

## **Music Education and Distance Learning During COVID-19: A Survey**

As the world moves into new stages of dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, cataloguing the initial stages of responses is crucial. The pace of change has already been quick, with the initial cases reported in December 2019, and the subsequent lockdown orders and school shutdowns coming just a few months later. As fall 2020 approaches, discussions have turned to possible vaccines and how schools will attempt to operate with cases waning in some areas and raging on in others. In an effort to document, examine, and learn from the various “stages” of this pandemic, the purpose of this paper is to describe the spring 2020 move to distance learning and how the policies put in place affected music educators. This documentation and examination of policy is particularly needed as the pandemic continues to unfold. To make informed judgments moving forward, policymakers need to first understand extant decisions.

### **Background: the COVID-19 Crisis and Spring 2020 School Closings**

In the spring of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic caused schools to move to distance learning, and in-person classes were canceled for the duration of the 2019-2020 school year in more than 75% of states (MSU IPPSR, 2020). Though state-to-state variation ensured a patchwork quilt of closing dates and other details of this change in modality, the resultant teaching and learning arrangements shared many commonalities. For example, districts across the country had to contend with how to reach students and continue instruction. To contend with the dramatic increase in demand for devices, districts had to spend millions on the necessary arrangements to supply materials for digital learning, and for printing paper packets (Kurtz, 2020; Wisely, 2020). School officials were confronted with equity and access issues and supporting students’ needs became critical.

Given the almost overnight timetable for closing schools, and the uniqueness of the pandemic, best practice research informing policy was hard to come by (Green, 2020). Some guidance documents suggested consulting the research on summer learning loss (e.g., Kim, 2006, 2007; Kim & White, 2008; Tallent-Runnels et al., 2006) or turning to principles from distance learning research (Bernard et al., 2009; Protopsaltis & Baum, 2009). However, others noted that neither of these bodies of literature fully contemplated the unprecedented education experiment of the spring of 2020, for several reasons. First, the timetable for implementing a new system of education delivery was rushed, and neither districts nor teachers were prepared (Cummings et al., 2020). Second, teachers and students alike were confronted with the ongoing trauma of the pandemic, including stress caused by the health crisis, grief over lost experiences, and worry for family situations (Cantor, 2020; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020; Haelle, 2020). In some areas, districts were mandated to outline plans that addressed student mental health throughout the crisis as part of their continuing education plans (Cummings et al., 2020).

Finally, unlike other planned distance learning or homeschooling arrangements, parents were faced with juggling work and facilitating remote schooling with little to no planning time (Harris, 2020). In sum, the move upended educational practice at all levels. To better understand the experiences during this time beyond anecdotal news stories, it is helpful to turn to public opinion surveys and reviews of state and local policies enacted during spring 2020.

### **Research on Policy Responses**

Educational policy responses varied at the state and local levels. As of April 23, 2020, twenty-nine states had required local school districts to plan distance learning options, and sixteen more were encouraging such action (MSU IPPSR, 2020). Some states lacking consistent

internet connectivity leaned on phone contact between teachers and students, while Alaska turned to its existing state-wide virtual school (MSU IPPSR, 2020). At the district level, anecdotal accounts suggest an approach to elementary education that involves some mixture of online applications, pre-recorded YouTube lessons, and paper/pencil packets to deliver instruction across mathematics, literacy, science, social studies, and social emotional learning. Approaches at the secondary level seemed to be more variable and course-dependent. It seems more online resources were provided to students in older grades in some places (Cummings et al., 2020).

Frequency and type of instructional interaction varied widely across district and state lines. While some teachers across K-12 settings held weekly synchronous class meetings, others connected with students via email or assignment feedback or via individual student meetings through platforms such as Zoom or Google Meet (Henderson et al., 2020). Student participation and accountability expectations saw similar amounts of variation. Teachers saw decreased student participation in areas with greater proportion of low-income students (Kraft & Simon, 2020) and appear to have held lower standards for some students, such as those in more rural areas (Gross & Opalka, 2020).

