

July 21, 2020

Greeting (Dear Minister \_\_\_\_\_ ),

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 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. Jurisdictions across the country - including 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.

*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

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.

*At a time when we have to stay physically distanced from each other, one of the ways we can stay connected is by sharing the joy of music. Of course great musicians aren't born, they're taught, and so to all the musicians out there, and especially the parents and teachers who first helped them find their groove, thank you.*

John Horgan, Premier of British Columbia.

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] really does uplift our spirits and our souls, and this is a time when we probably need that more than ever. As we move through the pandemic, we continue to see that artists and music are such an important part of connecting us. We may be physically distanced but we are socially connected. When we get to the other side of the pandemic – and we will – I think we're going to realize that music and arts are more important to us than ever.*

Kelvin Goertzen, Minister of Education and Training for Manitoba

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

*Insert list of organizations and signatures*