

Safe Singing and Playing in Ontario Music Programs

Fall 2021



ONTARIO MUSIC
EDUCATORS'
ASSOCIATION

www.omea.on.ca

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Introduction

The Ontario Music Educators' Association (OMEA), created the *Framework for The Return to Music Classes in 2020-21* at the outset of the pandemic. This document was referenced by the Ontario Ministry of Education and, along with the guidance of Ontario health professionals, was referred to as a resource guide for the safe teaching and learning in music by music educators, school and board leaders, affiliates, and music stakeholders in Ontario and across Canada.

Throughout the pandemic, music teachers in Ontario schools have been diligent in ensuring the safety and well-being of their students. They are innovative in designing lessons that enable students to meet expectations in the Ontario Curriculum even though choral and instrumental music has been restricted due to health guidelines. The OMEA continues to support school leaders and music educators as we gather the latest research for safe singing and playing in music. This document will be updated as new research and health guidelines become available.

Purpose

In anticipation of the return to more fulsome implementation of the Ontario music curriculum, the Ontario Music Educators' Association, representing public, separate and private music educators in our province, has reviewed current research and considered what other jurisdictions have determined are safe practices enabling students to fully participate in music-making.

Based on this review, OMEA has prepared recommendations for the safe delivery of music programs within schools in accordance with Ontario curriculum policy, Ontario Health guidelines, and research into safe practices. Our goal is for this document to be used as a reference tool for music teachers, administrators, and system leaders as they plan for safe music teaching and learning.

Audience

The intended audience for this document continues to be system leaders and music educators. In addition to Ontario education leaders, our initial document was used widely across Ontario and Canada by other provincial governments, affiliated organizations, corporate partners, individuals, and community organizations and we anticipate the same audience for this document as well. This document is endorsed by many of our affiliates in Ontario and those in Canada as you will note in our Research and References list at the end of this document.

Distribution

As with our initial *Framework for the Return to Music Classes in 2020-21*, the OMEA will distribute this document through postings on our website and social media channels. We will send this document via email to system leaders in boards of education across Ontario, our affiliated organizations, and to the Minister of Health and regional Chief Medical Officers of Health. We thank the Ministry of Education for sharing our *Framework for The Return to Music Classes in 2020-21* in the *Guide to Reopening Ontario Schools 2020-21* and ask the Ministry of Education to also include this document as a reference tool in return to school documents for the 2021-22 school year.

Participation in the arts contributes in important ways to students' lives and learning - it involves intense engagement, development of motivations and confidence, and the use of creative and dynamic ways of thinking and knowing. It is well documented that the intellectual and emotional development of children is enhanced through the arts.

The Ontario Curriculum Grades 1-8, The Arts. (Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2009), p.3.

Why Music is Essential for all Ontario Students

Music and Social Emotional Learning

Safe Singing and Playing in Ontario Music Programs emphasizes that it is more important than ever for students to receive music education as music learning contributes positively to student mental health and well-being, and social-emotional learning. The Ontario Arts curriculum is predicated on student engagement in, and application of the creative and critical thinking processes, foundational skills for social-emotional learning. Student learning in music is communal and therefore promotes opportunities for positive mental health experiences. Music educators consistently work to develop students' capacity on many levels. Students' social emotional growth works hand in glove with music experiences in classrooms from Kindergarten to Grade 12. In Ontario, social-emotional learning is embedded into the day to day instruction across curricula. Music class is especially rich in developing students' social emotional competencies.

Music and Arts education provides a strong foundation for learning in all areas of the curriculum. There is a myriad of research demonstrating music education support in both literacy and numeracy. As well, research surrounding music and literacy is clear and undeniable. Research has highlighted the importance of music skills and literacy being taught

When all students in a class or school learn and practise social and emotional skills, their sense of belonging within the classroom, school and community improves. Everyone tends to communicate in more positive and thoughtful ways, and they show respect for diversity of thought, culture, language, faith, identities and expression.

School Mental Health Ontario accessed April 13 <https://smho-smso.ca/educators/learn-more/explore-by-topic/social-emotional-learning/>

together. Ontario documents such as *Think Literacy*, are a strong source of content to emphasize the interweaving of these disciplines.

