



Choral Canada | Canada Choral

500 – 59 Adelaide Street East TORONTO ON M5C 1K6
info@choralcanada.org | www.choralcanada.org | 647.606.2467

We at Choral Canada, along with our colleagues at the Canadian Music Educators' Association, the Coalition for Music Education, and the Kodály Society of Canada, are writing again to update and to share key recommendations arising from the *Singing in Canadian Schools: COVID-19 Impact Survey (2021)*. Comments collected from almost 1000 music teachers across Canada point to a sector and population in crisis. Teachers outlined the many reasons why singing has always been a vital part of their curriculum and music programs as well as how its removal constitutes an enormous pedagogical and emotional loss for Canadian students.

"I am concerned we will have a generation of students who have not experienced the joy and wonder of group singing."

Music teachers throughout the country are now focused on the much-needed work ahead in rebuilding vital music programming, re-engaging, and recruiting students who so greatly benefit from singing and music-making opportunities and experiences in school. With the implementation of the recommendations below, this essential rebuilding process can begin.

1. SUPPORT THE SAFE INCLUSION OF SINGING IN SCHOOLS.

Singing is a core component of music curricula and is used widely to impart many foundational musical concepts. However, during the pandemic **more than 70% of teachers were unable to teach through group singing in the classroom** due to COVID-19 restrictions. Students were engaging in a high level of music learning through singing prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. During the 2020-2021 school year, **only 9% of Canadian schools were able to offer extra/co-curricular singing experiences**, leaving students without this vital outlet for creativity and musical expression.

"Singing means being able to express myself in ways I can't always talk about."

Mounting research¹ has established how to mitigate risk factors in singing. Restoring safe singing and rebuilding vital music programs will require the implementation of these practices. Based on the research, we believe that singing and safety can coexist in Canadian schools.

2. DEVELOP PLANS IN COLLABORATION WITH LEADERS IN MUSIC EDUCATION.

Singing in Canadian Schools COVID-19 Impact Survey results indicate a lack of support for singing in schools from the highest levels of authority for education in Canada, notably among division administrators and departments of education. With **less than 30% of music teachers able to teach fundamental learning outcomes related to singing under COVID-19 protocols**, government and education authorities need to work with leaders in music education (music educators, consultants, music educator associations and professional associations) to determine how to return to singing in schools and its many inherent benefits.

¹International Coalition Performing Arts Aerosol Study: <https://www.nfhs.org/articles/unprecedented-international-coalition-led-by-performing-arts-organizations-to-commission-covid-19-study/>





3. PROVIDE SPACE AND RESOURCES TO IMPLEMENT PROVINCIAL SAFETY PROTOCOLS.

Fewer than half of music educators are able to implement recommended guidelines that would allow singing in schools given space and resource limitations. An even larger proportion of music teachers (69.3%) say they have not yet received those resources required to bring safe singing practices into the classroom. The challenges of implementing recommended distancing and ventilation-related safety protocols have restricted singing even in provinces and territories where singing was permitted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Adequate resources are required to ensure COVID-19 protocols around singing activities can be implemented in schools.

4. REINSTATE ACCESS TO PERFORMANCE AND MUSIC INSTRUCTION SPACES.

One clear mechanism for facilitating health guidelines is reinstating access to music classrooms, theatres and other performance spaces. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many music teaching spaces were reassigned to non-music subjects. As a result, **the number of music educators teaching in spaces devoted to music education at school dropped dramatically from 84% to 27%**. Almost 1/3 of teachers fear they will not have access to a dedicated music room in the coming year.

Safe guidelines for singing are best implemented in music rooms and performance spaces, spaces that are specifically designed to facilitate high-quality delivery of music programs from both the teacher and learner perspectives. Access to instruments, music-specific pedagogical aids and equipment, space for student movement and room for any required distancing are necessary resources for optimal student learning.

5. SUPPORT STUDENT WELLBEING THROUGH SINGING IN SCHOOLS.

Music and singing support mental health and well-being and are critical agents for inclusive education. For many students, music classrooms are a safe space that provide students with a sense of acceptance, community and inclusion. This is particularly important for marginalized youth and **diverse student groups, including Indigenous—First Nations, Metis, Inuit, racialized, and/or LGBTQIA2S+ students, many of whom declared group singing provided a very positive and accepting environment in their school and who are now arguably** at increased risk of mental health impacts due to COVID-19. *Singing in Canadian Schools: COVID-19 Impact Survey* results show that **these marginalized groups have experienced reduced access to choir and group singing programs due to singing restrictions.**

“Mostly I worry about the kids who gravitate to the arts and the long-term effects it’s going to have for them and their mental health.”

We aim to see students return to these safe spaces and regain their voices as an invaluable tool for creative self-expression.

6. FOCUS ON RECOVERY PLANNING FOR MUSIC EDUCATION.

“It will take time, energy and passion from committed, qualified music teachers to rebuild.”

Well-established music programs ground to a halt during the COVID-19 pandemic, and now need to be rebuilt from the ground up. In collaboration with music educators, Canadian education leaders must now



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shift from emergency response planning to recovery planning for the 2021-2022 school year. Music teachers are most concerned with 1) gaps in music learning caused by more than a year without access to core curriculum outcomes, and 2) rebuilding irreplaceable music programming for Canadian schools. Music learning and skill loss will be significant for many students and will require remediation; educators will require **time** and **support** at all government levels to recruit and re-engage students. Essential tools for engaging students and achieving learning outcomes such as **live rehearsals and performances** should be thoughtfully conceived and implemented with locally-developed safety considerations.

We know the power of music and singing in the lives of all human beings. Indeed, the world has both greatly missed yet deeply witnessed this power throughout these past many months. We believe in the importance of music and singing in the formal education of every child and youth in Canada. Every student in this great country deserves to experience music and singing through strong and accessible music education programs.

We believe the *Singing in Canadian Schools: COVID-19 Impact Survey (2021)* contains very important and insightful information that will help us all rebuild music education programs in Canada. We look forward to working with you in not only reviving school music programs, but also re-imagining how singing can be supported in K-12 school settings, providing opportunities for our students to learn in, through, and about music.

Sincerely,

Dr. Laurier Fagnan
President, Choral Canada

Meghan Hila
Executive Director, Choral Canada

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
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Newfoundland and Labrador Music Educators' Association

