Liberty University

School of Music

Rebuilding the Secondary School Choral Program after the COVID-19 Pandemic: Tools for Teachers and Administrators and Implications for Future Disruptions to Education

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by

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ABSTRACT

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many secondary choral music programs suffered in terms of

student involvement, performances, the ability to rehearse, and the overall impact on students'

social and emotional health. Choral music educators have been tasked with implementing

strategies to rebuild their programs as schools resumed in-person learning. Utilizing explanatory

sequential mixed methods, this study considered surveys of choral music educators and

disaggregated student perception data, analyzing the specific needs of students, as well as

utilized research surrounding the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the social and

emotional health of students. Guided by student perception surveys, this mixed methods research

study identified the strategies needed to rebuild secondary choral programs after the COVID-19

pandemic, as well as the social and emotional needs of secondary choral music students.

Although this research is explicitly geared toward the secondary choral music classroom and the

COVID-19 pandemic, the implication of this study also aids in the overall improvement of the

morale and culture of any school faced with a major disruption to the educational environment,

in addition to the surrounding communities associated with each school.

Key Words: COVID-19, Music Education, Choral Music Programs

DEDICATION

This Thesis is dedicated to the following:

1) My parents, John and Vicki.

2) My siblings, Angie, Ben, Kendra, and Brad.

3) My best friends, Matt, Ana, and Amy.

4) The participating staff and students of this research study.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CONTENTS

TABLE OF FIGURES

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Background

Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Secondary Choral Music Classrooms

In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic altered many aspects of day-to-day life. According to Bilal Javed, Abdullah Sarwer, Erik Soto, and Zia-ur-Rehman, "A pandemic is not just a medical phenomenon; it affects individuals and society and causes disruption, anxiety, stress, stigma, and xenophobia. The behavior of an individual as a unit of society or a community has marked effects on the dynamics of a pandemic that involves the level of severity, degree of flow, and aftereffects."[1] Initial observation suggests that many secondary choral programs suffered and continue to suffer due to COVID-19. This is partially because, according to Nina Vindegaard and Michael E. Benros, "regarding indirect effects of COVID-19 on general mental health, there seems to be evidence of an increase in depressive and anxiety symptoms along with negative impact on general mental health."[2] An early analysis of the secondary choral music classroom implies that student enrollment has declined. Choral music educators have been working to rebuild their programs, with a focus on enrollment and academic rigor. Restrictions during the pandemic prevented rehearsals and concerts, and many students opted to leave the choir.

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[1] Bilal Javed, et al., "The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic's impact on mental health," *Int J Health Plann Mgmt* 35 (2020): 993– 996, https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1002/hpm.3008.

[2] Nina Vindegaard and Michael Eriksen Benros, "COVID-19 pandemic and mental health consequences: Systematic review of the current evidence," *Brain, Behavior, and Immunity* 89 (2020): 531-542, https://doi.org/ 10.1016/j.bbi.2020.05.048.

As schools resumed in-person learning during the 2021-2022 academic year, secondary choral music educators were tasked to rebuild music programs and address students' social and emotional needs. This was especially true of the graduating classes of 2025, 2026, and 2027, as these students had not been in a regular classroom since the end of fifth grade, sixth grade, and seventh grade, respectively. Michelle Anthony notes that "the middle school years are marked by significant personality changes and serve as a time when students begin to gain more independence, shift the center of their social world from home to peers, and explore and discover their talents and interests within a larger community of influence."[3] The classes of 2025, 2026, and 2027 missed critical aspects of development only garnered through social interactions, and teachers and administrators will need to develop tools and implement strategies to meet the needs of these students.

The strategies needed to rebuild secondary choral programs are vital to ensure student needs are met. This study addressed the perspectives secondary choral music educators and students had about the impact of COVID-19 on the choral music classroom, overall mental health, and how to move forward. Additionally, this study addressed the social and emotional needs of students of various backgrounds who were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Research indicates that recruitment and retention in choral programs was problematic before the COVID-19 pandemic. After two school years largely void of traditional rehearsals and performances, choral music educators and administrators had to work hard to ensure students felt inclined to enter the choral classroom and supporters of the arts felt inclined to attend performances despite fears associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.

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[3] Michelle Anthony, "Social Development in Pre-Teens: What You Need to Know," accessed April 15, 2022, https://www.scholastic.com/parents/family-life/social-emotional-learning/development-milestones/social-development-11-13-year-olds.html.

Over three years after the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, society has largely resumed

normalcy, but steps had to be taken to re-engage community constituents. Even prior to COVID-

19, a key component of any successful choral program was community support. Alex T. Favazza

and Anion Eady stress the importance of this support with the following:

> What is the support needed from the community that travels right to the heart of the shared goals within a musical classroom? Well-attended performances, especially by parents and administrators, serve as wonderfully validating and gratifying punctuations to the process of music education, but is there anything that compares to the experience of taking students to perform outside the regular school environment? The level of appreciation shown by audiences that do not usually get to hear live choral music making, especially by young people, is unique and celebratory in a way all its own.[4]

Just as students were hesitant to move back into the choral classroom, parents, friends of the arts,

and community members were reluctant to attend performances. Jeremy Blocker, the managing

director at New York Theater Workshop, expressed concerns about the decline in attendance at

live music events, stating:

> People got used to not going places during the pandemic, and we're going to struggle with that for a few years. Many presenters anticipate that the softer box office will extend into the upcoming season and perhaps beyond. And some fear that the virus is accelerating long-term trends that have troubled arts organizations for years, including softer ticket sales for many classical music events, the decline of the subscription model for selling tickets at many performing arts organizations and schools, and the increasing tendency among consumers to purchase tickets at the last minute.[5]

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[4] Alex T. Favazza, Jr. and Anion Eady, "Resilient Choral Teachers," *The Choral Journal* 61, no. 2 (09, 2020): 18-29, http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fscholarly-journals%2Fresilient-choral-teachers%2Fdocview%2F2447008246%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D12085.

[5] Michael Paulson and Javier Hernandez, "Live Performance is Back. But Audiences Have Been Slow to Return," *The New York Times,* August 21, 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/21/arts/performing-arts-pandemic-attendance.html#:~:text=From%20regional%20theaters%20to%20Broadway, and%20worrisome%20%E2%80%94%20drops%20in%20attendance.

The challenges music directors and teachers have faced as they have worked to rebuild music programs and reengage community constituents was further demonstrated by the reluctance of students to enroll in choir classes and community constituents to attend live performances.