As outlined in the *September Ready Fall 2020 Guidance for Arts Education Report*, published by Arts Ed NJ, music and arts experiences promote social emotional learning in a variety of ways:

- The relationship built between arts teachers and students over multiple years of instruction fosters the caring environment necessary to help build school connectedness and foster empathy.
- The perseverance needed to dedicate oneself to artistic excellence fosters resiliency both in and out of the arts classroom.
- Artistic creation fosters self-awareness and allows students to develop a greater sense of autonomy and emotional vocabulary.
- The collaborative community developed in the arts classroom welcomes discussions and an awareness of acceptance and embracing diversity.
- Through the arts students learn the necessity of personal goal-setting, self-assessment, and accountability as they develop high standards for their artist endeavors and themselves.
- Arts education provides developmental experiences that actively allow students to practice and hone social emotional competencies.

Music and social and emotional learning (SEL) go hand-in-hand. Teaching students about music and active music-making promotes important social and emotional skills that will stick with them throughout their lives. Students learn to manage their emotions, are taught to celebrate diversity, and develop leadership skills.

<https://apertureed.com/5-ways-build-social-emotional-skills-music/>

Take-aways:

- Improve students mental health through music
- Celebrate diversity through music
- Work through emotions through music-making
- Foster leadership skills

Current research into the implications of SEL in music education can be found in the following scientific papers:

It is clear that participating in a concert band can improve students' SEL skills in all five competencies. Furthermore, SEL skills are vital in this 21st century, especially in education and work. Therefore, it is highly important that students be equipped with universally applicable skills that prepare them to be valued members of society, ready for the challenges of the future.

Saibunmi, S., Chandransu, N., & Chanoksakul, S. (2021). Developing social and emotional learning skills through secondary school concert bands, *Malaysian Journal of Music*, 10(1), 1-11. <https://ojs.upsi.edu.my/index.php/MJM/article/view/3854/2809>.

Five themes were developed in this study completed in an American urban choral ensemble, including choral experience as uncompetitive, sectional bonding as social bonding, singing as shared experience, chorus as safe space and trips as pivotal bonding experiences.

Elizabeth Cassidy Parker (2010) Exploring student experiences of belonging within an urban high school choral ensemble: an action research study, *Music Education Research*, 12:4, 339-352, DOI: [10.1080/14613808.2010.519379](https://doi.org/10.1080/14613808.2010.519379)

Music and Literacy

Music and Arts education provides a strong foundation for learning in all areas of the curriculum. There is a myriad of research demonstrating that music education supports both building and strengthening literacy skills. As well, research has highlighted the importance of music skills and literacy being taught together. Ontario documents such as *Think Literacy*, are a strong source of content to emphasize the interweaving of these disciplines.

Research Tells Us:

- Musical activities that strengthen phonological awareness build word recognition/word decoding skills.
- Students who obtain higher scores on pitch tasks also obtain higher scores on phonological awareness tasks.
- Preschool and elementary programs that combine musical activities and literacy instruction improve student scores on reading and writing tasks.

Placing Music at the Center of Literacy Instruction, Dr. Jonathan Bolduc and Dr. Carole Fleuret. The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, Research Monograph #19, May, 2009.

The need to guide adolescents to advanced stages of literacy is not the result of any teaching or learning failure in the preschool or primary years: it is a necessary part of normal reading development. Guidance is needed so that reading and writing develop along with adolescents' ever increasing knowledge of oral language, thinking ability, and knowledge of the world.

Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, and Rycik, 2000. *Think Literacy*

Music and Numeracy

It is important to understand that music doesn't just support number sense. It is fundamentally numerical in nature. Music is the tangible representation of the complex interplay of numbers. What students come to understand about how time, space and quantity are measured, divided and compounded and manipulated, they understand first as a musical idea. (From Manitoba's Returning to Manitoba's Music Classrooms. Jan, 2021)

Recent research tells us that teaching music and math together can be the key to long lasting understanding of concepts in both disciplines. "...the greatest impact of interdisciplinary learning seems to be in the potential for making connections: across disciplines, between individuals, and with the wider world" (Bazinet & Marshall, 2015). Furthermore, the creative thinking and skill that is developed in music class is extremely beneficial to the craft of creative problem solving found in mathematics.

