



Music Education in Rural America

Volume I: Policies and Perspectives

Edited by Daniel C. Johnson



Music Education in Rural America

This two-volume publication is the first of its kind, advancing asset-based policies and practices in music education for nearly 10 million rural students nationwide. By exploring the influence of urbanormativity and historical trends, the authors advocate for school music programs that sustain rural values, interests, communities, and ecosystems.

While earlier research has offered insights on the topic, none have assembled a collection of experts and scholars committed to promoting an asset-based view of rural music education in the United States. *Volume I: Policies and Perspectives*, presents ten chapters addressing a range of issues that affect one-fifth of K–12 students nationwide. Ideas encompass a multi-dimensional definition of rurality that includes population, landscape, and sociocultural contexts. The authors offer their own first-hand perspectives to describe the importance and character of rural places themselves. Throughlines of this volume are disentangling assumptions about rural schools and their resources, pedagogical potential, and musical possibilities. Written for music educators, scholars, policymakers, school administrators, and music-teacher educators, this volume affirms that geography is not inherently a limitation and that *all* students deserve access to responsive music education, regardless of their zip codes.

Daniel C. Johnson is Professor of Music and Music Education at the University of North Carolina, Wilmington, where he coordinates Graduate Studies in Music Education.



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

Music Education in Rural America

Volume I: Policies and Perspectives

Edited by Daniel C. Johnson

Designed cover image: Shutterstock

First published 2026

by Routledge

605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158

and by Routledge

4 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

© 2026 selection and editorial matter, Daniel C. Johnson; individual chapters, the contributors

The right of Daniel C. Johnson to be identified as the author of the editorial material, and of the authors for their individual chapters, has been asserted in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

For Product Safety Concerns and Information please contact our EU representative GPSR@taylorandfrancis.com. Taylor & Francis Verlag GmbH, Kaufingerstraße 24, 80331 München, Germany.

Trademark notice: Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

ISBN: 9781032811741 (hbk)

ISBN: 9781032811758 (pbk)

ISBN: 9781003498476 (ebk)

DOI: 10.4324/9781003498476

Typeset in Sabon

by codeMantra

This book is dedicated to my great-grandmother, Sophia Sullivan (1874–1957), and to her twin daughters: my grandmother, Viola Johnson (1902–1987), and my great aunt Verona Arnold (1902–1977). These three pioneering women were long-time public-school teachers in rural Alabama. In an era when most women worked at home, they all pursued post-secondary education and supported their children in doing the same.



Taylor & Francis

Taylor & Francis Group

<http://taylorandfrancis.com>

Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>Preface</i>	<i>x</i>
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>xii</i>
<i>Contributor Biographies</i>	<i>xiii</i>
1 History and Current Landscape of Rural Music Education: Policy and Praxis	1
J. KESSA ROBERTS AND ALCIA COLE	
2 Surveying the Field: A Systematic Review of Rural Music Education Research in the United States	15
TIMOTHY E. NOWAK	
3 Urbanormativity in Rural School Music	36
VINCENT C. BATES	
4 The Intersections of School, Community, and Music in Rural Spaces	56
WHITNEY MAYO	
5 Place-Based Pedagogy and Rural Communities as Cultural Contexts	78
CATHERYN SHAW FOSTER AND MELODY CAUSBY	
6 Love Your Mother: How Ecology Can Inform Music Teaching and Learning in Rural Settings	97
DANIEL J. SHEVOCK	

viii *Contents*

7 Preservice Music Teacher Education: Preparing the Next Generation for Rural Schools	113
DANIEL C. JOHNSON AND ERIC M. PENNELLO	
8 Rural Music Teacher Retention and Turnover	130
DAVID N. SANDERSON	
9 Answering the Call for Rural Music Teacher Professional Development	152
DANIEL C. JOHNSON	
10 Potential Unexplored: Land-Grant Institutions, Rural Engagement, and Music Education	173
JASON B. GOSSETT AND ANGELA MUNROE	
<i>Index</i>	193

Figures

2.1	Methodological Designs of Reviewed Literature in Rural Music Education.	17
6.1	Areas of Resistance to Enclosure Identified in Laudato Si'.	108
7.1	The Influence of Rurality on Pedagogical Content Knowledge Domains.	116
9.1	Rural Music Educator PD as a Teacher-Centric Paradigm.	161

Preface

This volume of *Music Education in Rural America* examines Policies and Perspectives that define and describe music teaching and learning for nearly 10 million students in rural communities nationwide. The first of its kind, this volume brings together 13 authors to consider fundamental and far-reaching principles of rural school music programs. In ten related yet distinct chapters, the authors also offer specific policy recommendations based on their expertise and experience with rural education, as music teachers and teacher-educators.