In a review of a nationally representative subset of school websites (N = 3,511), researchers examined collected data at the school and district level across 45 different types of activities/actions (National Center for Research on School Access and Choice [REACH], 2020). These included for example, provision of live online lessons and office hours, whether websites included specific plans for students with disabilities or English language learners, and whether schools provided students with necessary technology for remote instruction. Demographic

factors were then examined as predictor variables. Education attainment of the parents and neighbor internet connectivity were most predictive of school response. Traditional public schools were more comprehensive in their responses to disadvantaged students, while charter schools were rated higher in engagement and maintaining high academic standards. Schools in Midwestern states were more comprehensive in their responses than those in the south even after accounting for various demographic factors. Finally, special education was relatively neglected across schools, with two-thirds of schools failing to mention students with disabilities on their websites.

### **Public Opinion Polling and Surveys**

Researchers also engaged in public opinion polling to track parents' responses to distance education. For example, the USC Dornsife Center for Social and Economic Research (2020) has included public polling questions on COVID bi-weekly since early March 2020 (these data come from the nationally representative *Understanding American Study*). Some highlights from the first waves of research include opinion on school communication and access. For example, 88% of school-aged children had in-person schooling cancelled. Of these students, 87% were participating in at-home learning. In terms of access, the students from lower education households (i.e., parental educational attainment) were 15% less likely to have access to a laptop and internet. Encouragingly, 78% of parents were satisfied with their school's communication and support for learning. The surveys also focused on the gendered burden of managing at-home learning, with women shouldering more of the responsibilities for ensuring children's participation in distance learning.

Other surveys from journalistic outlets and advocacy groups recorded parental perceptions. While an Education Next poll found that 71% of parents surveyed nationally felt their students were learning less during the distance learning period, 72% were satisfied with the approach taken by their child's school/district (Henderson et al., 2020). Most parents reported that schools were introducing new content, and also indicated the types of interactions occurring during the spring, with assigned work occurring daily but one-on-one meetings rarer. Interestingly, the same survey included a sample of teachers, and while the teachers' responses mirrored the parents', there were some differences. For example, teachers were even more pessimistic about learning during the distance learning period, reported less assignments given than the parents did, and reported more one-on-one time. Finally, the survey uncovered a number of problematic findings related to race and income. Students from the lowest quartile and Black and Latino families reported less contact time and less new content than students from the (respectively) higher quartiles and White families.

The RAND corporation utilized the American Educator Panels to survey a nationally representative group of teachers about COVID-19 and schooling in April-May 2020 with a focus on experiences in the spring and needs for the fall (Hamilton et al., 2020). Educators indicated less coverage of new content, with more review of previous curriculum occurring during the move to distance learning. In keeping with other surveys, teachers indicated large disparities in student access to learning and supports, and they indicated a need for more targeted teaching training to deal with vulnerable populations. While the survey did not specifically reference music curricula, recommendations included ways to provide students with hands-on experiences in a distance learning setup.

A working paper recently detailed teacher working conditions during the COVID-19 crisis of spring 2020 (Kraft et al., 2020). The survey featured responses from a sample of 7,841 teachers across 206 schools and 9 states. Responses support much of what was found in the other literature cited here related to overall challenges experienced by teachers as well as how the emergency remote teaching move exacerbated inequalities for high-poverty and majority-Black schools. However, researchers here detail novel findings related to how teachers were supported by their principals and districts. Teachers who indicated they could depend on effective communication and strong training from their school and district leadership, were the least likely to report experiencing declines in their sense of success. Additionally, the smallest declines in reported sense of success were associated with meaningful collaboration, recognition of teacher effort by principals, and communication of fair/clear expectations.

There is also some data from state-wide surveys of educators. For example, a survey of around 8,500 K-8 teachers and principals in Michigan illuminated responses to distance learning in spring 2020 (Cummings et al., 2020). The authors separated the survey responses into broad categories. First, educators expressed concern about the impacts of distance learning, including loss of supports, impacts of related trauma, and barriers to e-learning. Educators suggested they interacted with students more online than with physical resources sent home. Providing online resources was most common, and the least common mode of engagement was virtual “1 on 1” or small group tutoring sessions. Finally, educators expressed the need for better internet connectivity, more resources for facilitating distance teaching, and noted that the most significant challenges related to student engagement and access to technology.

