Perceptions of Secondary Music Educators on the Transition to, and First Years of the Every Student Succeeds Act

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Perceptions of Secondary Music Educators on the Transition to, and First Years of the Every Student Succeeds Act

A Dissertation Submitted to Molloy College
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In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

by

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APRIL 2022
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Abstract

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 has the potential to be important for American music education. Unlike its predecessor, No Child Left Behind (NCLB), ESSA mentions music by name as one of the components of a “well-rounded education,” rather than including it under the arts. However, there is much that is unknown about ESSA and how it pertains to music education. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to better understand the perceptions of music educators on the transition to and the first years of ESSA. The primary source of data included 18 semi-structured interviews with secondary music educators working in Nassau County, New York. Most participants did not consider themselves knowledgeable about ESSA or the policy process in their schools. Similarly, the participants of this study felt they were uninvolved in the transition from NCLB to ESSA. However, applying the theory of policy enactment as a framework showed that the participants were more involved than they realized due to how they responded to the consequences of ESSA and other policies. Many music educators in this study were also concerned about the effects of educational policy on equity and the civil rights of students. Additionally, participants noted numerous contextual factors that influenced the manifestations of educational policies in schools and their impacts on music education. These findings have implications for music educators, policy makers, administrators, and all those who hope to advocate for equitable music education, as well as music’s important role in the curriculum.

Keywords: music education, policy, qualitative research, ESSA
This dissertation is dedicated to my wife, Jennifer.
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“Music has the power of producing a certain effect on the moral character of the soul, and if it has the power to do this, it is clear that the young must be directed to music and must be educated in it.”

– Aristotle, Politics

Chapter One: Introduction

In his classic work, Politics, Aristotle muses about the importance of music education. This quote, which may be among the oldest arguments for music education in the history of Western thought, remains relevant today as American music educators continue to advocate for music’s place in the curriculum. Aristotle was an educator himself and considered music essential to the education of the population, along with reading and writing, physical training, and drawing (Bailey, 2014; Turan, 2011). In Politics, he makes the case that music, though perhaps less practical than the other subjects listed above, deserved to be included for its moral qualities, as well as the pure enjoyment it brings to the student (Turan, 2011; Woerther, 2008).

The evidence for the validity of music education has come a long way since Aristotle’s notion of the moral character of the soul. Music instruction has been linked to everything from higher test scores (Hallam, 2010; Schellenberg, 2004) to greater socio-emotional development (The Royal Conservatory of Canada, 2014). Yet, the increased focus on standardized testing famously ushered in by No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and related initiatives such as the Common Core and Race to the Top, forced some schools to prioritize certain “core academic subjects” over the arts. This may have been particularly true in districts with lower test scores and less funding (Gerrity, 2009; Giroux & Giroux, 2008; West, 2012). Aristotle could not have possibly foreseen the longevity of his stance on music education’s place in a well-rounded education. The fact remains, however, that it has been well over 2000 years since he wrote Politics, and the subject of music’s place in curricula is still quite political.
Although NCLB was replaced with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015, the effects of this shift in legislation on music education have yet to be documented. ESSA, which was signed into law by President Obama on December 10, 2015, replaced the concept of “core academic subjects” with the much broader notion of a “well-rounded education” (Darrow, 2016). Tuttle (2016) pointed out that this was an exciting development for music educators who were quick to celebrate the fact that ESSA lists music among a number of subjects that could be used to fulfill this new well-rounded education requirement. ESSA was the first federal education policy to refer to music by name as its own subject area, rather than including it under “the arts.” It also conceivably opened the door to new sources of music funding by allowing states and districts more freedom to decide how to allocate public funds (Darrow, 2016; Tuttle, 2016).

In the years since ESSA was passed, however, some events have threatened music’s role in American education. For instance, in 2017, the Trump administration proposed a budget that would decrease education funding by over 13% (Bendix, 2017; U.S. Department of Education, 2017; Wissmuller, 2017). These cuts would have impacted the arts (among other subjects like foreign languages and history) in a disproportionate way. Furthermore, President Trump repeatedly proposed the outright elimination of the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, and the Institute for Museum and Library Services (U.S. Department of Education, 2017; Wissmuller, 2017). While these proposed cuts were never implemented by Congress, their results would have been disastrous for arts education (Bendix, 2017; Wissmuller, 2017).

The mere proposal of the budget cuts described above highlights the precarious position of music and all of the arts in American schools. The music education community must not take for granted that ESSA, or any legislation, will protect their discipline from future political
developments. The language of ESSA is encouraging, particularly the inclusion of music as part of a well-rounded education. However, educators, administrators, and other stakeholders must have more data to understand what changes the law brought to music educators and what challenges still remain. Furthermore, there is a lack of data on the role, if any, that music educators played in the ESSA policy enactment process in their districts and schools. The perceptions and lived experiences of the music educators who lived through this change in national policy are a valuable source of such data.

Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative case study was to better understand the perceptions of music teachers in Nassau County, New York, on the transition to and first few years of ESSA. I also included the experiences of teachers in high, average, and low need districts, defined by New York State’s “need/resource capacity index,” a measurement of the ability of each district to meet the needs of its students using local resources. I chose to include participants from all three need levels in order to compare the different ways that district needs may impact the manifestations of education policy and how music teachers experience them.

My interest in this topic was partly inspired by my own training and experience as a music educator living and working in Nassau County, New York. However, it has been over a decade since I have taught in any K-12 school. Although I no longer work in Nassau County’s public schools, I am still connected to them through friends and professional acquaintances. I was also raised in Nassau County and attended its public schools as a child. I currently teach music in a college that also happens to be located in Nassau County, and a large percentage of my students also attended Nassau County schools. I believe that all of this imbues me with an insider-outsider positionality that helped me to relate to the participants I interviewed.
Ball et al.’s (2012) theory of policy enactment was used to frame the study and analyze the data. This theory states that educational policies are seldom implemented exactly as written and often go through a process of interpretation and translation known as “enactment.” Furthermore, this theory focuses primarily on schools and the teachers working within them, as well as the influences of technical, normative, and political factors such as budgets, student demographics, and pressure from government agencies (Ball et al., 2012).

The following research questions were developed by contemplating the purpose of this study through the lens of the theory of policy enactment (Ball et al., 2012) and the gaps in the current literature on the topic:

1. How do secondary music teachers working in high, average, and low need schools in Nassau County, New York experience the transition to, and first few years of ESSA since it was signed into law in 2015?
   a. What are the perceptions of music teachers on how they were educated about ESSA and prepared for the transition away from NCLB?
   b. What role did music teachers play in the enactment of ESSA in their schools?
2. How do these music teachers perceive the influence of contextual factors (technical, normative, and/or political) on the ways that their districts, schools, and departments respond to the impacts of educational policy?

**Statement of the Problem and Significance**

The transition from NCLB to ESSA, and its impact on music education, is a complex topic that has yet to be fully explored by academia. As stated above, this transition was a relatively recent event, and the lack of empirical studies on the subject can be attributed to that fact. To fully grasp the significance of this study, it is important to understand the history of
NCLB and its effect on American arts education. This history provides valuable context to the current study and illuminates the gaps in the literature that will be filled by this analysis.

NCLB and ESSA are both reauthorizations of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which was signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1965 (Skinner, 2019). ESEA was part of Johnson’s “War on Poverty” and was intended to help close racial and socio-economic achievement gaps by providing financial assistance to schools serving impoverished communities (National Education Association, 2006). The goals of the original ESEA legislation were shared by NCLB, which was signed into law by President George W. Bush in 2002 (Hollingworth, 2009). However, critics have claimed that, once implemented, NCLB actually did more harm than good (Lipman, 2013; McGregor, 2009).

NCLB’s detractors have condemned it as a neoliberal attempt to apply free market principles to education (Au, 2016). Neoliberalism emphasizes school choice, the ranking of schools, increased teacher accountability, and increased standardized testing, particularly in English, math, and science (Lipman, 2013; Ravitch, 2016). Proponents of NCLB have countered these criticisms by affirming their belief that free market principles will eventually lead to increased performance and more effective instruction (Woo, 2014). However, these promises did little to assuage critics of the notion that the focus on standardized testing, combined with the consequences of increased accountability, would lead to a shrinking of the curriculum that would put untested subjects, including the arts, in a perilous position for years to come.

It is undeniable that at least some music educators were wary of NCLB and feared that any narrowing of the curriculum would disproportionately affect arts education (Beveridge, 2010; Tuttle, 2016). Whether or not those fears were warranted, however, has proven difficult to quantify. The majority of literature on the topic concerns arts education as a single entity
encompassing visual arts, music, theater, and dance (Beveridge, 2010; Chapman, 2014; Greene, 2013; Mishook & Kornhaber, 2006; Neel, 2017; Spohn, 2008). While useful in its own right, this literature cannot account for the differences between each of these disciplines. There also seems to be some disagreement on the extent to which NCLB actually narrowed the curriculum (Au, 2007; President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, 2011; West, 2012).

Yet, it is documented that NCLB’s impact on the arts was particularly felt in schools and districts that were considered high need, as well as schools that were struggling with low test scores (West, 2012). This is because NCLB required schools to achieve certain “Adequate Yearly Progress” (AYP) benchmarks in order to receive Title I funding. Many schools that already relied heavily on these funds were understandably quite concerned with reaching these benchmarks and therefore devoted more time and resources toward preparing students for their yearly math, science, and reading assessments (Giroux & Giroux, 2008; West, 2012). It should be noted that even schools that did not rely on Title I funding had reason to be concerned about AYP under NCLB. Schools that failed to achieve AYP were put on probation and even threatened with closure if test scores did not improve (Beveridge, 2010). Faced with these potential consequences, some schools chose to prioritize tested subjects over those that would not be tested, such as social studies, foreign languages, and the arts (Au, 2007; Elpus, 2014; Frierson-Campbell, 2007; Shaw, 2016; West, 2012).

It is true that NCLB did not lead to a unilateral decline of arts education nationwide, particularly in low need school districts with high test scores and ample resources (President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, 2011; West, 2012). However, evidence does suggest that some economically disadvantaged schools and schools that struggled to meet AYP did see a decrease in instructional time for the arts (Gerrity, 2009; West, 2012). This decrease was felt in a
variety of ways. Some schools simply chose to offer fewer art and music classes (Brinckmeyer, 2016; Gerrity, 2009; West, 2012), and some diverted time away from their existing arts classes to dedicate it to proctoring and test preparation (Abril & Gault, 2006; Brinckmeyer, 2016; Gerrity, 2009). Also, under NCLB, music teachers increasingly found that they were expected to incorporate math and reading enrichment into their lessons, which diverted focus away from the music instruction itself (Gerrity, 2009; West, 2012).

Furthermore, historically marginalized students of color, special education students, immigrants, and ELLs were more likely to see their access to music education cut by the unintended effects of increased standardized testing and accountability (Elpus, 2014; Elpus & Abril, 2011; Lorah et al., 2016; President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, 2011). This is partly because these students are more likely to be pulled out of their music and arts electives to receive remediation in the tested subjects (Beveridge, 2010; Elpus, 2014; Roda, 2016). The fact that access to music classes is disproportionately denied to historically marginalized students is particularly troubling, considering the proven socio-emotional and cognitive benefits of music education (Brinckmeyer, 2016; DeLorenzo, 2012; Southgate & Roscigno, 2009) as well as concerns about equity. Art and music should be a part of every student’s education regardless of race, socio-economic status, cognitive ability, immigration status, or language ability.

By 2008, the issue of protecting art and music education was considered important enough for then Senator Barack Obama to make it one of his central talking points during his presidential campaign (President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, 2011). Furthermore, after he won the presidency, both President Obama and his Secretary of Education Arne Duncan continued to press the issue as they called for the reauthorization of ESEA that
would eventually become ESSA (Duncan, 2010). Duncan seemed especially invested in the future of arts education. He gave several speeches in which he recounted the benefits of the arts in schools, citing increased academic performance among students who had art and music instruction (Duncan, 2010, 2012). Duncan also infused his speeches with sobering statistics, including the fact that by 2010, over 1.3 million American elementary school students and 800,000 middle and high school students received no music instruction whatsoever in school (Duncan, 2012; President’s Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, 2011). These speeches given by Duncan all stated that the arts should be included in a “well-rounded education,” a concept that would become an integral part of the ESSA legislation (Duncan, 2010, 2012).

ESSA has now been the law of the land for several years, yet many questions about its impact on music education remain unanswered. The literature on the subject is still emerging, and it is unclear if the implementation of ESSA has actually brought any real and lasting change to the professional lives of music teachers in public schools. The current body of literature also does not address the role that music teachers played in the process of transitioning from NCLB to ESSA in their districts and schools. These omissions are highlighted by the fact that music educators are often underrepresented in research related to issues of public policy (Aróstegui, 2018; Hollingworth, 2009; Richerme, 2019). This research addresses these gaps by examining the transition to, and first years of, ESSA through the perceptions and lived experiences of secondary music educators working in Nassau County’s public schools. Their recollections and current perspectives of the policy are valuable in exploring ESSA’s true impact on the world of music education, especially as it relates to issues of curriculum narrowing, instructional time, and lesson planning. Special attention is also paid to shedding light on the role that music teachers played in the policy enactment process. This information will be useful to districts that hope to
enact policies that protect music education as well as to music educators and administrators who are advocates for music’s place in the curriculum.

**Theoretical Framework**

The matter of educational policy and how it impacts educators is a complicated and often difficult topic to study (Ball et al., 2012). A great deal of the difficulty comes from the fact that policies such as NCLB and ESSA are written by state and federal legislators who often have no background in education. While they may rely heavily on input from educators, the truth is that these lawmakers have likely spent little time working in actual schools (Ball et al., 2012; Hollingworth, 2009). Therefore, it may be difficult for lawmakers to fully understand the implications of their policies on educators and how they conduct their professional lives. Furthermore, the policies themselves are rarely implemented exactly how they are written. More often than not, each district, school, or even department will apply policies and laws in ways that best suit their needs and working conditions. This process by which laws are translated, interpreted, and adapted forms the basis for the theory of policy enactment (Ball et al., 2012).

The theory of policy enactment is unique in that it allows the researcher to understand policy through the study of teachers and schools rather than lawmakers and bodies of government. Ball et al. (2012) stated that policies must go through a process of interpretation and translation by educators before they are fully put into practice in schools. This process, which Ball et al. have named *enactment*, is an often-overlooked step in the life of an educational policy. It is also a necessary step in the policy process since there are so many technical, normative, and political factors that must be taken into account before a policy is put into effect in a school (Ball et al., 2012).
Ball et al. (2012) argued that these factors, or “contextual dimensions” (p. 21), are essential when attempting to understand the implications of an educational policy in its proper context. The theory of policy enactment specifically mentions “situated contexts,” “professional cultures,” “material contexts,” and “external contexts” as the four categories of contextual dimensions that must be considered (Ball et al., 2012). Each of these factors is explained in greater detail in the next chapter. Taking these factors into account allowed me to explore the transition from NCLB to ESSA, as it pertains to music education, with greater context and depth. Considering these factors also allowed me to better understand the cultures surrounding music education in low, average, and high need Nassau County schools as well as how these cultures may have impacted the enactment of ESSA.

The framework is well suited to the study of the transition from NCLB to ESSA. In fact, it can be argued that ESSA uniquely lends itself to the concept of enactment given that the law is designed to give states and districts more autonomy in how they implement it. Moreover, Ball et al. (2012) asserted that teachers are too frequently omitted from the discussion of educational policies. In this study, I responded to this omission by focusing specifically on the perceptions of music teachers and their role in the enactment process.

**Methods and Design**

This study was conducted using a qualitative case study design. The constructivist nature of qualitative research allowed me to examine the complexities of the transition from NCLB to ESSA with depth and detail. It also provided me with the ability to simultaneously acknowledge and explore the varied perceptions and lived experiences of multiple participants. Likewise, the case study design, with its emphasis on the use of varied forms of data and real-world context, further lent itself to the in-depth analysis I intended to achieve (Bogdan & Biklen, 2016;
Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2014). Moreover, the fact that case studies must exist within a “bounded system” (Merriam, 2009, p. 41) also helped to narrow the scope of this study and guided the selection of the setting, participants, and data-collection procedures.

**Setting and Participants**

As mentioned above, case studies require a “bounded system.” In other words, there must be a limit to the potential number of participants, a specific time frame for observations, or some other factor that would ensure that the data is finite (Merriam, 2009). The participants of this study were bounded by several factors. First and foremost, participants must have been employed as a music teacher in a public middle or high school in Nassau County, New York, during the transition from NCLB to ESSA in 2015. This criterion ensured that they were able to comment on the period of transition from one law to the other, as well as any changes that the shift in policy brought to their professional lives. I also chose to limit the sample by studying only secondary music educators. This choice further aligned this study with the theory of policy enactment which specifically focuses on secondary teachers (Ball et al., 2012).

Furthermore, since the theory of policy enactment concerns the actions of schools and school employees, and because of the localized nature of ESSA, all participants were required to be currently employed in the same school and district that they were teaching in during the transition. The requirement that participants be employed in the same school for such a long period of time also essentially ensured that each participant had received tenure in that district. This is important as tenured teachers are likely less concerned about job security and more willing to speak openly and honestly about their working conditions without any threat of dismissal for being critical of the district or school.
I utilized purposeful and snowball sampling techniques by using the selection criteria described above and by asking participants to recommend others to interview about the subject. Snowball sampling has been described as an effective means of securing appropriate participants that may otherwise be difficult to find (Crossmen, 2019). Snowballing was useful to this study as there is currently no comprehensive data that would help identify Nassau County music teachers that fulfill the requirements listed above. Therefore, I relied on the recommendations of my participants, other educators working in the Nassau County public school system, and various professional networks.

Rather than drawing participants from one school or district, I collected data from music teachers employed in several districts in Nassau County, New York. This region is unique in terms of New York State education for a number of reasons. First, it is a relatively large, mostly suburban county that is home to a remarkable number of school districts. There are currently 56 school districts in Nassau County and over 300 schools. Nassau County is also quite racially and socio-economically diverse (NYSED.gov, 2019). However, it should be mentioned that the diversity of the county as a whole is not always reflected in its individual towns and school districts, which is why it is considered one of the most segregated regions in the United States (Foreman, 2005; Gross, 2018).

New York State also classifies each of its schools and districts as either high need, average need, or low need (see Appendix C). The state determines the need level of each school and district using a “need/resource capacity index” (NYSED.gov, 2011). The index is “a measure of a district’s ability to meet the needs of its students with local resources,” that uses “the ratio of the estimated poverty percentage (expressed in standard score form) to the Combined Wealth Ratio (expressed in standard score form)” (NYSED.gov, 2011, para 1). It should be noted that
ESSA provides its own definition of a high need district, which is based on the percentage of students who come from families with incomes below the national poverty line. The law does not give any definition for average need or low need (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). It should also be noted that the New York State Education Department does not hyphenate “high need,” “average need,” or “low need” on its official website (NYSED.gov, 2019). Therefore, I have chosen not to hyphenate them in this dissertation.

Since I chose to focus this study exclusively on New York schools, I decided to use the definitions of low, average, and high need districts provided by the state. According to NYSED.gov (2019), out of Nassau County’s 56 districts, 37 are considered low need, 14 are considered average need, and only 5 are considered high need (see Appendix C). It is also worth mentioning the racial disparities between the three district need levels. High need districts in Nassau County are predominantly Black and Latinx, while low need districts are typically mostly White. Though, in recent years there has been an influx of Asian students in low need districts. Average need districts are more diverse, though some also serve mostly White populations (ERASE Racism, 2017; Foreman, 2005; Gross, 2018). By selecting participants from several school districts, I was able to secure a sample that included teachers from high, average, and low need schools, as well as schools with varying levels of racial diversity.

Data Collection and Procedures

The primary source of data for this study was 18 semi-structured, audio-recorded interviews. Participants were asked about several aspects of the policy process, including the transition from NCLB to ESSA, how they were prepared for the new law, the differences between NCLB and ESSA, and the role that music educators played in the enactment of ESSA. Each interview took place on Zoom to maximize the safety of both the participant and the
researcher due to COVID-19 restrictions and to abide by Institutional Review Board guidelines. Interviews were conducted and recorded from March to August 2021, and professionally transcribed using Rev.com. I originally intended to collect additional data from school and district documents, such as testing schedules, music department event schedules, budgets, and any documents related to the enactment of ESSA. However, it soon became apparent that I would not be able to collect a significant amount of these documents from my participants. Many participants could not recall if any such documents existed. Others were forbidden from, or uncomfortable about, sharing district documents with an outsider. Only one participant was able and willing to provide a relevant document related to the transition to ESSA.

Data analysis was ongoing and coincided with my data collection. As each interview was finished, I reviewed and organized my notes and memos for use in ongoing reflection. After the first transcripts were completed by Rev.com, I began reading and coding the data by hand with the intent of finding patterns as they emerged. I then used these patterns, as well as my theoretical framework and research questions, to develop codes. The transcripts were then uploaded into an online data-analysis software program, called Dedoose, and coded. Once the coding was complete, each code was exported and analyzed before being combined into themes. These themes allowed me to further analyze and express the diverse perceptions and lived experiences of my participants.

**Assumptions and Limitations**

For the purposes of this study, it must be assumed that all participants answered the interview questions honestly and to the best of their recollection. It must also be assumed that they spoke openly about their experiences. As mentioned above, this was one of the reasons for only choosing participants who have already been granted tenure in their school. Finally, since
participants were asked about events from several years ago, it was assumed that their recollections are accurate.

This study had several limitations that must be addressed. First, responses to interview questions were limited by each participant’s ability to remember events and ability to express their perceptions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The use of documents was also limited by their availability and the participants’ willingness to share them. Furthermore, this study was limited by the lingering impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, which brought temporary but significant changes to both music education and standardized testing in New York State over the past several years.

The uniqueness of the Nassau County public school system should also be considered. In fact, given the previously noted factors that make Nassau County unique, some results may only be relevant to Nassau County itself. To fully understand the impact of this historic shift in educational policy on music education nationwide, more studies in more locations will be needed in the future.

**Definition of Key Terms**

**Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP):** This was the amount of improvement each school was expected to achieve each year under No Child Left Behind. This improvement was measured by scores on standardized assessments in math, reading, and science (U.S. Department of Education, 2001).

**Average Need District:** According to the NYSED.gov (2011), a district is categorized as average need if it falls between the 20th and 70th percentile on the need/resource capacity index.

**Combined Wealth Ratio:** “The ratio of district wealth per pupil to State average wealth per pupil, used in the 2007–08 Governor's proposal” (NYSED.gov, 2011, footnote 2).
Common Core: Also known as The Common Core Standards Initiative, the Common Core is a set of standards released in 2010 that detail what American K-12 students should know and be able to do in the subjects of Math and English Language Arts by the time they reach the end of each grade level (Gewertz, 2015).

Curriculum Narrowing: An increase in instructional time dedicated to certain subjects at the expense of others. This can occur when some subjects are assessed by high-stakes tests and others are not (Au, 2007).

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA): The federal education policy signed into law by Lyndon B. Johnson in 1965. The goal of the law was to provide increased federal aid to economically struggling students and schools. It included several provisions to reach this goal, including increased funding, scholarship opportunities, and grants (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).


Enactment: The process by which schools interpret and translate polices before ultimately putting them into practice (Ball et al., 2012).

Estimated Poverty Percentage: “A weighted average of the 2006–07 and 2007–08 kindergarten through grade 6 free-and-reduced-price-lunch percentage and the percentage of children aged 5 to 17 in poverty according to the 2000 Decennial Census. (An average was used to mitigate errors in each measure.) The result is a measure that approximates the percentage of children eligible for free or reduced-price lunches” (NYSED.gov, 2011, footnote 1).
**High Need District:** New York State has four categories of high need districts, each with their own slightly different definition of high need. One of these categories is exclusively for New York City, one is for other large city districts, one is for rural districts, and the fourth is for urban-suburban districts. I used the urban-suburban definition for this study since the high need districts of Nassau County all fall in the urban-suburban category. This categorization applies to any district at or above the 70th percentile on the need/resource capacity index that also has “at least 100 students per square mile” or “an enrolment greater than 2,500 and more than 50 students per square mile” (NYSED.gov, 2011, Need/Resource Capacity Category Definition Table).

**Low Need District:** According to NYSED.com (2011), any district that falls below the 20th percentile on the need/resource capacity index is classified as low need.

**Need/Resource Capacity Index:** NYSED.gov (2011) defines this as “a measure of a district’s ability to meet the needs of its students with local resources, is the ratio of the estimated poverty percentage (expressed in standard score form) to the Combined Wealth Ratio (expressed in standard score form). A district with both estimated poverty and Combined Wealth Ratio equal to the State average would have a need/resource capacity index of 1.0” (para. 1).

**No Child Left Behind (NCLB):** This reauthorization of ESEA was passed by Congress in 2001, signed into law in 2002, and characterized by an increase in standardized testing in math, reading, and science, as well as a focus on school choice, increased accountability, and the ranking of schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2001).

**The Theory of Policy Enactment:** This theory states that policies must go through a process of interpretation and translation before they are put into effect in schools. Rather than focusing on
the actions of lawmakers, this theory specifically focuses on schools and the people who work in them (Ball et al., 2012).

**Title I funding:** This funding, established by ESEA, is provided to low-income schools by the federal government with the goal of helping low-income students achieve academic standards (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

**Neoconservatism:** This modern political movement is characterized by an emphasis on “traditional values,” interventionist foreign policy, and free market economics (Apple, 2006; Evans, 2015; Kornfeld, 2005; Mullen, 2019; Vaïsse, 2011).

**Neoconservatism in education:** Neoconservative educational policies often encourage high academic standards and curriculum reform. Neoconservatives seek to align curricula with “traditional values” and promote patriotism in schools (Apple, 2006; Kornfeld, 2005; Mullen, 2019).

**Neoliberalism:** The exact definition of neoliberalism is often disagreed upon (Thorsen & Lie, 2006). For this study, I will rely on the definition provided by Harvey (2005) who described neoliberalism as “an institutional framework characterized by strong property rights, free markets and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices...Furthermore, if markets do not exist (in areas such as land, water, education, health care, social security, or environmental pollution) then they must be created, by state action if necessary” (p. 2).

**Neoliberalism in education:** Neoliberal educational policies often result in increased standardized testing, school choice, school rankings, and increased teacher accountability (Apple, 2014; Woo, 2014). Apple (2006) stated that neoliberal education reforms are often spurred on by public concerns over a variety of factors, including educational standards, teacher
effectiveness, safety, and desire to preserve the same “traditional values” championed by neoconservatives.

**Secondary Teacher:** For the purposes of this study, a secondary teacher is any teacher teaching grades 6-12.

**Race to the Top:** An initiative implemented in 2009 to encourage states to compete for federal funding by earning points based on multiple factors, including implementing educational policies, adoption of certain standards, and performance evaluations for teachers and principals (Toporek, 2014).

**Conclusion**

The transition from NCLB to ESSA has the potential to be a historic moment for American music educators (Tuttle, 2016). Many in the music education world have long claimed that their discipline has suffered as a result of the curriculum-narrowing effects of NCLB (Beveridge, 2010; Chapman, 2004). ESSA is the first national education law to mention music by name as a component of a well-rounded education. It also reallocates decision-making abilities from the federal level to the states and other local officials. Some believe that these elements of the law may ease the stress that they feel NCLB put on music education (Darrow, 2016; Tuttle, 2016). However, as optimistic as they are, even the most ardent supporters of ESSA are quick to point out that any improvements on the current status quo are far from guaranteed (Darrow, 2016; The National Association for Music Education [NAfME], 2016; Tuttle, 2016).

