

A NafME Small School Initiative

Elevating the Small School Music Education Experience

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Chair of the Small School Initiative

Midwest Clinic
December 18, 2024
12:00-1:00 p.m.
W179



Session:

We are here to **elevate** the small school music education experience:

- Share challenges & create solutions
- Share successes
- Share ideas, solutions and build community



Introducing the NAFME Small Schools Initiative:

Teaching music at a small school affords unique opportunities and benefits, while also presenting specific challenges.

Small School Initiative is an extension of the:

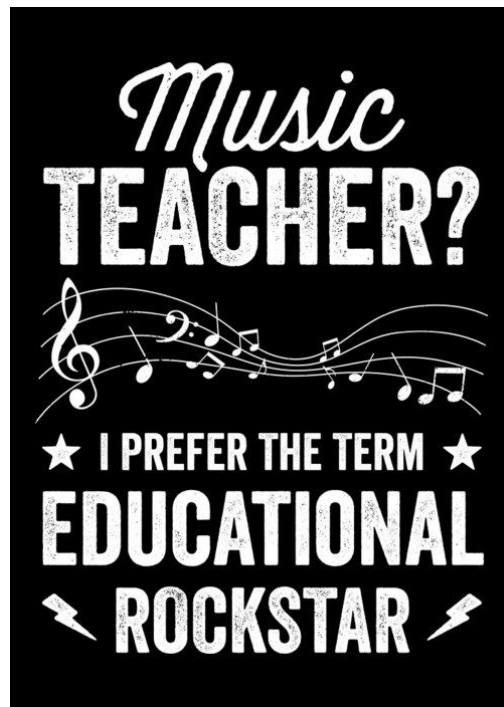
- 2022 NAFME Strategic Plan whose keystone is equity and,
- 2023 NAFME Music Teacher Professional Initiative that focuses on recruitment, education and retention of music educators



NAfME is an association where all people are heard, seen, and feel they belong throughout their lifelong experiences in music.

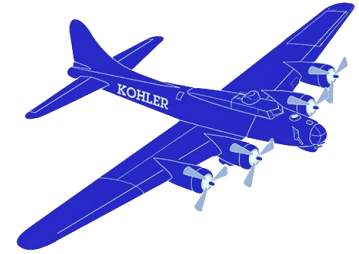
Who in this room teaches in a small school?

- Band
- Choir
- Orchestra
- General Music
- Two or more genres





My Story:



Richard Tengowski



NAfME's Small School Initiative:

Starting its work in February 2023, the Task Force identifies key issues and effective strategies for:

- Networking
- Community building
- Professional learning
- Advocacy
- Resource development

to support music educators in small schools throughout the United States, primarily but not exclusively serving in rural contexts.



What is a small school?

Best Answer: If you think you're small, you are probably a small school!

Note: Every state has different definitions or laws defining "small or rural school districts."

As of January 18, 2024, the national average for the number of students per public school was:

- A. 1488 students
- B. 1123 students
- C. 903 students
- D. 526 students Correct Answer

Snapshot Lightning Round!

Wisconsin School Districts

Urban	4%
Suburban	19%
Town	39%
Rural	55%

Our Districts and Schools

Data from 2022-2023 school year unless noted.

District Settings	Districts	Percent
Traditional School Districts	611	100%
Ohio 8 Districts	8	1.3%
Other Urban Districts	47	7.7%
Suburban Districts	123	20.1%
Small Town Districts	199	32.6%
Rural Districts	229	37.5%
Other Districts	5	0.8%



About **49%** of Pennsylvania's 501 school districts are rural, which is considered a significant percentage. Rural school districts in Pennsylvania are typically around 150 square miles in size, but some can be more than 250 square miles.