### **A Need for Research on the Arts During COVID-19**

While a number of concerns have been raised in relation to the current crisis, we wonder whether and how schools attempted to provide a well-rounded experience for kids. A hallmark of a quality curriculum is that it features a variety of subject matter, including the arts. In the move to distance learning, it is possible that this enriched curriculum—especially in music—would be ignored. We suspect this for several reasons. First, music often occupies a secondary position in the curriculum, prone to cuts and a relative lack of attention (see Shaw, 2018). This is, of course, tied to the permissiveness of arts policy at the state level. In the ArtScan state-by-state database, one can see the lack of clear policy support for the arts, as only 32 states consider the arts as a core subject (ArtScan, 2020). Additionally, not all states have elementary arts requirements or require arts credits for high school graduation (ArtScan, 2020).

Second, the content and typical delivery of music classes may make distance learning difficult. Music classes are primarily skill-based, performance-focused, and feature group music making. Also, the curriculum is often not standardized in the way an adopted elementary school math curriculum may be. There are few or no textbooks and ready-made templates/worksheets and very little that can be completed in a learning packet (paper/pencil) approach. Additionally, while teachers and researchers have explored the applications of technology in music curriculum (e.g. Bauer, 2014), few, if any, have considered the implications of teaching music entirely in a distance context. Last, music classes often involve materials like sheet music and instruments that are owned by the school and not easily available to individual students. Teachers interviewed in news articles from spring 2020 voiced these concerns and numerous others (e.g., Lee, 2020).

Empirical studies of music education and distance learning are few and far between. Researchers have examined online graduate courses (Blake, 2018; Hebert, 2007; Walls, 2008) or ways to supplement in-person instruction with social media (Salavuo, 2008). The most extensive examination of distance learning in music education is almost 20 years old (Rees, 2002), and the pace of technological change has rendered much of the research from the 1990s obsolete. More recently, there has been some literature demonstrating the challenges of instrumental music instruction via videoconferencing (Denis, 2016; Duffy & Healey, 2017; Kruse et al., 2013). However, none of these studies contemplate K-12 music education operating in a distance learning context.

Technology use in music education has not received the level of attention and prior training as other content areas prior to the pandemic. When discussed, technology is often integrated as special projects or in a supplementary role (Bauer, 2014). Additionally, the successful use and subsequent implementation of technology in an area requires a different type of knowledge, often referred to as TPACK (technological pedagogical and content knowledge (Bauer, 2014). Publications related to technology integration have not yet examined the role of technology as the primary mode of instruction delivery and the necessary training required to successfully facilitate meaningful music learning and experience.

Questions abound related to what happened in music education settings during the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis. What were educators directed to do to facilitate instruction? In elementary schools, music classes are relatively common, but were they considered in district policies for distance learning? How did elementary music teachers design instruction, and did students “log in”? At the secondary level, where large performing ensemble music courses are



the norm, how did teachers develop distance learning? To address these questions, we set out to collect data on how school districts attempted to provide music education during the COVID-19 crisis. We focus on describing district/school policies, teacher response, and stakeholder perceptions of success and associated challenges. We were especially interested in the possible differences from school to school, from level to level, and from content specialty to specialty, given our backgrounds. Researcher one (NAME) has worked in secondary instrumental music settings and with pre-service teachers in instrumental classrooms, and researcher two (NAME) has worked in a variety of early childhood, elementary general and choral settings. We sought to bring our insight to the questions we asked teachers, and to our interpretation of what these findings may mean for policy in the year to come.

### **A Survey of Music Educators**

After obtaining IRB approval, the National Association for Music Education sent a link to a Qualtrics survey on our behalf to a random sample of its membership (N = 25,416). The survey featured questions on music education-related policies during the spring 2020 distance learning period, including questions on instruction, engagement, and technology. Additionally, several questions were five-option Likert-type (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree) and asked teachers to respond to prompts such as, “I felt meaningfully included in the district’s plan for distance learning.” Finally, a few questions were in free-response format and aimed at illuminating issues not specifically explored elsewhere (“Is there anything else you would like to say?”). After a reminder email sent a week later, we had received 1,368 completed surveys, for a total response rate of 5.4%. In addition to concerns related to the low response rate, there may be other limitations to the validity of the results. For example, NAFME membership is not universal,

with certain states (e.g., Texas) not featuring NAFME state-level affiliates, or some states in which NAFME membership is somewhat rare (e.g., Michigan). For the purposes of this paper, we analyzed the overall responses and also break out differences in responses based on teachers' indicated teaching assignments.