Problem solving occurs regularly in music class. Just like solving a math problem using the math process, music students must understand, plan, solve and check continually while rehearsing, practicing and performing.

How Music and Mathematics Can Come Together in Harmony. Mishaal Surti. Autumn 2017. The Recorder, page 12-14.

Recommended Safe Practices for Singing and Playing Instruments in Ontario Schools in Fall 2021*

*These recommendations precede a gradual return to regular operations as possible, based on health guidance

Safe Practice	Suggested Directive	Research
Hygiene	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students and staff follow recommended hand hygiene, regular sanitizing of surfaces. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International Coalition Performing Arts Aerosol Study • Public Health Ontario
Safe Distancing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two meters of distance between each student. (Allow for 3 meters in front of trombone players.) • Students will be in cohorts outdoors or in indoor spaces that provide for social distancing. • Classes will be cohorted. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International Coalition of Performing Arts Aerosol Study Report 3 • Measurements and Simulations of Aerosol Released while Singing and Playing Wind Instruments • Public Health Ontario • A Framework for The Return to Music Classes in 2020/2021
Materials for Safe Wind Instrument Playing (including recorders)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bell covers (masks) for instrument bells. • Slitted mouthpiece masks may be used. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International Coalition of Performing Arts Aerosol Study Report 3 pg.3. • Measurements and Simulations of Aerosol Released while Singing and Playing Wind Instruments • A Framework for The Return to Music Classes in 2020/2021 • International Coalition of Performing Aerosol Study Report 3
Singing Safely	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All Students with masks. • Singing (at low volume level) inside & outside with masks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International Coalition of Performing Aerosol Study Report 3 • Let's All Sing... and Sing Safely! (Updated August 2021) https://www.choralcanada.org/uploads/3/8/9/2/38921071/let's_all_sing...and_sing_safely__updated_august_10_2021.pdf
Instrument Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One to one wind instrument use; no sharing of wind instruments unless proper sanitization occurs between uses. • Other types of instruments (ex. percussion) may be shared with proper cleaning procedures in place. • Student mouthpieces to be disinfected at home to minimize use of shared cleaning spaces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Framework for The Return to Music Classes in 2020/2021 pg. 12 • NAFME COVID-19 Instrument Cleaning Guidelines

Ventilation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 60 minutes of active music making class (wind instrument playing or choral singing) outside or; 30 minutes inside with 2-3 air exchanges between each indoor class; use of HEPA filters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International Coalition of Performing Arts Aerosol Study Report 3 • International Coalition Performing Arts Aerosol Study • Measurements and Simulations of Aerosol Released while Singing and Playing Wind Instruments • Public Health Ontario
Sharing of Sheet Music	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sheet music sharing allowed with proper hand hygiene 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unprecedented International Coalition led by Performing Arts Organizations to Commission COVID-19 Study
Instrument Cleaning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OMEA has provided detailed instructions for cleaning of each instrument type 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Framework for The Return to Music Classes in 2020/2021 pg. 12/13

Disclaimer*: These practices do not replace or serve as medical advice in any way. It is not a recommendation of procedure or of disinfectants; we will leave those recommendations to the health professionals. Instead, this approach serves to give educators support for possible directives that the Ministry of Education and health professionals may give.**

The evolving evidence surrounding the COVID-19 health crisis continues to evolve. These recommended practices will be updated periodically, as new information becomes available.

K-12 Music Scheduling and Programming: Practical Considerations

- Current and on-going research, as outlined in this document, confirms that music education can proceed with safety measures in place. If we understand the risks and control the environment, we can safely play instruments and sing, as detailed in the International Coalition Performing Arts Aerosol Study.
- Active music-making needs to return to music programs in every school in Ontario, as it is this essential experiential learning that allows students to develop their creative and critical thinking skills as stated in the Ontario Music Curricula.
- We strongly encourage collaboration between teachers and administrators when adjusting programming and schedules in response to the recommendations in this document. Qualified music teachers are uniquely situated to offer creative solutions to ensure quality music education experiences for all students.
- A return to an unrestricted number of person-to-person contacts per student will allow for the adequate time allotment for music classes in elementary schools, and for the music curriculum to be taught in its entirety.
- Music classes should be taught by a qualified music teacher. Qualified music teachers have the understanding to access the curriculum in a fulsome way and can assist administrators in safe and effective programming.
- Access to resources and dedicated music classrooms are critical components of success. Students experience music through speech, song, movement, and the playing of instruments. These experiences foster creative exploration and Social-Emotional development of students.
- Secondary school music courses will require some latitude and flexibility with regard to class sizes as music programs begin to rebuild.