Through this carefully designed qualitative case study, I have discovered themes related to music teachers’ perceptions of the transition from NCLB to ESSA, how involved they were in the process of policy enactment, and how it has impacted their professional lives in the
classroom. I have also uncovered themes related to the myriad factors that influence the policy process by studying music educators working in high need, average need, and low need districts. While the scope of this study was limited to secondary music educators in one New York county, I believe that the localized nature of ESSA warrants this limitation. It is my assertion that the results of this study can help provide valuable insight into the lived experiences of music educators and the role they play in the policy process.

In the next chapter, I provide a review of the literature related to this topic. The pertinent components of both NCLB and ESSA are also explained and compared in greater detail. In addition, the literature related to the benefits of music education, curriculum narrowing, and the equity and civil rights implications of music in schools is explored.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

In December 2015, the United States Congress passed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The law replaced its long-standing predecessor, No Child Left Behind (NCLB). It also signaled a period of nervous anticipation as American educators speculated about what this would mean for their careers and their students (Neel, 2017; Tuttle, 2016). As details about ESSA were released to the public, some in the music education community wondered if the policy would address the particular strains that NCLB had placed on their professional lives (Darrow, 2016; Tuttle, 2016). Many teachers of music, and all of the arts, were impacted by the well-documented consequences of NCLB. These consequences included decreased instructional time, diminished resources and funding, and an overall loss of status as school districts diverted more money and energy toward preparing students for standardized tests (Baker, 2012; Beveridge, 2010; Brinkmeyer, 2016; Chapman, 2004; Frierson-Campbell, 2007; Miller & Hopper, 2010; Spohn, 2008).

On the other hand, ESSA brought some major changes that many in the music education committee found promising (Darrow, 2016; NAfME, 2016; Tuttle, 2016). ESSA puts much more decision-making ability in the hands of the states, which gives them considerably more flexibility to include music and the arts in their plans for how to utilize federal funds. In fact, ESSA provides new opportunities for schools to obtain grant money that could conceivably be used to bolster music programs (Darrow, 2016; NAfME, 2016; Tuttle, 2016). While encouraging, these possible improvements to the status quo are by no means guaranteed. Furthermore, many problematic aspects of NCLB remain intact, such as the emphasis on standardized testing in reading and math (NAfME, 2016). However, ESSA does specifically mention music as one of
the subjects included in a “well-rounded education.” This is the first time a national education policy lists music by name as its own subject, rather than including it under the broader title of the arts (Tuttle, 2016). This is of particular interest to music educators and others who have long advocated for music’s vital role in the curriculum (Darrow, 2016; NAfME, 2016; Tuttle, 2016).

Music is a valuable part of any school curriculum. Music classes provide students with enjoyment, opportunities for self-expression, and feelings of accomplishment (Brinckmeyer, 2016). Additionally, music instruction has an entire host of well documented cognitive and socio-emotional benefits for students, including increased attention spans, higher test scores, and greater capacities for empathy (Brinckmeyer, 2016; Rabinowitch et al., 2013; The Royal Conservatory of Canada, 2014). However, despite all of this, music programs continue to suffer from the unintended consequences of national education policies, and music teachers often have little say in the decisions that affect their profession (Aróstegui, 2018; Hollingworth, 2009; Richerme, 2019).

This qualitative study focused on the perceptions of music teachers employed in Nassau County, New York’s public secondary schools, on the transition to and first few years of ESSA. It concentrated specifically on music teachers since, as this review shows, their views have been underrepresented in previous studies (Aróstegui, 2018; Richerme, 2019). Moreover, music teachers are the only ones qualified to speak on their perceptions of this policy shift in their districts and schools. The views expressed by these participants are crucial to the understanding of how ESSA impacts their profession. The results of this study also help to illuminate the role that music educators play, if any, in the policy-enactment process.
Neoliberalism

To understand how policies like NCLB and ESSA shape our educational system, it is helpful to have a basic understanding of neoliberalism. This understanding can help to provide greater context for this study as well as a deeper understanding of how public policies impact schools. Thorsen and Lie (2006) explained that neoliberalism is often misunderstood and, at times, poorly defined. Despite being touted as one of the dominant ideologies currently shaping our society, experts and scholars disagree on what, exactly, the term neoliberalism means (Harvey, 2005; Thorsen & Lie, 2006). Despite this confusion, many in the academic community do agree that neoliberal ideologies play a large role in the operations of many of our social institutions, including education (Evans, 2015; Harvey, 2005; Thorsen & Lie, 2006; Woo, 2014). Therefore, this section presents a working explanation of neoliberalism as it pertains to the current study.

A great deal of the confusion about neoliberalism may stem from the name itself. Thorsen and Lie (2006) argued that while neoliberal theories may have been initially rooted in traditional liberal ideology, neoliberalism and modern liberalism have little similarity to each other. Many traditional liberal thinkers, such as John Locke, Adam Smith, and Baron de Montesquieu, were in favor of the kind of free markets and minimal government regulations that neoliberals consider essential to their philosophy. However, modern liberals have largely embraced a stronger government presence in the economy, education, health care, and other aspects of society. In fact, neoliberal economic ideas are so closely aligned with conservative ideology that neoliberalism has sometimes been conflated with neoconservatism. However, Evans (2015) explained that it is important to make a clear distinction between the two ideologies. While neoliberals may believe in free-market principles similar to those of the
neoconservatives, in the United States, the term *neoconservative* is more often used to describe
an individual’s stance on social issues, such as abortion and affirmative action. Harvey (2005)
defined neoliberalism as:

> an institutional framework characterized by strong property rights, free markets
> and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional
> framework appropriate to such practices...Furthermore, if markets do not exist (in
> areas such as land, water, education, health care, social security, or environmental
> pollution) then they must be created, by state action if necessary. (p. 2)

In education, neoliberal policies have manifested themselves in the form of an increased focus on
standardized testing, ranking of schools, increased accountability for teachers, school choice, and
other policies ushered in by NCLB (Apple, 1999; Giroux & Giroux, 2008; Roda, 2016; Woo,
2014).

NCLB was an attempt to reform education through free-market principles (Chapman,
2004). By ranking schools and emphasizing school choice, education was essentially turned into
a commodity and the public education system in the United States was transformed into the kind
of market described above by Harvey (2005). Woo (2014) noted that proponents of NCLB
claimed that the free-market system was inherently fair and nondiscriminatory. Their position
was that so-called failing schools would be replaced by better, more efficient ones, and that such
practices would eventually benefit society as a whole. They assured the public that ineffective
teachers would be compelled to improve or be replaced, and that unsatisfied parents would have
the ability to choose a school that best served their children’s needs (Woo, 2014).

While these claims are all quite positive, critics of neoliberal educational reforms like
NCLB are steadfast in their belief that such policies do not work as promised (Apple, 1999;
Many experts have pointed out that NCLB failed to account for the pervasive effects of school segregation, poverty, race, and other social factors. In fact, rather than ameliorating the effects of inequality, such neoliberal reforms may make them worse (Baltodano 2012; Brathwaite, 2016; Lipman, 2013; Roda, 2016). Although NCLB has been replaced by ESSA, the new law retains many of the same neoliberal ideas as its predecessor, particularly high-stakes standardized testing (Darrow, 2016).

**Theoretical Framework: The Theory of Policy Enactment**

Neoliberalism provides a foundation for understanding our country’s current and past educational policies. However, the actual implementations of these laws are complicated, with a great deal of variability from state to state, district to district, and even school to school. Therefore, this study required a framework that would allow for a detailed examination of ESSA at the local level. It should be noted that, often, studies of educational policy focus on the policy itself, as written by lawmakers (Ball et al., 2012; Hollingworth, 2009). While this is valid and useful in its own right, it does not take into account the subtle and unique ways that policies are interpreted, negotiated, and ultimately enacted by individual schools and teachers. Studies that ignore the actions of teachers and other local stakeholders leave out a significant part of the policy process. Ball et al. (2012) proposed the theory of policy enactment in response to this all too common omission.

The theory of policy enactment is a relatively new and strikingly straightforward framework for conceptualizing policy studies. Ball et al. (2012) argued that policies, as written, do not always reflect the realities of actual schools. Rather, they are created by politicians and lawmakers who often have little, if any, experience in the classroom. This lack of experience,
according to Ball et al. (2012), tends to lead to policies written with an often unrealistic, partially imagined version of schools in mind. As a result, policy makers frequently have little concept of school budgets, facilities, student demographics, or any number of factors that affect how their policies are put into action. Unsurprisingly, these policies often cannot be implemented exactly as written. They must first go through a process of translation and interpretation known as enactment (Ball et al., 2012).

Schools, and the people working in them, are at the center of the enactment process (Ball et al., 2012). They are made up of many individuals, each with their own values, agendas, relationships, and opinions. Enactment describes the process by which these individuals make sense of, adapt to, alter, or even ignore educational policies. Ball et al. outlined several steps in the process of policy enactment. The first step in this complicated process is interpretation. This describes the initial reading and attempts to understand the policy as written. The second phase of the process, translation, can be much more complicated. Translation denotes the actual steps involved in putting the policy into action through debate, planning, budgeting, staff meetings, professional development, and other initiatives (Ball et al., 2012).

The theory of policy enactment maintains that this process is necessary to the understanding of educational reforms because different schools rarely, if ever, deal with any given legislation, or the ramifications of any given legislation, in exactly the same way. Individual schools must take context into account when deliberating the implications of each policy. Ball et al. (2012) specifically mentioned four different contexts or “contextual dimensions” (p. 21) that schools must consider. The first dimension, “situated contexts,” deals with the location of the school, its history, and its student body. The second dimension, “professional cultures,” encompasses the school’s values, the commitments and experience of
the faculty, and its history of managing policies. “Material contexts” concern matters such as the physical limitations of the building, size of the staff, technology, and budgets. Finally, “external contexts” include support from outside entities, expectations and pressure from government agencies, community members, and anything else coming from outside the school itself (Ball et al., 2012).

This theory is particularly well suited to this study because ESSA, unlike previous legislations, relies heavily on plans and decisions made at the state and local level. Furthermore, this study focuses specifically on the perceptions of music teachers. Ball et al. (2012) noted that teachers in general are often left out of policy studies. They go on to explain that this omission does an injustice to the significant role that teachers play in the enactment process. There are even fewer, if any, studies in the current body of literature that examine how music teachers contribute to the way policies take shape in their schools. Using the theory of policy enactment, I investigated this crucial aspect of teachers’ perceptions of the transition to ESSA.

Organization

A review of the existing literature on NCLB and music education, and the emerging literature on ESSA and music education, revealed several common themes. These include an overview of the policies themselves, the impact they had on the availability of resources for the arts, and the overall feeling that tested subjects like math and reading have been prioritized above all other disciplines (Au, 2007; Au & Temple, 2012; Chapman, 2004; Miller & Hopper, 2010). The benefits of music education are also often discussed as a means to support the importance of preserving music’s place in the curriculum (Brinckmeyer, 2016; Chapman, 2004; The Royal Conservatory of Canada, 2014). Several sources also explore the issue in the context of equity, noting that music programs in low-income areas and communities of color are often most
affected by these neoliberal policies (Brinckmeyer, 2016; DeLorenzo, 2012; Frierson-Campbell, 2007; Gerrity, 2009).

In this literature review, I analyzed each of the themes mentioned above in an effort to add context to this constantly evolving issue. First, NCLB, ESSA, and the differences between the two are briefly explained. This leads into a discussion about how these neoliberal reforms have affected arts education, and particularly music education, in the United States. The cognitive and socio-emotional benefits of music education are also explored, as well as the equity and civil rights implications of ensuring access to these benefits for all students. Finally, I discuss the gaps in the current body of literature and how I attempted to address them.

**NCLB and ESSA: What Has Changed and What Has Stayed the Same?**

NCLB and ESSA are both reauthorizations of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The version specifically known as NCLB was effective from 2002 to 2014. In theory, NCLB was supposed to make education more equitable and close racial and socio-economic “achievement gaps” by providing federal funding to low-income schools (Darrow, 2016). However, this funding came with a number of stipulations. Unlike prior incarnations of ESEA, NCLB held schools accountable for their students’ proficiency in certain “core” subjects. Each school was required to demonstrate “Adequate Yearly Progress” (AYP) as measured through the use of standardized tests in reading, math, and science. Schools that underperformed were subject to disciplinary action, lost funding, and even risked being shut down (Beveridge, 2010; Chapman, 2004; Darrow, 2016).

It should be noted that although this review focuses primarily on NCLB, there were other federal-level and state-level policy initiatives that may have contributed to the culture of accountability described above. Two of these initiatives, the Common Core and Race to the Top
(RTT), were specifically mentioned in the interview data collected from the participants of this study. Although the Common Core and RTT are not synonymous with NCLB, they are related (Shaw, 2016).

Common Core was a series of standards detailing what K-12 students should know and be able to do at the completion of each grade. These standards focused primarily on Math and English Language Arts (ELA) (Gewertz, 2015). Meanwhile, RTT was an initiative introduced by the Obama administration that encouraged the competition for federal funding amongst participating states. These states could earn points in several ways, including adopting standards (though not necessarily the Common Core), evaluating teachers and principals, and implementing certain educational policies (Toporek, 2014). LaVigne and Good (2014) argued that these initiatives were inspired by NCLB’s accountability goals and added to the federal policy’s curriculum-narrowing effects. Furthermore, RTT may have been particularly stressful to teachers since it effectively tied federal funding to teacher performance. In some states, including New York, this resulted in teachers from untested subjects, such as music, being evaluated on student standardized test scores in tested subjects like Math and ELA (Gewertz, 2015; Lavigne & Good, 2014; Shaw, 2016; Toporek, 2014).

Critics of NCLB (and other related initiatives) claimed that the policy was an attempt to undermine teachers, their unions, and even public education in general (Baltodano, 2012; Chapman, 2004; Giroux & Giroux, 2008; Lipman, 2013). Furthermore, the increased emphasis on accountability was said to hurt the morale of teachers, intensify inequality, and reduce education to a commodity (Lipman, 2013; McGregor, 2009). However, the most frequently cited criticism of the policy, and the one that is most relevant to this study, states that NCLB led to a significant narrowing of the curriculum (Au, 2007; Au & Temple, 2010; Baker, 2012; Gerrity,
2009). Although NCLB designated multiple “core” subjects, only math, reading, and science were tested for the purposes of determining AYP. Therefore, some schools were compelled to increase their focus on these subjects to the detriment of untested disciplines, particularly music and the arts (Au, 2007; Au & Temple, 2012; Beveridge, 2010; Chapman, 2004; Miller & Hopper, 2010; Lipman, 2013). In response to these and other criticisms, Congress voted to replace NCLB with ESSA in 2015.

**Comparison of NCLB and ESSA**

The differences and similarities between ESSA and NCLB are numerous and complex. While ESSA made some sweeping changes, many of its provisions can be better described as rewordings of, or minor alterations to, its predecessor. Furthermore, some aspects of NCLB have been preserved in their entirety, though the responsibility for implementing them has been shifted to the states (The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development [ASCD], 2015; Darrow, 2016; NAfME, 2016). Both ESSA and NCLB are dense, complicated policies, and to thoroughly contrast and compare the two would be far outside the scope of this review. Moreover, this task has already been completed, and multiple side-by-side comparisons are readily available, such as the excellent one prepared in 2015 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD).

Rather than a lengthy analysis of the two policies, this section provides a brief overview of the most consequential similarities and differences between them. The topics covered here were chosen based on their potential relevance to arts education and the difficulties that NCLB may have created for art and music teachers. This section is by no means meant to be an exhaustive breakdown of either law, but instead, it provides a basic understanding of the changes ushered in by ESSA and what they could potentially mean for arts education.
Accountability, Testing, and Measures of Success. The most essential thing to understand about ESSA is that it dramatically increases the autonomy of the states. Rather than the enforcement of standards and accountability resting with the federal government, each state has a far greater ability to determine its own standards and parameters for success. ESSA also brought changes to the Common Core. While states are still allowed to adopt Common Core standards under ESSA, the policy prohibits the federal government from mandating or incentivizing their adoption (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). In fact, the law goes so far as to prohibit the federal government from dictating any standards to the states (Neel, 2017; Tuttle, 2016).

It should be mentioned that, while this is a significant victory for states’ rights activists and others who believe in minimizing the government’s role in local education, the federal government still has some control over the process. Each state is free to set its own goals for accountability, but these plans must be approved by the U.S. Department of Education in order to receive federal funding (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). There are also certain elements of accountability that must be included in each state plan. For instance, while states may use various measures to determine progress and how much weight to assign each of these measures, academic data such as test scores and graduation rates must be weighted more heavily than other indicators of success (ASCD, 2015).

Since the implementation of NCLB, high-stakes testing has been a consistent source of controversy. While ESSA brought some changes to the testing practice, the law is clear on the fact that standardized tests will remain a large part of American education. Like NCLB, ESSA required that students be tested regularly in reading, math, and science. However, states now have much more flexibility in when and how these tests are administered (ASCD, 2015; Darrow,
Rather than being required to administer one annual test, states now have the option to spread the testing out over the course of the year. States are also permitted to limit the amount of time dedicated to assessment. Additionally, school districts are now required to be transparent about the amount of time that students spend taking these tests. Districts may also develop and implement their own laws about opt-outs and must inform parents of their children’s rights regarding participation in assessments (ASCD, 2015; Darrow, 2016; Tuttle, 2016).

ESSA eliminated the concept of AYP that was so essential to the implementation of NCLB. Unlike NCLB, under ESSA, it is no longer required that 100% of students in any given school demonstrate proficiency in reading and math. Once again, the decisions for how to assess the progress of each individual school are largely left to the discretion of the states (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Also, while NCLB threatened strict interventions for all schools that did not demonstrate AYP, including restructuring the school, replacing the faculty and administration, and extending school hours, ESSA allows each state to develop its own intervention strategy for failing schools. However, while ESSA is less specific about how to intervene in a school, it is clear on what constitutes the need for intervention. According to ESSA, schools in the bottom 5% of test scores, and any high schools with a lower graduation rate than 67%, are subject to corrective action by the state (ASCD, 2015).

**ESSA as It Relates to Music and Arts Education.** Many of the changes described above are aimed at reducing some of the most obvious consequences of NCLB. In recognition of the fact that schools in different locations have widely different circumstances and needs, ESSA allowed decisions about accountability and standards to be made at the state and local level, rather than having them passed down from the federal government. Certain changes, such as the elimination of AYP and the 100% proficiency requirement, may decrease the amount of pressure
on schools to boost their test scores and as a result may ameliorate the curriculum narrowing that NCLB brought about. This could, in theory, free up some instructional time and resources for music and the arts (Darrow, 2016; Tuttle, 2016). While these results are by no means guaranteed and will likely vary from district to district, and school to school, the possibility is promising.

It should be stated that, as written, there is little if anything in ESSA that specifically bolsters or even protects school music programs (NAfME, 2016). Rather, ESSA affords states and districts more autonomy to decide their own priorities. For instance, under ESSA, each state must develop and implement their own plan for the allocation of public funds, some of which could go to music (Darrow, 2016; NAfME, 2016). Tuttle (2016) emphasized that the language used in ESSA is particularly interesting to music educators and advocates. ESSA replaces the NCLB era notion of “Core Academic Subjects” with the term “well-rounded education.” This is a significant shift in policy since NCLB had a very strict and narrow definition of what constituted a “core” subject. A “well-rounded education” can encompass a much wider range of subject areas. Many of these subjects are listed in the law by name, including art, history, economics, physical education, health, and music (NAfME, 2016; Tuttle, 2016).

The fact that ESSA mentions music by name is a victory for music education advocates (NAfME, 2016; Tuttle, 2016). In previous policies, music has been grouped together with all of the arts. This has been a point of contention for groups such as the National Association for Music Education (NAfME), which has been advocating for music to have its own name recognition in federal policy for over 25 years (Tuttle, 2016). The practical implications of having music listed separately from the other arts are debatable and have yet to be seen. However, this can be viewed as a gesture of respect toward music education as a discipline and profession.
The inclusion of music in the definition of a well-rounded education is also important because it may potentially open the door for another source of funding. Chapter IV-A of ESSA includes direct funding in the form of a new block grant designed to help districts ensure a well-rounded education for their students. Listing music specifically in the policy makes it eligible to benefit from this grant (Tuttle, 2016). However, it must be noted that there are stipulations to the funding. To be considered, music education must be identified as being in need of these funds by a district-wide assessment. Furthermore, any need that is identified must not already be met through local or state funding (NAfME, 2016; Neel, 2017; Tuttle, 2016).

**ESSA and Title I Schools.** Perhaps the most promising changes included in the ESSA legislation concern Title I schools. Title I is the provision of the law intended to provide additional funding to schools with high concentrations of students in poverty (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). These students can, and often do, include students with limited proficiency in English, immigrant students, students with disabilities, students suffering from food insecurity, students with behavioral issues, homeless students, or any students in need (Darrow, 2016; Tuttle, 2016). The eligibility to receive Title I funding is determined by the number of students enrolled in free or reduced price lunch programs at any given school. The schools that are deemed eligible and receive these funds are considered Title I schools. These schools are further categorized into either “school-wide Title I schools” and “targeted-assistance Title I schools” (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

The intent of Title I has not changed since NCLB. However, it should be noted that ESSA changes the language of the law to support the prevailing notion of well-roundedness. Unlike NCLB, ESSA encourages school-wide Title I schools to include their intentions and means of providing opportunities for a well-rounded education in their Title I plan. This is the
first time that other subjects besides those assessed by standardized tests are encouraged to be included in such plans. The pursuit of well-rounded education opportunities may include provisions for funding music education (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). ESSA also conceivably allows targeted-assistance Title I schools to allocate funding toward music education for their most at-risk students (Darrow, 2016; Tuttle, 2016). Once again, though, as with many provisions in ESSA, the allocation of Title I funds is determined at the state and local levels. Funding for music education is not, in any way, guaranteed.

The language used in Title I of ESSA also includes provisions to prevent students from being pulled out of any classroom for remedial studies in tested subject areas. This could help remedy the long-standing complaint that children who underperform on these tests are missing out on the arts in the name of math and reading remediation (Tuttle, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2015). However, the practical implications of these provisions are yet to be seen. It is also worth noting that Title I of NCLB also contained similar recommendations (ASCD, 2015).

The Importance of Advocacy

There are many ways that music educators could benefit from ESSA, but it is equally possible that music may be overlooked as states and districts prepare their plans for enactment. This is why it is important for music teachers to take an active role in advocating for their programs. Tuttle (2016) cautioned that if music teachers want to benefit from the funding and resources available through ESSA, they would need to educate themselves on the provisions of the law and what the possibilities are for their own programs. Prepared with this knowledge, these teachers could then volunteer to serve on the assessment committees for their respective districts. These committees are made up of administrators, parents, teachers, and others in the community and are responsible for determining the needs and priorities of each district.
By playing an active role in the process of enacting ESSA, music teachers can ensure that their programs are part of the conversation. However, even if they are not part of the committees responsible for enacting the law, music educators can advocate for their programs by appealing to committee members and making their needs and concerns known. Furthermore, music teachers may consider becoming involved with their local chapters of NAfME and other organizations who have been, and will continue, working on behalf of music education during this crucial time of transition (Neel, 2017; Tuttle, 2016).

**NCLB and Arts Education**

As previously stated, much of the criticism of NCLB is rooted in the fact that the pressure to increase test scores often results in a narrower curriculum. Many arts educators and advocates were initially heartened when the writers of NCLB listed the arts among the “core” subjects necessary to prepare students for success (Darrow, 2016; Neel, 2017; Tuttle, 2016). However, a closer reading of the law made it clear that this gesture was ultimately inconsequential. While the arts were considered core subjects, they were not deemed important enough for mandatory testing. Schools could conceivably choose to start assessing the arts, but since only math, reading, and science scores would be used to determine AYP, there was little incentive to do so (Beveridge, 2010; Chapman, 2004).

**NCLB and Funding for Arts Education**

While the effects of curriculum narrowing impacted many subjects, the arts were placed in a particularly difficult position. Even in the years before NCLB, art and music programs were notoriously imperiled by any budget cuts or drops in funding (Chapman, 2004). Many felt that NCLB added to this predicament, as untested electives and arts classes were frequently deprioritized in favor of tested subjects and test preparation (Shaw, 2016; Spohn, 2008). This
issue is compounded by the fact that arts programs can be expensive to maintain. The visual arts require materials, some of which, like paper, paints, and clay, must constantly be replenished. Likewise, music programs need to purchase or rent instruments, which are expensive, but even more costly when you factor in the regular maintenance they require (Beveridge, 2010; Chapman, 2004). NCLB did initially include funding for the arts; however, as Chapman (2004) pointed out, that funding was diminished in 2003. The Bush Administration justified this and other cuts by claiming that “terminating small categorical programs with limited impact” would free up funding that could be used for “higher priorities” such as reading and math (U.S. Department of Education, 2003).

The 2003 cuts did not completely do away with funding for the arts. The law still set aside some funds for arts education; however, there were stipulations attached to this funding. The law stated that these funds were to be used to support the integration of the arts into the standard curriculum (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). Chapman (2004) noted that this implies that the arts are somehow separate from the core curriculum and valued only as a means to support other subjects. Furthermore, the funding set aside for the arts was never guaranteed. In order for schools to receive this funding, the Department of Education had to have more than a certain, predetermined budget set aside for the arts in any given year (initially set at $15 million). If the department did not have the minimum amount of money available, all of the money that it did have was pledged to go to The Kennedy Center for The Performing Arts in Washington, D.C., and the performing arts programs it offers, particularly to students with disabilities (Chapman, 2004).

The impact that NCLB had on funding for arts education was often felt most deeply in schools and districts that did not meet their AYP benchmarks (Frierson-Campbell, 2007; West,
This was especially true when, as was so often the case, the school in question was underfunded in the first place. These schools were often under more pressure than their well-funded counterparts to secure as much federal money as possible (Giroux & Giroux, 2008). In the NCLB era, that meant doing well on yearly assessments. Schools that failed to achieve AYP were first placed on probation and risked losing funding if it happened again. During this probationary period, the schools had to develop a plan to raise test scores. The strategies these schools developed, such as tutoring and remedial classes, had to be paid for using existing funds. The arts were often the first programs to see their budgets decrease in order to fund these measures (Beveridge, 2010).

**NCLB and Instructional Time**

Despite fears that NCLB would lead to schools abandoning the arts altogether, the vast majority of American schools retained at least some art and music instruction (Spohn, 2008). However, this does not mean that the arts were unaffected. Studies have shown that the amount of time dedicated to arts instruction decreased in many ways under NCLB (Abril & Gault, 2006; Brinckmeyer, 2016; Lipman, 2013; West, 2012). Many low-income schools simply offered fewer art and music classes in favor of more math, reading, and science. These schools often chose to take time away from the arts and use it for test preparation and proctoring (Gerrity, 2009; Roda, 2016; West, 2012). Even art and music related activities in the general classroom were often diminished as teachers were forced to dedicate their time toward raising test scores (Gara et al., 2018).