## Survey Findings

### Overview of policies around lessons and instruction

When asked about the modality for instruction during distance learning, around half (53.3%) indicated the lessons were online and asynchronous, with paper packets and synchronous lessons reported less frequently. Interesting “other” options were elaborated, with one participant noting “Music and PE were told that we were “done” for the year, general teachers had a packet pickup that was poorly attended.” This sentiment was echoed by many participants in open response sections throughout the survey. Participants reported that music lessons were infrequent, with one lesson per week most common (57.3%). Only around 6% of respondents were required to offer 5 or more lessons per week. Of the elementary and early childhood respondents, 58.2% said they were required to provide only one lesson per week, with 15.2% not being required to provide any lessons. Several elementary music teachers indicated they had to provide instruction on a rotating basis (such as selected grade levels one week, alternating the next week). Secondary instrumental and choral teachers had more variation in their requirements, with the majority of responses still indicating one required lesson per week (37.8% and 26.4%, respectively). Those teachers working with a combination of areas (e.g. K-12, K-8) indicated that the expectations varied greatly across grade levels.

Length of pre-recorded lessons varied from less than 10 minutes (33.3% of all respondents), to between 10 and 30 minutes (28.4%). Secondary instrumental educators were

expected to provide more pre-recorded lessons overall, with 37% offering lessons less than 10 minutes long, and 20.2% offering 10 to 30-minute recordings. In the open response sections, some instrumental educators indicated that any expected practice time was to be included in the instruction, so this decreased the amount of time spent on pre-recorded lessons (e.g., a 30-minute lesson requirement might include 20 minutes of practicing and 10 minutes of the recorded instruction). As a caveat, more than a third of participants (35.3%) did not offer any pre-recorded lessons. Nearly half of secondary choral educators (44.2%) reported they did not provide pre-recorded lessons. Around 81% of teachers noted that students were expected to spend 30 minutes or less on lessons, with little variation across content areas.

Music lessons were generally encouraged to be completed but were not required in any formal way (around 32% discussed required lesson completion). Almost half of secondary choral teachers (44.5%) said their lessons were required, followed by 38.1% of secondary instrumental teachers, and only 14.4% of elementary teachers. Nearly 50% of each content area said lessons were encouraged, but not required. Class meetings--a frequent part of the online schooling in spring--was far from universal for music teachers with 44.9% indicating they had no synchronous meetings. Most elementary music educators did not hold synchronous meetings (64.5%), nor did 38.4% of secondary instrumental educators and 32.4% of secondary choral educators. When it came to feedback and assessment, we saw a mixed picture. Feedback on student work was expected for 67.6% of respondents, but 34.3% did not assign grades or indicated using a modified approach such as credit/no credit (43.6%). Again, there was a divide between elementary and secondary music teachers. Elementary music teachers largely did not assign grades (68.8%) while some (23.4%) utilized a modified grading scale. Inversely, secondary instrumental teachers mostly assigned grades on a modified scale (54%), with many

(30.3%) assigning grades as usual. Secondary choral instructors also assigned grades mostly on a modified scale (56.36%) with nearly a quarter (26.36%) assigning grades using the original scale.

### *Teacher Perceptions of Instructional Policies*

We asked several Likert-type questions about perceptions of instruction during the spring. To the question of “Music instruction can work well in a distance learning context,” results were more negative than positive (25.3% Strongly Disagree, 32.5% Somewhat Disagree, 12.8% Neither Disagree nor Agree, 25.7% Somewhat Agree, 3.7% Strong Agree). Teachers were slightly more positive about their own instruction, responding to the question, “I am satisfied with my instruction during the COVID-19 crisis,” as follows: 16.9% Strongly Disagree, 25.5% Somewhat Disagree, 17.9% Neither Disagree nor Agree, 31.6% Somewhat Agree, 8.3% Strongly Agree). Perhaps the strongest negative opinion was expressed in answering the questions, “I worry my students weren’t getting a quality musical experience.” Over 84% of respondents across all content areas somewhat or strongly agreed.

### **Overview of grading, meetings, contact and engagement**

We also wanted to understand how teachers contacted students and what the relevant policies were. Required check-ins with students were not universal, with around 58.7% indicating they were not required to contact students. It was more common for teachers to be asked to track participation, with around 75% of teachers noting they were required to track/report attendance or participation. That said, overall, engagement was also mixed. A fifth of respondents (19.5%) said less than 10% of their students engaged regularly with music instruction. Students in secondary grades were more likely to be engaged with instruction, with

teachers reporting approximately 75% of students were engaging (43.3% for instrumental, 42.7% for choral). Elementary teachers (38.4%) reported less than 10% of their students were engaging with instruction, with the next highest category at 25% students engaging (29.7%). Policies around office hours were also mixed, with 57.7% of teachers across content areas being required to hold office hours.