Success in the secondary choral music classroom requires a collective effort to learn from each other. Arthur Wenk writes, "The fastest way to succeed is to talk with successful people and find out what they do. Start with any contacts you already have in the musical community, especially other choral directors, and ask them questions."[6] As these conversations took shape, teachers faced hurdles rebuilding student and community trust, but Marilyn Watson, et al., wrote the following:

> Lack of trust can take different forms, but it always interferes with learning and positive behavior. Lack of trust can lead some students to be quiet and withdrawn, limiting their participation in classroom learning activities, some to be clingy and attention seeking and others to seek self-assurance by being controlling and aggressive. These students may also mistrust themselves and their ability to learn, leading them to shy away from the work required to succeed at school learning.[7]

This was written in 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic, so it is expected that post-COVID-19 teachers will face issues of a lack of trust in a more challenging context. This study addressed these challenges and provided practical solutions so students and secondary choral music educators could successfully move forward in a post-COVID-19 environment.

Despite many vaccinations, the COVID-19 pandemic persisted for over two years, and despite its classification as a pandemic over three years ago, the COVID-19 pandemic was not

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[6] Arthur Wenk, Camerata: A Guide to Organizing and Directing Small Choruses (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 27.

[7] Marilyn Watson, et al., "Building a Classroom Community that Supports Students' Social/Moral Development," *Teacher Education Quarterly* 46, no. 4 (Fall, 2019): 10-30, http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fscholarly-journals%2Fbuilding-classroom-community-that-supports%2Fdocview%2F2304942707%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D12085.

reclassified as an endemic. Sheila Mulrooney Eldred clarified that an endemic means "the disease is always present at a baseline level. So, it's not down to zero. There are observable cases. But unlike a pandemic or epidemic, in which a disease's behavior is often surprising or unexpected, an illness that has become endemic has become more predictable."[8] Influenza, also known as the flu, is an example of an endemic.

While many businesses and lives were impacted, the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on public education were far-reaching. Students, teachers, parents, administrators, and the surrounding communities will likely feel these consequences for many years. During the 2019-2020 school year and into the 2021-2022 school year, schools transitioned to online learning, hybrid learning, and eventually in-person learning, but with strict guidelines set by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). These guidelines included social distancing, masks, condensed schedules, grab-and-go breakfasts and lunches, and an unprecedented focus on the social and emotional health of teachers, students, and parents. The emphasis on students' social and emotional health was further highlighted by a report released by the Department of Education which stated, "Nearly all students have experienced some challenges to their mental health and well-being during the pandemic, and many have lost access to school-based services and supports."[9]

The hesitance of teachers and students returning to the classroom was highlighted in a report by Thomas S. Dee, who concluded that student enrollment had dropped significantly across the United States. In the first full school year after the onset of the pandemic, Dee

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[8] Sheila Mulrooney Eldred, "Coronavirus FAQ: What does endemic mean – and are we there yet?" accessed April 20, 2022, https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2022/03/11/1085839027/coronavirus-faq-what-does-endemic-mean-and-are-we-there-yet.

[9] United States Department of Education, "Education in a Pandemic: The Disparate Impacts of COVID-19 on America's Students," iv, https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/20210608-impacts-of-covid19.pdf.

reported that "national K-12 public school enrollment fell by 1.1 million students, an unprecedented decline of over 2 percent."[10] While many of these students have since returned to public school, reporters Bianca Vazquez Toness and Sharon Luryeh stated that hundreds of thousands of American students have dropped out of public schools since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and have essentially gone missing from schools.

In their report, Toness and Luryeh included an analysis by the Associated Press, noting that Stanford education professor Thomas Dee found "an estimated 230,000 students in 21 states whose absences could not be accounted for. These students didn't move out of state. They didn't sign up for private school or home-school, according to publicly available data."[11] Furthermore, the National Center for Education Statistics reported that "this decrease in enrollment during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic brought enrollment back to 2009 levels (49.4 million), erasing a decade of steady enrollment growth. It was the largest single-year decline in total public-school enrollment since 1943."[12] It is likely that this decline in enrollment also impacted enrollment numbers in the secondary choral music classroom.

Problem Statement

According to Vindegaard and Benros:

During the COVID-19 pandemic, general medical complications have received the most attention, whereas only a few studies address the potential direct effect on mental health of SARS-CoV-2 and the neurotropic potential. Furthermore, the indirect effects of the

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[10] Thomas S. Dee, "Public School Enrollment is Down by more than a Million. Why?" accessed March 10, 2023, https://www.edweek.org/leadership/opinion-public-school-enrollment-is-down-by-more-than-a-million-why/2022/11

[11] Bianca Vazquez Toness and Sharon Luryeh, "Thousands of Kids are Missing from School: Where did they go?" accessed March 10, 2023, https://apnews.com/article/covid-school-enrollment-missing-kids-homeschool-b6c9017f603c00466b9e9908c5f2183a.

[12] National Center for Education Statistics, *Condition of Education,* accessed March 10, 2023, https://nces.ed.gov/whatsnew/press_releases/05_31_2022.asp

pandemic on general mental health are of increasing concern, particularly since the SARS-CoV-1 epidemic (2002–2003) was associated with psychiatric complications.[13]

For many students with mental health issues, participation in a choir is a source of strength. The COVID-19 pandemic deprived students of the choir experience and significantly impacted overall mental health.

Examination of the short and long-term effects the COVID-19 pandemic had on the secondary choral classroom is a crucial step in moving forward to rebuild choral programs. The reason, according to Yan, is simple: "As physical classrooms shifted to virtual experiences, interactions between students and teachers changed. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many schools worldwide adapted some sort of online platform to host virtual classes."[14] Before the pandemic, virtual experiences within choral music were typically voluntary and did not disrupt the traditional classroom. However, the sudden change to the pedagogical approach coupled with the lack of in-person rehearsals has resulted in a lack of academic rigor and a decline in enrollment.

The issues caused by the COVID-19 pandemic are not exclusive to the choral classroom, but because of the hands-on, participatory nature of choral music in general, the adverse COVID-19 effects have been especially highlighted. Şenay Kılınçel, Oguzhan Kılınçel, Gurkan Muratdağı, Abdulkadir Aydın, and Mirac Baris Usta stated the following:

> School routines are essential coping mechanisms, especially for young people with mental health problems. The length of the quarantine period, fear of infection, boredom, lack of information, being away from classmates and teachers, lack of personal space at home, and financial losses in the family cause stress in children and adolescents. All

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[13] Vindegaard and Benros, "COVID-19 pandemic and mental health consequences."