From an introductory chapter providing important background information on rural arts education (J. Kessa Roberts & Alycia Cole), the next section builds upon a systematic literature review (Timothy E. Nowak) to explore fundamental issues such as urbanormativity (Vincent Bates), community and cultural contexts (Whitney Mayo, and Catheryn Shaw Foster & Melody Causby), and ecology (Daniel J. Shevock). Applications for music teacher education (Daniel C. Johnson & Eric M. Pennello), teacher retention and turnover (David N. Sanderson), and teachers' professional development (Daniel C. Johnson) extend themes introduced in the earlier chapters. The final chapter explores the potential for rural engagement through music education at land-grant institutions (Jason B. Gossett & Angela Munroe). Written for music educators, scholars, policymakers, school administrators, and music-teacher educators, this volume affirms that geography is not an inherent limitation on quality music education. Exploring the influence of urbanormativity and other trends, the authors examine existing policies and advocate for school music programs that are both responsive and committed to sustaining rural values, interests, communities, and ecosystems.

For many years, interest about music education in rural America has not kept pace with parallel research in urban contexts although this topic is a national concern, with every state in the country having underserved rural areas, comprising about one-fifth of the K–12 student population. While earlier research has offered insights on related issues, none have

assembled a collection of experts and scholars committed to promoting an asset-based view of rural music education. In addition, this volume provides foundational scholarship for the second volume in this series: *A Teacher Guidebook*, which offers practical guidance based on the policies and perspectives explored here. A throughline of both volumes is challenging assumptions about rural schools and their resources, pedagogical potential, and musical possibilities. While addressing these topics from progressive perspectives, the contributing authors all approach these themes from an asset view. Instead of emphasizing shortcomings and deficits, they offer proactive and forward-thinking ideas to celebrate success and inspire achievement in rural schools—on the part of both music teachers and their students.

Acknowledgments

I acknowledge the collaboration of so many wonderful and thoughtful colleagues whose contributions brought this book to fruition. Without their diligence and perseverance, the project would not have been realized. I also acknowledge the University of North Carolina Wilmington for its support in the form of a research reassignment to write this book. The sabbatical semester of spring, 2025 allowed me the time to focus on writing and editing the final version of this project.

Contributor Biographies

Vincent C. Bates is Professor of Education at Weber State University in Ogden, Utah. His publications on rural music education, based on his experiences as a rural music student and teacher, include articles and chapters in a variety of professional journals and handbooks. Other research interests include critical theory, social class, and environmental sustainability.

Melody Causby is Associate Professor of Music Education and Graduate Coordinator for the School of Music at the University of Southern Mississippi where she teaches instrumental music education courses. An active clinician, guest conductor, adjudicator, and presenter, she has more than a decade of experience leading rural band programs.

Alycia Cole is a doctoral student in Utah State University's Teacher Education and Leadership program. A former secondary English and performing arts educator, her research focuses on strengthening writing education in secondary schools by enhancing teacher preparation and promoting rigorous, accessible, and practice-informed approaches to support students' literacy development.

Catheryn Shaw Foster is Assistant Professor of Practice of Music Education at Virginia Tech. Her publications credits include the *Journal of Music Teacher Education* and the *Bulletin for the Council of Research in Music Education*. A former band director, she is the co-founder of the Rural Band Director Alliance.

Jason B. Gossett is Associate Professor of Instrumental Music Education at West Virginia University. He taught band in rural Kentucky for ten years and has published research on music teacher agency, identity, and values in *Contributions to Music Education* and the *Journal of Research in Music Teacher Education*.

Daniel C. Johnson is Professor of Music and Music Education at the University of North Carolina Wilmington where he coordinates Graduate Studies in Music Education. With a focus on teaching general music, his

scholarship includes numerous research journal and book publications on rural music education, integrated arts education, and teachers' professional development.

Whitney Mayo is Assistant Professor of Music Education at the University of North Dakota. Her research interests include rural music education as well as general music for early childhood and elementary learners. An advocate for anti-bias, equity, access, and inclusion, her professional interests include teachers' professional and instructional practices.

Angela Munroe is Associate Professor of Music Education at West Virginia University, where she teaches General Music Methods and graduate courses. A former K–8 music specialist, she now researches music teacher education and identity development with publications in *Journal of Music Teacher Education* and *Visions of Research in Music Education*.

Timothy E. Nowak is Associate Professor of Music Education at East Carolina University, where he teaches string methods, large ensemble methods, and supervises student teachers. A former orchestra director, his research interests include sociology in music education, music teacher education, and the history of string/orchestra education in the United States.