When students stopped engaging, 73.7% said they were encouraged or required to reach out to students. This held most true for secondary choral (62% required, 30.3% encouraged) and secondary instrumental (52.2% required, 38% encouraged) teachers. For elementary teachers, only 29.7% were encouraged to reach out, while 61% were neither required nor encouraged to make contact with students who were not engaging. Respondents indicated a number of reasons why students were not engaging, with the most common (more than 80%) being “lack of motivation/desire to engage.” Other frequently selected reasons included lack of internet access and lack of parent/guardian facilitation. Respondents added some troubling “other” reasons including “mental illness, anxiety, despair,” “feeling overwhelmed by ‘core/academic’ coursework,” “music being viewed as ‘enrichment,’” “students as essential workers,” and “family death/caring for family member(s) diagnosed with COVID-19.” It should also be noted that in some cases, teachers were explicitly limited in terms of engagement. For example, 25.8% of participants said they were restricted in the type or amount of contact with students. When asked to explain the nature of the restriction, some said they were asked not to join homeroom meetings, were told not to hold meetings or office hours, were told not to contact individual students, or were prohibited from contact for the first four weeks of instruction.

### *Teacher Perceptions of Engagement*

In the Likert-type question, “My students were meaningfully engaged with my instruction,” responses lend credence to the other reported inconsistencies (13.7% Strongly Disagree, 23.3% Somewhat Disagree, 15.3% Neither Disagree nor Agree, 41.1% Somewhat Agree, 6.7% Strongly Agree). Asked whether students could keep up with music instruction, results were similar but slightly more negative (12.2% Strongly Disagree, 27.2% Somewhat Disagree, 31.2% Neither Disagree nor Agree, 23.5% Somewhat Agree, 5.9% Strongly Agree). Participants noted other potential barriers to engagement with instruction in this section. A question about supports for students with disabilities was especially concerning. In response to the question, “I was able to accommodate my students with IEPs/504 plans,” only about a third (34.6%) somewhat or strongly agreed.

#### **Overview of technology, supports, PD, and district’s valuing of music**

We asked several questions about the technology used to support distance learning online. Zoom (39.7% of respondents using) and Google Meet (31% of respondents using) were the most commonly used video conferencing platforms used. Interestingly, some respondents indicated in free-response comments that, due to privacy concerns, no live video conferencing was allowed. Another respondent wrote, “My colleagues and I did not use video conferencing tools because there were no established guidelines or policies in place to protect us from mandated reporting and other inappropriate occurrences during a virtual meeting.”

Google Classroom was by far the most commonly used learning management system (49.9% of responding using). We can also see evidence of music teachers using their own tools here, as numerous “other” responses indicated use of SmartMusic or Quaver Music, as well as various other systems, to manage learning. In addition, a number of respondents used FlipGrid,

an interface that allows teachers to post short videos and collect video responses from students. This shift to online modalities required new learning on the part of the teacher, as 55% indicated they were not previously using a learning management system prior to the move to distance learning, a response especially prevalent among elementary music teachers (70%). In terms of professional development, 53.4% of respondents received some training from their district. Additionally, participants indicated that students were provided with technology supports, with around 80% saying laptop computers or tablets were provided, and around half indicating hotspots or other internet connectivity resources were provided. Provision of musical resources was less prevalent, with around one third indicating that district-owned musical instrumental/supplies were made available.

#### *Teacher Perceptions of Support/Value*

Teachers generally expressed mixed perceptions of their value during the distance learning period of spring 2020. In responding to the question, “I felt meaningfully included in the district’s plan for distance learning,” responses were as follows: 32.2% Strongly Disagree, 22.9% Somewhat Disagree, 18.5% Neither Disagree nor Agree, 17.9% Somewhat Agree, 8.4% Strongly Agree. However, a related question, “Music just wasn’t a priority for my district during this COVID-19 crisis,” turned up different results (10.2% Strongly Disagree, 13.1% Somewhat Disagree, 17% Neither Disagree nor Agree, 25.7% Somewhat Agree, 34% Strongly Agree). By content area, 73% of elementary music teachers, 52.4% of secondary instrumental teachers, and 50.2% of secondary choral teachers responded to this question with Somewhat or Strongly Agree. Specific questions about support were also mixed. Respondents felt somewhat supported by their principal (31.1% Strongly or Somewhat Disagree, 30.1% Neither Disagree nor Agree,

38.5% Agree or Strongly Agree), and less by the district as a whole (42.6% Strongly or Somewhat Disagree, 26.2% Neither Disagree nor Agree, 31.2% Agree or Strongly Agree).