Another somewhat hidden way that time was diverted away from arts instruction under NCLB was through remedial classes. Under NCLB, it was not uncommon for the arts to be relegated to the status of enrichment or even used as a reward for students who performed well in
tested subjects (Beveridge, 2010; Chapman, 2004; Tuttle, 2016). Likewise, students who underperform sometimes lost their elective art or music class. Rather than joining the rest of their class in art or music, these students would be pulled out for remediation until their test scores improved (Brinckmeyer, 2016; Gerrity, 2009; Roda, 2016). Beveridge (2010) described the numerous ways that this common practice was damaging to students, educators, and the arts education profession as a whole. First and foremost, students were denied what was often their one elective and one opportunity for expression throughout the day. They were also singled out as different in some way from the rest of their peers, which could be psychologically damaging to a child. Moreover, the simple fact that the arts could be replaced by remedial classes once again implied that they were less important than tested subjects (Beveridge, 2010). I believe that this was disrespectful to arts educators and sent the message that the arts are less worthy of a student’s time and commitment. Furthermore, in the case of the performing arts, the loss of one student in the middle of the year could jeopardize an entire performance. All of this contributes to a general undermining of arts education as a profession and an institutionalized lack of respect for arts educators.

**NCLB and Music Education**

Based on my experience as a music educator, I believe a distinction must be made between the literature that deals with NCLB and its impact on arts education as a whole and the literature that deals with NCLB and its impact on music education specifically. Many of the articles cited above speak of “the arts” as a whole (Beveridge, 2010; Chapman, 2004; Lipman, 2013; Spohn, 2008). This term includes music, but also encompasses all of the various visual arts, and often even other electives such as theater, film, and dance. It is true that all of these subjects fall into the broad category of “the arts,” and that they are all affected by neoliberal
educational reforms in similar ways. Yet, I believe it is important to understand that they are also all unique disciplines, each with their own individual set of necessities, difficulties, and pedagogical standards.

Music education was put in a unique position by the implementation of NCLB (Beveridge, 2010). Like all of the arts, it was impacted by curriculum narrowing, loss of instructional time, and decreased funding (Shaw, 2016; Spohn, 2008). However, the plight of music teachers might be unique because of the perception of how others see their role in the educational process. Many principals and other administrators publicly support their music programs and generally agree that music education is important (Abril & Gault, 2006; Gerrity, 2009). Still, this support rarely translates into any substantial action (Abril & Gault, 2006; Brinckmeyer, 2016; Gerrity, 2009; West, 2012). In fact, in one study of Ohio school principals, Gerrity (2009) found that 71% of respondents espoused appreciation for music, yet ranked it as the least important subject. Gerrity’s study echoed similar conclusions made by Abril and Gault (2006) about the dichotomous feelings that principals seem to have about their own music programs. Not surprisingly, respondents from both studies cited pressure to increase test scores and achieve AYP as reasons for their lack of consistency. Principals in these same studies also reported that NCLB was hurting their music programs, but that they felt obligated to prioritize tested subjects first. I do not believe that school principals are necessarily being disingenuous when they say they value music education. Rather, I feel they are being forced to make difficult decisions about what is best for their schools.

The way that music programs were overlooked during the NCLB era impacted music teachers in ways that went beyond funding and time restraints. Several studies found that this state of affairs often led to music teachers feeling uneasy or insecure about their jobs (Abril &
Bannerman, 2015; Gardner, 2010; Gerrity, 2009; West, 2012). This was particularly true in schools that were struggling to achieve AYP (Gerrity, 2009; West, 2012). Furthermore, many of these teachers felt as though the intense focus on math and reading was contributing to the idea that their classes only existed to provide a prep period for other teachers (Abril & Bannerman, 2015; Brinckmeyer, 2016; Rizzuto et al., 2022). It should be noted that music teachers faced similar examples of disrespect long before NCLB was implemented (Frierson-Campbell, 2007). While the policy did not necessarily create these issues, it could be argued that it intensified them.

Another pervasive effect of NCLB is the increased expectation that music teachers integrate math and reading into their classes. Gerrity (2009) and West (2012) found that many administrators now require their music teachers to include some sort of math and reading instruction. This expectation has also found its way into professional development. During the NCLB era, professional development courses for music teachers started to shift their focus toward math and reading integration (Brinckmeyer, 2016; Frierson-Campbell, 2007; West, 2012). While there is nothing inherently wrong with this kind of integration, I believe that the shift in focus is still unfair. Music teachers deserve the opportunity to attend professional development classes that are relevant to their field of expertise. To expect otherwise once again implies that music education only exists to play a supporting role in the curriculum.

The implementation of NCLB led to some significant changes to the field of music education and to arts education as a whole. The effects of curriculum narrowing, decreased funding, and diminished instructional time have presented challenges for teachers of the arts (Abril & Gault, 2006; Brinckmeyer, 2016; Gerrity, 2009; Spohn, 2008; West, 2012). However, it has been argued that the size of NCLB’s impact on the arts may have been overblown (Abril &
Bannerman, 2015; Au, 2007). It has also been pointed out that other subjects such as social studies and foreign languages have been similarly affected by the narrowing curriculum (Au, 2007; West, 2012). Also, as Abril and Bannerman (2015) reported, many music teachers feel that their jobs are more impacted by decisions made on the state and local level, rather than by national policy. However, while some may argue the degree to which NCLB has impacted music education, few would deny that music teachers are still dealing with its effects.

**The Benefits of Music Education**

Several of the sources included in this review contain some mention of, or even an entire section on, the cognitive and socio-emotional benefits of music instruction in schools (Brinckmeyer, 2016; Chapman, 2004; The Royal Conservatory of Canada, 2014). Despite the popularity of this theme, it can still be difficult to put the importance of music education into words. Music is enjoyable, entertaining, and lifts people’s spirits. The ability to make music, and to participate in the arts in general, is one of the most unique aspects of the human experience. The arts help us make connections with the world around us and with our own humanity (Greene, 2013). Yet, in the current data-driven educational climate of the United States, these reasons, though valid, may not be enough to justify prioritizing school music programs.

Advocates have pointed out that music education can do more for students than simply provide an enjoyable elective in their daily schedule (Brinckmeyer, 2016). While there is much to be said about the value of art for art’s sake, it is also useful to explore the physical, social, cognitive, and emotional benefits of music instruction. Through this lens, music education can be viewed as an essential component of every school. Not only can music programs coexist with tested subjects like reading and math, but they can also work together toward the shared goal of
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helping all students reach their full potential (Brinckmeyer, 2016; The Royal Conservatory of Canada, 2014).

Music Education and Cognitive Development

The act of learning and playing music is one of the most mentally stimulating activities that a person can do. Playing music, or even just listening to music, activates multiple regions of the brain simultaneously, including the regions responsible for language and spatial reasoning (The Royal Conservatory of Canada, 2014). This increased brain activity may account for the many apparent cognitive benefits of music instruction (Brinkmeyer, 2016; Hallam, 2010; The Royal Conservatory of Canada, 2014). For instance, children who receive music lessons early in their development have been shown to learn how to speak and read quicker than children who do not learn music (Hallam, 2010). Another interesting advantage of music instruction is that it may increase a child’s ability to focus and pay attention for extended periods of time. The self-discipline and resilience required to master an instrument can be applied to any facet of student’s life (The Royal Conservatory of Canada, 2014). The experience of practicing music could conceivably help prepare children to concentrate on other rigorous, and even laborious activities such as sitting for standardized tests.

An increased attention span is not the only advantage that musically trained students may have in school. Research suggests that children who have had at least some musical instruction seem to have a stronger working memory than those who have not (George & Coch, 2011). Working memory is essential for tasks such as reading comprehension and mental math. Put simply, it is the kind of memory that can be accessed when the brain is occupied with other tasks (George & Coch, 2011; The Royal Conservatory of Canada, 2014). Furthermore, musically trained students tend to have larger vocabularies than other students (Piro & Ortiz, 2009). They
also have been demonstrated to have better spatial intelligence, which is useful in mathematics (Hallam, 2010; The Royal Conservatory of Canada, 2014).

There is also evidence that musical instruction may actually change the physical dimensions of the brain (The Royal Conservatory of Canada, 2014). Certain areas of the brain, such as the frontal lobes, are larger in people who have studied music. The frontal lobes also happen to be responsible for many higher-level brain functions, like language, problem solving, and emotional expression. The temporal cortex is also generally larger in musical individuals. This is not surprising since this area of the brain is responsible for hearing and processing sounds (The Royal Conservatory of Canada, 2014).

**Music Education and Standardized Tests**

Given the cognitive advantages of music education, it is perhaps unsurprising that evidence shows a link between musical instruction and academic achievement (Southgate & Roscigno, 2009). Students who have had some musical training have been shown to have higher IQ scores and do better on standardized tests in math and reading (Hallam, 2010; Schellenberg, 2004). Musical instruction has also been linked to increased attendance and better graduation rates. Students who have studied music have also been shown to attend college and earn degrees at greater rates than other students (Brinkmeyer, 2016; The Royal Conservatory of Canada, 2014). Given that attendance, graduation rates, and test scores are all markers of school success, the data provides a compelling rationale for protecting music education.

Not all researchers are as willing to declare a causal link between music education and measures of academic success. It is difficult to know how much of the connection between academic achievement and music instruction is due to selection bias (Elpus, 2013). Just because music students tend do better on standardized tests does not necessarily mean that their
accomplishments are due to music instruction itself. There is also the question of how much of a role student privilege plays in the equation. Students of higher socio-economic status tend to be more likely to receive music instruction. These students are also more likely to do well on standardized tests than students of lower socio-economic status backgrounds for various reasons, including access to test preparation and greater parental involvement (Elpus, 2013; Elpus & Abril, 2011). This is not to say that musical training does not play any role in cognitive development or academic achievement. Rather, music education may be just one of many components that contributes to these results. However, given the importance of testing in neoliberal education policies, anything that could possibly help boost test scores is worth exploring. Even if the benefits of music education are slightly exaggerated by advocates, it does not mean that they do not exist or can be overlooked.

Music Education and Socio-Emotional Development

As noted above, music education has many cognitive benefits, but there is also a socio-emotional component to the importance of music education. Music classes provide children with the opportunity to work with others and strive toward a common goal. Through their music classes, students get to experience the feeling of being part of something greater than the sum of its parts (DeLorenzo, 2012; NAfME, 2010). Students who participate in school music ensembles often form strong bonds with one another and with their instructors (DeLorenzo, 2012). This experience may prepare them to collaborate with others in school and later in life. There is also evidence that music education may aid in the development of empathy (Rabinowitch et al., 2013). These apparent benefits of music education are not yet fully understood, but it may be that children who receive music education early in life have a greater ability to detect nuances in
speech and therefore understand the meaning behind the words (The Royal Conservatory of Canada, 2014).

**Equity and Civil Rights in Music Education**

The numerous benefits of music education make access to music in schools an equity and civil rights issue. In the United States, children of color and those of lower socio-economic status tend to have less access to music education than their White, higher socio-economic status counterparts (DeLorenzo, 2012; Elpus, 2014; Lorah et al., 2014; Southgate & Roscigno, 2009). A lack of music instruction is troubling for any student population because the ability to play music is an important part of a well-rounded education. However, denying music instruction to historically marginalized students is even more distressing considering the fact that these children are missing out on an array of cognitive and socio-emotional benefits.

This information about the benefits of music education is pertinent to the current study because evidence shows that NCLB has exacerbated the issue of access to music instruction in school for historically marginalized students (Elpus, 2014; Mishook & Kornhaber, 2006; Shaw, 2016; West, 2012). As mentioned above, the consequences of NCLB had a tendency to be more severe in schools that failed to reach AYP (West, 2012). Generally speaking, a disproportionate number of these schools serve mostly students of color and/or low socio-economic status students, particularly in Nassau County, New York, where this study took place (Foreman, 2005; Gross, 2018). Furthermore, research showed that students for whom English was not their first language were more likely to be pulled out of arts classes for remediation, or in some cases, not enrolled in the arts at all (Brinckmeyer, 2016; Elpus, 2014; Elpus & Abril, 2011; Lorah et al., 2014; Roda, 2016). ESSA, if enacted correctly, has the ability to help rectify this situation.
However, if this trend is not reversed, lack of access to equitable music education may contribute to widening achievement and opportunity gaps in education.

Analysis and Gaps in the Current Literature

The literature presented in this review depicts an unenviable situation for music educators. The pressures imposed by NCLB have led to an educational landscape full of questions with no easy answers. Administrators feel compelled to prioritize tested subjects above music, even though they themselves personally value their music programs (Abril & Gault, 2006). Music teachers, possibly driven by a sense of self-preservation, must adapt to a working environment with fewer resources, less instructional time, and a general lack of consideration for their hard work (Abril & Bannerman, 2015; West, 2012). Even the subject matter taught in music classes is in danger of being diluted by the pressure to integrate math and reading instruction (Chapman, 2004; Mishook & Kornhaber, 2006; Shaw, 2016). These consequences of NCLB are even more pronounced in economically disadvantaged schools where the cognitive and socio-emotional benefits of music education may be able to do the most good (Frierson-Campbell, 2007; Mishook & Kornhaber, 2006). The introduction of ESSA presents many opportunities to address these issues, but the flexibility of the law leaves much room for interpretation. Individual states and districts must decide how much they value their music programs and how willing they are to use federal funding to support them (Darrow, 2016; Tuttle, 2016).

An analysis of the current literature provides a clear understanding of the issues facing music educators, but there are gaps and shortcomings that must be acknowledged. First and foremost, as mentioned previously, most of the information available concerns arts education as a whole (Au, 2007; Au & Temple, 2012; Chapman, 2004; Mishook & Kornhaber, 2006; Shaw, 2016; Spohn, 2008). There are comparatively fewer studies that deal with music education
specifically (DeLorenzo, 2012; Elpus, 2013; Elpus & Abril, 2011), and even fewer that focus on
the issues that music teachers face when navigating the effects of educational policies (Elpus,
2014; Shaw, 2016; Spohn, 2008; West, 2012). Also, the majority of the studies cited used
quantitative methods (Au, 2007; Au & Temple, 2012; Elpus & Abril, 2011; Elpus, 2014). These
studies are valuable in their own right, but the large sample sizes used may have led to results
that were overly generalized. Qualitative methods may be able to shed light on some of the more
nuanced and personal perceptions that music teachers have on the issue. Much of the previous
literature also lacks enough contextual information about the schools they study (Shaw; 2016;
Spohn, 2008; West, 2012). The context that is provided is often vague and based on quantifiable,
sometimes outdated measures such as AYP (West, 2012). Finally, the most obvious and perhaps
most important limitation of the previous studies is that most of them are outdated. These studies
focused on the consequences of NCLB, which is no longer in effect. ESSA may or may not have
a similar impact on music education, but at the time of writing this review, it is too soon to tell.

I address the gaps listed above in a number of ways. First, this study is among the first to
focus specifically on ESSA as it relates to music education. Furthermore, in accordance with the
recommendations of Ball et al. (2012), this study focuses on teachers and the crucial yet often
overlooked role that they play in the policy process. The findings of this study add to the
important, yet comparatively small collection of research that attempts to explore music teacher
perceptions of educational policy through qualitative means (Shaw, 2016; Spohn, 2008; West,
2012). Finally, this study is one of the first designed to consider the unique context of each
district in the sample. By focusing on teachers from multiple schools within the same county of
New York, the varied ways that ESSA was enacted in different districts, schools, or even
classrooms was investigated.
Conclusion

A survey of the current literature indicates that many music teachers saw their funding decrease, their time for instruction diminish, and their status as an important part of the curriculum called into question under NCLB (Mishook & Kornhaber, 2006; Shaw, 2016; Spohn, 2008; West, 2012). Students, particularly students of color and lower socio-economic status students, also suffered under the law since many had less access to the socio-emotional and cognitive benefits of music classes (Elpus & Abril, 2011). However, there are gaps in the existing research on music education and policy. The role that music teachers play in the policy process has yet to be investigated. Additionally, many previous studies lack adequate context (Shaw, 2016; Spohn, 2008; West, 2012). Also, most of the literature that exists concerns NCLB, which has now been replaced by ESSA. Furthermore, ESSA was passed relatively recently, and research on the policy and music education has yet to be published. This study was designed to shed light on the role that secondary music educators in Nassau County, New York, played in the enactment of ESSA. It also explored their perceptions of the first few years of ESSA and the transition away from NCLB. In doing so, I have addressed the gaps in the current literature noted above and added to the emerging body of knowledge on ESSA and music education.
Chapter Three: Methodology

This chapter describes the research methods used to conduct this qualitative case study. As outlined in Chapter Two, I drew upon the theory of policy enactment (Ball et al., 2012) to explore the transition from NCLB to ESSA from the perspective of music educators. The theory of policy enactment emphasizes the process of interpretation and translation that educational policies must go through before ultimately being enacted in any given school. It also focuses on the actions of schools and those working within them, rather than on laws and lawmakers. Furthermore, this theory takes various technical, normative, and political factors into account to properly contextualize the implications of these policies (Ball et al., 2012). By using this theory as a framework for my study, I was able to better understand the role that music teachers played in the enactment of this landmark legislation and how they experienced the process.

In the following sections of this chapter, I discuss the procedures used to conduct my research. The first section provides an overview, including a statement of the problem, brief review of the literature, and the significance of the current study. Subsequent sections consist of detailed descriptions of the qualitative research paradigm and worldview. I also describe the role of the researcher, the participants, data collection, and site selection, as well as the context. Each aspect of the methods and procedures is accompanied by a rationale describing why it was deemed appropriate.

Study Overview

This section provides a brief statement of the problem along with a brief summary of the current literature on the topic, followed by the significance of this study. Then, with the context fully laid out, I state the purpose of my research. Finally, I reiterate the research questions and explain how they were developed.
The Problem

Many music educators and advocates were heartened to learn that NCLB’s replacement, ESSA, contained provisions to protect the arts in schools (Neel, 2017; Tuttle, 2016). As detailed in previous chapters, ESSA also allows more autonomy for states and districts to make their own decisions about accountability and the use of public funding. Moreover, ESSA mentions music by name as one of the subjects eligible for inclusion in a “well-rounded education” (Darrow, 2016; NAfME, 2016; Tuttle, 2016). While these aspects of ESSA are encouraging, it is still unclear if they will lead to any real changes in American music education. Furthermore, the role that music educators have played in determining these changes, if any, is also uncertain.

The Current Literature

Given that ESSA is still a relatively new law, there is little empirical research documenting its impact on the American educational landscape. Most of the literature on ESSA and its effects on music education specifically take the form of think pieces or policy reviews (Darrow, 2016; Neel, 2017; Tuttle, 2016). These articles aim to present the facts about the law and how it differs from NCLB. They also speculate on how the provisions of the policy could, in theory, be used to support music programs. Moreover, these sources act as a call to action for music educators to play a greater role in the development of their district plans for ESSA funding (Neel, 2017; Tuttle, 2016). While articles such as these are informative and important in their own right, they offer little empirical data.

The current information on ESSA is still developing; yet there is a wealth of related information on NCLB that can provide context to this study. A survey of the literature on NCLB as it pertains to arts education reveals a few common themes. For instance, several articles focus on the emphasis that NCLB placed on tested subjects and how this focus on math, reading, and
science led to a narrowing of the curriculum. These studies and think pieces make the case that NCLB led to arts educators being deprived of resources such as funding and instructional time (Au, 2007; Au & Temple, 2012; Chapman, 2004; Miller & Hopper, 2010; West, 2012). Many researchers and advocates also discussed the benefits of the arts, and particularly music, to underscore the importance of preserving their place in schools (Brinckmeyer, 2016; Chapman, 2004; The Royal Conservatory of Canada, 2014). Others raised the issue of equity by noting that music programs in low-income areas and communities of color are often the ones that are most in danger of being impacted by such policies (Brinckmeyer, 2016; DeLorenzo, 2012; Frierson-Campbell, 2007; Gerrity, 2009).

Although this literature contains a great deal of relevant and important information, there are gaps that must be addressed. First and foremost, it must be reiterated that most of the empirical studies cited above focused on NCLB, which has been repealed and replaced by ESSA (Au, 2007; Au & Temple, 2012; Miller & Hopper, 2010; West, 2012). Furthermore, much of the literature that currently exists focuses on the arts as a whole rather than music specifically (Au, 2007; Au & Temple, 2012; Chapman, 2004; Spohn, 2008). It is true that the other arts often face similar issues pertaining to educational policy (Chapman, 2004). However, there are many aspects of music education that make it unique and must be taken into account. Moreover, the existing literature provides little empirical data on music educators and how policies such as NCLB and ESSA impact their profession (Aróstegui, 2018; Hollingworth, 2009; Richerme, 2019). Of the comparatively few studies that do study music educators, few use qualitative methods to do so (Spohn, 2008; West, 2012).
Significance of the Current Study

The current body of literature is incomplete and outdated. The study outlined in this dissertation addresses many of the gaps noted above by exploring the perceptions of music teachers on the transition to, and first few years of, ESSA. It also highlights the often-overlooked perceptions of music teachers on the process of enacting educational policy, and the role they played in this process. Moreover, it is among the first studies to take the unique aspects of ESSA into account, particularly the emphasis on state and local decision making. This information is important to music educators, administrators, policy makers, and anybody who values the role that music plays in the curriculum.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to better understand the perceptions of music teachers in Nassau County, New York, on the transition to and first few years of ESSA. The following research questions were devised with this purpose in mind, as well as the theory of policy enactment (Ball et al., 2012) and the gaps in the current literature:

1. How do secondary music teachers working in high, average, and low need schools in Nassau County, New York experience the transition to, and first few years of ESSA since it was signed into law in 2015?
   a. What are the perceptions of music teachers on how they were educated about ESSA and prepared for the transition away from NCLB?
   b. What role did music teachers play in the enactment of ESSA in their schools?
2. How do these music teachers perceive the influence of contextual factors (technical, normative, and/or political) on the ways that their districts, schools, and departments respond to the impacts of educational policy?
Research Paradigm

I endeavored to answer these research questions by using a qualitative case study research design. A case study can be defined as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth within its real-life context” (Yin, 2014, p. 16). This design is well suited to this study because of its ability to illuminate the lived experiences and perceptions of the participants as they navigate a particular situation, such as the transition from NCLB to ESSA (Bogdan & Biklen, 2016; Merriam, 2009). Also, the case study design has been recognized as useful for “studying educational innovations, evaluating programs, and informing policy” (Merriam, 2009, p. 51). Furthermore, I feel that the constructivist nature of qualitative research has allowed me to thoroughly explore the complexity of this issue and the multiple subjective meanings that individuals make of their experiences.

According to Merriam (2009), a case study must take place within a “bounded system.” As she explained, the “boundedness” of a system could be assessed by asking “how finite the data collecting would be, that is, whether there is a limit to the number of people involved who could be interviewed or a finite time for observations” (p. 41). This particular study is bounded by the time frame around the transition from NCLB to ESSA. This unit of time, starting from December 2015 when ESSA was signed into law, intrinsically limits the potential population to secondary music teachers who were actively working in the field before and after the policy change. This potential sample size is further limited by Nassau County and the 56 school districts within its borders.

Role of the Researcher

As a researcher, I bring a unique insider-outsider perspective to this dissertation. I was trained as a music teacher and received a bachelor’s degree in music education in 2007. After
becoming certified by the State of New York, I worked for a brief time in the Long Island public school system before transitioning to teaching music at the college level. I hold a master’s degree in musicology and have been working as an adjunct instructor of music for over a decade.

While I no longer work in a public school setting, I am still connected to K-12 music education in a number of ways. For instance, I currently teach in a music program where my responsibilities include preparing future music educators for the field. I have also led professional development sessions for K-12 music departments and have interviewed music teachers for previous research projects on similar topics. Moreover, I have a number of friends and professional acquaintances who are music teachers. As such, I am familiar with several aspects of the profession including the lexicon of musical terms, the process of teaching instruments, and the complexity of programming a concert. I believe that this familiarity facilitated communication during the interview process and helped me to better understand my participants’ experiences and perceptions.

It was also not uncommon for participants to realize we had mutual friends or even had worked in the same schools. Two participants, Benny and Larry, both described how my contact in their district “vouched” for me. According to Benny, my contact said I was “a good guy” and encouraged him to participate. Similarly, another participant, Mia, joked that she had never participated in a study before and might not have said yes if our mutual friend and fellow participant Ronny did not encourage her to do so. Although none of my participants said so directly, I do feel that many of them were more comfortable and even honest with me than they might have been if we did not share similar references and experiences.

I also feel that my background as a music educator helped me to gain access to several districts. This was particularly true when the administrator I was corresponding with was a
district director of music. In fact, two of the district directors I contacted were professional acquaintances of mine who later referred me to administrators in other districts. Several district directors wanted to hear about my experiences in music education before they granted permission to contact potential participants, and one even told me that he might not have agreed to let his teachers participate if I were not “a music person.”

Despite the connections detailed above, I am still very much removed from the current K-12 educational landscape on Long Island. It has been well over a decade since I have worked in a K-12 school. Therefore, I have no personal experience with ESSA or what it is like to transition from one law to another. Moreover, I currently have no professional relationship with any school district on Long Island. I am also unfamiliar with many of the more recent conventions of Nassau County music education. This was particularly apparent when my participants would use acronyms or colloquialisms that they assumed I would understand but had to be explained to me. Also, the outsider aspect of my role as a researcher also may have prevented me from gaining access to some districts and participants. Although it was never expressed to me directly, I do feel that some administrators were hesitant to grant access to someone who does not currently work in a Nassau County school district. Some participants even told me that they were uncomfortable sharing district documents with an outside researcher.

While I do not have any professional stake in the Long Island public school system, I do care very much about music education and identify with music teachers. I also live in Nassau County and attended its public schools. However, I believe that my training and experience has allowed me to remain objective in the collection and analysis of my data. I also engaged in frequent self-reflection during the course of this study, with the intent of mitigating the potential impact of my own biases. Furthermore, given my lack of professional connection to the public
school system, I do not feel that I experienced any ethical concerns arising from my interactions with the participants of the study.

Participants

The participants of this study were purposely selected and required to satisfy certain criteria. Some aspects of these criteria were dictated by the boundaries of the study itself. In order for these participants to be able to comment on the transition from NCLB to ESSA, they had to have started their careers as Nassau County secondary music teachers prior to ESSA being signed into law in 2015. This specification ensured that each participant had the experience of teaching under NCLB, during the transition to the new law, and under ESSA itself. It was also imperative that these teachers be currently working in the same public school where they worked under NCLB, and during the transition process that began when ESSA was signed. This requirement was theoretically important since the theory of policy enactment focuses heavily on the ways that policies are negotiated within the walls of any given school building (Ball et al., 2012). This requirement also served a practical purpose considering the fact that since music teachers on Long Island are generally certified K-12, it is not uncommon for them to be moved to different schools or even different grade levels within a school district. Additionally, participants were drawn only from public schools since private, charter, and parochial schools are often not under the same pressure to meet federal standards as their public counterparts. Finally, limiting the potential sample to individuals with a long history in any given district almost guaranteed that these teachers were tenured, which may have made them more willing to talk openly than teachers with less job security. It also ensured that they were conceivably able to provide data on how their district and school implemented and adapted to policy changes over time.
School music can take many forms. Therefore, the sample for this study contained representatives from the three major categories of performance ensembles: band, strings, and vocal, as well as several unconventional music classes. I also chose to limit my participants to teachers working in secondary schools. For the purposes of this study, secondary schools are defined as schools serving grades 6-12. The decision to focus on secondary music educators was made to further align this study with the theory of policy enactment, which was written specifically with secondary schools in mind (Ball et al., 2012).