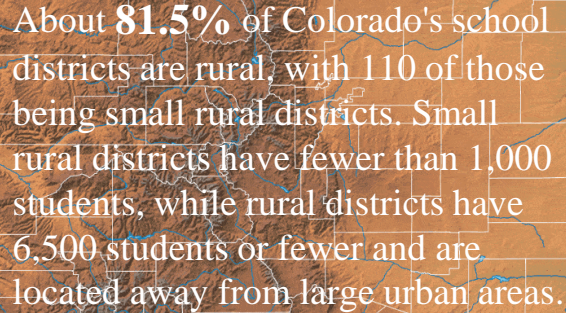
Data Source:

U.S. Dept of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), 2012-13

<https://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Data/Frequently-Requested-Data/Facts-and-Figures>

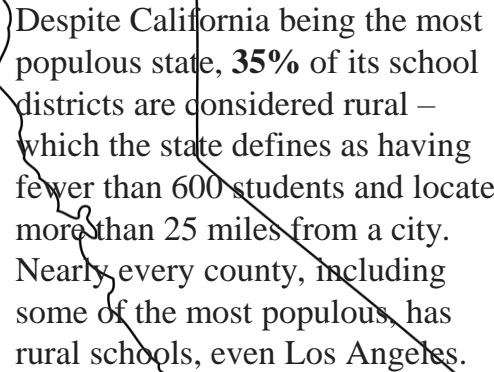
https://www.rural.pa.gov/getfile.cfm?file=Resources/fact-sheets/Trends_in_education.pdf

Snapshot Lightning Round!



About **81.5%** of Colorado's school districts are rural, with 110 of those being small rural districts. Small rural districts have fewer than 1,000 students, while rural districts have 6,500 students or fewer and are located away from large urban areas.

0 100 km 100 Miles © geology.com



Despite California being the most populous state, **35%** of its school districts are considered rural – which the state defines as having fewer than 600 students and located more than 25 miles from a city. Nearly every county, including some of the most populous, has rural schools, even Los Angeles.

North Carolina



78 of 100
counties are rural

Data Source:

<https://www.cde.state.co.us/schoolview/explore/statesnapshot>

<https://calmatters.org/education/k-12-education/2024/03/https://carolinademography.cpc.unc.edu/2024/02/20/who-are-north-carolinas-public-school-students>



Snapshot Lightning Round!

Texas has more than 2,000 campuses classified as being in rural areas, according to the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics. **Texas has more schools in rural areas than any other state**, with more than 20% of campuses located in rural areas. Some 900,000 Texas public education students attend rural schools.

Data Source:

Advocating for Rural Schools: Organization Works to Help Students in Small Districts

<https://www.tasb.org/news-insights/advocating-for-rural-schools> (Texas Assoc. of School Boards)