Eric M. Pennello is Lecturer of Music Education at the University of Oklahoma, where he teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in music education and research and supervises student teachers. A former band director, he remains an active clinician and adjudicator. His research interests include music teacher preparation, mentoring, and instrumental methods.

J. Kessa Roberts is an Assistant Professor in the College of Education at Clemson University. A former rural K–12 educator, her research explores the intersection of education policy and leadership in rural contexts, focusing on how school, family, and community actors shape policy and practice.

David N. Sanderson is Associate Professor of Music Education at the University of South Dakota where he leads the undergraduate and graduate music education programs. His research interests include rural music education and music teachers' professional development, with publications in *Arts Education Policy Review* and *Research and Issues in Music Education*.

Daniel J. Shevock teaches music at Central Mountain Middle School (Mill Hall, PA), previously having taught with Penn State Altoona and the Pittsburgh Public Schools. With several journal and book publications, his music education scholarship integrates ecological literacy, place-consciousness, improvisation, history, and philosophy. He is active in the MayDay Group.

1 History and Current Landscape of Rural Music Education Policy and Praxis

J. Kessa Roberts and Alycia Cole

For those readers with limited exposure to rural places, the concept of rural education might evoke mental images of one-room schoolhouses or school buses driving down dusty dirt roads. While these images are not necessarily inaccurate, they portray merely one slice of what rural education looks like in the United States. Across the country, over 9 million students attend rural schools each day (Showalter et al., 2023). These students possess diverse identities across race, class, culture, sexuality, and immigration status and are educated in schools influenced by corresponding geographic, demographic, economic, and political contexts. These influences have important impacts across the curriculum, including to arts education and, more specifically, music education.

As a foundation for the wide-ranging yet cohesive chapters in this volume, we provide an overview of the history and current issues in arts and music education, respectively, and explore how the current landscape of education in rural places shapes music education in rural contexts.

Arts Education: Historical Overview and Current Trends

Historical Development of Arts Education

Arts education in the 19th century evolved through distinct yet complementary developments in visual art and music, both shaped by broader societal needs and educational reforms. Drawing instruction was the first form of arts education to appear in public schools, introduced experimentally in Massachusetts in 1821 and formally adopted statewide in 1860 as part of a broader push to enhance industrial skills, particularly in design and manufacturing (Dobbs, 1971; Whitford, 1923). This practical emphasis on industrial applications marked the early stages of visual arts education. However, by the 1880s, its scope had expanded to include the cultivation of aesthetic taste, eye-hand coordination, and broader mental development (Whitford, 1923).

2 *Music Education in Rural America*

Meanwhile, music education began its transition from private instruction in singing schools to inclusion in public education during the 1830s, influenced by broader educational philosophies that emphasized its intellectual and cultural value. Guided by Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi's idea of music as a "science" that could foster intellectual growth, advocates like William C. Woodbridge and Lowell Mason worked to bring music instruction into schools, emphasizing structured, methodical teaching approaches (Brophy, 1992). These developments in music education paralleled those in visual arts, as both reflected the 19th-century movement to integrate the arts into schooling to promote individual development and societal enrichment.

By the early 20th century, however, thinkers such as John Dewey shifted the rationale for arts education, advocating for its role in fostering creativity, critical thinking, and personal development (Heilig et al., 2010). Dewey argued that arts education should move beyond technical analysis or rote art history, emphasizing the teacher's role in helping students connect personally and dynamically with the arts, likening the process to an apprenticeship requiring active guidance to make the arts meaningful and engaging (Fleming, 2012).

In the 1990s, arts education underwent significant federal reform driven by advocacy from national arts teacher associations to integrate the arts more centrally into education. This culminated in the 1994 publication of the National Voluntary K–12 Standards for the Arts, the first time arts educators across disciplines—music, dance, theater, and visual arts—collaborated with federal agencies (Heilig et al., 2010). Despite these advancements, state and local authorities retained control over implementation, leading to inconsistencies (Herbert, 1995). Additionally, after the 2000 national election, new educational priorities shifted away from the arts, creating ongoing challenges for sustaining arts education in schools. Furthermore, the early 2000s brought new challenges as federal priorities shifted toward standardized testing under policies like No Child Left Behind. These accountability-driven policies pushed arts education to the periphery, reducing its presence in many schools despite its recognition as a core subject (Heilig et al., 2010).