The state of New York categorizes each of its school districts as either high need, average need, or low need using a “need/resource capacity index” (NYSED.gov, 2011). NYSED.gov (2011) stated that:

The need/resource capacity index, a measure of a district's ability to meet the needs of its students with local resources, is the ratio of the estimated poverty percentage (expressed in standard score form) to the Combined Wealth Ratio (expressed in standard score form). (para. 1)

As seen in Appendix C, 36 of Nassau County’s 56 school districts are considered low need, 15 are considered average need, and only 5 districts fall in the high need category (NYSED, 2019). I was careful to draw participants from high need, average need, and low need districts.

It should be mentioned that need level is just one of the factors that was considered for this study. In the theory of policy enactment, Ball et al. (2012) argued that multiple technical, normative, and political factors must be considered when studying the implications of any educational policy. Ball et al. (2012) categorized these factors into four “contextual dimensions” (p. 21). Funding, for example, would be characterized as a “material context” along with
technology, staff, and infrastructure. Likewise, “situated contexts” would encompass the history, student demographics, and location of any given school. Another contextual dimension, “professional cultures,” relates to the relationships, commitments, and experiences of a school’s faculty and staff. Finally, “external contexts” refers to any outside entities that may impact a school’s operations, such as external donors, parents, government agencies, and community members (Ball et al., 2012). These contextual dimensions helped guide the data collection and analysis. They also provided valuable context to the results, as they pertain to low, average, and high need districts in Nassau County, New York.

I used purposeful and snowball sampling procedures to acquire a group of participants that fit the previously mentioned criteria. Snowball sampling is appropriate for this study since, as Crossman (2019) noted, it is an ideal technique for reaching participants who may otherwise be difficult to identify. There is no publicly available list of music teachers in Nassau County who satisfy all of the criteria detailed above. Therefore, I chose to rely on my personal and professional networks of contacts in the field, and referrals from the teachers whom I interviewed, to lead me to other teachers who fit the criteria.

My initial goal was to compile a sample of 10 to 15 participants from at least 3 to 4 different school districts. This number was chosen because it would be large enough to represent the variety of teachers I planned to study. However, it would still be small enough to abide by Crouch and McKenzie’s (2006) recommendation that samples of under 20 participants are more manageable and better for developing the kinds of relationships that facilitate open, honest communication.

I found that the process of finding participants took much longer than I initially thought it would. This was, in part, due to the fact that each district had its own policies and procedures for
allowing teachers to participate in research. These processes and procedures varied considerably from district to district. Some districts had their own IRB process, while others simply needed the approval of an administrator. Some administrators needed their decisions to be approved by higher levels of administration, and some were able to grant permission themselves. Certain districts required that I interview with an assistant superintendent before interviewing music educators, and others engaged me in long email exchanges about my plans for the study.

I started by approaching four districts that I had contacts in. My process for seeking approval began with an email to the district director of music (for districts that had one) or the principal of each individual school building. Then, I would follow the protocol for each individual district. I found that I often had to send several emails and follow-ups before I received a response. Additionally, one district never responded to my emails but did respond when I contacted them via telephone. After I had approval from those initial four districts, I began the process of acquiring referrals from the participants, professors, fellow doctoral students, and anyone else I knew who had connections to the music department or administration of a Nassau County school district. In total, I reached out to 20 school districts. Of those 20 initial emails, four received no response and one denied my request to interview their faculty. The district that denied me explained their decision by saying that they had been hit particularly hard by the COVID-19 pandemic and had decided to close their district to researchers until they could work out a districtwide protocol for approving studies.

Fifteen districts agreed to allow me to contact and interview their music teachers. Many of the administrators I was in contact with were kind enough to recommend teachers based on the criteria for participation. I contacted a total of 53 teachers across those 15 districts via email. Of those initial emails, 19 received no response. Eight potential participants declined. Two of
those who declined my initial request cited personal reasons for not participating, and the rest offered no reason beyond simply not being interested. Three music teachers agreed to be interviewed but changed their mind before the interview could take place. Two cited personal reasons and the other claimed that she felt she did not know enough about the topic to participate. Ultimately, four districts that had previously agreed to allow me to interview their teachers were not included in the study because no teachers would agree to participate. Of the remaining 11 districts, 3 were classified as high need, 3 as average need, and 5 as low need.

In the end, 23 teachers from those 11 districts agreed to participate. However, 5 of the 23 had to be dropped from the study because it was revealed they had not been working in their current positions long enough to meet the participation criteria. This resulted in a final total of 18 participants, 5 of whom worked in average need districts, 4 in high need districts, and 9 in low need districts. While my goal was to keep my sample to a manageable size, the exact number of participants used in this study was determined by saturation, which Creswell and Creswell (2018) described as the point when “fresh data no longer sparks new insights or reveals new properties” (p. 186).

**Site Selection and Context**

There is no one specific site for this study. Rather, the data were collected from teachers working in several public school districts, all within Nassau County, New York. Nassau County is a relatively large, diverse, suburban county in the New York metro area. Along with Suffolk County, Queens, and Brooklyn, Nassau County is geographically located on Long Island. However, it should be noted that Brooklyn and Queens are boroughs of New York City. One of the features that makes Nassau County notable is its sheer number of school districts. According to NassauCountyNy.gov, Nassau County is currently home to 56 school districts. This number is
especially large, considering that most other counties in the state contain fewer than 15 school districts, with the notable exception of Suffolk County, which contains 68 (NYSED.gov, 2019). The public schools of Nassau County currently serve 199,305 students spread across over 300 schools. Of these students, over 100,000 are attending Nassau County’s public secondary schools (NYSED.gov, 2019).

The students of Nassau County are also very diverse. As of 2019, public records indicated that the county’s K-12 public school students were 47.9% White, 25.2% Latinx, 13.4% Asian or Native American, 11.8% Black, and 1.5% Multiracial (NYSED.gov, 2019). However, it must be mentioned that the diversity depicted in these statistics is often not reflected in the student populations across school districts. Long Island, as a whole, has long been among the most racially and economically segregated areas of the United States (Gross, 2018). This segregation can be seen in school demographics. For instance, 36% of Latinx and Black students on Long Island attend schools that are populated by mostly other low-income students of color (ERASE Racism, 2017). These schools tend to also be more likely to be classified as high need by the state of New York (Foreman, 2005; Gross, 2018). On the other hand, 43% of White students attend majority White, affluent, or low need schools (ERASE Racism, 2017).

Procedures

The first step of my research process was to apply for IRB approval from Molloy College (see Appendix A). After being approved, I began contacting my connections in the field with the intent of finding participants. Before any actual data collection took place, I was sure to contact each participant’s principal, district director of music, and/or superintendent either in person, on the phone, or through email. These administrators were informed about the details of the project and the steps to ensure confidentiality. Data collection proceeded only after I received
administrative approval from each district. Once I obtained this approval, I discussed the project with each potential participant. Participants were informed that participation was strictly voluntary and confidential. Once they confirmed that they understood and that all their questions were answered, they were asked for their signed consent.

Data Collection

The primary source of data for this study was semi-structured interviews with the participants (see Appendix B). Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, interviews took place on Zoom to adhere to safety protocols. Each of these interviews lasted 30 to 60 minutes and was recorded digitally. These recordings were then transcribed by Rev.com. Once each transcription was completed, it was proofread against the original recording to ensure accuracy and readability before being analyzed. I kept detailed field notes throughout the interview process and reflected on each interview through the use of memos.

I determined semi-structured interviews to be an appropriate means of collecting the data for several reasons. First, the flexibility of the interviewing process allowed me to explore the perceptions of my participants and how these perceptions were developed. It also allowed me the freedom to develop new questions, prompts, and insights as the data-collection process proceeded. Furthermore, interviews allowed participants to elaborate on their responses and provide historical information on the topic (Bogdan & Biklen, 2016; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). It should be mentioned that this method does have its limitations. Creswell and Creswell (2018) noted that data from interviews could be affected by the presence of the researcher and limited by the participant’s perceptiveness and ability to articulate their perceptions. However, I believe that the benefits of using semi-structured interviews outweighed the limitations.
I initially planned for the data collection to last from March 2021 to June 2021. By the end, it had extended into August 2021. I decided it was appropriate to bring my data collection to an end at that time because I felt as though I had reached the data saturation point, and I also succeeded in obtaining participants from high, average, and low need districts.

**Data Analysis**

The data analysis plan for this project closely followed the recommendations of experts such as Bogden and Biklen (2016) and Creswell and Creswell (2018). The process was ongoing and coincided with my data collection. The first stage of this process began by reflecting on each of my interviews as they were completed. After each interview, I reviewed and systematically organized my notes and memos for use in reflection. This also helped me to fine-tune my interview protocol. Additionally, as I collected more of my notes and memos, I searched for patterns and themes that began to emerge.

The recordings of the interviews themselves were professionally transcribed by Rev.com. As the first few transcripts were completed, I read and coded the data by hand to further assess emerging patterns. I also began the process of “winnowing the data” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 192) and compiled a set of codes. These codes were developed using the data, my theoretical framework, and my research questions.

I utilized an online data-analysis program, Dedoose, to assist me in coding the completed transcripts. As each transcript was finished and checked for accuracy, it was uploaded into Dedoose and analyzed using the codes that were developed earlier in the analysis process. After each interview was coded, I exported each code and analyzed them separately with the goal of combining them into themes. As Creswell and Creswell (2018) recommended, I was careful that
these themes “display multiple perspectives from individuals and be supported by diverse quotations and specific evidence” (p. 194).

**Trustworthiness**

Several strategies were used to ensure the trustworthiness of this study. First, the interview data were triangulated using a combination of documents from the New York State Education Department and my own field notes and memos. Additionally, I consulted the publicly available details about ESSA itself to further ensure that my participants’ responses were accurate. I also used member checking to make sure that my interpretations and conclusions accurately reflected the intentions and perceptions of my participants. During the member-checking process, I contacted six participants, explained my findings, asked their opinions on my analysis, and asked additional clarifying questions about the results. I also used peer debriefing with the members of my dissertation committee to help me assess any potential shortcomings in my own interpretation of the data.

In accordance with the recommendations of Creswell and Creswell (2018), I provided a “rich, thick description” of my findings in the interest of further adding to the validity of the study. I also continued the interview process until I achieved data saturation. Moreover, I was sure to offer several different perspectives on each of my themes and honestly reported any evidence that countered or contradicted my interpretations. Furthermore, my theoretical framework, methodology, and analysis techniques were thoroughly explained, thus allowing for future researchers to follow the steps of my data collection and analysis.

It should also be stated that the case study design, and qualitative research in general, has drawn criticism for being prone to bias and for lacking generalizability (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam, 2009). However, I believe that this concern is outweighed by the ability of
qualitative research to depict the nuances and contradictions of real-life phenomena (Merriam, 2009). Given the complicated nature of the issue, I maintain that the qualitative case study design was a sound choice both methodologically and ontologically.

Ethical Considerations

Given the fact that I have no professional connection to any public school district in Nassau County, I did not experience any ethical concerns during my study. However, as with any reputable research project, every effort was made to ensure that this study remained ethically sound. To that end, I followed Creswell and Creswell’s (2018) detailed list of recommendations for addressing possible ethical concerns throughout the various stages of my investigation. I also strictly adhered to the recommendations and standards of the Molloy College Institutional Review Board.

I acknowledge the possibility that some administrators, or even teachers, may object to the disclosure of any negative data. I was clear from the beginning that I am ethically bound to report all data, both positive and negative. All parties involved were thoroughly informed of my research objectives and procedures prior to giving consent. To further assuage their concerns, all participants and their administrators were assured that I would use several strategies to protect their identities. As mentioned above, all participants and districts were given pseudonyms and all other potentially identifying information (such as demographics and physical descriptions of schools) were presented using approximations and general terms. Also, my participants were informed of their rights before signing the informed consent form. I made every effort to make sure that they understood that it was their choice to participate in the study and that they had the right to withdraw their consent at any time.
Additionally, as stated above, the interviews were conducted on Zoom. I also asked that each participant be alone, preferably away from school grounds or in a private office during their interview. By keeping my participants’ privacy in mind, I hoped to further protect their confidentiality and ensure that nothing they say would hurt them professionally. Finally, all data were securely stored in a password-protected computer.

**Limitations**

Like any study, this one had its limitations. For instance, given the uniqueness of the setting, it is likely that some of my data will only apply to Nassau County. In fact, some data will be specific to each participant’s district or school. However, these same limitations will apply to some extent to any study about this law. It must be understood that this study is hopefully the first of many similar studies seeking to explore the perceptions of music educators as they navigate ESSA and how it is implemented in many different locations across the country. Also, I do not believe that this limitation takes away from the value of this investigation. In fact, I would argue that it adds another layer of significance to my results. Not only will my results be important to local educators and lawmakers, but they will also be a significant resource for future researchers who are interested in exploring this topic in their own counties and states.

This study, like all interview-based studies, was limited by the ability of participants to accurately recall and express their perceptions and lived experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). However, I contend that the flexibility and capacity for nuance that semi-structured interviews allow outweigh this limitation. Additionally, I believe that this study was limited by the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the significant changes it brought to all aspects of education, including the temporary suspension of standardized testing and musical performance in New York schools.
Conclusion

This chapter outlined the research design and methodology that I used during this study. As detailed above, I used a qualitative case study design to explore the transition to, and first few years of, ESSA through the perceptions of Nassau County music educators. I feel that the constructivist worldview of a qualitative case study design allowed me to thoroughly analyze this complex and multifaceted issue. Furthermore, by using the theory of policy enactment (Ball et al., 2012), I was able to investigate how the provisions of ESSA are interpreted and implemented within the context of each individual district and school. This research is crucially needed at this time given the lack of research on ESSA and music education, and the lack of qualitative research on music teachers and educational policy in general.

To better understand the perspectives of music educators on this important time in educational history, I conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with participants from several Nassau County school districts. This study is a necessary step in exploring the lived experiences of these participants as they navigate the transition to and first years of ESSA. It also gives voice to a group of educators who have been largely ignored in the literature about educational law. Finally, it is my hope that the findings of this study will be of interest to future policy makers and administrators who wish to secure the place of music in American schools.
**Chapter Four: Findings**

As stated in previous chapters, the purpose of this qualitative case study was to better understand the perceptions of music teachers in Nassau County, New York, on the transition to and the first years of ESSA. Given how recently ESSA was implemented, there is currently very little literature on how this law impacts music education (Darrow, 2016; Tuttle, 2016). Using Ball et al.’s (2012) theory of policy enactment as a framework, I addressed this gap in the current literature by shedding light on the lived experiences of music teachers. This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do secondary music teachers working in high, average, and low need schools in Nassau County, New York experience the transition to, and first few years of ESSA since it was signed into law in 2015?
   a. What are the perceptions of music teachers on how they were educated about ESSA and prepared for the transition away from NCLB?
   b. What role did music teachers play in the enactment of ESSA in their schools?

2. How do these music teachers perceive the influence of contextual factors (technical, normative, and/or political) on the ways that their districts, schools, and departments respond to the impacts of educational policy?

In this chapter, I provide a description of the participants, sampling procedures, and my role as the researcher, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of my insider/outsider perspective. I also describe the rationale for the data collection and analysis process used in this qualitative case study. Finally, the findings of this study are summarized with supporting evidence from the interview data to support my claims.
Participants

As detailed in previous chapters, I used purposeful and snowball sampling techniques, coupled with my own professional networks to amass the sample of participants. The process of compiling this sample lasted from March through August 2021. Much of this time was spent navigating the various protocols of each individual school district. In the end, 15 school districts agreed to allow their teachers to participate in this study. I reached out to 53 music teachers across those 15 districts. Ultimately, 18 teachers who fit the criteria for participation agreed to be interviewed for the study. These 18 participants were drawn from 11 districts, with 4 teachers from high need districts, 5 teachers from average need districts, and 9 teachers from low need districts. A detailed description of how the sample for this study was compiled can be found in Chapter Three.

More information about the participants can be seen in Table 1. Note that participants and districts are referred to by pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. Similarly, all classes other than band, orchestra, chorus, and general music are referred to as an “unconventional music class.”

Table 1

Participant Details

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Need Level</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Teacher Participants</th>
<th>Classes/Grade Level</th>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low Need</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Richard</td>
<td>Band Grades 9-12</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Carl</td>
<td>Chorus Grades 9-12</td>
<td>Over 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Michelle Cara</td>
<td>Chorus Grades 9-12</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Orchestra Grades 6-8</td>
<td>Over 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Josephine</td>
<td>Chorus Grades 6-8</td>
<td>Over 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Subject and Class</td>
<td>Years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-8</td>
<td>Trevor</td>
<td>Band</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>Chorus/General Music</td>
<td>Over 30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Larry</td>
<td>Band</td>
<td>Over 30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Benny</td>
<td>General Music/Unconventional Music Class</td>
<td>Over 20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>

**Average Need**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grades</th>
<th>Name</th>
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<th>Years</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7-12</td>
<td>Bruce</td>
<td>Chorus/Unconventional Music Class</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jennifer</td>
<td>Chorus</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-12</td>
<td>Ronny</td>
<td>Orchestra</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mia</td>
<td>Chorus</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jackson</td>
<td>Chorus</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**High Need**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grades</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Subject and Class</th>
<th>Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9-12</td>
<td>Jerry</td>
<td>Band</td>
<td>Over 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stacey</td>
<td>Orchestra/General Music/Unconventional Music Class</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>Chorus/Unconventional Music Class</td>
<td>Over 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fred</td>
<td>Band/General Music</td>
<td>Over 20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Totals**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Range: Grades 6-12</th>
<th>Years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Range: 8-30+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Role of the Researcher

I believe that my experience in the music education field helped me build rapport with the participants, which facilitated conversation throughout the interview process. As an adjunct instructor teaching in a college-level music education program, I am familiar with many of the factors that impact the professional lives of music educators. I also shared much of their vernacular and experiences. I am also a resident of Nassau County who attended and worked in its public schools. This familiarity with, and experience in, the Nassau County public school system also may have helped me acquire access to some of the participants. Many of the administrators that I approached for permission to interview their employees were intrigued by the fact that I had grown up in the area. Furthermore, many of these administrators seemed interested in hearing about my own experiences in music education. One administrator, a district director of music from an average need district, even told me that he was initially hesitant to talk to me but changed his mind after he read that I had a music education background.

While my insider perspective was valuable in many ways, it is also important to recognize the ways in which I was as outsider. It has been over a decade since I have worked in a Nassau County public school in any capacity, and I soon found that many of my contacts had since retired or moved on to other districts. Furthermore, while I shared a common vernacular with the participants to an extent, I found that many terms and policies that I was familiar with had changed in the time that I have been pursuing my current career in higher education. My role as an outsider may have made it more difficult to gain access to several prospective school districts. I should state that this was never expressed to me directly, but I felt as though some administrators and even teachers were wary to talk to someone from outside the public school system. Moreover, it was expressed to me by several participants that they either felt
uncomfortable or were simply not allowed to share school district documents with an outside researcher. However, the outsider aspects of my role as a researcher were not completely detrimental. I feel that my separation from the districts I was studying helped me to understand them in the greater context of Nassau County and New York State as a whole. Many participants were only familiar with the way things operated in their own districts. As an outsider, I was free from such assumptions.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

The data for this study were collected from 18 semi-structured interviews with secondary music educators currently working in Nassau County public schools. The data-analysis process was ongoing and coincided with the collection of the data. In accordance with COVID-19 safety protocols, each 30- to 60-minute semi-structured interview was conducted and recorded on Zoom. The audio from these interviews was then transcribed by Rev.com. As noted in Chapter Three, semi-structured interviews were deemed appropriate for this study for their flexibility, which allowed me the freedom to adapt my interview protocol and develop new prompts during the data collection and analysis process. It also allowed participants the flexibility to respond freely and elaborate on their responses in any manner they chose (Bogdan & Biklen, 2016; Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The first few transcripts were coded by hand with the intention of developing codes based on the framework and in vivo codes based on participant responses. These initial codes were first written in the margins of the transcripts and then reduced through axial coding. This process of reduction allowed me to develop a manageable list of categories that cut across the data. My interview protocol also evolved during my data-collection period as I added prompts based on certain responses I began to hear from multiple participants. These prompts included questions
The first codes I developed were based on the theoretical framework in conjunction with the elements of policy enactment that I expected to see based on the existing literature. These included “NCLB Enactment,” “ESSA Enactment,” “Music Educator Policy Involvement,” and “Contextual Dimensions.” As I conducted the first interviews and hand-coded the transcripts, several in vivo codes began to materialize based on the responses of the participants, including “the importance of advocacy,” “community involvement,” and “the importance of administration.” A full list of the codes I used in my analysis can be seen in Table 2. These codes are divided into two broad categories: theory-driven codes and in vivo codes. Parent codes are depicted in a bold font with child codes listed beneath them.

**Table 2**

*List of Codes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory-Driven Codes</th>
<th>In Vivo Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>NCLB Enactment</strong></td>
<td>Importance of advocacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCLB District-Level Enactment</td>
<td>Parent advocacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCLB School-Level Enactment</td>
<td>Administrative advocacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCLB Department-Level Enactment</td>
<td>Teach advocacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ESSA Enactment</strong></td>
<td>Importance of administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESSA District-Level Enactment</td>
<td>Department level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td><strong>Music Educator Policy involvement</strong></td>
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These codes were then uploaded into Dedoose and used to code the interview transcripts. When coding on Dedoose was complete, the codes were exported, the excerpts were reviewed, and the codes were combined into themes that cut across the data. All of my data-analysis procedures are in line with the recommendations of Creswell and Creswell (2018) and Bogden and Biklen (2016). This combination of codes into themes led to the development of three major findings, which can be seen in greater detail in Figure 1.
I also made sure to note interesting outliers that I encountered while reading through the transcripts. As described in Chapter Three, trustworthiness was maintained through member checking with six participants and peer debriefing with the three members of my dissertation.
committee. My own interview notes and memos were also used for triangulation. The data were further triangulated using publicly available information about ESSA and each individual school district. Additionally, I engaged in frequent reflection throughout the data collection and analysis process to minimize the impact of my own possible biases.

**Findings**

In this chapter, I organized the findings into three sections based on the three major finding of my analysis. The first section details the general lack of information that most participants felt they had about ESSA. The second section explores the notion that music teachers play a greater role in the policy process than they realize. The third section uses the contextual dimensions put forth in Ball et al.’s (2012) theory of policy enactment to better contextualize the participants’ experiences with the effects of policies such as NCLB and ESSA, and their implications for equity and civil rights. This section also demonstrates the usefulness of these dimensions for future policy studies.

**Finding 1: Most Music Teachers Felt They Were Not Well Informed About ESSA**

Most of the participants confessed to not knowing very much about ESSA. Speaking candidly, 4 of the 18 participants told me that they knew of ESSA but were unaware that the policy had been put into place. Moreover, three other participants stated that they had never heard of ESSA until my email requesting that they take part in the study. Only 4 of the 18 participants felt confident enough to say that they were well informed about ESSA.

Overall, there was a great deal of variation in the amount of knowledge the participants possessed. Jerry, a teacher working in a high need high school, said that he was “vaguely aware” that NCLB had been replaced and that “it had something to do with Obama” but had no further information. Three participants stated that they knew that ESSA “got rid of the Common Core,”
as Cara, a middle school teacher from a low need district put it. To be clear, ESSA technically prohibits the federal government from requiring or incentivizing states to adopt the Common Core but it does not prohibit it (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Additionally, two participants were aware that ESSA was the first federal education policy to mention music by name. Most felt like Mia, a teacher from a high school in an average need district, who said, “I know what it is. Yeah, I just don’t know a lot about it.”

**Reasons for Lack of Knowledge**

The data revealed several reasons why most participants did not feel knowledgeable about ESSA. The most common of these reasons was that many of the educators I interviewed are simply apathetic about changes in national education policy. Of the 18 participants, about half of them cited a general lack of interest as one of the reasons for why they had not pursued more information about ESSA. As Bruce, a middle school and high school teacher from an average need district put it, “I just don’t think it applies to what I’m doing.” Cara, a participant from a low need district, echoed Bruce’s sentiment stating, “I think that’s really more for the other teachers to think about.” The prevailing attitude from these participants was that NCLB and ESSA are mostly concerns for teachers of tested subjects (math and ELA) rather than music teachers.

However, not all the music educators in the sample were disinterested in ESSA. Roughly half of the participants claimed to be interested in the law and its possible ramifications for music education but still believed themselves to be underinformed. Each of these participants had varied reasons for why they had not learned more about ESSA, including a lack of information being provided by their district, not knowing where to seek information for themselves, and in
the case of one participant (a high school teacher from an average need district), insecurity about her own ability to understand the policy as written.

**Lack of Time.** The strongest, cross-cutting explanation for why teachers considered themselves to be uneducated about ESSA was time. Many participants expressed the feeling that the responsibilities of their profession make it difficult to find time to inform themselves about policy. “At this point in my career, I think I would be interested in learning more, especially if I end up in administration,” said Ronny, who teaches in both the middle and high school of an average need district, “but I don’t know when I would do it.” Additionally, Karen, a high school teacher working in a high need district, laughed when asked if she had tried to educate herself on ESSA and said, “I would love to, but I have too much going on at school right now.” This issue of not having the time to educate oneself about ESSA was common to all participants who were interested but still uninformed about the policy.

Time was also a response I heard from the teachers who were less interested in ESSA. One of these participants, Michelle, a high school chorus teacher from a low need district commented, “We’re all so busy. We [music teachers] have a lot of responsibilities.” Regardless of their varying levels of interest in ESSA, these participants all felt that they could not spare the amount of time that would be needed to become better informed about the law. Furthermore, many felt that ESSA is not relevant to their profession. Whether this assessment of the law’s relevance is true or not, it still may have led to a hesitance on the part of some participants to seek information about the policy.

Five teachers brought up the amount of reading materials they received from their districts as a reason for not being informed about ESSA. These participants noted that the reading materials, which mostly took the form of memos and emails, often went unread. This
makes it difficult to discern how much of this reading, if any, concerned ESSA. When asked if she had ever received information about ESSA from her district director of music, Stacey, a middle school teacher from a high need district noted, “There might have been an email. I’m sure there was, but to be honest, I just don’t have the time to read everything they send out.” Stacey went on to say that even if she knew information about ESSA was distributed from her district, she still did not think she would read it. “There’s just too much to do,” she said, “there’s not enough time.”

Sally, a middle school teacher from a low need district, echoed Stacey’s concerns emphatically saying, “If I have to read it? You know how it is. Come on.” Sally clarified this point by stating that she often receives multiple pages of reading material from her central administration a week. She claimed to rarely read these materials because she felt that most of them did not apply to her or the classes she taught. According to her, she would occasionally skim materials such as these but hardly ever read them in their entirety. When asked if it was possible that any of those materials contained information about ESSA, Sally replied, “It’s possible. I’m sorry. I really wouldn’t remember either way.”

