



The Ontario Music Educators' Association

Education Policy: The Ontario Music Educators' Association Joins Chorus of Concern

The Ontario Music Educators' Association is extremely concerned with the changes to learning opportunities for Ontario's children proposed by the current Ontario government. Of greatest concern are:

- An increase in class size (more than 27% larger in High School) will lead directly to fewer teaching sections available for Music and the Arts.
- Close to 1 Billion dollars a year of funding is being clawed back from Ontario schools, including \$235 million in Local Priorities funding used to support our most at-risk children¹
- An insistence that over 13% of a high school student's curriculum be received in front of a computer screen instead of a teacher
- A unilateral curriculum focus on STEM-- Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math--- to the exclusion of all other subject areas (despite the fact that research supports the importance of STEAM, with the "A" representing the Arts, and the creative, critical, and collaborative aspects of those subjects)

Class Size:

Changes to funding in class size will lead to a major reduction in the number of teachers in front of our students. In secondary schools alone, over 11,000 fewer teachers could be in front of high school students once the plan is fully implemented. Add to this the fact that 13% of courses will be delivered online, and another 4,000 classroom teachers are lost. The government consistently points to it's "broad consultation" of 72,000 teachers, parents, and interest groups, but refuses to indicate how many, if any, of those consulted suggested that increasing class size would be of benefit to Ontario students. The Minister of Education refuses to provide this information. There is neither research nor common-sense support for the idea that increasing class size will improve student learning in any way.

Funding:

Taking close to a billion dollars out of education will significantly impact the way Ontario's children experience their education and will lead to increased inequity. Schools in affluent areas which already provide a broader range of programming to their students, will continue to be able to offer enhanced programs in areas like music through parent fundraising. Schools in rural, isolated, and economically disadvantaged communities will not be able to keep up, worsening the "have" and "have not" situation in our province. Currently, fewer than 1 in 5



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elementary students outside of an urban area will see a music teacher at all; proposed changes will foster even greater inequity.

We need STEAM, not just STEM:

This is the area of proposed education policy which we find most problematic. The OMEA recognizes the importance of Ontario students having a strong background in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math, but to focus on these curricula to the exclusion of the Arts is not supported by education research or economic data. Educators, researchers, economists, and industry all recognise the importance of bringing 21st century skills to the workplace. These skills include creativity, critical thinking, and collaboration, all of which are integral to the music classroom. Further, it is widely accepted that these skills, nurtured in the music room, are imminently transferable to the science, math, and tech subjects. Ignoring music and the arts in the STEAM paradigm risks creating students with exemplary technical skills without the creative and critical thinking habits that will put them to effective use.

Entirely aside from the support it provides for other disciplines, Music has value in and of itself. From our own Ontario curriculum documents, *“The arts nourish the imagination and develop a sense of beauty, while providing unique ways for students to gain insights into the world around them.”*² Furthermore, in purely economic terms, Music and the Arts has value. According to StatsCan, in 2010 culture output totaled 93.2 billion, or 3% of the economy.³ With the chronic downturn in manufacturing in Canada, it is highly likely that this percentage is currently significantly higher. Ignoring education of our children for participation in the Arts and Culture sector places them at a significant disadvantage.

This government, and specifically Lisa Thompson, the current minister of education, has demonstrated profound disrespect for the value of music education, and for the music teachers that deliver it. When asked in an interview with CBC whether schools would have to cut programs such as band or arts classes, the minister responded “there are many different ways to ensure that students have a well rounded education,” going on to comment that the youngest in her family “participated in a band club”.⁴ We would not expect that reading be taught in a “reading club”, or that science instruction be limited to the “science team”; to suggest that Music could be meaningfully experienced by Ontario children in this manner, separate from any connection to classroom instruction, reveals a profound lack of understanding of Music, the complexity of Music pedagogy, and the importance of Arts in school culture.

Again, the government may choose to reference the “72,000 respondents” consulted by the government in their emphasis on STEM. In response to this, we reference a segment of our OMEA consultation response to their survey: *“As a retired music educator, I am extremely upset*



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by the absence of consideration given Music and the Arts in this consultation. In the media this survey has been portrayed as a chance for Ontario parents and citizens to shape the future of education in Ontario. What I have experienced in completing both the Open Response and Survey for Parents is a political document canted heavily towards the current governments plans, rather than an opportunity for citizens to be part of those plans. STEM, health issues, and financial literacy are covered, but the very important and essentially human Arts are not even put on the radar. On a survey, you get what you ask for, and if you don't ask for feedback on Music and the Arts you won't get it. The intentional exclusion of these subject areas is manipulative. I welcome a response at advocacy@omea.on.ca.”⁵ No response was received from the Ministry of Education, and no mention of these considerations is included in proposed ministry policy.

We call on the Ontario Government and the Ministry of Education to re-consider the consequences of their action. We are committed to equitable, balanced, and effective Music education for the children of Ontario. As offered in our July 1st, 2018 letter to Minister Thompson⁶, we would be happy to work collaboratively towards this end.

1. <https://peopleforeducation.ca/our-work/changes-to-ontario-education-funding-and-policy-will-have-a-long-term-impact/>
2. <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/secondary/arts910curr2010.pdf>
3. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/13-604-m/2014075/culture-4-eng.htm>
4. https://www.cbc.ca/listen/shows/ottawa-morning/segment/15679296?fbclid=IwAR25gI7EtXW8p_GAec7ulxXRrrJ4JmpvzoXLjOqYS3LGKvtLJgGanPlbJaU
5. <https://drive.google.com/open?id=1ukk22GQ0-Yf101aGfoRHXu6BYbpVpDGF>
6. <https://drive.google.com/open?id=1VBXHhjRVNla7IOt7oSFACk-nHUpDf2OB>

Contact your local Media, and your local MPP!

Further information available from advocacy@omea.on.ca