### **Policy Discussion and Considerations for Fall 2020**

One issue that jumps out from the survey results is the disparate treatment of elementary (primary) and secondary music teachers. Because primary music teachers often work on a rotation with other “specials” classes like art and physical education, they seem to have been relegated to second-class status in the spring move to distance learning. Many elementary music teachers reported being told not to give assignments or make contact with students regarding music, and instead were asked to provide support for “core” classes. This is true both in comparison to classroom teachers as well as with regard to secondary music teachers. Secondary music teachers seem to have existed on more equal footing with other classes on students’ schedules, which, while expected given the difference in scheduling, is problematic nonetheless. Policymakers should plan out ways to more meaningfully include elementary music teachers—as well as teachers of art, physical education, and any other “specials”—in distance learning arrangements.

Advocacy concerns have taken more of a central position for arts teachers as they look toward the fall semester. In the rush to transition to online learning and in the holding pattern that occurred in early summer 2020, policy conversations were relatively muted in the music education sphere. As educators awaited the results of an aerosol study organized by the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) and the College Band Directors National Conference (CBDNA) and spearheaded by researchers at the University of Colorado and University of Maryland (see Niehoff, 2020), organizations made general statements about the



importance of music but not about specific modalities of instruction or other policy statements. For example, the most widely advertised message was “Arts education is essential,” a unified statement of 50+ arts organizations that capitalized on the concept of the “essential worker” and “essential services” (State Education Agency Directors of Arts Education [SEADAE], 2020). The statement reminds the reader that whether “virtual or in person,” the arts are important. The stance is understandable--without being able to say that “in-person music making is safe,” few other messages were feasible. Other publications made use of aerosol study preliminary data and CDC guidelines to make broad recommendations for the “return to learn” period, but again, few specifics could be advanced.

However, it is unclear if the advocacy messages to retain music teachers and programs have staved off cuts. This lack of clarity is true because of the multi-stage nature of budget planning and the multi-layered funding structure of K-12 schools. For example, most education funding comes from local and state sources of revenue, but the COVID-19 pandemic has caused tax revenue decreases that will inevitably cause budget holes. Federal relief funding (e.g., CARES Act and other proposed stimulus bills) differs by state and there are restrictions on the spending (see Jordan, 2020). Additionally, school aid funding numbers at the state level have not been made available as of the end of August in some states, and plans to solidify online/hybrid/in-person school modalities were only being readied as of the end of August, putting enrollment numbers and teacher layoffs in flux. All of this points to uncertainty, and while some music program cuts and layoffs were publicized in the summer of 2020 (e.g., Borsuk, 2020; Cattafi, 2020; Stallsmith, 2020; Tierney, 2020), taking stock of these reductions will require some passage of time. If we see widespread practice of re-assigning music teachers

to non-music positions, or widespread cuts to music positions, immediate policy action at the state and national levels will be necessary.

We are concerned about the treatment of music during this period and about what this portends for the future. When music programs are weakened over time, they become more vulnerable to being cut. This has been seen in the post-NCLB period of cutting instructional minutes (e.g., Center for Education Policy, 2005), where program elimination is rare but hollowing out programs (i.e., less instructional time, moving programs to outside the school day slots, moving unqualified teachers into music teaching positions) is less rare. This has also been evidenced in situations where music instruction at the elementary level becomes more intermittent (every few weeks instead of in a weekly rotation) and begins to be considered less integral to the curriculum (e.g., Shaw, 2018). Our participants were candid in free responses about the purposeful demotion of their classes, and direct policy directives to limit contact with students. For example, one wrote: “I had no direct access to my students. I don’t even know how many or which students accessed the lessons I provided. Music was intentionally left out of learning menus, even when I provided the lessons. I wasn’t allowed to give my lessons to students directly. It had to be given through the homeroom teachers, many of which do not value music education so did not include it.” Many music teachers across content areas were told “not to bother” parents and students with music content, and also reported parents explaining the lack of participation as “it’s just music.” In sum, we should be concerned about the long-term effects of pushing music aside.