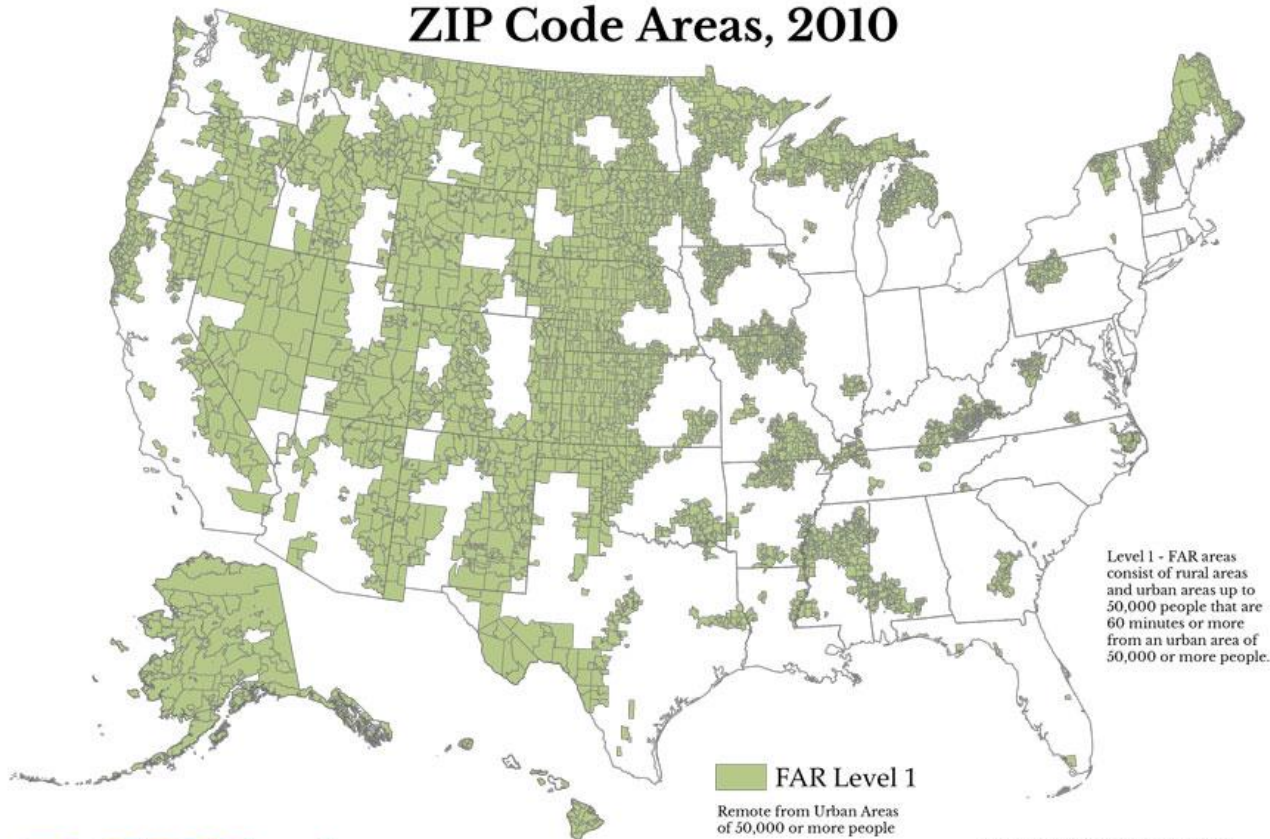
Theresa Gage-Dieringer

Wednesday, August 14, 2024



Frontier and Remote (FAR) Level 1 ZIP Code Areas, 2010

Remote areas of people that are 60 minutes or more from an urban area of 50K people or more.



Moral of the Story:

- There are a lot of small schools that need our attention.
- Small schools have unique challenges and benefits.
- Small schools need quality music teachers.
- Small school students deserve a well-balanced education – one that include music!



Identify the Challenges

The following are the results of a nationwide survey identifying challenges within small school music programs.



CHALLENGES

Isolation

Ensemble

Lack of Resources

Parent/Community Barriers

Workload

Administration/Teacher Barriers

Funding

Other Issues

Scheduling

Conflicts

Sharing Students



CHALLENGES - 122 Weighted Comments

10	Isolation	18	Ensemble
17	Lack of Resources	8	Parent/Community Barriers
8	Workload	9	Admin./Teacher Barriers
16	Funding	9	Other Issues
15	Scheduling		
6	Conflicts		
6	Sharing Students		



Isolation - both w/in school and network of surrounding colleagues

My biggest challenge is being the only teacher in my district that does what I do. It's hard to know if what you are doing is the right thing or if there are better methods out there. You don't have a cooperating teacher nearby to bounce ideas off of or get advice.




Lack of Resources

Facilities: My smaller school uses the library for music, art, and library classes. We rotate through the week.

Equipment: I have more students interested than I have instruments.

Transportation: Transportation for some of my students can be a problem if we have something that falls outside of the school day.

Enrichment: Lack of access to high quality cultural activities such as concerts, plays, operas, musicals etc. Lack of access to private instruction. Limited support for the arts in general.



Workload

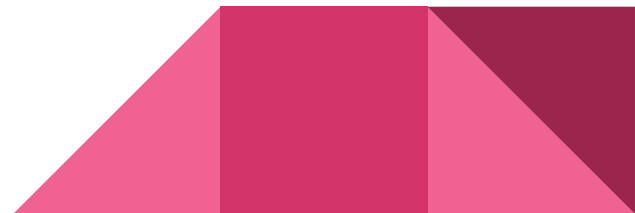
I am being spread too thin.. not enough time in a day, week, year.. working alone in my department.

It's overwhelming to bring great music experiences to such a huge range of age groups.



Funding

Our students never receive the same funding, opportunities or education as larger schools with better tax base provide. No matter how good Johnny is, he is playing on the schools 25 year old horn and isn't provided free lessons like other schools. It devalues my students and our programs.



Scheduling

I am losing students to Art or Tech in High School because they can't take both.

Scheduling issues - ex. secondary students couldn't do band & choir

Scheduling conflicts - Having one district Music, Art, and PE Teacher limits the schedule severely and makes it so that students can only do Band in MS and Choir in HS. It makes it so you have to sacrifice one program for the other to be sustainable, which I don't want to do.

