

Jim Palmer <advocacy@omea.on.ca>

to EDULABFINANCE

My name is Jim Palmer, Advocacy Director with the Ontario Music Educators' Association, representing elementary and high school music teachers in Ontario.

As an organization, we are greatly concerned over the effect that larger class sizes, especially in high school, will have on the ability of Ontario children to access programs in Music and the Arts. Furthermore, you must be aware that we take particular offence to comments made by the Minister of Education. Lisa Thompson, the current minister of education, has demonstrated profound disrespect for the value of music education, and for the music teachers that deliver it. When asked in an interview with CBC Radio whether schools would have to cut programs such as band or arts classes, the minister responded "there are many different ways to ensure that students have a well rounded education," going on to comment that the youngest in her family "participated in a band club". We would not expect that reading be taught in a "reading club", or that science instruction be limited to the "science team"; to suggest that Music could be meaningfully experienced by Ontario children in this manner, separate from any connection to classroom instruction, reveals a profound lack of understanding of Music, the complexity of Music pedagogy, and the importance of Arts in school culture.

In terms of this consultation, a increase in average high school class sizes to 28 will lead directly to a 27% reduction in the number of teaching sections available to schools. This leaves fewer options available outside of designation "pre-requisite" courses. As most Music and Arts courses fall into this "elective" category, it stands to reason that schools will be able to allocate fewer sections to music. Recent notices in the press regarding teachers being declared surplus, and especially the scaling back or complete cancelation of specialty Music and Arts programs, bears witness to our concerns. Music teachers have, and will continue, to lose their positions.

In terms of equity, this will exacerbate an already deplorable discrepancy between urban and rural schools. Currently, People for Education statistics indicate that urban elementary schools are 5 times more likely to have a Music teacher than rural schools. In fact, less than one student in 5 in rural Ontario will see a music teacher at all in their elementary career, while well over half of urban children will have some kind of music instruction.

In terms of efficacy, Music and Arts education are effective and foundational to a 21st century education. The OMEA recognizes the importance of Ontario students having a strong background in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math, but to focus on these curricula to the exclusion of the Arts is not supported by education research or economic data. Educators, researchers, economists, and industry all recognise the importance of bringing 21st century skills to the workplace. These skills include creativity, critical thinking, and collaboration, all of which are integral to the music classroom. Further, it is widely accepted that these skills, nurtured in the music room, are imminently transferable to the science, math, and tech subjects. Ignoring music and

the arts in the STEAM paradigm risks creating students with exemplary technical skills without the creative and critical thinking habits that will put them to effective use. In terms of fiscal responsibility, aside from the support it provides for other disciplines, Music has human and economic value in and of itself. From our own Ontario curriculum documents, “The arts nourish the imagination and develop a sense of beauty, while providing unique ways for students to gain insights into the world around them.”² Furthermore, in purely economic terms, Music and the Arts has value. According to StatsCan, in 2010 culture output totaled 93.2 billion, or 3% of the economy. With the chronic downturn in manufacturing in Canada, it is highly likely that this percentage is currently significantly higher. Ignoring education of our children for participation in the Arts and Culture sector places them at a significant disadvantage.

As the recognised professional association for Ontario Music Teachers, the OMEA stands ready to work with this government and with all stakeholders to ensure a well rounded, fiscally responsible, and equitable education for all Ontario children, and we are committed to the understanding that Music and the Arts (Drama, Dance, Music, and Visual Art) are integral to that education.

A response is welcome at advocacy@omea.on.ca
Respectfully,
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