[14] Spring Yan, "COVID-19 and technology use by teenagers: A case study," *Human Behavior & Emerging Technologies* 3 (2021): 185– 193, https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1002/hbe2.236.

these lifestyle changes may worsen the effects on young people's mental health and even lead to a problematic vicious cycle.[15]

Teachers had to address student mental health issues before the COVID-19 pandemic. Still, it is already clear that teachers must apply new tools and strategies to address the unique challenges posed as the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic continues. In the secondary choral classroom, this also includes recruitment, retention, and the assurance that choral singing is now safe for both students and audience members.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to examine the aspects of the secondary choral music classroom that were most valued prior to and during the initial surge of the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, this study addressed the significant challenges faced by students and educators of secondary school programs as in-person learning resumed, despite the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. This study assisted in refining and developing classroom strategies meant to rebuild the secondary choral music classroom. The findings of this study provided strategies for proactive measures during future pandemics or other events that disrupt education.

Significance of the Study

Rebuilding Secondary Choral Programs

There are numerous books, articles, and workshops that address building choral programs. These resources include information about recruiting more males, student retention,

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[15] Şenay Kılınçel, et al., "Factors affecting the anxiety levels of adolescents in home-quarantine during COVID-19 pandemic in Turkey," *Asia Pacific Psychiatry* 13:e12406 (2021), https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1111/appy.12406.

rigor in the music classroom, how to make choir fun, and how to work with administrators to create a course schedule that is conducive to the arts. However, secondary choral programs have never faced the aftermath of a worldwide pandemic. It is crucial to look at the limited research on the social and emotional impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on students, analyze student perception data, and interview choir directors to discover the necessary tools and strategies used to effectively rebuild secondary choral music classrooms.

<center>Recruitment Strategies Pre-COVID-19</center>

There are many successful choir recruitment strategies that were used before the COVID-19 pandemic. It is essential to recognize that teachers, regardless of the content area, have been resilient in adapting to change. Just as students are monitored and adjusted each day in the classroom, educators must also adjust their teaching strategies accordingly.

Tori Cook states, "Singers don't just appear at your doorstep. It takes careful thought and a solid recruitment strategy to bring them in."[16] Cook lists the following questions to consider when developing a recruitment strategy:

> What is the current demographic makeup of the chorus? Are you looking to keep the same makeup or looking to change? What types of musical experience should potential singers have? What is the audition process like (if any)? What is your chorus's mission and brand and what types of qualities do you expect from your singers to live up to your mission? Which adjectives best describe the chorus culture? What are the benefits your chorus provides its members? What can singers expect out of their experience with the chorus? What is the value for them? What types of people will benefit from singing in the chorus?[17]

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[16] Tori Cook, Chorus Management 101: The Ultimate Guide to Singer Recruitment (self-pub., Chorus Connection, n.d.), 4.

[17] Ibid.

These questions are fundamental during a post-COVID-19 school year. Additionally, Cook suggests, "You may also wish to survey your existing singers to help you identify your demographics, the reasons why singers joined your chorus, and the reasons why they stay."[18] Secondary choral music educators must reevaluate everything about their classrooms pre-COVID-19 and make essential adjustments to meet the needs of students.

Working with Administrators and Colleagues

Heather Price believes that "When there is a positive relationship between a principal and a teacher, teacher performance and school climate increases."[19] It stands to reason, then, that this logic could be extended to the key components of a successful music program; including the support of school administrators and colleagues. It is possible to experience success without this support, but choral music educators should make an effort to build a working relationship with their administration. Administrators often do not know or understand the needs of the choral program, so it is the responsibility of the choral music teacher to educate. Part of this lack of connectedness could be because students who take music classes are not required to take a state standardized test and are generally only required to have one fine arts credit to graduate. This can lead to a lack of emphasis on fine arts courses such as choir. Alex Favazza and Anion Eady state, "So often, administrators are out of touch with the realities of the music classroom and are only involved when a problem arises or persists. Jumpstarting this working dialogue with a developed

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[18] Cook, Chorus Management 101, 4.

[19] Heather E. Price, "Principal–Teacher Interactions: How Affective Relationships Shape Principal and Teacher Attitudes," *Educational Administration Quarterly* 48(1) (2011), 39-85, doi:10.1177/0013161X11417126.

and shared vision can preempt the challenges every teacher inevitably encounters and open the

door to more possibilities to be explored with the administrator, and not alone."[20]

To further detail the importance of a solid teacher-administrator relationship, Favazza and

Eady note the following:

> Developing a class schedule, for example, that benefits and fosters the growth and
> development of the students and the program, is unattainable without the help and
> support of an administrator. This is territory that remains "uncharted" for so many music
> educators and becomes a "deal breaker" in the end. On the other hand, for those fortunate
> enough to get the schedule aligned appropriately, it opens the program up to
> unprecedented possibility. This must be done working hand-in-hand with an
> administrator. Exposure to different scenarios, environments, challenges, and
> demographics can help equip educators with the confidence, vision, and creativity to
> move this administrator relationship toward shared goals.[21]

In addition to teacher-administrator relationships, relationships with colleagues are a vital aspect

of the overall success of the classroom.

Favazza and Eady also provide essential information and research about teacher-teacher

relationships. They explain that "We cannot shy away from making sure teachers understand

these relationships are not a box to check but a reservoir where they may find resilience. Not

only can these relationships see them through their most precarious moments, but often they

become some of the most personally valuable, long-lasting, and impactful."[22] These relationships

were crucial before the COVID-19 pandemic, but because of the new unique challenges teachers

and students faced post-COVID-19, cooperation to ensure success among all facets of each

school cannot be overemphasized.

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[20] Favazza, Jr. and Eady, "Resilient Choral Teachers," 18-29.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid.

At the beginning of the 2021–2022 school year, the National Association for Music

Education (NAfME) and the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS)

collaborated on new resources to help music educators, stakeholders, and decision-makers ensure

that music education is provided safely to all students. Accordingly, these organizations stress

the importance of advocacy. The NAfME website stated:

> As music educators come back to their classrooms in Fall 2021, they will need to be
> prepared to advocate for keeping music learning environments safe for students, faculty,
> and staff in light of local conditions, public health updates, and research. Music educators
> are on the front lines of providing instruction to their students and may be better informed
> than their principals and superintendents about returning to music with reduced risk. As
> COVID-19 evolves, music teachers may have to advocate for flexibility in response to
> the ever-evolving pandemic. Ultimately, the music educator can help administrators with
> awareness of research and best practices in the area of safe music instruction, all
> informed by local, state, and federal public health guidance.[23]

It is important to recognize the guidance and knowledge of administrators and to present research

specific to the music classroom, as these classrooms are unique learning environments that

require unique solutions for safety.

