving grades 5–8. The objective of this survey was to provide descriptive statistics regarding what musical content was available to fifth through eighth graders throughout the U.S. and its territories and to learn basic demographic details about the music teachers who taught this content. Using the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2019) “Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey Data 2018–2019 Preliminary Directory” (the most recent directory available when research began), the 101,923 listed schools were cleaned to remove those schools that did not serve grades 5–8 (see Table A1). The remaining 71,523 schools were organized into a 16-cell stratification using a cross-tabulation of the 4 standard U.S. geographical regions (Midwest, Northeast, South, and West) and 4 researcher determined grade level groupings (K–5, K–8, Middle Level, and Other) (see Table A2). The U.S. territories were grouped into the four geographical regions per common U.S. government practices. There is no common practice for the Bureau of Indian Affairs Schools (BI), so we grouped all BI schools into the Western division, as many (but certainly not all) BI schools are located in this region. A stratified random sample of 15% was determined using a 7.5% margin of error or 171 smallest cell size for a large population (Conroy, 2021). In order to obtain  $n = 171$  in the smallest cell of stratification, a 15% sample ( $N = 10,727$ ) was required and schools for each strata were selected without replacement using the randomized function in Excel.

Between June and October 2020, the website of each sampled school was reviewed for the music teacher(s)’ name and contact information. When music teacher information was unavailable on a school website, primary investigators made phone calls or wrote emails to principals.

As a result of this research, 144 schools (1.34%) were identified as permanently closed in 2020–2021 (see Table A2). All remaining schools received a postcard in October 2020 notifying them of the forthcoming survey. One music teacher from each school was randomly selected to serve as the respondent on behalf of the school community and received the electronic survey instrument via Qualtrics beginning in November 2020. Three reminders and a note of gratitude were emailed to each potential respondent, and paper copies of the survey were sent to those schools for which no email address could be obtained. Paper survey responses were entered into Qualtrics by a primary investigator.

Survey responses, collected in Qualtrics, were downloaded, cleaned, and then uploaded to STATA17 for weighting and analysis. Given that the survey target population was all public schools in the U.S. and its territories that served grades 5–8, regardless of preexisting music programs, we constructed survey weights for use in our analysis to ensure representativeness across the 16-strata. We created a base weight for each school based on the percentage (15%) of the population originally sampled in each strata. Then, we constructed a non-response weight based on whether a school responded to the survey. As our sample was selected at random, and not based on any other school-level demographics beyond those identified by the strata, we did not include any additional factors in the weighting procedures. The final weight for each school was developed from the strata base weight and the non-response weight such that each strata contained a percentage of responses equal to the original sample (see Table A2). Analysis focused on descriptive statistics and was weighted in alignment with the 16-strata sample.