Arts Education and Its Role in Modern Learning

Despite setbacks in the early 2000s, recognition of arts education's role in fostering critical thinking, creativity, and deeper learning spurred efforts to reintegrate it into contemporary curricula (Workman, 2017). As education shifted from rote memorization to concept-based learning, arts programs became valued for developing essential skills like collaboration, communication, and perseverance (Gibas, 2015). These benefits were especially significant for at-risk students, including those from low-income

backgrounds and English language learners, providing vital tools for academic and social development (Workman, 2017).

At the same time, however, challenges remain. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 allows states to prioritize the arts as part of a well-rounded education, yet the focus on standardized testing continues to marginalize arts programs (Workman, 2017). Access to arts education also remains inequitable, with lower-income schools offering fewer robust programs, particularly in dance and theater (Elpus, 2022). In contrast, wealthier students benefit from greater access to private arts education, and school choice policies often exacerbate these disparities by diverting resources from underserved students (Hourigan, 2023).

Looking ahead, arts educators must embrace innovation by blending traditional arts with emerging technologies and integrating with STEM subjects to keep curricula relevant and inclusive (Colwell & Randles, 2024). Through fostering partnerships and advocating for equitable access, arts education can remain a transformative force for personal, social, and academic development, contributing to a more just and cohesive society (Colwell & Randles, 2024; Gibas, 2015).

Historical Foundations and Shifts in Music Education

Music education in the United States began in the 19th century, evolving significantly as societal, political, and educational reforms shaped its role in public schools. Early reformers in the 1800s advocated for music's inclusion as a means of promoting cultural and moral values (Hash, 2024). This movement emphasized Western classical music, reflecting the belief in the superiority of European traditions over uniquely American ones (Mark, 2015).

While traveling abroad, William C. Woodbridge, a Massachusetts-born educator, encountered Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi's educational philosophy, which emphasized hands-on, sensory-based learning and believed music could be systematically taught to develop intellectual and individual potential (Brophy, 1992; Mark, 2015). Inspired by his observations, Woodbridge returned to the United States in 1829 and collaborated with Lowell Mason, a prominent church musician and leader in the Singing Schools movement, to integrate these ideas into American education (Brophy, 1992). In 1838, Lowell Mason, a respected teacher and influential figure in Boston's social and educational circles, successfully demonstrated at Hawes Grammar School—where he taught without pay—that public school children could learn to read music and sing, leading the Boston School Committee to formally include vocal music in the curriculum (Pemberton, 1992).

Over time, music education in the United States evolved to reflect broader societal shifts, consistently promoting democratic ideals, flexibility, inclusivity, and adaptability in response to societal changes (Colwell &

4 *Music Education in Rural America*

Randles, 2024). These values enable music education to incorporate diverse perspectives, fostering social cohesion. Mark (2015) identified four key rationales—“cultural elevation,” “cohesive society and immigration,” “commercial prosperity,” and “social justice and multiculturalism” (p. 4)—which demonstrate how music education has served not only as a means of cultural enrichment but also as a tool for addressing social and economic challenges, such as integrating immigrant communities through shared musical experiences.

Though aligned with democratic ideals, music education’s evolution has been shaped by external pressures. A major shift occurred after Sputnik in 1958, when national priorities turned toward science and mathematics, sidelining the arts (Hash, 2024). In response, Music Education as Aesthetic Education (MEAE) emerged, emphasizing listening and understanding over performance, though it faced criticism for being too detached from practical music-making.

By the 1980s, music education underwent a significant philosophical shift with the emergence of praxialism, a concept developed by scholars such as Elliott, Alperson, and Regelski. As Elliott (1997) noted, praxialism challenges earlier aesthetic-based models, which had emphasized listening and emotional response, often detached from practical music-making. Praxialism instead views music as an active, socially embedded practice encompassing performing, composing, arranging, listening, and other forms of “musicing” (Elliott, 1995; Mark, 2015). It emphasizes connecting students to the cultural, historical, and social contexts of music-making as a pathway to self-knowledge and personal growth (Alperson & Elliott, 2016; Elliott, 1997).

Regelski (2017) further expanded on this perspective by highlighting music’s role in fostering social cohesion and meeting diverse human needs. He argues that music should be understood as “praxis”—goal-oriented, intentional action rooted in human values and situated within specific cultural and social contexts, rejecting the notion of music as an isolated “art-for-art’s-sake” endeavor. Praxialism thus positions music as a vital, communal activity that enhances individual creativity while fostering meaningful connections and shared experiences. As Elliott (1997) explains, it embraces a “multidimensional concept of musical practices and musical works, a multidimensional concept of musical understanding, [and] a multidimensional concept of music’s significance in human life” (p. 22), underscoring the diverse ways music holds meaning and value across social and cultural contexts.