Social and Emotional Benefits of Singing in a Choir

Initial research by Gautam Srivastava details how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted

students. His research concludes:

> Although youngsters appear to be less vulnerable to COVID-19, the side effects of the
> pandemic can be devastating. Children and adolescents may be highly exposed to
> biopsychosocial stressors generated by the pandemic and once population's containment
> measures to reduce virus spread are required, they could be potentially affected by the

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[23] National Association for Music Education, "Return to Music, Phase III: Guidance and Resources," accessed September 4, 2021, https://nafme.org/my-classroom/nafme-and-nfhs-return-to-music-guidance-phase-iii-august-2021/

disruption in daily life routine as a result of social isolation and their unseasoned ability to conceive and comprehend the short and long-term consequences of this outbreak.[24]

Students' social and emotional health was severely affected because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Teachers play a vital role in students' social and emotional health, which leads one to understand the crucial importance of choral singing to positive mental health.

In a 2010 study about the effects of choral singing on a person's psychological well-being, Don Stewart found that "various component elements of singing, and also being part of a singing group, exert a counteractive influence on factors potentially detrimental to wellbeing and health."[25] He found the following to be true: (1) Choral singing engenders happiness and raised spirits, which counteract feelings of sadness and depression, (2) Singing involves focused concentration, which blocks preoccupation with sources of worry, (3) Singing involves deep controlled breathing, which counteracts anxiety, (4) Choral singing offers a sense of social support and friendship, which ameliorate feelings of isolation and loneliness, (5) Choral singing involves education and learning, which keeps the mind active and counteracts decline of cognitive functions, and (6) Choral singing involves a regular commitment to attend rehearsal, which motivates people to avoid being physically inactive.

Further research about the positive effects of choir participation on mental health by Steven Clift, Sharon Manship, and Lizzi Stephens concludes that:

> Principal benefits from group singing, identified from the earliest studies, are a more positive mood and increase in psychological and social wellbeing. These effects, observable even after a single singing session and strengthening over time, have been

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[24] Gautam Srivastava, "The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Mental Health of Children and Adolescents." Order No. 28132326, Uppsala Universitet (Sweden), 2020, in PROQUESTMS ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fdissertations-theses%2Fimpact-covid-19-pandemic-on-mental health%2Fdocview%2F2431053655%2Fse

[25] Don Stewart, "Choral Singing and Psychological Wellbeing: Quantitative and Qualitative Findings from English Choirs in a Cross-National Survey," *Journal of Applied Arts and Health* 1, no. 1 (2010): 19–34.

reported in studies of: established choirs, women in prison, homeless people, older people in care settings, people experiencing chronic pain, people with COPD [Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease], and people in choirs for people affected by cancer.[26]

Singing can be a positive influence, helping students rebound from the pandemic, as many students are still suffering from post-COVID-19 mental health issues.

Teachers must be aware of their impact on their students' mental health and the importance of building relationships with students. In a research study about student-teacher relationships, Halladay, Bennett, Weist, et al. reported:

> Given that teachers may be the first to observe early signs of mental health concerns among students, the quality of their relationships with students and their responsiveness to expressed emotional concerns may represent important social processes that promote student help seeking behaviors. For example, positive teacher-student relationships may facilitate mental health help seeking behaviors among students by fostering trusting relationships that help decrease perceived stigma, fear, embarrassment and shyness some of the most prevalent barriers to youth accessing mental health care.[27]

Teachers have always been tasked with more than ensuring academic success. Given the unique circumstances presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, positive student-teacher relationships have been a crucial component of whether students succeed.

Implementing Academic Rigor in the Secondary Choral Classroom

According to research, academic rigor across all age groups suffered during the COVID-19 pandemic. Kayra Tasci, Ryan Anderson, and Merritt Drewery conducted research and deduced that, "Ultimately, [data highlighted that] Covid-19 changed not only the format of

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[26] Stephen Clift, Sharon Manship, and Lizzi Stephens, "Further Evidence that Singing Fosters Mental Health and Wellbeing: The West Kent and Medway Project," *Mental Health and Social Inclusion* 21, no. 1 (2017): 53-62, http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fscholarly-journals%2Ffurther.

[27] Jillian Halladay, et al., "Teacher-student relationships and mental health help seeking behaviors among elementary and secondary students in Ontario Canada," *Journal of School Psychology* 81 (2020): 1-10, ISSN 0022-4405, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2020.05.003.

secondary classrooms, but also the level of academic rigor."[28] In the choral classroom, instead of

a hands-on approach to singing, which should have included the development of vocal technique,

sight-reading skills, music analysis, and music performance, students were instead given menial

assignments to stay busy. Early research also suggested that the general attitude from

administrators was that as long as students were turning in assignments, they should get close to,

if not full credit.

As noted by Matthew J. Myers, the lack of academic rigor was problematic for some

programs prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. In his article, "Standards-Based Assessment for

Secondary Choral Ensembles: A Framework to Document Student Learning," he stated:

> Music education provides opportunities for student growth and a rich variety of learning opportunities. Performing in music ensembles can benefit students' personal lives, help them develop skills they will use as future professionals, offer opportunities for critical thinking, and sustain their learning across the curriculum. However, too many schools allow students to earn passing grades in ensembles simply for attending and not causing trouble. If teachers increase their commitment to assessment, they can guide their choral students to learn rather than simply attend. Assessments provide formative development to students as they grow in musicianship and performance skill. By incorporating regular individualized assessments which address all eleven of the national anchor standards, music educators ensure that their students receive a well-rounded musical experience which will not only benefit them in the present day but will provide them skills to serve the world as self-actualized musicians in the future.[29]

The COVID-19 pandemic allowed choral music teachers the opportunity to reevaluate their

approach to teaching and redevelop classroom curricula that are far more beneficial to a student's

musical growth through an increase in academic rigor.

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[28] Kayra Tasci, Ryan Anderson, and Merritt Drewery, "Altered Academic Rigor in the Secondary Classroom During COVID-19: How and Why," accessed June 9, 2023, https://symposium.foragerone.com/txsturctf21/presentations/20748.

[29] Matthew J. Myers, "Standards-based assessment for secondary choral ensembles: a framework to document student learning," *Arts Education Policy Review* 124, iss. 1 (2023): 1-12, https://doi.org/10.1080/10632913.2021.1877229.

Overview of the Significance of Study

Even during a normal school year, building a solid secondary choral music program requires much work, and research points to the importance of choral music for social and academic development. In a research study by Chorus America, "70% of parents said their child has become more self-confident, more self-disciplined, and has developed better memory skills since joining a choir; 80% of educators surveyed agree with parent assessments that choir participation can enhance numerous aspects of a child's social development and academic success."[30] This study also eluded to why the lack of in-person choir classes held such significance, as, "a full 90% of educators surveyed believe choir participation can keep some students engaged in school who might otherwise be lost."[31] Choral music classes are an integral part of school settings and must exist for the benefit of academic achievement and for the social and emotional benefits associated with singing.

