Dear Minister Churchill,

We are writing to you as concerned parents, teachers, musicians, music teachers and arts leaders from coast to coast to coast. As the Coalition for Music Education in Canada, we must bring to your attention an urgent crisis. As plans are created for the reopening of schools, we know that teachers, administrators, and other school professionals are going to face many traumatized students who are seeking some semblance of normalcy as they return to classrooms. Music is the ideal antidote to help students surmount this trauma, and we must ensure that it remains a part of their school experience.

We know that Canadian children have been affected by the school closures as a result of COVID-19. In a recent interview on CBC News Network, Dr. Ronald Cohn, President and CEO of SickKids Hospital in Toronto addressed a statement on the reopening of schools that his hospital posted: “COVID-19 has created a crisis in children’s health and a potentially catastrophic impact to the physical and mental health of children.”

A recent survey conducted by Children’s Mental Health Ontario found that one in three Ontario parents indicated that their children’s mental health deteriorated from being home from school, and over half the parents noted behavioural changes like outbursts, extreme irritability, personality changes and sadness. This is raising grave concerns from education professionals as they prepare for the reopening of schools.

Throughout the pandemic, it has been made clear that the remedy for the emotional strain created by this pandemic has been music and the arts. The level of creativity and community engagement has risen world-wide, and we witnessed on television and the internet the relief and appreciation that music and other forms of artistic expression provided through these uncertain times. During our times together, music – aided with technology – is uniting us for this shared experience.

Now more than ever, music can play such an important role in expressing our community spirit and our love and appreciation for each other as we get through this very difficult time together.

Adriana LaGrange
Minister of Education for Alberta
Music Monday 2020
expression provided through these uncertain times. During our annual advocacy event, Music Monday, Deputy Premier of Yukon Ranj Pillai expressed that “while this pandemic might be keeping us apart, music – aided with technology – is uniting us for this shared experience.”

Just as adults have turned to music throughout the pandemic, students must also have time during their school day for authentic musical and artistic experiences that allow them to collaborate with others, and to express their personal emotions and understandings of their world. Because the health and safety of our students, teachers, and their families is paramount, we know that music class may not look quite the same. Music educators in jurisdictions across the country—British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Prince Edward Island—have presented several teaching scenarios and developed guidelines for how music education can be taught in a safe and supportive environment.

During his Music Monday message Brad Trivers, Prince Edward Island Minister of Education and Lifelong Learning, stated, “In these uncertain times, music lifts our spirits, fills our lives, and provides relief while binding us together.”

Children and youth have been the unheard voices in this pandemic. We have a responsibility to ensure that our children and youth are a priority, and we must do everything in our power to address their social emotional learning and mental health, within a safe and healthy environment. Eliminating or postponing music education will have a negative effect and will severely impact learning overall. Access to music and music education is a human right.

The Coalition for Music Education is an advocacy organization that speaks on behalf of more than 45 national, regional and provincial music education organizations in Canada. Together, we continue to gather the most recent evidence-based research on music and music education, including singing and the playing of instruments in group settings. We promote the guidelines for music education that
have already been created by jurisdictions across the country, and we are willing to work with decision makers to ensure that music education is accessible even in these uncertain times.

Canadian children and youth have suffered four months of isolation and fear, and the end of this pandemic is not yet in sight. As a country, we have a moral responsibility to create safe, engaging, meaningful, and joyful learning environments in schools throughout the nation. Music education creates just that. This is not the time to consider decreasing music education in schools; in fact, it should be just the opposite. We must increase access to music education in order to counteract the harm COVID-19 has caused this generation of young Canadians.

Music education is the ideal vehicle through which our students can connect with their feelings. With a few modifications, music can be delivered while maintaining a safe classroom setting for both students and teachers. As we plan for schools to reopen, it is our responsibility to ensure that we are providing our students with a safe environment that also supports their socio-emotional recovery from this pandemic.

Yours respectfully,

Dr. Eric Favaro
Chair and Interim Executive Director
The Coalition for Music Education in Canada

CC: Minister Delorey, Dr. Strang
The Coalition for Music Education speaks on behalf of the following organizations that have endorsed this letter:

Rolf Bertsch  
Chair  
Alberta Music Education Foundation

Mandart Chan  
President  
BC Music Educators’ Association

Dawn Haylett  
President  
BC Orff Chapter

Donalda Westcott  
President  
Canadian Music Educators’ Association

Andrea McNeil  
President  
Carl Orff Canada Ontario Chapter

James Jackson  
President  
Carl Orff Canada

Kellie Walsh  
President  
Choral Canada

Christin Reardon MacLellan  
President  
Coalition for Music Education BC

Dr. Jody Stark  
President  
Kodály Society of Canada

Dr. Kim Eyre  
President  
Kodály Society of Ontario

Virginia Helmer  
President  
Manitoba Music Educator's Association

Neil Yorke-Slader  
Associate Director  
Chair Instrumental Jazz  
MusicFest Canada

Isaac Moore  
President  
Ontario Music Educators' Association

Amy Boyes  
1st Vice President  
Ontario Registered Music Teacher’s Association

Steven Giddings  
President  
PEI Music Educators’ Association

Katherine Carleton, CM  
Executive Director  
Orchestras Canada