Building on earlier developments, the introduction of national standards in the 1990s marked a pivotal moment in formalizing music education in the United States, establishing core skills such as composing, listening, and understanding music within its cultural context (Hash, 2024). The 2014 National Core Arts Standards further expanded this framework,

incorporating a broader range of genres and performance settings to foster a more inclusive curriculum. This diversification is crucial for ensuring that music education remains relevant in a rapidly globalizing world (Colwell & Randles, 2024; Mark, 2015; Reimer, 2015).

Despite progress, teacher shortages continue to pose a significant challenge in music education, particularly in underserved rural and urban areas. Hash (2021) noted that schools struggle to recruit and retain qualified music educators due to low pay, inadequate working conditions, and a declining number of candidates pursuing education degrees. Although alternative certification programs have been introduced to address these shortages, disparities in the quality of instruction persist, especially in schools serving historically marginalized communities (Mark, 2015; Reimer, 2015).

Music Education in Rural Contexts

We now turn to an overview of the current issues in rural education and their intersections with music education in rural contexts. To organize this section, we draw upon the National Rural Education Association's (NREA) Rural Research Agenda 2022–2027 (NREA, 2022). The NREA developed this agenda using a grounded theory approach based on surveys, interviews, and focus groups with a diverse group of key rural stakeholders from across the country, including K–12 and higher education practitioners, researchers, and policymakers (Hartman et al., 2022; McHenry-Sorber et al., 2023). Participants discussed the current state of rural education in their specific contexts, highlighting successes, challenges, and the need for more research, thus providing a comprehensive summary of the current rural educational landscape. This field-emergent agenda organizes participants' responses into five categories (Policy and Funding; Teacher and Leader Preparation, Recruitment, and Retention; Partnerships and Community Relationships; College and Career Trajectories; and Health and Wellness) as well as a core category of Educational and Spatial Equity, which intersects with all categories (Hartman et al., 2022; McHenry-Sorber et al., 2023; NREA, 2022). Recognizing that most topics are cross-cutting rather than fitting neatly within one distinct category, we organize our discussion by category to increase readability.

Educational and Spatial Equity

Rural education is shaped by inequity, both educational inequity and spatial inequity, which is the way that place impacts access to resources and opportunities (Hartman et al., 2022). Issues of equity are intertwined with each of the other categories discussed below (i.e., Policy and Funding;

6 *Music Education in Rural America*

Teacher and Leader Preparation, Recruitment, and Retention; Partnerships and Community Relationships; College and Career Trajectories; and Health and Wellness). The inequity found in rural schools, broadly, and in music education, specifically, stem from a long history of classism and urbanormative policies and reform efforts. Historically, rural music education was part of broader efforts to urbanize and reform rural communities. Early 20th-century music education reformers saw rural cultures as backward and sought to “improve” them through the introduction of classical music founded on Western Europe traditions and large ensemble performances (Mark & Gary, 2007). This reform reflected a belief that rural music was culturally deficient and led to a persistent deficit ideology, viewing rural music as inferior to urban standards (Bates, 2018). Compounding this bias are factors—discussed in subsequent sections—such as geographic constraints, smaller student enrollment numbers and faculty sizes, and disadvantageous funding formulas that often serve to increase inequities in rural music education. When music teacher educators prioritize place-based curricula by using an asset view of teaching in rural places, however, they can at least partially ameliorate educational and spatial inequities while also better preparing their graduates to successfully teach in rural contexts.

Policy and Funding

Perhaps unsurprisingly, policy and funding are areas that significantly shape and constrain opportunities for learning in rural schools. While this is true for many non-rural schools, rural schools are also particularly disadvantaged due to urbanormative policymaking and inequitable funding formulas (Showalter et al., 2023). In many schools, music often lacks protection (Spring, 2016), meaning it may be sidelined or reduced in scope or funding in favor of other curricular priorities or mandates. These reductions limit curricular opportunities, including those intended to embrace local cultural traditions, as well as expose students to traditions absent from their own communities (Brook, 2016; Johnson & Stanley, 2021). Inadequate funding for rural music education limits the ability to buy or repair instruments or maintain performance spaces (Isbell, 2005) and forces educators to manage all music programs across multiple schools or entire districts (Hunt, 2009). Limited funding for music education may particularly compound inequitable educational opportunities in high-poverty areas, where students may not be able to afford instruments or extracurricular music lessons. However, despite facing limited funding, some rural music educators can build thriving music programs by embracing local musical traditions such as country music, which may be better suited to their cultural context and available resources, rather than trying to