Building a strong choral program takes dedication and careful planning. As noted by John Bertalot, "All improvements in your choir will involve you in extra work. If you want the members of your choir to work harder for you, you must work harder for them."[32] After the COVID-19 pandemic, secondary choral music educators had to work more diligently than previously required to motivate students. It has been crucial for educators to find healthy motivation. In a book organized and compiled by James Jordan and Michele Holt, it is noted that "To motivate (by definition) means to provide with a motive. As a force, stimulus, or influence. Noun, motivation is further explained as the act or process of motivating, being a motivation is

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[30] "The Chorus Impact Study: How Children, Adults, and Communities Benefit from Choruses," *Chorus America*, accessed April 26, 2022, https://chorusamerica.org/publications/research-reports/chorus-impact-study.

[31] Ibid.

[32] John Bertalot, *How to be a Successful Choir Director* (Stowmarket, UK: Kevin Mayhew, LTD., 2002), 4.

often confused with manipulation. When an extrinsic reward is used to stimulate an individual to

accomplish a given task, it often refocuses the desired energy on the product rather than the

process."[33]

Music classrooms are a haven for many students. Author and composer Shanthi Murali

wrote, "Choral music provides a safe space for people to express themselves musically. All

choirs I have assembled have a mix of trained and untrained singers. The trained singers play the

role of mentors; everyone rises to her fullest potential and in the process, there is so much

positive energy generated"[34] Additionally, Higgins and Willingham noted that "Empathetic

practice is a key to the building of communities, and developing the capacity to show empathy

towards the challenges that are being faced daily by those around us enables us to value the

realities, the good and the bad. Community music values process but insists on the rigor of

developing the musical potential to the fullest."[35] Now that COVID-19 is no longer classified as

a pandemic, secondary choir directors have worked to balance empathy and rigorous musical

expectations while addressing the social and emotional needs of students. Teachers must be

careful not to sacrifice academic rigor because of the emotional toll COVID-19 has had on

students.

Secondary choral directors and administrators have worked to motivate students to join or

even rejoin choir. Additionally, they have addressed existing fears surrounding a COVID-19

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[33] James Jordan and Michele Holt, *The School Choral Program: Philosophy, Planning, Organizing, and Teaching* (Central.Chicago: GIA Publications, 2020), 600, accessed June 8, 2021, ProQuest Ebook.

[34] Shanthi Murali, "Building Community through Music." *Sruti*, no. 395 (August 2017): 56–59, accessed June 13, 2021, https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ibh&AN=124466366&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

[35] Lee Higgins and Lee Willingham, *Engaging in Community Music: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 48.

resurgence, students' social and emotional health, student recruitment, and academic rigor. Teachers and administrators have also addressed constituent concerns, in hopes that they will fully participate and support their programs. There have always been challenges in building secondary choral music programs, but the COVID-19 pandemic presented unique challenges that required unique solutions. Choral music educators, administrators, students, and constituents have worked communally to ensure the challenges were met with solutions, and this study provided solutions that have not only been applicable post-COVID-19, but these solutions will likely protect against future disruptions in education.

Research Questions

The primary research questions for this study were:

Research Question 1: What aspects of the in-person choral music classroom experience were valued most during the COVID-19 pandemic according to the perspectives of secondary choral students?

Research Question 2: What are some significant challenges students and educators faced in secondary school choral programs post-COVID-19?

Research Question 3: What strategies were used by secondary school choral music educators to overcome the unique post-COVID-19 challenges to ensure student success in the music classroom?

Research Question 4: What repertoire themes can secondary school choral educators utilize to help alleviate COVID-19-related student-anxiety issues?

This study examined the social and emotional impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on secondary school students, specifically secondary choral music students, as well as the perceptions of choral music educators and students. It included surveys and interviews to collect

data. Additionally, this study analyzed current trends for building choral music programs. The findings are presented on how these strategies can be adapted when considering the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on secondary choral music classrooms.

This study utilized the convergent mixed methods design to address and answer the research questions about the tools and strategies helpful in the rebuilding of secondary choral music classrooms post COVID-19 pandemic. Creswell and Creswell define convergent mixed methods as "a form of mixed methods design in which the researcher converges or merges quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive analysis of the research problem."[36] This method allowed the opportunity to combine current research with data from perception surveys that then informed the tools and strategies needed to rebuild secondary choral music programs.

Research about the social and emotional impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was combined with choir director surveys and student perception data about how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted programs and social and emotional health, as well as the tools and strategies utilized to rebuild secondary choral music programs. Additionally, secondary choral music students participated in a survey about the impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on their social and emotional health and their needs to feel safe and be successful in the classroom.

<div align="center">Hypotheses</div>

The following includes the four guiding research questions for this study as well as the associated hypotheses:

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[36] John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2018), 15.

Research Question 1: What aspects of the in-person choral music classroom experience were valued most during the COVID-19 pandemic, according to the perspectives of secondary choral students?

Hypothesis 1: Aspects of the in-person choral music classroom experience were valued most during the COVID-19 pandemic according to the perspectives of secondary choral students included social interaction, the opportunity to sing (even with restrictions), musical creativity, and an intentional focus on mental and social health awareness.

Research Question 2: What were some significant challenges students and educators faced in secondary school choral programs post-COVID-19?

Hypothesis 2: Some significant challenges students and educators faced in secondary school choral programs post-COVID-19 included fear of singing, trust, unique social and emotional needs, and less rigor in the classroom.

Research Question 3: What strategies may be used by secondary school choral music educators to overcome the unique challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure student success in the music classroom?

Hypothesis 3: Strategies that may be used by secondary school choral music educators to overcome the unique challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure student success in the music classroom may include the implementation of safe singing practices, the adaptation of teaching strategies to meet unique student needs, and the utilization of community building strategies, so administrators, students, and constituents are directly involved in the restructuring process.

Research Question 4: What repertoire themes can be utilized by secondary school choral educators to help alleviate COVID-19 related student-anxiety issues?

Hypothesis 4: Repertoire themes that can be utilized by secondary school choral music educators to help alleviate COVID-19-related student-anxiety issues include topics of hope, love, awareness, and community.

Core Concepts

The core concepts of this study revolve around the impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on secondary choral music students. While most classes during the 2021-2022 school year resumed normally, there was much concern about the spread of COVID-19 through singing. Consequently, choral music classrooms were severely impacted, resulting in limited in-person rehearsal and few, if any, in-person performances. Moving back to regular in-person rehearsals and mask-free concerts will take time, planning, and careful attention to choral music students' social and emotional health.