It may very well be that there was significantly more information about ESSA being distributed to the participants of this study than even they were aware of. However, if this information was distributed in the form of reading materials, it likely went unread. Only one participant, Larry, a teacher from a low need middle school, was able to recall and locate any specific documentation about ESSA shared by his district. Although more research is surely needed to say for certain, it would appear from the data gathered during the interview process that the distribution of reading materials was not an effective means of disseminating information about ESSA in the districts contained in the sample.
**Disillusionment.** There was also a strong feeling of disillusionment that colored many of the participants’ responses, particularly the veteran teachers in the sample. For the purposes of this study, I define *veteran teachers* as those who have been in their positions for 20 years or more. Of the 18 participants, 10 fit this description. These teachers largely felt that it was not worth the effort to educate themselves on policies like ESSA because it was too political. As Jerry, a teacher working in a high need district, phrased it, “It’s [educational policy] all just talk. I know that’s probably not what you want to hear. But, for me, I just don’t listen to it anymore. Show me what you’re actually going to do. Don’t just talk about it.” Jackson, a middle school teacher from an average need district, echoed Jerry’s point saying, “I think there’s too much politics. One party comes in, and they change things, and then in a few years, the other party changes it back.” Jackson further stated that he felt that politics had no part in education. “It’s about the kids,” he said, “and I don’t think these politicians have that in mind, frankly.” Jackson, like many of the veteran participants, felt that education had become too politicized over the course of his career.

This feeling of disillusionment was not limited to the veteran teachers in the sample. It was also not limited to teachers who considered themselves uneducated about ESSA. Even teachers who possessed more information about the law felt disillusioned, but for a variety of reasons. Josephine and Larry, teachers who both worked in different low need districts and considered themselves educated on ESSA, both expressed the feeling that ESSA was not significantly different from NCLB. As Josephine said, “I was happy to hear they were trying to get rid of No Child Left Behind. I was disappointed that it ended up being kind of the same thing, just rebranded.” Carl and Trevor, both teachers from low need districts and well versed in the provisions of ESSA, expressed disappointment that ESSA did not address the social
disparities and racial discrimination at the core of so many of America’s educational issues. Carl stated,

So, ESSA and No Child Left Behind is legislation designed to solve a problem that A, is false, and B, you’re never going to be able to solve that problem, because the problem is hinged on poverty and it’s hinged on racial discrimination. There’s so many things that are here that need to be solved before those two, whether ESSA or No Child Left Behind, are never going to solve because there’s other problems that need to be handled first. So, I think that music teachers wouldn’t generally know. I mean, most teachers probably wouldn’t even really be able to wrap themselves around that. But I think that’s an important piece for people who are, like you, going through educational leadership programs and hopefully looking at how are we going to formulate policy moving forward? We have to solve racism in this country. We have to solve the poverty disconnect in this country. And that will level the playing field so that all of our children can be successful.

Carl implied that his belief that NCLB and ESSA do not do enough to solve the true causes of inequity in American education, such as racism and poverty, was at the heart of his disillusionment. Trevor had similar feelings about the efficacy of federal policy in addressing social and economic issues in education, saying,

I don’t think these federal mandates are doing much to disrupt inequity and to make schools better. I don’t think tying student achievement to test scores is the right idea. I think that students’ capacities as a learner are not translatable to standardized tests, and it kind of goes against what I believe in as an educator.
Trevor went on to note that these issues of inequity are particularly prevalent in Nassau County and that he did not think that any federal law could do very much to ameliorate that fact without dealing with the issues that impact the county specifically. According to Trevor, these issues included “segregationist boundaries that specifically excluded people,” creating “White enclaves” and separating people of color from certain educational opportunities. The feelings expressed by Trevor and Carl both bring up valid concerns about equity and the effectiveness of federal policy to deal with such issues. These concerns about equity appeared in other interviews as well, though no other participants articulated their concerns as directly as Carl and Trevor.

*Where are music teachers getting their information about ESSA?*

Most participants felt that their districts either did not make an attempt to educate them about ESSA or that they could not recall if they had or not. Carl, a high school teacher from a low need district, was an exception to this theme. He mentioned that he did attend a meeting with his district’s administration, and ESSA was talked about, but he found it unsatisfying. He said, “So, it wasn’t like they said, ‘Oh, we have to talk about ESSA today.’ It was like, ‘Oh, we’re going to talk about our response to interventions when it comes to students that we feel who are at risk, what are some strategies we can use?’ So, they teased out the different components and presented it to us. And I got to tell you, a lot of it just was like, ‘What are you talking about?’”

According to Carl, the meeting he attended was not a comprehensive overview of the law itself. He felt that his administrators were instead picking and choosing the aspects of the policy they were most concerned about.

Another participant from a different low need district, Larry, also felt that he got an incomplete explanation of ESSA from his administration. According to Larry, any information
he learned about ESSA from his district “came from central administration, trickled down through the building principals to the directors of music and other directors and chairmen, and then we had meetings and staff developments regarding it.” Like Carl, Larry felt that he mostly learned about the parts of ESSA that his administration chose to focus on rather than the complete law itself. However, Sally, a teacher who teaches in the same middle school as Larry, did not remember any attempt by her administration to educate her about ESSA. Karen, a high school chorus teacher from a high need district, also mentioned that she attended a meeting where ESSA was brought up by her district director but candidly confessed that she “wasn’t really listening.” The only other mention of a possible attempt by a school district to educate their music teachers about ESSA came from Michelle, who said that she believed there “may have” been a meeting about it in her low need district but that she would not really know since she did not attend it. Therefore, it is possible that some of the districts in the sample made at least some attempt to inform music educators about ESSA but the participants either did not take advantage of them or found them unhelpful.

Only four participants believed themselves to be knowledgeable about ESSA. All four of them acquired at least some of their knowledge of the policy by researching it on their own. Two of the four, Carl and Larry, mentioned above, claimed to have received some of their information from their respective districts. However, both claimed to have done a considerable amount of their own research as well. Trevor, a middle school band teacher from a low need district claimed to have obtained much of his information on ESSA “mostly from The New York Times” and his doctoral studies in education. Josephine, a teacher from the same low need district as Trevor, credited a large portion of her knowledge about the policy to the writings by professional music education organizations, particularly NAfME, and to the information released by the
federal government itself. She also noted that she felt compelled to stay informed about educational policy because she also teaches graduate education students at a local university. Speaking of the topic of ESSA and its predecessor, she stated that, “It comes up in my coursework that I teach, so I brush up on it every year. I’m like, I’ve got to read about this again."

The NAfME writings about ESSA came up in many interviews. Carl and Larry credited NAfME’s publications with helping them educate themselves about ESSA. Even participants who did not claim to know much about ESSA knew of these publications, though they may not have read them. Michelle admitted that she had memories of NAfME “really talking up ESSA as the next big thing” but could not remember if she read the articles themselves. Similarly, when asked where music teachers get their information about policy, Jackson answered, “I know NAfME does super important work related to all that. It’s not really my thing, but I know that’s a big one.” In total, 10 participants were at least aware of NAfME’s work on ESSA or educational policy in general. Although most of these participants chose not to make use of NAfME’s resources, the fact that they knew of them may imply that the organization is a respected source of information about policy matters. However, one participant, Trevor, was not as positive in his assessment of the organization, stating, “Whenever I hear about NAfME, there’s always a controversy.” Trevor clarified that he was referring to one incident in particular when somebody who worked for NAfME made a controversial statement about music education and race. This was the only negative thing I heard about NAfME during data collection.

I believe it is interesting to note that of the four teachers who considered themselves well informed about ESSA, two, Josephine and Trevor, had either earned a doctorate or were working toward a doctorate in education. Additionally, Josephine taught about educational policy at the
graduate level. Similarly, Carl held a high position in his teachers’ union. The other, Larry, was a veteran teacher who had been teaching in his district for over 30 years and claimed to have served on numerous committees (though he did decline the opportunity to serve on a committee related to the transition to ESSA). It may be that at least some of the more well-informed participants had acquired their knowledge in relation to roles outside of their primary music teaching responsibilities. It could also be that the same interests that drove these participants to pursue advanced degrees in education and other roles in their districts also drove them to educate themselves about ESSA. Regardless of the reason, these participants were in the minority in the sample.

**Lack of information about the transition from NCLB to ESSA**

Given the general lack of information that most participants possessed about ESSA, it is perhaps unsurprising that few of them were able to recall any information about their district’s plans for transitioning to the policy. In fact, 14 of the 18 participants reported being unaware of any official transition in their district. As Benny, a high school teacher in a low need district said, “I’m not sure about if there was a transition period or, you know, plan. Honestly. If there was, nobody told me.” In fairness, it must be mentioned that these participants were in the midst of dealing with the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which greatly impacted their schools and professional lives for nearly two years. One such effect was the temporary suspension of both state testing and in-person musical performances. However, participants reported being unaware of the transition to ESSA even before COVID-19 became an issue. As Ronny put it when asked what he knew about his average need district’s plan for transitioning to ESSA, “I'm going to tell you right now, I really know nothing about it. I’ve heard the phrase
‘Every Student Succeeds Act’ before, but I know absolutely nothing about it from any sort of standpoint.”

The four participants who claimed to possess some knowledge of their district’s transition could not recall anything specific beyond the fact that committees were formed and that some of their administrators had mentioned it. Only one participant, Larry, was asked to be a part of a committee related to the transition to ESSA, but ultimately declined citing that he felt the policy would not impact him enough to justify the time commitment. Another participant, Richard, a high school teacher working in a low need district, said that the only reason he knew about the transition was that he also held an administrative position at the time. Yet, he was clear that his knowledge of how the transition was handled was still, in his words, “very minimal.” According to Richard, he believed that his district intentionally kept information about the transition to ESSA from teachers, stating,

I think a lot of times they try to hide things from teachers, and they try to...Of course, they’re going to tell you that, ‘Oh, this was for the best interest of the teachers. We didn’t want to put anything out too early.’ But I think having more of an open line of communication so that teachers could plan for things would be a major asset. I think that even speaks to this whole ESSA thing where we knew something was happening; we knew something was changing, but it seems like nothing was actually given to the teachers until the day that they were already supposed to be teaching with it.

Although Richard was the only participant that implied his administrators were intentionally keeping information from teachers, the fact remains that most participants did not feel they were prepared for or even aware of the transition to ESSA in their schools and districts.
According to the participants, the transition to ESSA was handled mostly by central administration (superintendents and assistant superintendents). When school administrators were involved, they were mostly principals and assistant principals. This depiction of top-down leadership is consistent with Ball et al.’s (2012) description of policy implementation. Six participants mentioned that their district’s director of music may have been involved but that they did not know for sure. Moreover, three of the participants who told me that central administrators facilitated the transition to ESSA noted that this was just an assumption. As Bruce replied, when asked who oversaw the transition to ESSA in his average need district, “I would think it was the superintendent’s office. But I’m guessing.” As alluded to above, the participants possessed a range of interest in policy-related matters. Therefore, it is possible that information about the transition to ESSA was distributed to at least some participants and that this information went unread.

Finding 2: Music Teachers Played a Larger Role in the Policy Enactment Process Than They Realized

Given the lack of information that most participants felt they possessed about ESSA, it is perhaps unsurprising that none of the participants believed that they played a significant role in the implementation of the policy in their schools. As mentioned above, only one participant, Larry, was asked to serve on a committee concerning the implementation of ESSA but ultimately declined. It may be true that the educators in the sample did not contribute to the implementation of ESSA, however, as the theory of policy enactment indicates, this is not the complete story. To more fully investigate the true role that music educators play in the policy process, Ball et al. (2012) calls on educators to expand their understandings beyond simple implementation and embrace the multifaceted concept of enactment. Policy enactment sheds light on the often-
overlooked aspects of the policy process that take place within schools, after the policy has been formally adopted.

The theory of policy enactment (Ball et al., 2012) makes a clear distinction between the meanings of implementation and enactment. As explained in Chapter Two, implementation describes a top-down process by which policies are written by policy makers and then put into place by high-level administrators. As Ball et al. (2012) noted, this is the process that most people in education have come to understand, partially because this top-down dynamic is how the introduction of a new policy is portrayed in most of the existing literature. However, the broader and much more nuanced concept of enactment reveals a more complicated process that is often overlooked. As defined in previous chapters, unlike implementation, enactment includes the rich and varied ways that a policy is understood, interpreted, and adjusted by the members of a school community. The theory of policy enactment focuses on the actions of teachers, rather than policy makers, and highlights the ways that they work with and adapt to new policies, and especially their implications, within their schools. I believe that this expanded understanding of the policy process helps to illuminate the ways that participants contributed to the enactment of ESSA. To be clear, the music educators in the sample were not aware of the definition of enactment at the time of the interview. Therefore, evidence of their role in the enactment process came from my own analysis of the data.

I believe that the evidence of the participants’ role in the enactment process can be seen in the varied ways that they worked with and adapted to the implications of both NCLB and ESSA. It may be true that the participants did not participate in the implementation of laws like NCLB and ESSA in the traditional top-down sense. However, I found that their stated actions helped shape the implications of these policies for their students, schools, and their music
programs. The following sections focus on four specific policy impacts on the music education profession that were influenced by NCLB: curriculum narrowing, changes to instructional time, students being pulled from music classes, and changes to lesson planning. These impacts were specifically asked about during the interviews because of their prevalence in the existing literature on NCLB and music education (Beveridge, 2010; Brinckmeyer, 2016; Chapman, 2004; Elpus, 2013; Elpus & Abril, 2011; Gerrity, 2009; Spohn, 2008; West, 2012). I chose to focus on the impacts of NCLB since, due to the relatively recent nature of ESSA, there is no empirical literature on its specific impacts on music education yet. I illustrate how the participants experienced these impacts, what if anything had changed in the age of ESSA, and the strategies participants used to influence how these policies affected their music classes and schools.

**Curriculum Narrowing**

Participants overwhelmingly reported that they had experienced curriculum narrowing, defined as an emphasis on certain subjects (in this case, ELA and math) over others. In fact, most participants who had been in their positions long enough to remember the implementation of NCLB associated that law with the proliferation of a culture of testing that often took precedence over music classes. Josephine, a teacher from a low need district who was already teaching in Nassau County when NCLB was implemented, noted,

I remember clearly that math and ELA were just going to be the, be the ‘end all’ in the building and that everything had to kind of dump into getting all the kids to pass those. And that’s a lot of where those support mechanisms that took kids out of music classes started appearing.

Josephine’s quote supports the idea that NCLB led to a narrowing of the curriculum that emphasized tested subjects like ELA and math over music. This sentiment appeared in other
interviews as well. In fact, all 18 participants reported that they felt their districts valued tested subjects over music. This was true regardless of the need level of the district. For instance, Carl claimed that his low need district put a great deal of pressure on students to “keep their test scores at the top of the rankings.” Likewise, when Karen was asked if her high need district placed pressure on students to do well on standardized tests, she replied, “Yes, of course. They care very much about that. And it really stresses them [the students] out. I see it happen.”

Participants were also asked about what they believed changed since NCLB was repealed and ESSA was signed into law. Specifically, if they believed that the emphasis on tested subjects had decreased since the repeal of NCLB. The participants almost all claimed that very little had changed. However, there was one outlier. Benny noted that he felt the focus on math and ELA in his school was “less extreme” in recent years, though he claimed that he could not confidently say if that was because of ESSA or not. I believe that the curriculum narrowing noted by the participants is important, as it is related to all the other policy impacts that are touched upon in the following subsections.

**Changes to Instructional Time Due to Testing**

Changes to instructional time is a complicated issue because it can manifest itself in several ways. It can mean the loss of entire classes and rehearsals, or it can mean the loss of individual students who get pulled out of music classes. For the sake of clarity, this section concerns the former, meaning loss of rehearsal time (classes or otherwise) due to testing and testing-related activities such as preparation and proctoring. The issue of individual students being pulled out of music classes is discussed in its own subsection.

For the most part, participants reported that losing entire rehearsals or classes due to testing either did not happen or was rare. According to Stacey, who works in a high need district,
she only misses rehearsals for testing: “Maybe twice a year. That’s not something I really have to think about.” Similarly, Bruce felt that losing rehearsals to testing was not an issue in his average need district stating, “I don’t think that’s ever happened to me.” Cara, who has also taught in the elementary schools of her low need district recalled, “I remember that more so when I also worked on the elementary level.” Seven participants did say that they occasionally have had to proctor exams during times when they would have been teaching or holding rehearsals, but as Benny, a participant from a low need district, put it, “No more than any other teacher. We all do that.” Similarly, Michelle said, “That’s just part of the job,” in her low need district. These teachers did not feel that proctoring significantly reduced their instructional time. Likewise, only two of the teachers I talked to reported that they had ever had to cancel or reschedule a performance due to testing.

Some participants claimed that they had to miss rehearsals because music classes made too much noise during standardized tests. Three of these participants were from the same average need district, including Jackson who said, “It’s strictly a noise issue. We’re loud.” Mia, also from that district said, “We typically get asked not to sing during those days. We do other things. Like theory, you know?” Jennifer said that her district made a similar restriction during testing and commented, “I get it…I mean, I understand. We make it work.” This issue of music classes being impacted strictly because they are loud is interesting since I did not encounter this reasoning in the existing literature on the topic.

I should state that I do not believe the data support the idea that testing has no impact on music educators in Nassau County and their instructional time. Rather, I believe that these results can be seen as evidence of the enactment process at work. This is particularly evident in the data from the veteran teacher participants. Six of the participants who had been teaching since before
NCLB noted that the general time frame for their rehearsals and concerts had evolved over time to minimize the impact of testing. When asked how testing impacted rehearsals and concerts in his high-need district, Jerry commented,

I think we just sort of figured it out over the years. You learn to make concessions to avoid things. Then you keep doing the things that work. So now, no, I really don’t think the tests they want to do get in the way of concerts really. We figured that one out years ago.

This shows evidence of the enactment process going as far back as the implementation of NCLB. By learning to work around testing and testing-related activities, these veteran music teachers were able to mitigate the impacts of these tests on their students and departments. Karen, a teacher working in a high need district, supported this idea when she noted, “I learned over the years that certain things I have to get done before [testing] starts or it’s just not going to happen.” Moreover, when asked about what she remembered about the early days of NCLB, Michelle noted, “I remember I knew the students were distracted, so I tried not to do anything too difficult when that [testing] was happening.” All of these responses demonstrate that the participants were adapting their schedules and lessons to the testing-related impacts of NCLB.

This idea that enactment has been going on since the early days of NCLB complicates the interpretation of data from participants who started in their current districts and positions well into the NCLB era. For instance, the fact that these newer teachers claimed that the testing associated with NCLB and ESSA has little impact on their rehearsals could be interpreted to mean that state testing simply is not an issue for music departments. However, I believe it is also possible that the complexities of scheduling rehearsals and performances around state tests had
already been figured out by previous generations of music teachers during the enactment of NCLB, making it easier for those who came after them to adapt.

Furthermore, all 18 participants said that the testing schedules in their schools have not changed significantly since ESSA was put into place. This reinforces the interpretation that the enactment strategies of the past (in this case, scheduling around testing and test prep) are likely still in place today. It also supports the idea that ESSA has not led to significant changes in standardized testing practices in these districts. This is not only true for testing but for all the perceived impacts of educational policies. Music teachers had many years to learn to live with the effects of NCLB. It stands to reason that the strategies that worked in the past would still work for ESSA, especially in situations that have not changed in any major way. It should be stated that not all standardized testing is related to NCLB and ESSA. Also, there are many other factors that can and do impact instructional time for music classes. There is also a great deal of variation between different districts. However, I do believe these results indicate that participants took testing and testing-related activities into account when planning for rehearsals and concerts, and in this way, managed the impact that these tests would have on their programs.

**Pull Outs**

The term “pull outs” is a colloquial expression used by most of the participants to describe a student, or group of students, being removed or “pulled” from their music class period to receive some other service such as remediation, test prep, or language instruction. Much of the previous literature on NCLB and music education mentions pull outs as an unintended consequence of such policies (Beveridge, 2010; Brinckmeyer, 2016; Gerrity, 2009; Tuttle, 2016). As described in Chapter Two, the literature on the topic strongly implies that certain groups of students, typically special education students and ELLs, are pulled from their music classes more
frequently than their peers (Brinkmeyer, 2016; DeLorenzo, 2012; West, 2012). This clearly impacts the civil rights of these students, especially when considering the well-documented social-emotional and cognitive benefits of music education (Brinkmeyer, 2016; Rabinowitch et al., 2013; Rizzuto et al., 2022; The Royal Conservatory of Canada, 2014).

To be clear, there are many reasons why students may be pulled from a music classroom during the day, including to receive special services and enrichment. Therefore, I am not implying that the impacts of policies such as NCLB and ESSA are the only reason for pull outs. However, I feel that the inclusion of pull outs in the current literature on NCLB and music education justifies their inclusion in my analysis. Furthermore, the teachers in the sample were responding to questions about students being pulled from their classes for testing, test preparation, and remediation specifically (see Appendix B).

All 18 participants said that they had encountered students being pulled from their music classes for testing, test preparation, and remediation. Furthermore, 15 expressed that they felt students were pulled from music classes more than other subjects. When asked if she felt that students were pulled from music classes more frequently than others in her high need district, Stacey responded, “Always. It’s always music or art, or one of the other specials.” She added, “They’ll come to me and say, ‘we need to take a test, can we have [your student]?’ And, I do understand, but I want to say, does it always have to be my class every time?” Jackson, who teaches in an average need district, noted that he had students that got pulled from his class so frequently that, “there are kids I maybe see a couple of times a month. They never get music.” Sally said that in her low need district, “They don’t want to take them out of academics, but they are very comfortable taking them out of my class. And it’s unfortunate.” Karen even went so far
as to express her frustration that the frequency of pull outs in her high need district was impacting the quality of her concerts:

Yeah. All the time. All the time… ‘I got to go, Miss, I have to go, I have to go, I have to go for this test. I have to go.’ But you have class with me right now that you can’t miss either! Yes. And they’ll take them straight out. They take them from the arts all the time. So then of course, just like everyone else we’re looked at when we have to give performances. And we don’t give a great performance sometimes. Everyone’s going to say, ‘[Karen] what are you doing with the kids? They sound horrible.’ But you take them out and we can’t rehearse with them or have rehearsals and not everyone is able to do it!

The responses of the participants from the three high need districts in the sample and one of the average need districts supported the literature that ELLs were being pulled from their classes more frequently than other students. I only heard this experience from one teacher who worked in a low need district, Carl, who noted that he had more ELLs pulled from his classes than other students but “I think we have more ELLs than other districts like us, mostly from Asia.” All the participants agreed that their special education students were also more frequently pulled from their classes.

While most participants claimed that the number of pull outs they encountered had remained consistent over the years, 7 of the 18 participants did say that they noticed fewer of their special education students being pulled out of their music classes in the years since ESSA was signed into law. However, none of these teachers described any perceived decreases in pull outs as a significant change to their professional lives. As Benny said of the special education students being pulled from music classes in his low need district, “I see it less, but not much less.” Furthermore, according to the participants, three of the districts in this study added extra
periods to their day specifically for remediation and special services. Carl noted the addition of a period at the beginning of the day in his district saying,

They [students needing remediation or special services] use that period in the high school as a remediation period. So, if you had a small group ELA class, or you had a support class, you could take that period and just come to school early. And then you would have a regular school day without that interfering.

Carl went on to say that he felt that this extra period could be one reason why fewer special education students were being pulled from his classes. However, like Benny, he felt the actual change in the number of pull outs was relatively small. It should be noted that none of these participants were able to conclusively link either of these changes to ESSA. However, ESSA does contain provisions intended to protect students from being pulled from classes for testing and remediation (Tuttle, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Therefore, it is possible that these changes were at least partially inspired by the law. Further research, possibly with district administrators, may be needed to investigate this possible link.

By far, the most common enactment strategies used by the participants to deal with students being pulled from their music classes were negotiation and advocacy. These negotiations may take many forms, but the most common scenarios I heard from participants involved music teachers agreeing to allow students to be pulled out of their classes during certain times of the year in return for the promise that they would not be pulled close to performances. When talking about the band he teaches at his low need high school, Richard noted, “I try to save my favors for when we have concerts and competitions. Like…okay, you can take them, just not this week.” When asked how she has tried to decrease pull outs in her low need district, Cara exclaimed, “You have to talk to them [administrators and other teachers] and explain [why
students should not be pulled out of music classes] sometimes. Sometimes they listen.” Mia, who also noticed a decrease in the students being pulled from her classes, noted the advocacy of one of her colleagues, Ronny, who happened to also participate in this study. Speaking of the decrease in pull outs in their average need district, she explained, “I think the only reason that happened is because of [Ronny]. He has a good relationship with the other teachers, and he really works things out with them.”

However, not all the teachers who reported advocating against pull outs felt that they were always successful. Michelle, who teaches in a low need district, noted, “Oh yeah, I’ve tried. Sometimes it works; most of the time it doesn’t.” Jerry felt the same about his efforts in his high need district, stating, “Sometimes there’s just nothing you can do.”

Even though some participants felt that their attempts at advocacy did not have an impact on pull outs, the data still support that negotiation and advocacy can be effective enactment strategies. By working to ensure that students remain in their classes, these music teachers mitigate effects of this consequence of policy on their special education and ELL students. This advocacy allows them to protect their own instructional time, and more importantly, ensure that their special education students and ELLs have the opportunity to experience the benefits of music education.

Lesson Planning and the Common Core

The literature on policy and music education often mentions the pressure that music teachers face to incorporate math and ELA into their music curricula as a consequence of NCLB (Beveridge, 2010; Brinckmeyer, 2016; Chapman, 2004; Mishook & Kornhaber, 2006). All but two of the music teachers interviewed reported that they have been required or strongly
encouraged to do this in their own schools. However, the data present a complicated picture of this particular consequence of policy.

Most participants of this study experienced the pressure to include tested subjects in their music lessons, but several connected it to factors other than NCLB. Four of the teachers in the sample associated this pressure with the 2010 Common Core Standards. When asked if this pressure increased with NCLB, Michelle, a high school chorus teacher in a low need district, replied, “I think what you’re really talking about is the Common Core stuff,” adding, “Okay, here’s what I recall. I don’t know when exactly it started, but I recall discussion about that, and I recall encouragement about reading skills, or math skills, coming into our classrooms. And I recall a lot of complaining.” Stacey, who started her current position after the Common Core was introduced, noted that she was required to adhere to the standards by her administrators, particularly when being observed for her Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR). APPR is a rating of a teacher’s effectiveness determined by considering several factors including student performance on standardized tests and classroom observations (Boser, 2012; Shaw, 2016). Stacey described the administrators in her high need district being quite concerned with the Common Core standards, saying,

It was always taking your goal and your lesson and stretching it to be a Common Core goal. And I never really felt it was an issue; I felt like in general music, I was always able to incorporate other contents. But that’s what administrators would come in and want to see aside from just like, ‘Oh yeah, they’re playing instruments or they’re singing, but what Common Core standards did you tie into?’ To the point where, when I had my observations, I created a lesson template that was like a flip over with the ELA and math Common Core standards that I would check through and be like, and I hit all these too.
Furthermore, Jerry, who felt pressured to incorporate ELA into his band class, rolled his eyes as he said, “Oh, we’re talking about Common Core, I guess.” Moreover, Larry, who had a tendency to use NCLB and Common Core interchangeably, made a noticeable grunting sound the first time he mentioned the Common Core standards. Later in the interview, he removed his glasses and covered his eyes with his hand saying, “I can’t tell you how many meetings we had about that—about changing our lessons for that.”

It may be true that the pressure to incorporate math and ELA into music lessons is more closely related to the Common Core than to NCLB specifically. However, while NCLB and the Common Core are not the same thing, they are closely related. Also, ESSA prohibited any federal mandate on states to adopt the Common Core standards (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Therefore, I do believe this issue is justified for inclusion in this study.