# Table A1

## Database, Population, and Sample by U.S. State or Territory

State or Territory	Total Schools in Database N=101,923		Population: Schools Serving 5th-8th Grade N=71,523		Total Schools in Database N=101,923		Assigned Geographic Strata
	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Alaska	512	0.50	453	0.63	61	0.57	West (W)
Alabama	1,463	1.44	1,014	1.42	151	1.41	South (S)
Arkansas	1,104	1.08	716	1.00	112	1.04	South (S)
American Samoa	29	0.03	23	0.03	3	0.03	West (W)
Arizona	2,456	2.41	1,608	2.25	226	2.11	West (W)
Bureau of Indian Affairs	174	0.17	152	0.21	20	0.19	West (W)
California	10,478	10.28	8,139	11.38	1,253	11.68	West (W)
Colorado	1,930	1.89	1,505	2.10	207	1.93	West (W)
Connecticut	1,032	1.01	682	0.95	104	0.97	Northeast (NE)
District of Columbia	235	0.23	157	0.22	29	0.27	South (S)
Delaware	231	0.23	169	0.24	26	0.24	South (S)
Florida	4,307	4.23	3,484	4.87	529	4.93	South (S)
Georgia	2,329	2.29	1,786	2.50	296	2.76	South (S)
Guam	41	0.04	33	0.05	7	0.07	West (W)
Hawaii	294	0.29	257	0.36	34	0.32	West (W)
Iowa	1,337	1.31	876	1.22	156	1.45	Midwest (MW)
Idaho	766	0.75	568	0.79	82	0.76	West (W)
Illinois	4,375	4.29	2,757	3.85	404	3.77	Midwest (MW)
Indiana	1,950	1.91	1,382	1.93	189	1.76	Midwest (MW)
Kansas	1,326	1.30	1,001	1.40	148	1.38	Midwest (MW)
Kentucky	1,559	1.53	1,054	1.47	172	1.60	South (S)
Louisiana	1,402	1.38	1,039	1.45	168	1.57	South (S)
Massachusetts	1,872	1.84	1,183	1.65	178	1.66	Northeast (NE)
Maryland	1,425	1.40	1,140	1.59	190	1.77	South (S)
Maine	603	0.59	387	0.54	51	0.48	Northeast (NE)
Michigan	3,795	3.72	2,420	3.38	356	3.32	Midwest (MW)
Minnesota	2,615	2.57	1,688	2.36	246	2.29	Midwest (MW)
Missouri	2,461	2.41	1,715	2.40	286	2.67	Midwest (MW)
Mississippi	1,085	1.06	657	0.92	109	1.02	South (S)
Montana	828	0.81	610	0.85	91	0.85	West (W)
North Carolina	2,700	2.65	2,015	2.82	306	2.85	South (S)
North Dakota	536	0.53	384	0.54	58	0.54	Midwest (MW)
Nebraska	1,111	1.09	801	1.12	109	1.02	Midwest (MW)
New Hampshire	500	0.49	317	0.44	59	0.55	Northeast (NE)
New Jersey	2,618	2.57	1,639	2.29	261	2.43	Northeast (NE)
New Mexico	892	0.88	655	0.92	93	0.87	West (W)
Nevada	755	0.74	575	0.80	77	0.72	West (W)
New York	4,851	4.76	3,428	4.79	517	4.82	Northeast (NE)
Ohio	3,638	3.57	2,281	3.19	320	2.98	Midwest (MW)
Oklahoma	1,811	1.78	1,141	1.60	154	1.44	South (S)
Oregon	1,260	1.24	1,005	1.41	163	1.52	West (W)
Pennsylvania	3,018	2.96	2,045	2.86	290	2.70	Northeast (NE)
Puerto Rico	1,102	1.08	667	0.93	100	0.93	Northeast (NE)
Rhode Island	326	0.32	195	0.27	23	0.21	Northeast (NE)
South Carolina	1,283	1.26	906	1.27	126	1.17	South (S)
South Dakota	704	0.69	472	0.66	86	0.80	Midwest (MW)
Tennessee	1,874	1.84	1,298	1.81	220	2.05	South (S)
Texas	9,505	9.33	6,407	8.96	865	8.06	South (S)
Utah	1,074	1.05	890	1.24	149	1.39	West (W)
Virginia	2,132	2.09	1,474	2.06	207	1.93	South (S)
Virgin Islands	28	0.03	20	0.03	4	0.04	Northeast (NE)
Vermont	316	0.31	250	0.35	34	0.32	Northeast (NE)
Washington	2,470	2.42	1,755	2.45	267	2.49	West (W)
Wisconsin	2,291	2.25	1,490	2.08	232	2.16	Midwest (MW)
West Virginia	743	0.73	497	0.69	83	0.77	South (S)
Wyoming	371	0.36	261	0.36	40	0.37	West (W)
<b>Totals</b>	<b>101,923</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>71,523</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>10,727</b>	<b>100.00</b>	

## Table A2

### Population, Sample, and Respondents by Strata

Strata Name	Population		Sample		Closed Schools		Respondents		Respondents Weighted by Strata	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	% of Strata Sample	% of Total Respondents (n=2,749)	%
MW_K5	5,848	8.18	877	8.18	14	1.60	202	23.03	7.35	8.18
MW_K8	4,526	6.33	679	6.33	6	0.88	161	23.71	5.86	6.33
MW_ML	3,881	5.43	582	5.43	0	0.00	144	24.74	5.24	5.43
MW_O	3,012	4.21	452	4.21	8	1.77	182	40.27	6.62	4.21
NE_K5	4,189	5.86	628	5.85	3	0.48	163	25.96	5.93	5.86
NE_K8	2,966	4.15	445	4.15	4	0.90	97	21.80	3.53	4.15
NE_ML	2,369	3.31	355	3.31	0	0.00	78	21.97	2.84	3.31
NE_O	1,289	1.80	193	1.80	8	4.15	56	29.02	2.04	1.80
S_K5	12,011	16.79	1,802	16.80	20	1.11	341	18.92	12.40	16.79
S_K8	3,800	5.31	570	5.31	12	2.11	92	16.14	3.35	5.31
S_ML	5,708	7.98	856	7.98	7	0.82	177	20.68	6.44	7.98
S_O	3,435	4.80	515	4.80	26	5.05	170	33.01	6.18	4.80
W_K5	5,969	8.35	895	8.34	1	0.11	282	31.51	10.26	8.35
W_K8	6,615	9.25	992	9.25	16	1.61	289	29.13	10.51	9.25
W_ML	3,175	4.44	476	4.44	4	0.84	125	26.26	4.55	4.44
W_O	2,730	3.82	410	3.82	15	3.66	190	46.34	6.91	3.82
<b>Totals</b>	<b>71,523</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>10,727</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>1.34</b>	<b>2,749</b>	<b>25.63</b>	<b>100.00</b>	