The rebuilding of secondary choral music programs will require a specific focus on Social Emotional Learning (SEL). Scott Edgar states, "SEL is a 'unifying concept for organizing and coordinating school-based programming that focuses on positive youth development, health promotion, prevention of problem behaviors, and student engagement in learning'"[37] While SEL has long been utilized in education, its use post-COVID-19 will be instrumental in rebuilding the secondary choral music classroom; therefore, SEL tools and strategies will be analyzed for extensive use in the choral classroom.

Secondary choral music programs will require a renewed focus on student-teacher relationships, teacher-teacher relationships, teacher-administrator relationships, and teacher-community relationships. While these relationships have always been meaningful, there will

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[37] Scott Edgar, Music Education and Social Emotional Learning. the Heart of Teaching Music (Chicago: Gia Publications, Inc., 2020), 14.

likely be hesitancy in a post-COVID-19 school environment, so this study addressed how to overcome this hesitancy and successfully move forward.

Definition of Terms

Choir: [Originally], an organized body of singers performing or leading in the musical parts of a church service.[38] As society evolved, choirs did not perform exclusively for church and were also heard outside the church. Choirs may perform without accompaniment or may be accompanied by any instrumental combination, from piano to full orchestra. For this thesis, the following words will be used interchangeably but will each mean an organized company of singers: choir, chorus, choral ensemble, and vocal ensemble. A choir can include any age group and any grouping of voices.

Choral Music: Music performed by a group of singers or a choir. Although it originated in the church, choral music "began to leak outside of the church, and into more secular performances. Though still used in church, choral music in the secular arena had greater license to experiment away from the rigid strictures of the church."[39]

COVID-19: An infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. Most people infected with the virus experience mild to moderate respiratory illness and recover without requiring special treatment. However, some become seriously ill and require medical attention.[40]

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[38] André de Quadros, ed., "Choral Music: History and Context." Chapter, in *The Cambridge Companion to Choral Music*, Cambridge Companions to Music, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

[39] Calgary Children's Choir, "A Brief History of Choral Music," accessed July 17, 2023, https://calgarychildrenschoir.com/a-brief-history-of-choral-music/.

[40] World Health Organization, "Coronavirus disease (COVID-19)," accessed April 20, 2022, https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus#tab=tab_1.

Pandemic: A disease covering a wide geographic area, disease movement that is traceable, high attack rates and explosiveness, having minimal population immunity, diseases that are fairly new, having a high rate of infection, having a high rate of contagiousness, and having severe symptoms and fatality rates.[41] For the purpose of this study, the COVID-19 pandemic refers to the widespread outbreak of COVID-19 throughout most of the world, beginning in March 2020.

Secondary Choral Music Program: A choir program that includes students in grades 7-12. A secondary choral music program is comprised primarily of vocal and choral music classes. Students in a secondary choral music program are called secondary choral music students. Courses that are generally classified as vocal or choral music classes include various levels and sizes of ensembles, including choir, chorus, vocal technique, and sometimes musical theatre. These classes are taught by a secondary choral music teacher.

Secondary Education: Secondary education covers ages 11 or 12 through 18 or 19 and is divided into two levels: lower and upper secondary (levels 2 and 3). For the purposes of statistical comparability, the United States has defined lower secondary education as grades 7 through 9 and upper secondary as grades 10 through 12. In the United States, lower secondary education is the loose equivalent of intermediate school, middle school, or junior high school [and] upper secondary education immediately follows lower secondary education and includes general (academic), technical, and vocational education, or any combination thereof.[42]

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[41] David M. Morens, Gregory K. Folkers and Anthony S. Fauci, "What Is a Pandemic?," *The Journal of Infectious Diseases*, Volume 200, Issue 7, October 1, 2009, Pages 1018–1021, https://doi.org/10.1086/644537

[42] National Center for Education Statistics, "Education Indicators."

Social and emotional learning (SEL): The process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions.[43]

Chapter Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic left lasting effects on society but particularly on secondary students and secondary educators. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers were not given the tools to effectively teach remotely. Furthermore, students were not given the tools to effectively manage their academic success, and their mental and emotional health declined. Through student surveys and choral music teacher interviews, as well as previous and current research on the social and emotional impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the development of specific tools and strategies to rebuild the secondary choral music classroom was developed. Furthermore, the implications of this research also provided proactive measures that can be taken in the future. This research addressed the unique needs teachers, students, administrators, parents, supporters of the arts, and community constituents faced during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although schools are now largely operating under pre-COVID practices, the implications of this study will aid administrators, teachers, and students should future educational disruptions occur. Secondary choral music teachers need to rebuild relationships intentionally, and there will also be a need to reevaluate every aspect of the secondary choral music classroom. While the COVID-19 pandemic's impact has been far-reaching and largely negative, this pandemic has also provided time for the necessary reevaluation of many teaching practices.

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[43] "Fundamentals of SEL," CASEL, retrieved March 15, 2022, https://casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel/.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the existing literature and research about

several aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic. This chapter includes six sections. The first section

highlights the impact the COVID-19 pandemic had and continues to have on mental health. The

second section concerns the impact the COVID-19 pandemic had and continues to have on

secondary education. Section three is about COVID-19's impact on the safety of those who are

singing with others, followed by a section that highlights research pertaining to the positive

influence of choral singing on mental health. Section five relates to how music can be used for

community building. The final section addresses choir recruitment challenges and strategies

experienced and utilized before the COVID-19 pandemic. The research gleaned from this

literature review, coupled with the author's qualitative study, aided in developing tools and

strategies necessary to rebuild secondary choral music education programs.

COVID-19 and its Impact on Mental Health

According to Kahn, Mamun, Griffiths, and Ullah, the World Health Organization (WHO)

defines mental health as "the state of well-being in which an individual realizes their capabilities

to combat with normal life stressors and work competencies in contributing to the belonged

community, which is underpinned by six psychological elements comprising (i) self-acceptance,

(ii) meaning in life, (iii) autonomy, (iv) healthy relationships with others, (v) environmental

mastery, and (vi) personal growth."[1] Their research concluded the following:

> These mental health and emotional issues are now among the foremost public health
> concerns throughout the world because of the novel coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19)
> pandemic, due to fear of infection or fear of death from the virus. Consequently, many
> individuals are suffering from elevated anxiety, anger, confusion, and posttraumatic
> symptoms. Studies have reported that the spatial distancing, self-isolation, quarantine,
> social and economic discord, and misinformation (particularly on social media) are
> among the major contributing factors towards unusual sadness, fear, frustration, feelings
> of helplessness, loneliness, and nervousness. In extreme cases, it may trigger suicidal
> thoughts and attempts and, in some cases, actually result in suicide.[2]