**Race to The Top.** The discussion of the Common Core led some participants to describe the experience of being evaluated based on their students’ performance in other subjects, such as math and ELA. This is consistent with the changes to APPR and AYP brought about by RTT in some districts. RTT was an initiative implemented in 2009 by the Obama administration to reform education through encouraging states to compete for federal funding. It effectively tied teachers’ APPR evaluations to student test scores. In some schools, music teachers (and other teachers of untested subjects) were evaluated on how their students performed on math and ELA tests (Shaw, 2016). This was the situation that Michelle described in her low need district. As she recalled, “I remember everybody was up in arms because all of a sudden my accountability was tied to whether or not the eighth-grade math teacher was any good. People were freaking out.” Michelle was not the only participant to imply that her evaluations were tied to other subjects, but she was the only one to directly connect this phenomenon to RTT during her interview.
Josephine and Trevor, who both work in the same low need district, also mentioned previous concerns about their effectiveness rating being tied to student performance on subjects other than music. Trevor said, “For a couple of years, my teacher rating was tied to the middle school math state tests. So, a large percentage of my effectiveness as a teacher was kind of related to things that I had no control over.” When asked if this was related to RTT, Trevor replied that he could not remember, adding, “I wasn’t really thinking about policy as much back then.” Josephine described a time when, “They hooked the New York State teacher effectiveness score to standardized testing. That was the absolute worst. The teacher score was when it hit home for me.” She later said that RTT was “probably” the reason why her score became linked to standardized tests but could not say for sure.

All of the participants were asked about RTT during their respective interviews, but few felt confident enough to comment on it in great detail. It is worth noting that both Josephine and Michelle hold doctorates in education, and Trevor was a doctoral candidate at the time of his interview. Therefore, like ESSA, some participants may have been more inclined to be aware of the impacts of RTT than others. It is also worth noting that two other participants, Ronny and Stacey, were asked about RTT again during the member-checking process. Both confessed that they were unfamiliar with RTT but that they did remember music teacher effectiveness scores being partially determined by tests in subjects other than music. I feel this information indicates the viability of a future study on RTT and music education in New York State.

**Perceptions of Changes to Music Lesson Planning.** The participants of this study were split on their perceptions of incorporating math and ELA into music lessons. Some resented the notion that they should be responsible for teaching any subject besides music. Michelle described widespread frustration in her department surrounding the issue, “We were saying, ‘This isn’t my
subject. This isn’t what I’m supposed to do, and why am I supposed to do it?’” Similarly, Larry noted that he disliked having to alter his lesson plans to include other subjects. He also described how the requirement to do so changed the nature of his classes from what he described as more performance based to more theoretical:

So, I remember Common Core, I remember trying to fit our curriculum to the structure. And what resulted from that is that we wound up having to do more conceptual work than actual performance. Because what happened was we were doing more of the conceptual thing because we had to do assessments in that area now. The No Child Left Behind really meant more for the…what they considered core classes...math, science, English, ELA, but everybody wound up trying to fit music into that, which I felt was a huge mistake because that’s really not what, in my opinion, music’s about. Music’s not about that. Music’s about experiencing it. It’s about the ensembles. Teaching ensemble playing. Seeing music as a musician. Whereas I could see a music appreciation or a music theory class or a general music class fitting more into the No Child Left Behind structure. I could see that. I could see more Common Core.

Larry felt that the requirement to add other subjects to his music lessons ultimately hurt the quality of the repertoire that he was able to perform with his ensembles. He also noted that he found the process of incorporating these subjects quite stressful. To Larry, this requirement not only occupied instructional time that could have been spent rehearsing but also clashed with his personal philosophy of music education.

Yet, other teachers did not mind including tested subjects in their music lessons. Jackson said, “Honestly, it wasn’t a big deal. I do it anyway. I mean, we’re talking about division of time and things like that. You’re doing mathematical sort of things anyway. Music is mathematical.”
Benny mentioned that he actually enjoyed the challenge saying, “It’s fun in a way. Whether it be language, I was teaching lyrics to a song. Or math. If I can try to come up with a rap for a math song. There’s all different ways.” Still, most participants did not describe any strong feelings about the subject either way. These participants seemed to consider it a requirement for their APPR observations that many did not take particularly seriously. In the words of Mia, “It’s just another box to check.”

Meeting the Requirements. Regardless of what policy initiated the incorporation of math and ELA into music lesson plans, or how these participants felt about it, evidence of enactment can be found in the ways that these music teachers adjusted to the requirement. Benny described networking with other music teachers in his district to learn what strategies they were using in their classrooms, “You talk to your colleagues; sometimes you come up and you brainstorm, and you see what works out.” Cara spoke of trying to figure out how to incorporate tested subjects into the curriculum by speaking with the math and ELA teachers in her school, “It was like my team. I had the math teachers and the English teachers telling me suggestions like ‘do this,’ ‘try this.’” Fred, a teacher from a high need district, even told me that his principal asked him to add more reading to his classes and he simply ignored the request saying, “I kind of just forgot about it after that.”

There were several enactment strategies used by the participants to deal with the pressure to include tested subjects in their music lesson plans, but by far the most common was simply asking their administrators what they wanted to see. Mia recalled talking with her principal and assistant principal to learn exactly what they were looking for in her lessons when they observed her for her APPR saying, “I feel like our administration knows what this [requirement to include math and ELA] is, and they don’t care about it. As long as you give some sort of evidence that
you are covering those bases and it checks that box, nobody questions it.” Stacey laughed as she described a similar interaction with the director of music in her high need district: “I remember asking her, ‘Would this work?’ And she didn’t even care. She was like, ‘Yeah, that’s fine.’ I was so nervous and she didn’t even care.” Mia and Stacey’s quotes imply that some administrators who required participants to incorporate other subjects into their music lesson plans may not have taken the requirement that seriously themselves.

The experiences of the participants suggest that the impact of policy-related requirements like this vary depending on the administrator who is enforcing or not enforcing them. These impacts could even change dramatically with changes in administration. Richard shared an anecdote about being observed by a new assistant principal, saying, “I remember him asking me what was with all the English stuff I was doing, and being like, okay, I guess we’re not doing that anymore.” Similarly, Larry mentioned that the pressure to alter his lesson plans was “not as bad now that we have a new superintendent.” Even Michelle, who spoke of the frustration she and her colleagues felt about bringing math and English into their music classes, said, “I don’t think they ever even enforced it. They made such a big deal about us doing it…that was all it was.” By learning the expectations of their administration through observing their actions and through honest dialogue, these music teachers were able to control how much time and resources they dedicated to these requirements. In doing so, they shaped how this consequence of policy would affect their classrooms and students. Although this issue may be more closely related to the Common Core, APPR, and even RTT, I believe that this can be seen as evidence of the enactment process at work, regardless of what policy or initiative these teachers were reacting to.
Ultimately, participants were hesitant to relate any changes in the requirements placed on their lesson planning specifically to ESSA. As seen above, they were much more likely to relate any changes to these requirements to changes in their administration. However, given that most of the participants said that little had changed, and they were still being encouraged to incorporate math and ELA into their lessons, the enactment strategies that they developed are likely to remain in place into the foreseeable future.

Finding 3: The Influence of Context on How Music Teachers Experience the Equity and Civil Rights Implications of Policies Such as NCLB and ESSA

The interview data from the participants of this study revealed significant equity and civil rights implications of how educational policies were implemented in their schools. Many of these concerns, such as ELLs being pulled out of music classes, are related to the increase in standardized testing brought about by policies like NCLB and ESSA. These issues are not unique to Nassau County, New York; however, the segregated nature of its schools and the disparities in access to resources among high, average, and low need districts may play a role in proliferating them. At the beginning of this study, I set out to investigate music teacher perceptions on how these impacts of policy manifested in schools of varying need levels. The consequences of policy did in fact present differently across high, average, and low need schools. However, the data quickly revealed new complexities that had not been considered by previous studies.

In addition to need level, there were many factors at play that were quite useful in contextualizing the perceptions and lived experiences of the participants. These factors included the importance of advocacy, the physical dimensions of individual school buildings, each district’s reputation for music education, and the importance of parental involvement. This revelation was aligned with the ideas put forth by Ball et al. (2012) in *How Schools Do Policy:*
Policy Enactments in Secondary Schools. As Ball et al. explained, the policy process should be understood in the context of each school where it takes place; yet most policy studies do not take the context of individual schools into account. Those that do are likely to describe schools using broad generalities such as “disadvantaged” (p. 20). These general descriptions lack the specificity necessary to convey the distinct characteristics of each school and how these characteristics impact the enactment process (Ball et al., 2012).

While Ball et al. was referring to schools in England, I believe that the same could be said about educational policy research in the United States. This is particularly true about the literature related to policy and music education. Most of the literature reviewed for this study offered little context beyond quantifiable elements such as AYP and test scores (Brinckmeyer, 2016; Gerrity, 2009; Spohn, 2008; West, 2012). Mishook and Kornhaber (2006) were an exception to this trend, as they did ask participants about school demographics and history of arts education. Moreover, some of the more commonly seen contextual factors, such as AYP, have been rendered irrelevant by the passing of ESSA.

The four contextual dimensions put forth by Ball et al. as part of the theory of policy enactment provide an excellent framework for contextualizing research on the policy process. In this section, I support this assertion by describing these dimensions individually and offering an example from the current study that illustrates how each could be applied to the study of music education and policy. By using these contextual dimensions, I was able to illuminate elements of the policy process that are underrepresented or missing from the current literature on music education. Moreover, I was able to investigate possible explanations for the equity and civil rights issues that continue to impact music in Nassau County schools and beyond. Furthermore, I
believe that my results can be seen as evidence of the utility of these contextual dimensions for future research on educational policy.

**Situated Contexts**

Ball et al. (2012) described the first of their contextual dimensions “situated contexts,” as “those aspects of context that are historically and locally linked to the school, such as a school’s setting, its history and intake” (p. 21). Like all the contextual dimensions, this broad definition allows for quite a bit of interpretation. For the purposes of the current study, I have chosen to focus on the demographics of the schools in the sample, particularly the relative percentage of ELLs in the student population. As mentioned above, the data support the current body of literature suggesting that ELLs are pulled out of music classes to receive remediation and other services more often than others (Brinkmeyer, 2016; DeLorenzo, 2012; West, 2012). The frequency of these pull outs constitutes a serious civil rights concern, as these students are effectively being denied the cognitive and socio-emotional benefits of music education (Brinkmeyer, 2016). Furthermore, the current body of literature indicates that at least some of these pull outs are related to the effects of NCLB, particularly the increase in standardized testing (West, 2012). I believe that the data shed light on the complexity of this issue and its impact on the civil rights of Nassau County music students.

It is well documented that high need districts in Nassau County tend to have a high population of ELLs when compared to most low need districts. There is also great variability in the percentage of ELLs in average need districts. While most average need districts tend to be more racially and culturally diverse than low need districts, this does not always translate to a higher population of ELLs (Foreman, 2005; Gross, 2018; NYSED.gov, 2019). The data I gathered from the participants mostly supported these generalizations. All of the participants
from the three high need districts in the sample estimated that their district had a high percentage of ELLs, mostly from Latin America and the Caribbean. Three participants who taught in the same average need district reported similar perceptions of their student demographics. The other two average need teachers did not feel they had a significant enough proportion of ELLs in their music classes to comment. One of these average need teachers, Jennifer, noted, “I know we have a few, but not that many. Very few in my classes.” Carl was the only teacher from a low need district that mentioned a significant number of ELLs in his classes. As mentioned above, according to Carl, these students were “mostly from Asia.” Regardless of the need level of their individual districts, each of these participants noted that their ELL students were frequently pulled from their classes.

The participants with higher ELL populations spoke of the issue of pull outs in a different way than other participants from the sample. These participants saw pull outs as a civil rights issue and commented on how unfair it was that ELLs were being denied music instruction. As Ronny noted, “I really think it’s a shame that these kids [ELLs] get pulled out of music and art the way they do.” Jackson echoed Ronny’s sentiment saying, “I teach singing. Wouldn’t you think that would be a good thing to learn for someone trying to speak English?” The connection between singing and learning a language was also touched upon by Carl who said, “I think they actually learn a lot of English from my class. A lot about how to make the vowels and the sounds, stuff like that…when they’re here.” Karen, who teaches in a high need district, related the most straightforward opinion on the subject when she emphatically stated, “These students need music, too!” clapping her hands between each word. I should mention that Michelle and Cara, who teach in the same low need district, also mentioned ELLs being pulled from their
classes. Both teachers implied that their district did not have a large population of ELLs and they personally had very few ELLs in their classes to begin with.

Participants who did not report a large ELL population tended to speak of pull outs mostly as they related to special education students. When asked if any of his students were pulled from classes more than others in his average need district, Bruce replied, “I would definitely say mostly special ed more than anything.” Similarly, Larry, who worked in a low need district, noted that he didn’t have many ELLs in his classes but that “students who need services” were pulled out of his class most often. Larry later clarified that he was referring to special education students. When asked if he noticed ELLs being pulled from his band class more often than others, Trevor said, “I don’t have a lot of [ELLs] in my band. But I do see it with [special education students].” Interestingly, given the wealth of information about the cognitive benefits of music education (Brinckmeyer, 2016; Rabinowitch et al., 2013; The Royal Conservatory of Canada, 2014), I noticed that none of the participants mentioned any civil rights or equity concerns about special education students being pulled from music classes. One possible exception to this observation was Carl, who spoke of several students who were pressured to drop his music classes in favor of remedial math. Carl was rather passionate when he described his feelings about the situation, stating,

We are still having students who are being pulled from our classes, who would like have to drop music in the middle of the year, because they were at risk of not passing the state assessment. And that was upsetting because my comment was always like, ‘So, you have a student who’s not doing well in math, who probably dislikes math, so you’re going to give them more math but take away the class that they actually are enjoying and are
actually doing something in?’ And I was like, ‘That makes no sense. And that’s not going to help the kid do better on the state exam.’

I should add that Carl never identified these students as special education, though it is not difficult to imagine how special education students might be subject to similar pressures to drop music in favor of remediation. Interestingly, Carl’s low need district was one of the ones who added time at the beginning of the day for remediation. This could imply that the problem of students missing out on music in favor of tested subjects persists, even when measures are taken to ameliorate it. When asked if he still sees students being pressured to drop his music classes, after the additional period to the day was added, Carl replied, “That still happens, yeah.”

Carl’s responses demonstrate that participants with higher ELL populations did also experience special education students being pulled from their classes. Therefore, I do not mean to imply that pull outs are either a civil rights issue for special education students or a civil rights issue for ELLs. The two are not mutually exclusive. Rather, I believe that my analysis reveals new information about the broader topic of pull outs that might have been missed if the demographics of the schools were not taken into account. This information adds complexity and nuance to a topic that could easily be oversimplified. Additionally, this attention to context combined with the qualitative nature of the current study unexpectedly illuminated the equity and civil rights concerns of the participants. Moreover, my analysis shows one explanation for how the same policy impact (pull outs) can manifest itself differently in different schools. Finally, I believe my results demonstrate the potential of using “situated contexts” such as school demographics in future policy research. By taking these contexts into account, future researchers can avoid oversimplification and conduct richer, more contextualized, and potentially more relevant studies.
Professional Cultures

Ball et al. (2012) acknowledged that “professional cultures” is a concept that “refers to somewhat less tangible variables” (p. 26) than the other contextual dimensions. This dimension deals with the values of the school as well as the relationships between members of the school community. It also concerns their commitments, experiences, and history of managing policies. This broad definition can encompass many factors that are relevant to the policy process. However, for the purpose of this study, I have chosen to focus on the values of administrators and their relationships with the music departments in their respective districts. This decision was made based on the frequency that the role of administrators in the policy process came up in the interviews with the participants. All 18 participants spoke of the influence that administrators have over the policy process in their schools and districts. Although most participants did not possess specific information about the process itself, they were confident in stating that the administration was in charge. Given the great amount of power and influence these administrators possess, I feel that examining the values of administrators adds context to all the data in this study. I also believe that the amount of influence that these administrators have over the support for music education has implications for equity, particularly in districts with fewer resources.

The participants of this study were also asked to comment on the values of their administrators, specifically concerning policy, testing, and music education. Their responses revealed that most felt that their administrators appreciated music educators and the work they do. When asked if her administrators appreciated the music department in her low need district, Sally said, “Absolutely. I think we have about as good a situation as you can ask for.” Stacey, who teaches in a high need district, commented, “I think my principal really loves the music
program. I feel very lucky about that.” Only four participants claimed to feel unappreciated by members of their administration. Jerry, a teacher working in a high need high school, said, “I don’t think my principal really cares about the music department one way or the other.” Ronny had a more nuanced perspective on the administration of his average need district, saying, “Do I think they like what I do? Sure, everybody likes music, but it doesn’t mean anything. They like it because it makes the school look good. They don’t know what goes on in here.” Karen also implied that the appreciation from the administrators of her high need district was dependent on the public perception of her program, saying, “They love me when I’m winning competitions. When we’re not performing, I don’t know.” Jackson, a teacher from the same average need district as Ronny, had a similar take, stating, “They’re supportive when they want to be. I mean, they want to see you at the board meetings; they want to see us performing and doing stuff. They need their three-ring circus.” These participants implied that they felt the appreciation shown for their music programs by administrators was, at times, conditional and not fully sincere.

Notably, the teachers who did not feel supported by their administration, or at least felt that the support they received was conditional, came from high and average need districts. All of the teachers from low need districts felt very supported and appreciated by their administrators. However, it would not be accurate to imply that high need and average need district administrators value music less than their low need counterparts. The data clearly show that several high and average need teachers felt supported and appreciated as well. This may suggest that the professional cultures of a district are more important in evaluating administrative support for music than need level alone. It also demonstrates the influence of administrative values in districts that may have fewer resources to go around.
The Importance of District Directors of Music. While most participants did feel appreciated by their principals and superintendents, there was one administrative position that stood out as particularly salient to this study. The district director of music is an administrative position that oversees the music departments of all the schools in the district. The responsibilities and even the name of this position varies from district to district, and not all the districts in Nassau County have one. For the sake of clarity, I use the term district director regardless of the name of the position in each district. I also specifically refer to the position as it pertains to the music department, though some district directors do also oversee visual and other performing arts.

Out of the 11 districts in the sample, 9 had a district director of music. The 2 districts that did not have one were a low need district and a high need district. The participants from the districts that did have a district director were quick to note the important role these administrators play in advocating for the music department. To quote Karen, “We are so lucky to have [the district director]. I’ve worked in departments without a director before, and you can really tell the difference. He’s the guy in your corner when you need something.” Jackson described his director as “somebody who is there to fight for us” and “someone who understands what we need and what we’re going through.” This idea of advocacy came up frequently with participants. Carl even linked his district director’s advocacy to the issue of instructional time, noting that his director was “a very strong advocate for us having the time we needed to make sure that we’re prepared for our concerts logistically and artistically.” This information adds context to the previously mentioned data concerning the advocacy that music teachers use to manage the impacts of policies like NCLB and ESSA.
The directors were also the only members of the music department that the participants speculated may have been involved with the transition to ESSA. Six participants said they felt their district directors may have played a role in the transition. As Stacey said, speaking on her district director’s possible role in the implementation of ESSA, “I don’t know for sure, but I think she was probably involved in some way. She always is, and that’s great because we know she’s looking out for the music department.” Stacey was not the only participant to speculate on the possibility that her district director may have played a role in putting the policy into place. When asked if anyone from his music department helped with the transition, Larry replied, “If it was anyone, it was [the district director].” Similarly, when asked the same question, Michelle said, “I wouldn’t be surprised if [the district director] was in on it. That’s the only person I can think of. I certainly wasn’t.” Again, it must be noted that these were assumptions. None of the participants were able to definitively say how their district directors were involved in the transition to ESSA or if they were at all. This is a topic that requires future research, especially since the possible influence of district directors is another element that is largely missing from the current body of research on music education and policy.

As is the case with many of my results, the connections that can be drawn between the values of administrators and the role that music teachers play in the enactment of ESSA is limited by the lack of information the participants possessed about the policy process. However, I do still feel that the experiences related by participants supports the utility of “professional cultures” as a means for providing context to this or any study on policy and music education. This is particularly evident when considering the role that district directors play in advocating for their departments.
Additionally, I feel that taking the advocacy of district directors into account is important when considering the equity of music education in Nassau County, New York. This may be particularly true in high need districts, as evidenced by the fact that Jerry, who did not have a director of music in his high need district, expressed great dissatisfaction with the level of funding, support, and appreciation his department received. His experiences stood in sharp contrast to those of Stacey, who works in a high need district with a director of music. Moreover, Karen and Fred, who both work in another high need district in the sample, did not feel as supported as Stacey but still expressed a great deal of appreciation for the advocacy of their district director. Although more research is needed, I feel that these results suggest that the district director of music can be a valuable advocate for ensuring that students in high need districts have access to the benefits of music education. This observation may have been missed if not for the consideration of professional cultures.

**Material Contexts**

The third contextual dimension, “material contexts,” is perhaps the most straightforward and easy to understand of the four. This dimension encompasses various aspects of the infrastructure of any given school building, such as budgets, staffing, technology, and the physical dimensions of the building itself. All participants were asked to describe each of these elements as they pertained to their respective schools. They were also asked if and how they felt these elements impacted how their schools dealt with the implications of policy.

Few participants knew about the factors that impacted how their budget was determined. Ten of the 18 participants mentioned that their district director was somehow involved in determining their budget, but none of them offered any specifics beyond that. Carl, a teacher from a low need district, said, “I believe [the district director] has a lot of input,” but could not
comment on the process any further. Similarly, when asked how her department’s budget was determined in her high need district, Stacey stated, “I know [the district director] is always finding money somewhere, but to be honest with you, I don’t know.” All 18 participants said that their budgets were determined by their district’s central administration and their principal. None of the 18 participants were able to conclusively link any aspect of their budgets to NCLB, ESSA, or any other policy. To be clear, this does not necessarily mean that such policies have no connection to music department budgets. It simply implies that if such a connection does exist, the participants did not possess enough information to comment on it.

While the participants’ lack of information about budgetary matters did admittedly surprise me, my analysis of the data revealed an interesting connection between the physical dimensions of each school and how music classes were impacted by testing. Like other contextual factors uncovered by the data, this one might have considerable implications for equity in Nassau County music education. As mentioned above, five participants (including three from the same average need district, one from a high need district, and one from a different average need district) reported that they were required to suspend music making during standardized tests. It was explained to them that this was because they were too loud and would create a distraction. Further questioning revealed that the music classrooms were located in close proximity to where the tests were being administered. When asked if his room was close to where his school administered standardized tests, Ronny answered, “Oh yeah, right down the hall.” An analysis of the data revealed that all five participants who reported having to remain quiet during testing claimed to have classrooms that were close to where this testing took place. In fact, one of these participants, Jerry, rehearsed his band in a classroom that was located “in the
middle of the science hallway.” None of the participants who reported teaching in “music wings” or “music hallways” mentioned concerns about making noise during testing.

Although more research is needed, these data may point to a previously unreported inequity in Nassau County music education. This inequity can be found in the school buildings themselves and in how administrators choose to allocate space and other resources. Participants in this study who taught in low need districts were more likely to describe dedicated music facilities. One such participant, Richard, even spoke of how his district allocated significant funds to “soundproofed rehearsal rooms.” Students in these low need districts and other districts that dedicate adequate facilities to music classes do not experience any disruption to their music making activities. Therefore, these students continue to benefit from music making during testing while their peers in other districts cannot.

It is not surprising that the location of their classrooms would lead to these five teachers being asked to make such a concession. However, I do believe that this particular issue stands as a clear example of the importance of taking material contexts into consideration. It should be reiterated that none of the previous studies on music education and policy take the physical dimensions of school buildings into account. In addition, I have yet to come across any other study on the topic of music education and policy that mentions noise and proximity to testing as a possible reason for lost instructional time. This phenomenon warrants future study and should be considered by future policy researchers. It should also be considered by educators or administrators who seek to minimize the loss of music instruction due to standardized testing. Perhaps most importantly, it demonstrates yet another way that the context of each individual school can influence the impacts of policy on music educators. If these participants were not asked about the location of their classrooms, there would have been no explanation for why they
were asked to remain quiet during testing while other teachers were not. This attention to material contexts provided a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the issue. It also pointed toward a factor that may have been ignored by previous studies on the topic.

**External Contexts**

The fourth and final contextual dimension, “external contexts,” refers to any factor coming from outside the school itself. This can include pressure from external government agencies, community members, legal concerns, or outside donors (Ball et al., 2012). Like all of the contextual dimensions, external contexts has a very broad definition and there are numerous factors that could be considered. It should also be noted that Ball et al.’s application of external contexts in *How Schools Do Policy: Policy Enactments in Secondary Schools* is very specific to the English school system and largely deals with elements of educational policy that do not exist in the United States such as “LA support” and “Ofstead ratings.” Rather than trying to find an American equivalent to such things, I have chosen to focus on the support and involvement of parents in their children’s music programs. I feel that this topic is more accessible and generalizable to most schools, regardless of nationality. By exploring the influence of this particular external context, I was also able to uncover some possible differences between the means and methods of parental advocacy in high need and low need districts. These differences may have implications for future studies on music education and equity.

The music teachers in this study were keenly aware of the importance of connecting with the communities they serve, and particularly the parents of their students. Many participants implied that maintaining a good relationship with parents and other members of the community had beneficial effects on their relationships with their administrators. As Larry, a participant from a low need district, put it, “This community values music education, so [his administrators]
Michelle echoed Larry’s sentiment when she talked about why she tries to keep the parents in her low need district engaged and happy with her choral program: “I think that the parent voice is loud,” she said, adding, “the parents here often get what they want.” This notion that the parents of their students were a potential source of advocacy came up fairly frequently in the interview process. This advocacy was vocalized by another teacher from a low need district, Richard, who noted the high levels of parental involvement in his competitive marching band,

Our parents—they call themselves the Music Mafia—they are very vocal. They are very protective over the program. I think a lot of that holds to just what we’ve been able to accomplish over the years. The parents…if there’s ever a threat of something being cut, they go right up to the superintendent’s door without any question. If there’s ever a need for something…like we needed new uniforms two years ago; our uniforms were really falling apart. They’ve had them for probably 20 years between the competitive band and the previous just parade band that they had. We needed new uniforms because we’re competitive and they were getting commented on by the judges how terrible they looked. So, they walked up to the superintendent and said, ‘Hey, you need to make this happen,’ and [the administrators] were able to find $50,000.00 to get us new uniforms. Our parents are very extremely vocal, extremely supportive in that regard.

Richard further described the money and time that the parents of his students dedicated to his competitive marching band. In addition to donating money, these parents volunteer by driving students and equipment to competitions and helping during afternoon and weekend rehearsals. Richard’s experiences point to an element of privilege that may be more prevalent in low need districts than in districts serving less wealthy communities. This is evidenced by the sheer
amount of money and time that these parents were able to dedicate to Richard’s competitive marching band (an extracurricular activity). To be clear, participants in average and high need districts also noted parental involvement and fundraising, though not to the level that Richard did. In these less affluent districts, fundraising was a collaborative effort among students and parents that often involved “selling chocolates” and performing for donations at local community centers.

