

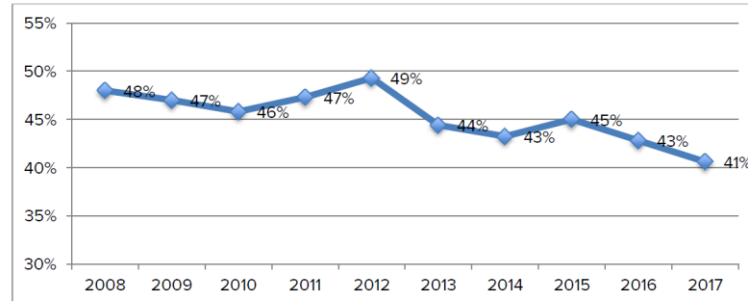


Continued Decline, Continued Concern.

An Ontario Music Educators' Association Response to the 2017 *People for Education Arts Report*.

The most recent survey of Ontario Elementary Schools conducted by [People for Education](#) includes data on a continuing and disturbing trend. In a pattern that has continued for over ten years, the number of students who see a qualified music teacher has again declined significantly. The data indicates that now only 41% of Ontario schools report they have a music teacher working with their students; this is a decline of a full 2 percent points over the 2016 school year, reaching the lowest level in history.

Figure 1: Percentage of elementary schools with a specialist music teacher, full- or part-time



From People for Education: *Arts Education in Ontario, May 15, 2017*

A 2% drop in music teachers may not look like much at first glance, but when considered in terms of the actual effect in the classroom, it is devastating. A 2% decline in one year means that just under 40,000 students who saw a music teacher on a regular basis last year did not see one this year. Over the last five years, 183,000 Ontario elementary school students lost their music teacher.

In the last five years, 183,000 Ontario students have lost their music teacher.

Looking more closely at the numbers presented in the May P4E report presents an even more dismal picture of the state of music education. In rural Ontario, most students can only dream of participating in a band or choir, or of experiencing the creative and critical challenges of a well-structured music class. In Northern and Eastern Ontario, 1 child in 5 will see a music teacher at any time in the elementary career. The rural disadvantage means that these schools are 2 ½ less likely to have a significant musical experience in their early years, when compared with their city cousins.





Furthermore, as challenging as these numbers are, the whole truth is even more disturbing. The OMEA believes that the available figures may actually **over-report** the number of qualified music teachers in Ontario schools. The People for Education report relies on the Ontario principals who respond to their survey. When asked if they have a music teacher on staff, we believe most principals honestly answer “yes” to the question if they have someone... *anyone*... teaching music. There is no requirement in this province that a teacher responsible for teaching music has even a modicum of music training. In some schools, a well-intentioned but unqualified teacher leads the program. We argue that this is not the same as having a qualified music teacher in front of our students.

*Qualified Music Teachers are vital to a
Quality music education*

No one has set out to create this troubling situation. Often, music education is a victim of unintended consequences. Well-intended policies and legislation designed to help with challenges in other areas of education have impacted negatively on music offerings. For example: the very valuable focus on Literacy and Math has often pulled resources and time away from the Arts; practices intended to protect the legitimate rights of teachers have made it difficult to hire qualified music teachers; reasonable space provisions attached to grants for school facilities threaten the closure of some music rooms. None of these programs was intended to deprive Ontario students of quality instruction in their Ontario music curriculum, but the data indicates that this is what is happening.

The Ontario Music Educators' Association has continued to raise all of the concerns mentioned above, and many more, with the Ontario Government, the Ontario College of Teachers, Principals' Associations, Teachers' Federations, and the Education Quality and Accountability Office. Access to quality music programming for our children is a goal all these stakeholders agree with. In *Achieving Excellence, A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario*, we find the government's commitment to “Promote the value of the arts, including the visual and performing arts, in developing critical and creative thinking skills that support success in school and in life.” The will is there. What is required is simultaneous action by all involved to reach a solution that benefits every student in Ontario, no matter where they live in the province.

We call upon the Ministry of Education to convene a roundtable for all stakeholders with the goal of implementing a solution that works for all involved, especially for the children of Ontario; The Ontario Music Educators' Association will be more than happy to work with the Ministry in this endeavor.

Statistics and graphics for tables 1 from the *2017 People for Education Arts Report*:
<http://www.peopleforeducation.ca/pfe-news/arts-education-in-ontario>

Statistics on numbers of elementary students taken from Ontario Ministry of Education website.
<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/educationFacts.html>