Gazmararian, Weingart, Campbell, et al. observed that the "abrupt move to online

learning in mid-March 2020 introduced mitigation strategies of social distancing and stay-at

home-orders to reduce viral spread, which likely have consequences on students' mental health,

including increased loneliness, anxiety, or depression. Preliminary cross-sectional findings in a

study of high school-aged adolescents in China indicated an increase in depressive and anxiety

symptoms during the COVID-19 pandemic."[3] The goal of this analysis was to "assess the impact

of the COVID-19 pandemic on the stress and mental health of high school…Specifically, this

study explores if students were generally concerned about the pandemic, and whether they were

experiencing pandemic-related stressors, such as financial concerns or family issues, as well as if

the pandemic affected students' depression, anxiety, and other mental health outcomes."[4]

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[1] Kiran Shafiq Khan, et al., "The Mental Health Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic Across Different Cohorts," *International Journal of Mental Health Addiction* 20, (2022): 380-386, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11469-020-00367-0.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Julie Gazmararian, et al., "Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on the Mental Health of Students From 2 Semi-Rural High Schools in Georgia," *Journal of School Health* 91, 5 (2021): 356-369. https://doi.org/10.1111/josh.13007.

[4] Ibid.

According to its authors, this study contributes to the existing, though limited, research examining the mental health impact of COVID-19 on adolescents. Gazmararian et al. stated that the results were surprisingly consistent with studies among high school students from China. These results indicated that approximately "20-25% of adolescents were experiencing general mental strife, depression, and anxiety related to the pandemic."[5] The results of these studies imply that the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the mental health of secondary students worldwide.

Research by Kathryn Ross of the United Nations Foundation also illustrated the impact COVID-19 has had and continues to have on mental health. In her article, Konstantinos Petsanis stated that when it comes to life post-pandemic, what worries him most is mental health. "Mental health repercussions regarding what is happening during this pandemic for people, today and beyond, will really be a problem in general," Petsanis concluded. He continued, "In general, stress behaviour for many, many people brings a lot of problems."[6] Additionally, "Just the fact of someone wondering if he is positive for COVID is like having a stigma and something that is threatening his life…and that affects, of course, his behavior. We know very well that panic leads to bad behavior and to psychosomatic problems as well, and that brings on somatic problems very, very easily, and we have to be careful and delicate with how we handle this."[7]

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[5] Gazmararian, et al., "Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on the Mental Health of Students From 2 Semi-Rural High Schools in Georgia," 32.

[6] Kathryn Ross, "Facing the Mental Health Fallout from the Coronavirus Pandemic," *United Nations Foundation,* May 28, 2020, accessed October 10, 2021, https://unfoundation.org/blog/post/facing-mental-health-fallout-coronavirus-pandemic/?gclid=CjwKCAjwk6-LBhBZEiwAOUUDp5Unv7X6XsTj9fMMSJorqklDfcWEFvwGZJE_eN9Ia_ofWHSpAOStYxoCGxUQAvD_BwE

[7] Ibid.

Adding to the concerned voices about mental health during and after the COVID-19-Pandemic, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres remarked, "Unless we act now to address the mental health needs associated with the pandemic, there will be enormous long-term consequences for families, communities and societies."[8] And finally, Petsanis is concerned that "this corona period is a big alarm, a wake-up call to invest in human capacity."[9]

Research has confirmed that COVID-19's impact on mental health was far-reaching. In a survey by the mental health charity *YoungMinds*, which included 2111 participants up to age 25 years with a mental illness history in the UK, Joyce Lee noted that "83% said the pandemic had made their conditions worse. 26% said they were unable to access mental health support; peer support groups and face-to-face services have been canceled, and support by phone or online can be challenging for some young people."[10] Lee continued, attesting that school routines are important coping mechanisms for young people with mental health issues. Her research deduced that when schools are closed, students lose a sense of normalcy in their lives, which could cause a relapse in mental health symptoms. Lee's assessment is a continued confirmation of the complexity of mental health issues surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic.

Lee's article referenced Zanonia Chiu, a registered clinical psychologist working with children and adolescents in Hong Kong, who said that "Going to school had been a struggle for [some children with depression] prior to the pandemic, but at least they had school routines to stick with, but now that schools are closed, some lock themselves up inside their rooms for weeks, refusing to take showers, eat, or leave their beds. For some children with depression,

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[8] Ross, "Facing the Mental Health Fallout from the Coronavirus Pandemic."

[9] Ibid.

[10] Joyce Lee, "Mental health effects of school closures during COVID-19," *Reflections* 6, no. 4 (2020): 421, https://doi.org/10.1016/S2352-4642(20)30109-7.

there will be considerable difficulties adjusting back to normal life when school resumes."[11]

Unfortunately, according to Lee, "not much is known about the long-term mental health effects of large-scale disease outbreaks on children and adolescents."[12]

Valerie J. Calderon concluded that the potential for heightened mental health challenges confronting schools in the fall of 2021 is evident in a new Gallup Panel polling of parents with school-aged children. The poll was conducted via the web in June 2020. This poll indicated that "Nearly three in 10 (29%) say their child is 'already experiencing harm' to their emotional or mental health because of social distancing and closures. Another 14% indicate their children are approaching their limits, saying they could continue social distancing a few more weeks until their mental health suffers."[13] Moreover, "While children make up relatively few cases among confirmed COVID-19 patients in the U.S., these survey results suggest that pandemic response measures are taking a toll on the wellbeing of some."[14]

According to research, it is not just children who are suffering. Calderon stated that in early April 2021, Gallup found that "15% of U.S. adults reported that they themselves were already experiencing harm to their own emotional or mental health because of social distancing practices and closures; 18% said they would be suffering in just a few more weeks. One month later, the percentage of adults already experiencing harm increased to 22%, and 13% indicated

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[11] Lee, "Mental health effects of school closures during COVID-19," 421.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Valerie J. Calderon, "U.S. Parents say COVID-19 Harming Child's Mental Health," Gallup, June 16, 2020, accessed October 9, 2021, https://news.gallup.com/poll/312605/parents-say-covid-harming-child-mental-health.aspx.

[14] Ibid.

their emotional and mental health would suffer in a few more weeks."[15] Even still, in the same

time period in May, "more parents indicate that their children's emotional or mental health is

already suffering."[16] Calderon deduced that the implications of this survey are that some parents

are already concerned for the emotional and mental health of their children in the midst of

pandemic response measures and that school closures not only upended most students' learning

mode, it deeply disrupted students' social networks and interactions with classmates and

teachers.