Overall, participants from high need and average need districts were less likely to speak of donations from parents. However, that does not necessarily mean that the parents in these districts were less concerned about funding for music. To the contrary, Stacey described the support from the parents in her district as a kind of protection against administrative decisions to cut music or funding:

If [the administration] were to say, ‘You know what? We’re just not going to do [Stacey’s ensemble] at the middle school anymore,’ there would be backlash from parents like, ‘Well, wait, what do you mean? We need [Stacey’s ensemble]. My son loves that.’ They’ve done that kind of thing.

Stacey’s quote demonstrates a difference in the ways that participants from high need and low need districts spoke of parental advocacy. Teachers from low need districts spoke of donations and support for programs that were already well funded. This can be seen in the concern for competitive marching band uniforms in Richard’s district. However, participants from high need districts often spoke about programs and classes “being cut” for financial reasons, depicting a more dire need for such advocacy.

Karen, a teacher from another high need district, noted the constant fear that her ensemble would be cut due to budgetary concerns. She said that she frequently advocated on
behalf of her unconventional ensemble and often made the parents of her students a part of her advocacy: “Of course I have the parents involved,” she stated emphatically. According to Karen, the parental voice in her district is so strong that members of her district administration asked her not to speak directly with parents about budgetary matters:

The hard part is, if we don’t [receive funding for Karen’s ensemble], then I have to tell the parents. And then that’s another thing; they don’t like me telling the parents. It’s like ‘You don’t have to tell parents.’ All right. That’s okay. But I have a great communication with the parents. So, if parents want to know, ‘Where’s the funds for [Karen’s ensemble]?’ I’m going to tell them; I’m not going to lie to them.

Karen went on to say that she has even seen parents threaten to not vote for a budget if her classes did not receive funding. This is perhaps another example of how parents in high need districts, who may have fewer resources than their counterparts in low need districts, make their voices heard. Though they may not have the means to raise money in the same way that more financially wealthy parents do, they can still exert economic pressure on their districts by voting for or against budgets. It should be noted that Fred, who teaches in Karen’s same district, did not mention similar parental involvement on behalf of his band classes. However, Fred also did not mention making any attempts to reach out to the parents of his students. The data may imply that Karen’s rapport with her students’ parents made a considerable difference in their willingness to advocate on her behalf.

Although the participants did not directly make connections to the policy enactment process, it is not hard to see the potential usefulness of parental support when the budgetary consequences of policy threaten to impact their programs. Furthermore, the differences seen in the parental advocacy reported by participants from high need and low need districts is yet
another indication of the inequities in Nassau County music education. None of the previous research on music education and policy that I reviewed for this study took parental advocacy for music education into account. By neglecting this and other “external contexts,” I believe these researchers missed an opportunity to provide greater context to their respective studies.

Ball et al.’s (2012) contextual dimensions allow researchers to add new levels of richness, complexity, and context to the study of educational policy. I believe that I have demonstrated just a few of the myriad ways that these dimensions can be applied. I also believe that by applying these dimensions to my interview protocol and analysis, I was able to shed light on elements of the intersection of music education and policy that were missing from previous research. These elements included the impacts of sound and proximity to testing, the influence of district directors of music, and the importance of community involvement.

The current research on music education and policy often lacks context. While the information these studies provide is important in its own right, the lack of context leaves some questions ultimately unanswered. By incorporating Ball et al.’s (2012) contextual dimensions, future studies can investigate the intersections between music education and policy more completely. This will likely call for in-depth studies that focus on individual districts and even schools. Yet, regardless of the size of these future studies, the inclusion of Ball et al.’s contextual dimensions will reveal new insights about the policy process that my study began to uncover.

**Conclusion**

This chapter presented the major findings of this qualitative case study. The first finding revealed how most participants did not feel that they were well informed about ESSA. They were also largely uninformed about their respective school districts’ plans for transitioning from NCLB to ESSA. Participants offered several explanations for why they possessed so little
information about ESSA, including a lack of effective communication about the policy from their districts, feelings of disillusionment with educational policy, and a lack of time to educate themselves on the topic. Only four participants considered themselves to be knowledgeable about ESSA, and these four obtained much of their information on the law from their own research. Additionally, the publications of NAfME were often mentioned as a trusted, though possibly underutilized, source of information about policy for music educators.

The second finding of this study related to the difference between the implementation of any given policy and the more nuanced process of enactment put forth by Ball et al. (2012). In that section, I explored how educators and researchers must expand their understanding of the policy process to include this concept. By applying the theory of policy enactment as a framework to guide the data collection and analysis, I was able to uncover the varied ways that the participants adapted to and worked with the implications of NCLB and ESSA, particularly curriculum narrowing, changes in instructional time due to testing, pull outs, and changes to lesson planning. In doing so, these participants influenced the effects that these policies had on their music programs. Although the participants did not feel they played an integral part in the policy process, I believe that my analysis illuminated the fact that they may have played a more important role than even they realized.

The third finding of this study demonstrated the usefulness of Ball et al.’s (2012) contextual dimensions. Applying these dimensions to my own analysis allowed me to shed light on elements of the relationship between music education and policy that have not been touched upon in previous research. These elements included the prevalence of ELLs in a student population, the impact of the location of music classes within a given school building, the importance of a district director of music, and the influence of parental advocacy for school
music programs. Taking these elements into account allowed me to explore the differences in how participants experience the impacts of policy in certain low, average, and high need school districts in Nassau County, New York. Also, these differences illuminated considerable civil rights and equity concerns in Nassau County music education. I believe that these contextual dimensions can and should be applied to future research on this or any topic related to education policy.

The fifth and final chapter of this study further explores and discusses these findings as they relate to the current literature on the topic of music education and policy. The practical implications of this study are introduced and explained. Additionally, its limitations are also presented, as well as my strategies for ensuring trustworthiness. The surprises that presented themselves throughout the data collection and analysis are also included. Finally, the chapter ends with a summary of the conclusions as well my recommendations for further research.
Chapter Five: Conclusion

The transition from NCLB to ESSA was a historic change in American educational policy. Unlike NCLB, ESSA mentions music by name as one of the subjects included in a “well-rounded education,” rather than grouping it with other subjects under “the arts” (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). This was a change that music educators and music education organizations have long advocated for. Including music by name can be seen as a gesture of respect for its unique place in the curriculum, but it also potentially makes music programs eligible to benefit from new sources of federal funding (Darrow, 2016; NAfME, 2016; Tuttle, 2016). However, while this and other changes may be promising, there are many aspects of ESSA, and how it relates to music education, that have yet to be studied. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to better understand the perceptions of music teachers in Nassau County, New York, on the transition to and first years of ESSA. As mentioned in previous chapters, there is currently very little literature on ESSA as it relates to music education (Darrow, 2016; Tuttle, 2016).

Methodology

The data for this study were collected from 18 semi-structured interviews with secondary music teachers currently working in the public secondary schools of Nassau County, New York. The interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes and were conducted from March 2021 to August 2021. To be eligible, each participant must have been working in their current school and position for long enough to have witnessed the transition to ESSA and therefore be able to reflect upon their experiences during that time. Potential participants were found using a combination of purposeful and snowball sampling, as well as recommendations from my own professional network of music educators and school administrators. In the end, 18 participants from 11 school
districts participated. These districts represented all three of the New York State categories of district need: high need, average need, and low need. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, each participant was interviewed on Zoom in order to adhere to safety protocols.

Data collection was completed when saturation was achieved. The interviews were coded, first by hand, and then using Dedoose. Member checking with six participants and peer debriefing with the members of my dissertation committee were used to ensure trustworthiness. Furthermore, I engaged in frequent memoing and self-reflection, with the intent of minimizing the impact of my own biases.

**Discussion of Findings**

Upon analyzing the data from the interviews, three major findings became apparent. First, I found that most music educators that I interviewed did not feel they were well informed about ESSA. There were several explanations for why these teachers were uninformed, including the feeling that the information did not pertain to them, disillusionment about educational policy, and the common belief that music educators are already too overworked to dedicate time to understanding complicated legislation.

The second finding of this study revealed that the participants did not feel that they were significantly involved in the implementation of ESSA, or the policy process in general, in their schools. However, by applying Ball et al.’s (2012) concept of policy enactment to my analysis of the interview data, I found that these participants played a larger role than they realized. This role was explored through examining the ways that the participants responded to the documented consequences of national policies like NCLB and ESSA and other policy-related factors such as Common Core Standards, RTT, and APPR. These consequences included curriculum narrowing,
changes to instructional time, students being pulled from music classes for remediation, and changes to lesson planning.

The third finding concerned the myriad ways that context impacts how music teachers make sense of the equity and civil rights implications of policies such as NCLB and ESSA. By analyzing the participants’ experiences and perceptions through the lens of Ball et al.’s (2012) “contextual dimensions,” I explored the complexities of how federal and state policies are enacted in different districts. This attention to context also revealed new insights about the inequities in Nassau County music education and how the participants perceived them. These findings are summarized, and their significance discussed below.

**Finding 1: Most Music Teachers Felt They Were Not Well Informed About ESSA**

The first and perhaps most important of these findings was that most of the music educators in the sample did not consider themselves well informed about ESSA. In fact, only 4 of the 18 participants felt that they were knowledgeable about the policy. These well-informed participants claimed to acquire most of their information about ESSA from various external sources, such as graduate studies, the media, and publications from professional organizations.

It was ultimately unclear if or how each district attempted to educate the participants on ESSA or prepare them for the transition away from NCLB. All but three participants stated that their districts did not make any attempt to educate them on ESSA that they were aware of. Similarly, most claimed to be unaware of any official plan for the transition to ESSA in their respective districts. About half of the participants admitted to being uninterested in educational policies such as ESSA. Even participants who were interested in learning more about ESSA did not always attempt to educate themselves. There were several reasons cited for this lack of action on their part, including a general feeling of disillusionment about educational policy and
skepticism that ESSA would significantly impact their professional lives. Many participants also expressed the feeling that ESSA was not significantly different enough from NCLB to warrant any effort to learn about it.

However, the most frequent concern raised by the participants was a lack of time to dedicate to informing themselves about educational policy. This concern was brought up by 11 participants with varying levels of interest in ESSA. Five of these 11 mentioned that it was possible that their districts attempted to inform them about ESSA through reading materials, but they admitted these materials often went unread. Other participants speculated that their districts may have attempted to provide information about ESSA at meetings or professional developments but that these attempts were ineffective. Therefore, it is possible that the districts in this sample tried to educate their music educators in some way, though most of the participants did not take advantage of any opportunities provided. Similarly, about half of the participants of this study were aware of information about ESSA in publications released by NAfME, but most did not read them.

The general lack of information possessed by most of the participants colors and complicates all the results of this study. Ultimately, it cannot be assumed that Nassau County music educators are knowledgeable about national education policy. The apathy about ESSA and other policies expressed by many of these participants also raises questions about why they felt this way. These results are not only significant to this study but to all future studies concerning music educators and policy. To be clear, I do not mean to suggest that the perceptions or lived experiences of the participants are any less valuable due to their lack of information. However, I do believe that the data from this study, and others like it, must be considered with this first
finding in mind. This may be particularly true of the few previous studies on the topic that relied on qualitative data from music educators (Shaw, 2016; Spohn, 2008; West, 2012).

Many participants of this study were largely unconcerned and underinformed about ESSA and other educational policies. However, I believe the information they are missing may be valuable in their efforts to advocate for themselves and their students. If music educators better understood policy-related factors that impacted their profession, they would be in a better position to express their concerns to administrators and find solutions. They might even be able to organize their efforts and effect change on the state and national level. However, if music educators do not make the effort to seek this information out, critical opportunities for advocacy may be lost.

**Finding 2: Music Teachers Played a Larger Role in the Policy Enactment Process Than They Realized**

All 18 participants of this study did not feel that they played a significant role in the transition to or implementation of ESSA in their schools. Their perception of their involvement is true in the sense that none of them served on committees related to ESSA or were otherwise included in the planning for the transition. However, I argue that these music educators were more involved in the policy process than even they may have realized. In fact, I found that their involvement extended beyond ESSA to include other policies and policy-related matters such as NCLB, RTT, the Common Core, and APPR. However, to understand this position, it is important to understand the distinction between policy implementation and the more complex, nuanced process of policy enactment put forth by Ball et al. (2012) in the theory of policy enactment.

Ball et al.’s (2012) theory of policy enactment challenges educators and researchers to expand their understanding of the policy process. Most literature on the subject presents a top-
down depiction of the implementation of a new policy. Ball et al. contended that this common depiction is too simplistic and offered the more multifaceted concept of enactment as an alternative. Enactment concerns the multiple ways that policies are translated, adapted, and adjusted within the confines of a school. Moreover, enactment focuses on the actions of teachers that often take place after a policy is formally adopted (Ball et al., 2012).

By applying the theory of policy enactment to my analysis, I was able to shed light on the ways that the participants influenced the impacts of policy-related issues such as curriculum narrowing, loss of instructional time due to testing, changes to lesson planning, and students being pulled from music classes for remediation. Since there is still a lack of information on music education and ESSA, these policy impacts were focused on because of their relevance to the existing literature on music education, NCLB, and related policy initiatives (Beveridge, 2010; Brinckmeyer, 2016; Chapman, 2004; Elpus, 2013; Elpus & Abril, 2011; Gerrity, 2009; Shaw, 2016; Spohn, 2008; West, 2012). The participants universally related to these documented consequences of policy and offered a wide range of strategies for dealing with and ameliorating their effects.

These strategies most often took the form of advocacy and negotiation between the participants and other teachers or administrators. For instance, participants described negotiating with colleagues to keep certain students from being pulled from their classes in the days before a performance. Other participants mentioned discussing expectations for the inclusion of math and ELA in music lesson plans with the administrators who would be observing them. The interview data also implied that the participants felt the transition from NCLB to ESSA had led to few changes to the aforementioned consequences of policy. Therefore, I reasoned that the strategies
that veteran teachers described for adapting to NCLB, such as not scheduling performances close to standardized tests, may still be effective under ESSA.

I believe the data, when viewed through the lens of the theory of policy enactment (2012), open up an important conversation about the nature of the policy process in schools. When researchers study the adoption of a new educational policy, what exactly should they be studying? I agree with Ball et al.’s (2012) argument that the policy process does not end once a policy is put into place by legislators or even by administrators. To truly understand the implications of an educational policy, researchers must examine the actions of all members of a school community, including teachers, as they work to interpret, translate, and adapt such policies within the context of their schools.

Through their advocacy, negotiation, and other strategies for managing the impacts of policy, participants help to shape the manifestation of these policies in their schools. In this way, I argue, they contributed to the enactment of ESSA, even if they were not aware that they were doing so. Furthermore, many music educators used the same or similar strategies during the enactment of previous policies and initiatives such as NCLB and RTT. I feel that, from a practical standpoint, the implications and consequences of any given policy are the most important thing to focus on. These implications impact the professional lives of music teachers and the education of their students, perhaps more than any other aspect of the policy process. The participants described multiple creative and effective ways of exerting influence on the effects of educational policies. However, I felt that the educators in this sample did not truly understand the significance of their actions. If music educators came to understand these actions as a valuable part of the enactment process, perhaps they would feel more inclined to become involved in other aspects of educational policy.
As it stands now, the participants of this study felt uninvolved in, and even unaware of, the policies impacting their professional lives. This could partially be because the bulk of the current literature on educational policy excludes the contributions of teachers (Ball et al., 2012) and particularly music teachers (Aróstegui, 2018; Richerme, 2019). It is my hope that educators and future researchers will become familiar with the concept of enactment and apply it to their own understanding of the policy process. I feel that this will help expand the academic conversation around policy to include the actions of not only music teachers but also all educators.

**Finding 3: The Influence of Context on How Music Teachers Experience the Equity and Civil Rights Implications of Policies Such as NCLB and ESSA**

In *How Schools Do Policy: Policy Enactments in Secondary Schools*, Ball et al. (2012) stated that much of the current literature on educational policy lacks proper context. As a remedy for this, they offered four “contextual dimensions” to allow researchers to understand policy changes within the context of the schools where they take place. These dimensions include (1) “situated contexts,” or the location, history, and demographics of the school/district; (2) “professional cultures,” or a school’s values and the relationships formed within the school community; (3) “material contexts,” or budgets, technology, staffing, and the physical aspects of the school; and (4) “external contexts,” or influences from community members, outside agencies, donors, and legal concerns.

By applying these contextual dimensions to my data collection and analysis, I was able to investigate aspects of the policy process that had considerable implications for equity and civil rights in Nassau County music education. For instance, considering the demographics of each district revealed differences in the phenomenon of students being pulled from music classes for
remediation. Participants who worked in districts with more ELLs tended to speak of them when discussing pull outs, while participants from other districts tended to speak of special education students. The participants from districts with greater ELL populations were also more likely to express their views about the civil rights implications of pull outs. Several of my participants also mentioned that, over the past few years, their districts attempted to decrease pull outs by adding extra periods before or after the school day for remediation and other services. According to the participants, this measure may have led to a small decrease in ELLs and special education students being pulled from music classes but did not resolve the issue. ESSA does include provisions designed to prevent students being pulled out of classes for remediation. (Tuttle, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2015). However, none of the participants could link the new periods in the day to the ESSA legislation.

The topic of ELLs and special education students being pulled out of music classes is a common theme in the existing body of literature on music education and policy (Brinckmeyer, 2016; Elpus, 2014; Elpus & Abril, 2011; Lorah et al., 2014). However, the interview data also revealed new information that has not yet been included in previous research. For example, some participants spoke of the influence of sound and location of music classrooms on the consistency of music instruction. Five participants from high need and average need districts described being compelled to cease music making in class during the administration of standardized tests. A discussion of the physical aspects of their school buildings revealed that the tests were often administered near the music classrooms in these districts. None of the participants from low need districts reported any interruptions to music instruction due to concerns about sound. This was possibly due to the fact that participants from low need districts were much more likely to report dedicated music wings and soundproof rehearsal rooms in their schools. Given the documented
cognitive and socio-emotional benefits of music education (Brinckmeyer, 2016; Rabinowitch et al., 2013; The Royal Conservatory of Canada, 2014), any interruption to music instruction for some students and not others should be considered an inequity. This is particularly apparent given that high need and average need districts in Nassau County serve considerably more students of color and low-income students than low need districts (Foreman, 2005; Gross, 2018).

Parents also came up as important community advocates in my interviews, albeit to different degrees, depending on the need level of the district. Participants described the importance of having parental support when advocating for the budgetary needs of their programs. However, the descriptions of this support varied considerably in some high and low need districts. Richard, a teacher from one low need high school, described the parents of his marching band students donating money and volunteering their time and other resources toward his competitive marching band. Karen, a participant from a high need district also described support from the parents of her students. However, the support from these high need parents came in the form of advocacy and fund raising, rather than donations and volunteering. This comparison is an example of how the availability of resources in a community can impact the kinds of support that parents can offer music programs. I believe that this raises important questions about privilege, disparities in resources between school districts, and music education in Nassau County and beyond.

The data also revealed that administrative support for music programs and the reputation that each district has for music education can play a significant role in how participants experienced the impacts of policy. This is particularly true in districts with a dedicated district director of music. The consideration of these factors helped to uncover possible explanations for how policy impacts could manifest differently, even in districts with the same level of need. This
can be seen in the data collected from the three high need districts in the sample. Two of these districts had a history of appreciation for music, support from administrators, and a strong district director of music. While these factors did not completely shield them from the impacts of policy, the participants from these three districts reported feeling supported and validated when advocating for their needs. Conversely, Jerry, a participant from a third high need district, reported no such history of appreciation for music, a lack of support from administration, and said that his high need district had no district director at all. Perhaps unsurprisingly, Jerry did not feel the same support and validation as the other high need district participants I interviewed. In his interview, Jerry noted there were several reasons for the state of his music program, including a general lack of funding and adequate facilities. He also implied that his principal and district administration were aware of these issues, and according to Jerry, were not concerned.

My results demonstrate how considering the unique qualities of individual schools can shed light on factors that may otherwise be missed by less contextualized studies. Many of these factors have significant implications for the equitable access to music education in Nassau County. It is important that all students have access to quality music education regardless of the community they live in, their economic standing, or the language that they speak. By exploring the myriad factors that impact access to music instruction in schools, researchers and educators can work together to make music education more equitable. However, many studies may miss these factors if proper attention is not paid to context. Therefore, I suggest the use of Ball et al.’s (2012) contextual dimensions for future policy impact studies.

**Findings Related to the Literature**

As discussed in previous chapters, there is currently a comparative lack of empirical research on music education and educational policies such as NCLB and ESSA. Much of the
research that does exist is not focused on music education specifically. Rather, this research includes music in the broader category of arts education along with other visual and performing arts (Au, 2007; Au & Temple, 2012; Mishook & Kornhaber, 2006; Spohn, 2008). Furthermore, most of the research on the topic uses quantitative methods (Abril & Bannerman, 2015; Au, 2007; Au & Temple, 2012; Elpus, 2014; Elpus & Abril, 2011). There are very few studies that use qualitative data to explore the perceptions of music educators on this topic (Shaw, 2016; Spohn, 2008; West, 2012). By using qualitative methods and focusing specifically on music educators, the current study fills this gap in the current literature. This section explores how the findings of the current study support and often complicate the existing research on music education and policy.

**Impacts of NCLB on Music Education**

Given that ESSA is relatively new, there is currently a lack of literature on the impact of the law on music education. Therefore, I chose to focus on the documented impacts of its predecessor, NCLB, and related factors like Common Core Standards and RTT. Research has shown that these impacts included curriculum narrowing, changes to instructional time, students being pulled from music classes for remediation, and pressure to include tested subjects in music lesson plans (Beveridge, 2010; Brinckmeyer, 2016; Chapman, 2004; Elpus, 2013; Elpus & Abril, 2011; Gerrity, 2009; Shaw, 2016; Spohn, 2008; West, 2012). My findings support the previous research in that all participants concurred that these are issues that they faced in their own careers. Moreover, most participants of this study felt that the prevalence of these NCLB-related impacts had changed very little in the years since ESSA was signed into law.

The lack of information that most participants possessed about ESSA, and about policy in general, complicates these results. It also complicates the results of previous studies on the topic,
particularly those that used qualitative methods (Shaw, 2016; Spohn, 2008; West, 2012). In other words, if the participants of this study were largely disinterested in and uninformed about policy, perhaps participants in previous studies were equally apathetic and unknowledgeable. None of the previous qualitative and mixed methods studies on the topic (Shaw, 2016; Spohn, 2008; West, 2012) addressed the amount of information music teachers possessed about policy or how they acquired it. This study is the first to take such factors into account. To be clear, I do not mean to imply that the data from this or any previous study is less valuable. I simply feel that this lack of information must be kept in mind when considering the results of any study concerning music educators and policy.

The Importance of Context

As noted above, the existing research on music education and policy provides very little context (Elpus, 2013; Elpus & Abril, 2011; Gerrity, 2009; Shaw, 2016; Spohn, 2008; West, 2012). When context is provided, it is usually presented in the form of very general descriptions of schools and school districts such as “underprivileged” or “struggling” (Elpus & Abril, 2011; Gerrity, 2009; Shaw, 2016; Spohn, 2008; West, 2012). Some of these studies attempted to provide context by describing the educational systems in the states where they took place (Gerrity, 2009; Shaw, 2016; Spohn, 2008; West, 2012). West (2012) provided some specific contextual data when he described schools in his sample that struggled to meet AYP benchmarks, though this information is now out of date since ESSA eliminated AYP (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Mishook and Kornhaber (2006) included significantly more context than other studies by asking participants about the demographics and history of arts education in their schools. I believe that the context provided by these earlier studies was important but ultimately did not go far enough to truly contextualize the multifaceted effects of
policies like NCLB and ESSA. By using Ball et al.’s (2012) contextual dimensions, I was able to extend the work of these researchers by exploring the impacts of policy and possible explanations for their varied manifestations in different schools.

**Equity, Civil Rights, and Music Education**

Much of the research on music education and the consequences of policy mentions the fact that ELLs and special education students are underrepresented in music classes (Brinckmeyer, 2016; Elpus, 2014; Elpus & Abril, 2011; Lorah et al., 2014). This underrepresentation can take many forms, but the phenomenon of these students being pulled out of music classes for remediation and test preparation is particularly relevant to this study. The results of the current study add to the body of literature suggesting that ELLs and special education students are being pulled out of their music classes more than other students (Brinckmeyer, 2016; Elpus, 2014; Elpus & Abril, 2011). The findings also extend these previous studies by presenting the participants’ perceptions of the civil rights implications of pull outs for the ELLs in their music classes. However, while the participants were vocal about their feelings that ELLs are missing out on the benefits of music education, I did not hear as many similar concerns about special education students. I believe these results demonstrate the need for more qualitative research on music educator perceptions on pull outs and what they mean for their students. There is also qualitative work to be done exploring the perceptions of the students themselves and their lived experience of being pulled out of music classes for testing and remediation.

**Implications**

Although some participants were apathetic about ESSA, and perhaps all educational policy, I feel that they would benefit from deepening their understanding of such laws. In doing
so, music educators can better comprehend the factors that contribute to such policy-related consequences as curriculum narrowing, pull outs, changes to lesson plans, and lost instructional time. This information could potentially aid these educators in their attempts to advocate for themselves and their programs. It will also likely increase their understanding of their rights as educators and the rights of their students. The participants of this study are already engaging in admirable and effective advocacy. Increasing their knowledge of ESSA and other policies will likely have a beneficial impact on the efficacy of their efforts.

The general lack of information that most of the participants possessed about ESSA also has implications for administrators who seek to educate music teachers about educational policy. Participants implied that the methods used for disseminating such information was ineffective. Alternate strategies must be developed if music educators are to gain the knowledge they need to understand and engage in the policy process. If administrators truly care about their music teachers being knowledgeable about policy, perhaps they could consider holding professional developments on the topic and why it is relevant. District directors of music could also work to collaborate with music teachers on advocacy to counteract the consequences of any given policy. Finally, if it is true, as some participants suspected, that district directors of music were involved in the planning for policies like ESSA, these directors should be more transparent about their role in the policy process. I believe that all of the suggestions above would make music teachers feel more involved in the policy process.

Furthermore, the data suggest that many participants were aware of resources to educate themselves but chose not to make use of them. This may be of particular relevance to NAfME and other music education professional organizations. These organizations may want to reconsider the ways that they present information about music education and policy. Perhaps the
concerns about lack of time voiced by many participants imply that the length of articles on the subject is also discouraging readership. If these articles were shorter and easier to read, they may reach a larger audience. The organizations that publish these articles might also consider focusing more effort on explaining why music educators should care about policy and the relevance that these policies have on their professional lives.

Music educators should also seek to understand the concept of enactment and the contextual dimensions that affect the policy process in their own schools. As the results of this study show, music educators are capable of influencing the impacts of policy in a variety of ways. These strategies of managing policy must be understood as such if they are to be replicated in the future. There are also multiple factors that contribute to the impacts of policy in any given district. Therefore, solutions to any policy-related issue will need to be developed with context in mind. By understanding Ball et al.’s (2012) contextual dimensions and how they impact their professional lives, music educators can better evaluate their strategies for dealing with unintended consequences of policy. They can also potentially learn from other, possibly similar districts and adopt strategies that have worked elsewhere.

The inequities in music education in Nassau County, and elsewhere, deserve more attention from administrators and policy makers alike. I believe that music educators and music education advocates must work together to ensure that this issue receives the attention it deserves. The participants of this study were quite aware that certain students, particularly ELLs and special education students, are not benefiting from the same access to music education as their peers. Furthermore, there are disparities in the factors that impact the access to and consistency of music instruction in low, average, and high need districts. However, it is unclear if anyone in these school districts besides the music educators themselves are aware of the
factors contributing to these inequities. Once these issues are illuminated, interventions can be developed to help correct them.

