



Choral Canada | Canada Choral

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May 14, 2021

Dear Minister of Education,

Along with our colleagues at the Canadian Music Educators' Association, the Coalition for Music Education, and the Kodály Society of Canada, we at Choral Canada are writing to advise that preliminary results from the *Singing in Canadian Schools: COVID-19 Impact Survey (2021)* are now available. These results contain information relevant to decision-making about K-12 music programs as we look ahead to 2021-2022.

This survey was developed in response to the considerable impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on singing in Canadian schools. Singing is at the core of music education and serves as an essential building block for students. This past year, education and health leaders alike were faced with challenging decisions. In schools throughout the country, singing was heavily restricted.

Some key points from preliminary survey results indicate that:

- **91% of respondents' students are no longer able to sing in extra and co-curricular programs such as choirs and singing ensembles¹**
- **Fewer than 30% of respondents are teaching music from their music classrooms, spaces designed for music teaching and learning²**

Led by Dr. Francine Morin (University of Manitoba), the research team developed a survey which paints an authentic picture of music educators' experiences managing singing restrictions and curriculum expectations this past year. The survey addresses key areas of concern such as:

- **impact on student learning and engagement in school music programs**
- **access to space and resources required to implement provincial singing guidelines**
- **challenges and concerns moving forward to preserve essential and vital music programming**

Leaders in education and health policy have a responsibility to ensure social-emotional learning and mental health are prioritized when students return to school in the fall. Youth are at a high risk of experiencing poor mental health during the pandemic due to social isolation and stress³. Singing is not only a tool for learning and instruction, but an essential means of self-expression. Further, researchers have discovered that group singing fosters social connectedness in children and youth^{4,5,6}. Access to an environment in which the students can safely sing in-person with their peers is crucial.

The voice is an equitable instrument, accessible to all students regardless of means. In our varied socio-economic climates throughout the country, such equity is crucial. Marginalized youth, including indigenous, racialized and LGBTQIA2S+ youth, are at increased risk of mental health impacts due to COVID-19. These groups are experiencing reduced access to choir and group singing programs due to COVID-19 singing restrictions.⁷

^{1,2,7} Morin, F., & Mahmud, M. N. (2021). Singing in Canadian schools: COVID 19 impact survey. Unpublished preliminary report. Choral Canada.

³ Mental Health Commission of Canada. (2020). *Lockdown Life: Mental Health Impacts of COVID-19 on Youth in Canada*. https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/sites/default/files/2021-02/lockdown_life_eng.pdf

⁴ Good, A., & Russo, F. (2016). Singing promotes cooperation in a diverse group of children. *Social Psychology*, 47(6), 340–344. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1027/1864-9335/a000282>

⁵ Kirschner, S. & Tomasello, M. (2010). Joint music making promotes prosocial behavior in 4-year-old children. *Evolution and Human Behavior*, 31(5), 354–364. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.evolhumbehav.2010.04.004>

⁶ Wiltermuth, S. (2009). Synchrony and cooperation. *Psychological Science*, 20(1), 1–5. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9280.2008.02253.x>





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As you look ahead to the coming school year, you will be faced with many difficult decisions alongside fellow leaders, administrators, teachers, and students. There are findings in the *Singing in Canadian Schools: COVID-19 Impact Survey* that may be of great use to you in these decision-making processes. We hope that you will avail yourself of this important information.

We are pleased to note that the survey response, with almost 1000 respondents from across the country, was truly representative of music education programs in Canadian schools. Analysis of the survey data is in the preliminary stages and a final published report will follow. Even in this preliminary stage, survey responses are very comprehensive and may guide policy and practice related to singing in schools in the upcoming year.

Now, more than ever, we know how crucial music-making is for our students. We encourage you to engage with our provincial partners as they too plan for the year ahead, committed to keeping students safely engaged in a comprehensive music education: one that includes singing.

Sincerely,

Laurier Fagnan
President, Choral Canada

Meghan Hila
Executive Director, Choral Canada

CC: Minister of Health, Chief Public Health Officer

On behalf of our research project partners and collaborators:

Coalition for Music Education
Canadian Music Educators' Association
Kodály Society of Canada
Orff Canada
MusiCounts
British Columbia Choral Federation
Choir Alberta
Saskatchewan Choral Federation
Manitoba Choral Association
Choirs Ontario
Alliance chorale du Québec
New Brunswick Choral Federation
Nova Scotia Choral Federation
British Columbia Music Educators Association
Ontario Music Educators Association
Saskatchewan Music Education Association
Nova Scotia Music Educators Association
Newfoundland and Labrador Music Educators' Association
Kodály Society of Nova Scotia
Orff Nova Scotia