We are similarly concerned that music teachers will receive confusing guidance, if any, about policies, as it seems this was a complaint from our participants. One participant commented, “Our district was so unprepared that the right hand didn’t know what the left hand

was doing. The superintendent was unclear and any policy he tried to give was changed within 24 hours.” When asked who they received policy direction from, one respondent said, “not quite sure—we got the same message from multiple people, and then at times the messages were the opposite of each other.” Music teachers are more likely than others to be itinerant and split between multiple buildings (Gardner, 2010), so they are likely to receive policy direction from several administrators. In this sample, 28.4% of teachers indicated they worked in two or more campuses/buildings, giving more credence to the possibility of confusing directions. We encourage this to be considered as districts think about their policies for the 2020-2021 school year.

## Conclusion

There is some consensus, heading in the fall 2020 semester, on what school leaders should consider. In a letter co-signed by more than 400 educational researchers (Harris & Strunk, 2020), the authors advance several main points, including providing substantial resources to stave off looming budget cuts, implementing universal internet/computer access, targeting resources to students with disabilities and with high-needs, providing personalized and engaging remote instruction, and expanding instructional time. These are commonsense recommendations that we support given the challenges described by these survey participants.

If we were to offer similar bullet points for specific considerations related to music education in fall 2020, the list would start with urging policymakers to meaningfully include and support music teachers and music instruction at both the primary and secondary levels. This means scheduling music effectively in person and online, and enabling contact between students and music teachers (e.g., office hours and check-ins). As music teachers navigate policy

guidance from a variety of administrators, some centralized plans are necessary, and principals may need to intervene if classroom teachers are interfering with music teachers' efforts at the elementary level. This visible support and acknowledgement of the value of music is equally critical in shaping the perceptions of the parents/caregivers who will be supporting students in distance learning. Engagement in the spring was challenging no matter what, with Kraft et al. (2020) finding only 59% of teachers reported regular engagement, and the results here—especially for elementary school music teachers—disturbingly low as well. Putting up local policy barriers to engagement would only exacerbate the problem.

Second, administrators must equip music teachers with professional development necessary to adeptly teach music in multiple modalities. In a distance learning context, teachers need time and funding to explore non-large group performance options to flexibly adapt to changing modalities. During spring 2020, music teachers across subject areas reported working more hours than ever to support instruction during the beginning of the pandemic (57.4%) and at odd or unusual times (71%). While this is understandable given the emergency move to remote learning, districts should design planned professional development to address instructional shifts, as doing so may be crucial in staving off teacher burnout. These new options might include project-based learning facilitated by technology applications. If schools are meeting in person, schools may need to be creative with scheduling smaller groups of music students that can be socially-distanced indoors, or may need to experiment with putting music performing groups outdoors. Preliminary data suggest that aerosols disperse more outdoors, which has spurred some plans and position statements regarding music courses to operate in outdoor tents (see Minnesota Department of Health, 2020; NFHS/NAfME, 2020). Teachers also need to be ready to be

flexible and not dig in their heels as music classes potentially shift to focus on musical response and creativity instead of large-group performance, a point emphasized in the NFHS/NAfME recommendations for fall 2020 (NFHS/NAfME, 2020).

Third, in line with the recommendations from Harris & Strunk (2020), we urge policymakers to pay better attention to designing equitable music education for students with disabilities. It was troubling to see music teachers saying that students with IEPs/504 plans were not getting support (8%), and equally problematic that many respondents (54%) did not know if support was provided, and this echoes concerns from other research (e.g. Harris et al., 2020). We encourage music teachers to familiarize themselves with the IEP/504 plan goals and supports for each of their students so that they can provide modifications/accommodations as required and advocate for the needs of their students.

In closing, this survey presents findings that capture a snapshot of the challenges of the spring 2020 move to distance learning. Cataloguing the policies and perceptions, however, should spur thoughtful action in the year to come. As one of our participants wrote that in fall 2020, “districts should have more time to plan and prepare their policies to truly show their priorities, and to apply what we learned during this past spring semester.”

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