For Elementary - small classrooms and shared spaces make everything difficult. Teaching all the grade levels means scheduling as a whole is very difficult, especially when there is a special day/event.

Conflicts - with sports, clubs and outside activities

Conflicts with sports. We all need the same kids and there is only a small amount of students.

Many students will choose not to even sign up for musical/band/ect. because they are afraid it will conflict too much with their sport schedule.



Sharing Students

We are all competing for the same kids.

The kids that do music are the same kids who are in sports - and theatre - and ag, and sometimes it's hard to fight for kids.



Ensemble

With a small pool of total students to pull from, we don't have large sections of the different instruments. Some years you have a nice sized trumpet section, a year or two later, you might only have two trumpets.

Small classes esp. band with limited instrumentation. It is hard to find music that sounds good with 12 members.



Parent/Community Barriers

Lacking support in a sport dominant community.

Admin/teachers/parents don't see the need to do anything differently even when "the way we've always done it" isn't working anymore.

Parents don't understand what we do.



Other Issues

High teacher turn over

Attracting candidates



Question No. 1

Some challenges are out of our control, but others have potential solutions.

What is **one** of your challenges that (with a little bit of creative brainstorming), you could improve?



Question No. 2

What is the best thing about teaching in a small school?



Question No. 3

How do you measure success in a small school?

The survey results say...



Measuring Success in a Small School:

Student growth; developing self-sufficient musicians

Participation numbers

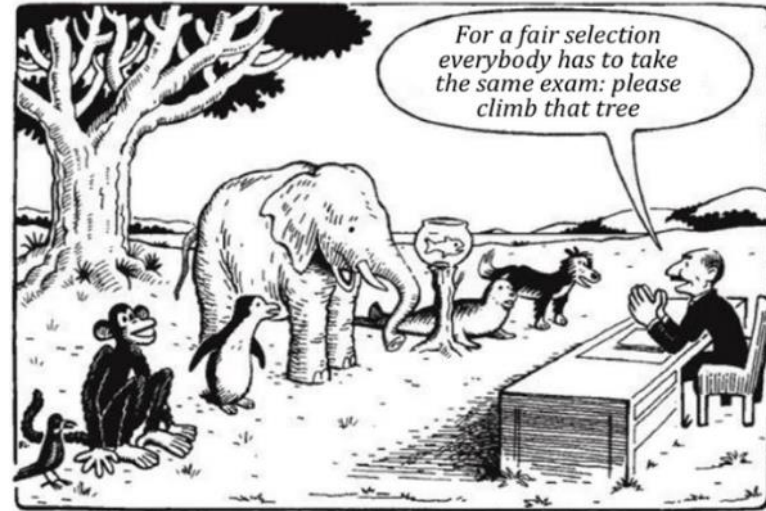
Ensemble (musicianship) improvement

Participating in festivals based on school size

Achievement of the national/state standards

Parent/Admin/Student feedback

Re-think how do you measure success?



Our Education System

"Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid."

- Albert Einstein

NAfME's *Teaching Music*:

Published Resources!

August 2023 *Teaching Music* Magazine Feature Article

- [Celebrating and Elevating the Small-School Experience](#)

October 2023 *Teaching Music* Magazine Feature Article

- [You Are Not Alone! Tips for New Teachers in Small Schools](#)



NAfME Small School Initiative Town Halls

Advocating for Federal Funds in the Small School Setting

- [View the recording of this October 2, 2024 NAFME virtual event](#)

Perspectives on Developing the Small School Music Program

- [View the recording of this April 10, 2024 NAFME virtual event](#)

Embracing and Influencing Change in Small School Music Programs

- [View the recording of this January 17, 2024 NAFME virtual event](#)

How to Redefine Success at a Small School

- [View the recording of this November 8, 2023 NafME virtual event](#)

Elevating the Small-School Music Education Experience

- [View the recording of this May 23, 2023 NafME virtual event](#)

Video Resources!

Free for NafME members.

For more information about the
NAfME Small School Initiative:



*Thank you small school music
teachers for making a profound
difference and inspiring so many!*

To view the slides from this presentation, go to
www.RichTengowski.com
and click on Music Educator