Budget Implications

- Purchase of bell covers for wind instruments and masks with slits for students who play wind instruments as needed
- Additional purchases or rental of instruments and equipment may be necessary to provide each child with an equitable opportunity.
- In the event of music being taught in regular classrooms or elsewhere, consider a mobile cart to facilitate transporting equipment and resources.
- Purchase of portable HEPA Filters for music rooms to help with ventilation between groups.
- Allow for purchasing of different types of instruments to complement percussion or stringed music-making opportunities. (ie. Handbells or Handchimes, Tubanos, Orff Instruments, etc)

Student Voice

From the student voices represented in this document, it is evident that students are looking forward to making music together once more.

Through participation in the arts, students can develop their creativity, learn about their own identity, and develop self-awareness, self-confidence, and a sense of well-being. Since artistic activities involve intense engagement, students experience a sense of wonder and joy when learning through the arts, which can motivate them to participate more fully in cultural life and in other educational opportunities.

The Ontario Curriculum Grades 9-10 The Arts. Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2009, p.3

The thing I miss most about **MAKING MUSIC** in a classroom is...

- ... the liberty to be loud and free spirited with music, which can also make you feel many different emotions.
- ... playing together with many people and seeing how it all comes together as one song.
- ... the collaborative creative atmosphere and all the positive vibes that everyone brought.
- ... the sound of a community coming together to perform a piece.
- ... learning a new piece and slowly hearing it come together every class.
- ... being able to hear me and all my classmates playing a song with just our instruments. It is so amazing that with music class we are able to truly CREATE music!
- ... not being with the whole class, playing and creating music with the class is a lot more fun than doing it alone.
- ... getting to have fun and experiment musically with my friends.
- ... being able to have real-time feedback on my playing. It's hard to tell what I'm doing wrong, and having no one experienced enough in music to tell me around, it really hinders the learning process.
- ... the bonding and teamwork in making sweet, beautiful music.
- ... the environment. It always felt so free and if you ever need help you could always ask your teacher or peers without feeling nervous, embarrassed, or pressured to ask.

MAKING MUSIC in school helps me to...

- ... connect, being able to make music at school with all my classmates makes me feel like we are one team supporting and helping each other grow.
- ... make friends, cooperate, coordinate, be a part of something, push myself, learn team ethic.
- ... gain my instrument skill, the knowledge of music and it helps me to understand to cooperate with others to play a perfect song.
- ... focus in many different ways, music helps me feel happy, calm and relaxed.
- ... calm down and enjoy the beauty of music in all genres.
- ... relax and enjoy. After making music I feel happy and calm because I like how some music can be relaxing while other music can make me feel active and energized.
- ... become distracted from other schoolwork, just to clear my head.
- ... relieve stress from stressful classes, express myself, and meet people that have the same interests as me.
- ... challenge myself. Music lets me see what I'm capable of and it lets me see what I need to improve on. It allows me to reflect on myself and learn.
- ... grow my knowledge about music and to express myself without words.
- ... Have a creative release and get involved in more opportunities within and outside the classroom.

Links To OMEA Resources

A Framework for The Return to Music Classes in 2020/2021

<https://www.omea.on.ca/covid19/>

RETURN TO PLAYING & SINGING A Step by Step Approach: From January 2021

Covid-19 and Music: province report: Updated April 2021

Advocacy Materials from the Singing in Canadian Schools: COVID-19 Impact Survey (2021)

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THINK LITERACY: Cross-Curricular Approaches -- Music Grades 7-9 <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/studentsuccess/thinkliteracy/files/ThinkLitMusic.pdf>

THINK LITERACY: Cross-Curricular Approaches --Music Grade 10-12 <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/studentsuccess/thinkliteracy/files/ThinkLitMusic10-12.pdf>

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