

August 8, 2021



ONTARIO MUSIC  
EDUCATORS' ASSOCIATION

Dear Minister Lecce,

The Ontario Music Educators' Association (OMEA) would like to begin by thanking your government for including Music in the August 3, 2021 release of *COVID-19 Health, Safety and Operational Guidance for Schools (2021-22)* with a return to playing and singing in Ontario schools. We agree that safety remains the number one priority for students and staff. Ontario music educators have and will continue to deliver music education safely and the permission of safe singing and playing of wind instruments, as noted on page 19 of this document, will assist students greatly in a return to a more fulsome, hands-on music curriculum.

Based on the research referenced in the document, *Safe Singing and Playing in Ontario Programs, Fall 2021*, published by the OMEA and previously shared in June 2021, we have identified a few additional options and mitigations that would allow for greater equity for students and access to music in Ontario schools. We also have a number of questions based on the *COVID-19, Health, Safety and Operational Guidance for Schools (2021-2022)* document so that we may offer clarity for educator and board leadership in planning for music instruction this year:

**Masking of Instruments/Use of Bell Covers:**

Research has shown that the use of bell covers substantially minimizes the risk to individuals. *Are these an option for indoor mixed cohorts and/or where proper distancing cannot be achieved?*

**Sanitization between Instrument Use:**

On page 19, it is noted that proper sanitation is required when sharing instruments. Specifics regarding safe sanitation would bring clarity to educators. The OMEA has included information and details on safe cleaning of instruments on page 5 of our *Safe Singing and Playing in Ontario Programs, Fall 2021* document. *Could our recommendations be referenced at this point?*

**Extra-curricular Band:**

Our inquiry pertains directly to no extra-curricular bands allowed with wind instruments and we would respectfully ask the government to reconsider this point. Not all bands or ensembles are created equal in size and instrumentation. For example, 5 students from a variety of classes may come together to perform in a chamber group, or another group of 13 students may join together with a rhythm section to create a jazz band. For a large number of students in a school community, band and small and large group wind ensembles is an area where students thrive, providing engagement and positive self-worth for these individuals. *Why is it that these groups cannot be allowed to come together while practicing safe distancing as is allowed with other extra-curricular groups i.e., sports teams indoors? Could instrument bell masks be used to allow for these mixed groupings to perform, share and learn together in*

*a safe, distanced manner? Could small ensembles and instrumental sectionals be allowed for our students with proper distancing in place?*

**Distancing in Schools:**

As we all recognize the value of Social Emotional Learning and how music is a great avenue for this, we recognize that without a class size reduction the required distancing in elementary and secondary classrooms will be challenging. *Could it be recommended and suggested that students have access to a larger, designated space for music instruction e.g., larger classrooms, gyms, auditoriums, libraries, cafeterias, which would allow for equipment access as well as safe distancing?*

**Playing and Performing:**

As a performing art, Music is often shared with audiences. *Could some direction be provided in terms of performances? If safe distancing and other mitigations can be ensured, could music be shared with audiences at assemblies and concerts?*

**Singing:**

The document encourages masking but not required if a minimum distance of 2 meters can be maintained. The OMEA continues to recommend masking while singing indoors and outdoors as research has shown that this is optimal for health and safety. *Could there be an additional statement, if safe distancing cannot be maintained, masks should be worn?*

We recognize the hard work of the government in maintaining a safe learning environment for every learner while ensuring their well-being and strengthening their social-emotional skills. We are available and willing to work with the team to develop a safe plan which will meet the varied needs and interests for all learners and are pleased to provide any further clarification, as needed.

Thank you and we hope to hear back by August 16, 2021 in order for sufficient time for music educators and school leaders to plan.

Musically yours,

Carolyn Lewis  
President, Ontario Music Educators' Association

cc: Sam Ossteroff, Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Education  
Nancy Naylor, Deputy Minister of Education  
Vanessa Bennett, Executive Assistant to Deputy Minister  
Marit Stiles, NDP Education Critic  
Jill Andrew, NDP Culture Critic  
Nancy Robb, Parliamentary Assistant to Jill Andrew