Policy makers should also consider the perceptions and experiences of music educators as they seek to evaluate and fine-tune their legislation. For instance, ESSA does contain provisions that should, in theory, prevent ELLs and special education students from being pulled out of classes for remediation (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). Yet, most participants implied that this issue had not significantly changed since the adoption of ESSA. This was even true in districts that added additional time for remediation into their school days. This information supports the assertion that the lived experiences of music educators can be valuable to legislators concerned with equity in schools.

**Limitations**

Like all interview-based studies, my research was limited by the ability of participants to remember their perceptions and express themselves effectively. Some of the events the participants were asked to recall took place over 20 years ago, and some participants understandably struggled to remember certain details. Also, I originally hoped to make policy-related documents issued by school districts a larger part of my analysis. However, it soon became clear that these documents were not going to be available to me. One participant, Michelle, told me that her district and several others in the area (though she did not say which ones) had recently suffered a data leak, and many of their confidential documents were stolen. It is impossible to say if this contributed to my difficulty obtaining documents, but it would be understandable if it did.

The case study design has also been criticized for lacking generalizability and for being prone to researcher bias. Similar concerns have also been raised against qualitative research in
general (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam, 2009). However, the qualitative case study design was appropriate for this study because it allowed for in-depth descriptions of a variety of lived experiences and perceptions (Merriam, 2009). I believe that the selection of the qualitative case study design was methodologically and ontologically sound and contributed to my ability to better explore the complexities and nuances of this topic. Additionally, I believe this design allowed me to make recommendations that were both practical and specifically rooted in the experiences of the participants. Still, I recognized the need to account for my own potential biases and took steps to do so through memoing and reflection.

This study was also limited by the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. While every school district in Nassau County, New York, was somewhat unique in their response to the pandemic, there were some commonalities that cut across all of them. For instance, all public schools in Nassau County were forced to adjust to several months of remote learning. This drastically changed the nature of music instruction. Furthermore, most districts in Nassau County canceled live performances for a time, and when they did return, music teachers had to adjust to safety protocols such as masking and social distancing. Also, the pandemic led to a temporary suspension of standardized testing throughout the state. All of this was taking place during the first few years of ESSA. Although it did not specifically come up in any of the interviews, it is not difficult to imagine that teachers may have dedicated more time to understanding the transition to ESSA had the pandemic not had such a stressful and drastic impact on their professional lives. It is also possible that administrators may have dedicated more resources to informing faculty about the law if they themselves were not preoccupied with the pandemic. Moreover, the ongoing ramifications of the pandemic impacted my ability to obtain participants. One district cited the pandemic as one of the reasons for denying me access to its teachers. It is
quite possible that I may have been able to draw more participants from more varied school
districts if I were conducting this study at a different time in history.

Participants of this study were drawn from 11 very different school districts, all with their
own administrators, policy-management styles, and protocols. Furthermore, the school system in
Nassau County, New York, is different from other school systems in the country, and even in the
rest of New York State. Among the factors that make Nassau County unique is the sheer number
of school districts. At the time of this study, the county contained 56 school districts, which is an
unusually large number for the state. Nassau County is also an exceptionally diverse, mostly
suburban area, though that diversity is notably not always reflected in its segregated school
system (Foreman, 2005; Gross, 2018). These factors must be taken into account when
considering the generalizability of this case study. Some of the responses of the participants were
only true to their particular district or even school. Ultimately, I believe that this study should be
viewed as the first of many similar studies that explore this topic in many different settings.

**Trustworthiness**

Multiple methods for ensuring trustworthiness were applied throughout the course of this
study. I was sure to reflect frequently on my own biases and preconceived notions using memos
and interview notes during data collection and analysis. These memos and notes were later used
for triangulation. I was initially planning on using school district documents to further triangulate
the data but was only able to obtain one such document. With those documents unavailable, I
triangulated the data using publicly available information on NCLB and ESSA, as well as
information about each participating school district from NYSED.gov. I also engaged in member
checking with six of the participants and used peer debriefing with the members of my
dissertation committee to assist me in the process of recognizing and improving upon
shortcomings in my interpretation and analysis of the data. Additionally, I purposefully collected data from participants from different contexts and with a variety of perspectives. The data-collection process continued until I was confident that I had achieved saturation.

In keeping with the recommendations of Creswell and Creswell (2018), I endeavored to provide readers with a “rich, thick description” of the results. I was also sure to report all perspectives present in the data honestly and note any data that contradicted or countered my analysis. Moreover, I was sure to acknowledge my own preconceived notions and biases whenever appropriate in a frank and direct manner. Finally, I provided a detailed explanation of my theoretical framework, methods, and analysis process with the intent of allowing future researchers to replicate my data collection and analysis. I believe that my dedication to following these well-documented protocols ensured the trustworthiness of this study.

**Surprises**

When I began this study, I was anticipating the need level of each school district to be a significant factor in how the participants experienced the impacts of policies like NCLB and ESSA. I predicted that high need districts might place more pressure on their teachers to increase test scores in ELA and math in order to secure government funding. I was also expecting the consequences of those policies to be more pronounced in these districts and that music teachers would be more aware of these issues. These expectations were partially based on previous research that implied that schools that struggled with test scores and socio-economic concerns were also likely to see their music departments impacted by NCLB (Gerrity, 2009; West, 2012). I also acknowledge that these expectations were partially based on my own preconceived notions of high need school districts in Nassau County formed during my years of living and teaching in
the area. To my surprise, the interview data proved that my expectations were, in fact, far too simplistic.

The impacts of NCLB and ESSA were acknowledged by all of the participants regardless of the need level of their respective districts. Additionally, according to the participants, districts of all need levels prioritized tested subjects like ELA and math over music education. Likewise, I quickly realized that need level alone was not a reliable indication of the participants’ awareness of the impacts of policy. However, there were differences in how these impacts manifested in high, average, and low need schools. Perhaps the most obvious example of this can be found in the issue of ELLs being pulled out of music classes for remediation and testing. In high need districts, more ELLs were pulled from their music classes than in their average and low need counterparts. This was likely because high need districts in Nassau County, New York, tend to have greater populations of ELLs than other districts (NYSED.gov, 2019). However, not all the differences in the manifestations of policy were as easy to conceptualize as pull outs. Some differences, like the impact of the physical characteristics of music classrooms, were uncovered only by analyzing the data through the lens of Ball et al.’s contextual dimensions. Applying these dimensions to my analysis added context to the need levels designated by New York State and provided more nuance and complexity than I was originally expecting.

I was also admittedly surprised with the lack of knowledge most of the participants possessed about ESSA. This was especially surprising, considering the amount of information available about the policy. I was not necessarily expecting all the participants to be well versed in the details of the legislation. Yet, I did find the lack of information, and in some cases, apathy about ESSA somewhat perplexing. After reflecting on my results, I began to wonder if my impressions of the intersections of policy and music education were entirely fair and accurate. A
considerable amount of my pre-service training was dedicated to learning about various educational policies, including NCLB. The writings of Chapman (2004) and Beveridge (2010) led me to believe that federal education policy would have a significant impact on music education. However, the results of this study complicate that belief. Perhaps if I spent more of my career teaching in Nassau County public schools, my impressions of policies such as ESSA and NCLB would be entirely different than the impressions I developed while teaching at the college level. Perhaps there is a disconnect between the perceptions of such policies held by academics and the perceptions held by music educators working in the field. Regardless of the reason, this surprising result needs to be kept in mind when considering the data from any study concerning music teacher perceptions of educational policy.

**Recommendations for Policy and Practice**

The findings of this study reveal much about music education in Nassau County and how music educators experience the policy process. The following recommendations for policy and practice were made with these findings in mind. Adopting these recommendations would benefit a variety of stakeholders, including music educators, policy makers, administrators, and future researchers.

**Music Education and Policy**

The profession of music education must become more engaged in educational policy. This will require action from teachers, administrators, music education training programs, and professional organizations. The first step in this endeavor should be to educate music teachers about the policies that impact their daily lives. They should also be informed about the enactment process and what they can do to influence the manifestations of policy in their own schools. This must be a joint effort undertaken by professional organizations like NAfME, administrators, and
music education training programs. Furthermore, this information should be presented in a variety of ways to better serve music teachers who do not have the time for lengthy reading materials. Informational media, professional developments, and conference presentations should be considered. Once a greater population of American music educators are better informed about policy, organized advocacy can begin to take place.

**Policy Makers Should Consult Music Educators**

I truly do not believe that policy makers are intentionally trying to do any harm to music education. However, the fact remains that consequences of policy such as curriculum narrowing, changes to instructional time and lesson planning, and pull outs are still impacting music programs in American schools. The inclusion of music in ESSA was a good start, but more must be done. Policy makers should consult music educators about the impacts of policy. Likewise, music educators should reach out to policy makers to start this conversation. By opening the lines of communication between the field of music education and legislators, mutually beneficial solutions can be reached.

**The Policy Process Must Be Transparent and Accessible**

None of the 18 participants expressed a complete understanding of how the policy process worked in their districts and schools. This implies that there is a disconnect between those responsible for implementing new policies in schools and music teachers. This disconnect may extend to teachers of other subjects as well. The policy process is different in every school district, so it is impossible to give specific instructions that will apply to all Nassau County schools. However, I do feel that it is reasonable to infer that the policy process in these schools would benefit from more transparency. If this transparency is not provided voluntarily, teachers must take it upon themselves to advocate for it.
Areas of Future Study

The results of this study add to the emerging body of literature on ESSA and music education. The findings also demonstrate the need for more empirical research on the topic, as there is still much left to discover. This section presents several recommendations for future research that were developed with the findings and limitations of the current study in mind.

Similar Studies with Different Settings and Participants

One limitation of the current case study is its generalizability. Nassau County is unique in many ways, including its size, demographics, and the sheer number of school districts within its borders. The results of this study demonstrated how important context is to the study of educational policy and how these policies impact music education specifically. Therefore, I believe similar case studies must be conducted in different counties and states.

I would be particularly interested in studies set in locations significantly different from Nassau County schools, as other suburban settings may yield similar results. For instance, one such study should be set in an urban setting, such as the public schools of New York City. Another possibility that may lead to interesting opportunities for comparison would be a study set in a rural location. Either of these settings would likely provide a sample of teachers from schools with significantly different demographics and economic conditions than the schools in the current study.

Most of the participants of this study were White. There were only two people of color in the sample, and both happened to work in high need districts. Therefore, I believe another possibility for future researchers would be to purposely select for a particular demographic of music teachers. While this study made no such attempt, future researchers may choose to focus on Black or Latinx music educators working in low, average, and high need districts of New
York State. This may yield interesting data about how the ethnicity and background of the participants impact their perceptions of the impacts of educational policy.

Each of these studies should also use the theory of policy enactment as a framework and make use of Ball et al.’s (2012) contextual dimensions. Ideally, the current study would be the first of many that investigate music teacher perceptions of ESSA throughout the country. The findings from these studies could then be compared through cross-case analysis. This would ultimately be helpful in figuring out which results are generalizable to all school music programs and which might be limited to individual schools.

**Similar Studies Conducted with Elementary School Music Teachers**

The sample of this study was exclusively made up of secondary music teachers (high school and middle school). However, one participant, Cara, who used to work in both a middle school and an elementary school in her district simultaneously made a comment during her interview that struck me. When asked about losing rehearsal time to testing, she recalled, “I remember that more so when I also worked on the elementary level.” This made me wonder if there were impacts of policy that were felt more strongly by elementary school music teachers than their secondary school colleagues. I propose that the framework and methodology of the current study be applied to elementary music educators in Nassau County. This may provide valuable insights in the differences between how elementary and secondary music educators experience the policy process and the roles they play in enacting polices in their schools.

**Case Study of One District**

For the current study, I interviewed participants from several districts in Nassau County. Future researchers may consider doing a similar though more in-depth case study on the music teachers of one particular district and their perceptions of the policy process. One possible
approach would be to interview teachers from one of the districts that was asked to suspend music making during testing because they were too loud. Future researchers might also consider focusing on one of the districts that added extra periods to their day for remediation and what impact that may have had on pull outs. Additionally, any of these studies could also benefit from the inclusion of observations in classrooms and department meetings.

**District Directors of Music**

Several of the participants speculated that their district directors may have played a role in the enactment of ESSA, though they could not say for certain. This fact alone warrants a qualitative study of these administrators and their perceptions of the role they played in the transition to ESSA, if any. Additionally, studying district directors may uncover information about elements of the policy process that many of the music teachers in the sample could not comment on, such as the impact of policy on music department budgets.

**Parents as Music Education Advocates**

The participants of this study were aware of the power of parental advocacy in their districts. According to the participants, parents can have a great deal of influence over the impacts of policy changes and the general values displayed by school administrators. I believe this influence warrants the study of the perceptions of these parents on music education and the consequences of policy. What motivates parents to advocate for school music programs? What issues are important to them? How informed are they about educational policy? How aware are they of the policy factors impacting their children’s music instruction? What about the parents of students who are frequently pulled from music classes for various reasons? What are their perceptions of the frequency and quality of the music instruction their children receive in school? The answers to these, and other questions, may shed light on the motivations and actions of this
particular group of stakeholders. A comparative analysis of parent advocates from low, average, and high need districts may also illuminate differences in how parents of different backgrounds and socio-economic standings view and approach advocacy.

**Perceptions of ELLs and Special Education Students on Pull Outs**

Every participant noted that ELLs and special education students are pulled from their classes more than other students. I feel that there is qualitative research to be done on the perceptions of these students on this unfair yet common phenomenon. The perceptions and lived experiences of these students may be beneficial in the quest to find practical solutions to this inequity. The data from such a study may also further reinforce the notion that the frequency of these pull outs is a civil rights issue that must be addressed to ensure that all students receive the benefits of music education.

**Context and Study of Equity and Civil Rights in Music Education**

As stated throughout this chapter, Ball et al.’s (2012) contextual dimensions were instrumental in uncovering several factors influencing the equity and civil rights of Nassau County music students. Some of these factors, like the impact of demographics on pull outs, are not new. However, other factors, such as the physical locations of music classrooms, have received less attention in the previous literature. I believe these factors, and their impact on music education and equity, warrant further research. Furthermore, researchers who seek to investigate equity and civil rights in music education should expand their attempts to contextualize their data using Ball et al.’s contextual dimensions. This may assist future researchers in discovering new solutions to the enduring equity and civil rights issues in American music education.
Concluding Remarks

As seen in Chapter One of this dissertation, the role that music should play in education has been debated since at least the time of Aristotle. However, while Aristotle argued that music was good for the soul of the student, we now know that it has other cognitive and socio-emotional benefits as well (Hallam, 2010; The Royal Conservatory of Canada, 2014; Schellenberg, 2004). I believe that if we accept that music education has beneficial effects on the learning and well-being of students, then we must also accept that we have the responsibility to ensure it is accessible and equitable. No student should be denied music education based on his or her race, socio-economic status, or native language. Yet, as this and other studies have shown (Elpus, 2014; Mishook & Kornhaber, 2006; Shaw, 2016; West, 2012), there continues to be disparities and inequities in access to music education in American schools. Perhaps even more troubling, educational policies such as NCLB and ESSA, as well as related initiatives like the Common Core and RTT, may be unintentionally exacerbating this issue.

Many in the music education community believe that the curriculum-narrowing effects of NCLB, in addition to the Common Core and RTT initiatives, had several impacts on American music education including pull outs, changes to lesson planning, decreases to instructional time, and a general emphasis on tested subjects over music (Baker, 2012; Beveridge, 2010; Brinkmeyer, 2016; Chapman, 2004; Frierson-Campbell, 2007; Miller & Hopper, 2010; Shaw, 2016). When NCLB was replaced by ESSA in 2015, some music educators and activists were hopeful that the new law would bring opportunities for music education and possibly alleviate some of the policy-related issues of the past (Darrow, 2016; NAfME, 2016). Publications by these advocates praised ESSA for being the first national education policy to mention music by name as one of the components of a “well-rounded education,” potentially opening the door to
new sources of federal funding for school music programs. These publications also commended the fact that ESSA removed several curriculum-narrowing aspects of NCLB, such as the incentives to adopt Common Core Standards and the notion of AYP (Darrow, 2016; NAfME, 2016; Tuttle, 2016). However, the results of this study showed that not all music educators share this enthusiasm for ESSA.

Most of the participants of this study were largely uninformed about ESSA. They did not consider themselves involved in the transition to ESSA in their schools, and most were generally disinterested in the policy process. Even the few participants who were knowledgeable about ESSA expressed doubts about its relevance to their professional lives. Yet paradoxically, all of the participants were aware of the documented impacts of policy on music education and had experienced these same impacts in their own schools. Furthermore, the participants had a history of employing effective strategies for influencing the impacts that policies such as NCLB and ESSA had on their programs. While this paradox may seem strange or even disconcerting, I believe that there is much hope to be found in the findings of this study.

While it may initially appear that Nassau County music educators are not involved in the policy process, I believe that this is an oversimplification. In fact, I found that applying the theory of policy enactment (Ball et al., 2012) to my analysis of the interview data shed light on the true power and influence that these participants possessed. The strategies used by these educators effectively shaped the manifestations of ESSA and its predecessor NCLB, as well as related initiatives like the Common Core and RTT. Participants often advocated against the consequences of policy and engaged in other tactics to control their effects. The participants were also quite concerned about equity and the civil rights of their students. Many described inequities in access to music education and provided valuable information about how the
contextual factors of their districts and schools contributed to them. The most obvious example of this is the practice of ELLs and special education students being pulled out of music classes for remediation and test preparation.

The time has come for music educators to recognize their important role in the policy enactment process. To do so, they will need to become better educated about the policies that impact their professional lives and the enactment process itself. These educators are already strong advocates for their rights and the rights of their students. I believe that they could do so much more if they were armed with the appropriate knowledge of ESSA and other policies. ESSA could potentially usher in a number of opportunities for the field of music education. Music educators can fight for these opportunities but only if they know about them. Furthermore, information about the provisions of ESSA could help music educators work toward greater access and equity for all students.

It is my hope that once music educators come to understand their part in the enactment process, they will be inspired to become more involved in other aspects of educational policy. In doing so, these educators can work toward a brighter, more equitable future for music education. The results of this study support the position that music teachers already possess far greater influence over the impacts of policy than they may realize. Music educators must learn to apply this influence with knowledge and intentionality. Only then will they be able to reach their full potential as advocates and change makers in their school districts and beyond.
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[https://sgp.fas.org/crs/misc/R45977.pdf](https://sgp.fas.org/crs/misc/R45977.pdf)


[https://doi.org/10.3200/aepr.109.4.3-12](https://doi.org/10.3200/aepr.109.4.3-12)


https://doi.org/10.1177/0027432116674149


https://doi.org/10.1017/s0009838808000074


Appendix A

IRB Approval Letter

DATE: February 18, 2021
TO: Thomas Rizzuto
FROM: Molloy College IRB

PROJECT TITLE: [1715043-1] The Perceptions of Secondary Music Educators on the Transition to, and First Years of, the Every Student Succeeds Act
REFERENCE #: 
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project
ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS
DECISION DATE: February 18, 2021
REVIEW CATEGORY: Exemption category # 2

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The Molloy College IRB has determined this project is EXEMPT FROM IRB REVIEW according to federal regulations. However, exempt research activities are subject to the same human subject protections and ethical standards as outlined in the Belmont Report.

This acknowledgement expires within three years- unless there is a change to the protocol.

Though this protocol does not require annual IRB review, the IRB requires an annual report of your exempt protocol (Expedited and Exempt Research Protocol Annual Report Form) which is available on the IRB webpage.

If there is a proposed change to the protocol, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to inform the Molloy College IRB of any requested changes before implementation. A change in the research may change the project from EXEMPT status and requires prior communication with the IRB.

We will retain a copy of this correspondence within our records.

If you have any questions, please contact Patricia Eckardt at 516-323-3711 or peckardt@molloy.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.
Sincerely,

Patricia Eckardt, Ph.D., RN, FAAN  
Chair, Molloy College Institutional Review Board

This letter has been issued in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Molloy College IRB’s records.
Appendix B

Interview Protocol

Nassau County Music Teachers

For all respondents: This study will be explained to the subject by the researcher, the consent form will be read, and the subject’s questions will be answered. The researcher will explain that the interview is confidential and will take about 30-60 minutes of their time. The subject will sign the consent form and verbally consent to be audiotaped.

Brief Project Description: The purpose of this study is to better understand the perceptions of music teachers in Nassau County, NY on the transition to and first few years of ESSA.

I. Introduction
1. Can we start by stating your name, job title, district, and experience in music education?
   Probe: How many years of experience do you have in your current position?

2. What are your specific responsibilities at your job? What areas of music education do you teach/specialize in?

3. How would you describe your current school district and school, and the level of support for the music program?
   Probe: How would you estimate the demographics of your school?
   Probe: How supportive of music are your administrators? What about parents?
   Probe: How much of the school’s budget is dedicated to music, compared to other subjects?
   Probe: Are there any outside donors or organizations that your department relies on for support? Financial or otherwise?
   Probe: How would you comment on the level of teacher morale, or collaboration in your school?
   Probe: Where is your school located and how would you describe the community you serve?
   Probe: How would describe the level of support from parents? How about their enthusiasm for music?

4. Do you think that there is a relationship between the history/reputation of this school district and the value that the district places on music education?
   Probe: Does you school or district have a reputation for quality music programs?
   Probe: Have any of your ensembles attended competitions?
   Probe: Do many of your students go to All County or All State?

5. How would you describe the physical aspects of the school building where you teach?
   Probe: Is it well maintained?
   Probe: What about your classroom, and the materials you use? (instruments, sheet music, etc.)
Probe: What about the level of technology?

II. The Transition to ESSA

Read: The following questions are about the transition from No Child Left Behind to the Every Student Succeeds Act. As you may recall, many music teachers were excited when it was announced that the 2002 law, NCLB would be replaced by ESSA in 2015. The following questions concern how the transition from NCLB to ESSA was handled by the state of New York, your district, your school, and your music department respectively.

1. What were your experiences with and feelings about NCLB?
   Probe: When you began your teaching career, was NCLB already in effect (the year 2002)? If not what do you remember about when it was implemented?
   Probe: If you were active before 2002, was your teaching impacted by changes in scheduling? Instructional time? If so, how?
   Probe: If you witnessed the implementation of NCLB, do remember a shift in the appreciation or support for music in your district? How about you school specifically?
   Probe: How did you feel NCLB affected music education in your district? How about your school specifically?
   Probe: Have you ever been required or encouraged to incorporate math, reading, or science into you lesson plans?
   Probe: Did NCLB impact the funding for your department?
   Probe: Were you ever expected to proctor and/or grade state exams?

2. How do you feel about the Every Student Succeeds Act?
   Probe: When did you first learn about the law?
   Probe: What are your perceptions on NCLB?
   Probe: How did you feel when you learned NCLB was going to be replaced?

3. What are your perceptions on how ESSA was implemented in your state, district and school?
   Probe: Who was in charge of the transition?
   Probe: What was the process like? Was it gradual, or were changes implemented quickly?
   Probe: Were changes made at the state level followed exactly, or were they changed or interpreted by your district? How about at your school? What about your department?

4. How did your colleagues adjust to the transition?
   Probe: Do you feel that some teachers handled it better than others? Will you elaborate on that?
   Probe: What about music teachers specifically? How did they react?

5. Was there anything about the transition that you feel uniquely impacted the music department?
   Probe: Do you remember any changes in the support for the music program, or the appreciation for music after NCLB was repealed?
Probe: Was there anything unexpected?

6. Have your perceptions on ESSA changed or evolved since the transition period?

7. Do you feel that there is anything unique about how your district has implemented the policy?
   Probe: What about your school?
   Probe: Do you think there is anything unique about how your music program has adapted?

8. What other policies or policy decisions at the national and state level affect your professional life? These do not include NCLB or ESSA.
   Probe: Race to the top? Budget passing? Enrollment? Change in administration?

III. Preparation for ESSA

Read: The following questions are all about how your district and school prepared you and your colleagues for the transition from NCLB to ESSA. I am going to be asking you about things like professional development, training materials, things you researched on your own etc.

1. How were the teachers at your school prepared for ESSA?
   Probe: What about music teachers specifically?
   Probe: Did music teachers receive any training or materials directly from the state?
   Probe: Did your district make any attempts to educate you on the new law? If so, how?
   Probe: How about your school? If so, how?
   Probe: And how about the music department? If so, how?

2. Was there any training or professional development about ESSA specifically aimed at music or arts educators?
   Probe: If so, would you elaborate on what it was?
   Probe: Who was in charge of providing this profession development?
   Probe: Did you do any research on ESSA for yourself at the time?
   Probe: If you were taught or otherwise provided with information about ESSA, who provided it to you? Do you know where it came from?

3. Do you feel your district adequately prepared music teachers for the transition? Why or why not?
   Probe: How about your school?
   Probe: Did your music department have any specific trainings or materials for you?

4. How thoroughly were you educated about your district’s ESSA plan? Or the state’s ESSA plan?
   Probe: How familiar are you with it now?
   Probe: Is music mentioned in the plan? If so, how?
   Probe: Do you know where this information about ESSA came from?

5. Who or where did you get your information about ESSA from?
**Probe:** Was there a specific person in your district or school in charge of this information? Did anything come directly from the state of New York?
**Probe:** Was there any materials or information specifically from the music department?
**Probe:** Was training offered from professional organizations like MENC or NAfME?
**Probe:** What were you told about Title IV funding?

**IV. Differences Between ESSA and NCLB**

**Read:** My next questions are about the specific changes that may or may not have taken place since ESSA was implemented. As you might be aware, ESSA was the first law to mention music by name as a component of a well-rounded education. The law also included changes to state testing. These questions are about what you’ve noticed in your district and school.

1. How has your job changed since the implementation of ESSA?
   - **Probe:** Have there been changes in instructional time?
   - **Probe:** What about funding for the music department?

2. Were you aware that ESSA is the first federal education policy to mention music by name as a component of a well-rounded education?

3. What changes have you noticed in students being pulled out of your classes to receive services?
   - **Probe:** Which students are more likely to be pulled out? ELLs? Students with special needs?
   - **Probe:** Do you feel the transition to ESSA has changed anything about this practice?

4. Do you feel that your school is less focused on Math and ELA now that the law has changed?
   - **Probe:** If so, how has their focused shifted?

**V. Role of Music Teachers in the Transition**

1. Were any music teachers or administrators involved in the development of your district’s ESSA plan?
   - **Probe:** What about at the school level?
   - **Probe:** Did your department chair or director make any attempts to seek or include your input during the transition? How about other teachers?

2. Were music teachers consulted at all before the plan was put into effect? How about during the transition?
   - **Probe:** If so, who reached out to them?

3. In your opinion, how could music teachers have played a bigger role in this process?
   - **Probe:** Is there anything you would change if you could? Please elaborate.
   - **Probe:** Imagine you could involve music teachers in the process at any level? Where do
you feel their input would be most useful? What does the state, district, school, and department need to know respectively?

Are there any other questions that I should have asked that I did not? Is there anything else you’d like to add?
Appendix C

School Districts of Nassau County, NY Organized by Need Level

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<th>High Need Districts</th>
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<th>Average Need Districts</th>
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