A research study by Sarah Brown and Alexander C. Kafka included statistics related to

the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on college-aged students. According to an April 2020

survey by Active Minds, a national mental-health advocacy group, "80 percent of college

students say the Covid-19 crisis has negatively affected their mental health. One-fifth say it has

significantly worsened."[17] For many students, said Kelly Crace, associate vice president for

health and wellness at the College of William & Mary, "uncertainty is at the root of their

pandemic-related distress. 'The thing I hear from students is a lot of the 'but' sentences.'

Sentences like: 'I can finish the semester remotely. But if this goes into July, I can't handle it.'"[18]

Crace continued, "They've lost their usual coping mechanisms. Students can text or call their

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[15] Calderon, "U.S. Parents say COVID-19 Harming Child's Mental Health."

[16] Ibid.

[17] Sarah Brown and Alexander C. Kafka, "COVID-19 Has Worsened the Student Mental-Health Crisis. Can Resilience Training Fix It?" *The Chronicle of Higher Education,* May 11, 2020, accessed October 10, 2021, https://www.chronicle.com/article/covid-19-has-worsened-the-student-mental-health-crisis-can-resilience-training-fix-it/?bc_nonce=0ckynnpyj959pjc0cg6zkyp&cid=reg_wall_signup.

[18] Ibid.

college friends, but it's not the same as getting together for a movie night. Classes can feel like

an uninspiring imitation of the real thing."[19]

COVID-19 and its Impact on Secondary Education

One need not look far to see that COVID-19 has had a direct impact on secondary

education. Authors Butnaru, Niță, Anichiti, and Brînză noted in their research that:

> The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has led to the temporary interruption of educational activities in the classroom…University students and high school students in their final years are in an unprecedented situation, which does not allow for a clear perspective of the future…The length of the pandemic and its effects on daily life, costs and other financial issues can directly affect the continuation of the education of university students and high school students, and the vulnerability caused by the disturbances in the academic space is worrying. The situation of both undergraduate and postgraduate students has generated unfavorable conditions, such as the necessity to drop out of education. A feeling of exclusion was created by the pandemic situation, outlining an image of inequity in the academic education system.[20]

This research indicates that the impact of COVID-19 is far-reaching and negatively impacted

students of all levels. The pandemic has also brought to surface many existing problems within

education, including inequity among students, which likely influences the social and emotional

health of students.

Kiran Khan wrote, "evidence suggests children and adolescents are less vulnerable to

infection from COVID-19, but their psychosocial functioning has also been affected during the

pandemic."[21] He further stated, "Quarantine periods, school closures, lack of outdoor activities,

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[19] Brown, "COVID-19 Has Worsened the Student Mental-Health Crisis."

[20] Gina Ionela Butnaru, Valentin Niță, Alexandru Anichiti, and Geanina Brînză, "The Effectiveness of Online Education during Covid 19 Pandemic—A Comparative Analysis between the Perceptions of Academic Students and High School Students from Romania," *Sustainability* 13, no. 9 (2021): 5311, http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fscholarly-journals%2Feffectiveness-online-education-during-covid-19%2Fdocview%2F2530166330%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D12085.

[21] Gazmararian, et al., "Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on the Mental Health of Students."

aberrant diets, disrupted habits, domestic violence, and child abuse have resulted in monotony, distress, impatience, annoyance, and neuropsychiatric problems for some children and adolescents."[22] Adding to the impact COVID-19 has had on secondary education, as well as the needs of secondary students, Kahn concluded, "Adolescents with mental health problems prior to the pandemic need special attention to help cope with quarantine because such closures mean a lack of access to the resources they had in school. School routines distract such individuals from their illness, and not being able to attend school can result in stressful life situations and family conflicts."[23]

Among the general population, which includes secondary educators, Khan remarked that, "COVID-19 transmission fear has facilitated the development of psychiatric symptoms such as depression, confusion, stress, and anxiety among individuals who have never previously experienced mental illness."[24] Khan even pointed out that, "At a community level, individuals may become suspicious towards others in terms of disease spread. Some individuals may develop fear of becoming very ill or dying helplessly. They may also blame one another and develop aggressive behavior towards people who are ill or perceived as ill, and this may also aggravate severe mental and emotional distress.[25] This paranoia within the general population will only add to the mental health crisis, therefore it is critical to be keenly aware of the challenges faced by persons of all ages.

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[22] Gazmararian, et al., "Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on the Mental Health of Students."

[23] Khan, et al., "The Mental Health Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic Across Different Cohorts."

[24] Ibid.

[25] Butnaru, et al., "The Effectiveness of Online Education during Covid 19 Pandemic," 5311.

Online learning has also impacted secondary education. Butnaru et al. declared that "Although there are studies suggesting that online and traditional education are comparable in terms of learning outcomes, it is also admitted that online learning is perceived as lacking in interactivity compared with classroom learning."[26] However, Butnaru et al., also concluded that there have been positive outcomes garnered from the swift transition to online education. According to Butnaru et al., online education has the potential to positively impact the education system by expanding educational opportunities, transforming student populations and encouraging the development of new pedagogical methods, making the learning process more efficient, more reliable, and less stressful for students and teachers. The effectiveness of online education has even demonstrated several advantages such as increased flexibility and learning opportunities. These advantages include, "easy access to experts, exposure to educational environments, a wide range of types of courses, and joining student communities."[27] There are also several disadvantages of online education, including "internet browsing issues, computer compatibility, or technical issues."[28] Despite the potential for online learning to benefit society as whole, the majority of administrators, teachers, students, and parents were not prepared for the quick transition.

As reported by Butnaru, et al., "in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the sudden and forced transition from traditional education to online education has had negative effects on the preparation of university students and high school students; these effects are generated by problems with access to technology and internet networks, and by the diminished quality of

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[26] Butnaru, et al., "The Effectiveness of Online Education during Covid 19 Pandemic," 5311.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid.

teaching."[29] Butnaru et al. cautioned that "the coronavirus pandemic differs from one country to another, but for the educational environment it is extremely important to take measures aimed at protecting young students and, implicitly, their health, such as: providing students with equal and non-discriminatory education opportunities, equal training for all students, protection of students with various vulnerabilities, and the use of opportunities regarding the possibilities of reorganization of the instructional/educational process."[30]

Ian Scott, while he fully acknowledged the challenges of teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, also noted that, "One significant aspect of the educational game that we have likely been thinking about is what we may have lost as we move our educational practice to virtual learning."[31] Scott presented the following question that he feels teachers should ask themselves as online lessons are created: "How well will the students engage with my online course, how should I adjust my assessments to be fair and ensure that the students learn the correct things and how can I support the social connections between students, myself and the programme?"[32]

Additionally, Scott suggested that, "As we consider what may be lost in the shift to virtual learning, we should also take the opportunity to reflect on what our previous 'normal' practices were accomplishing, and whether they were really doing what we wanted or needed them to do in an optimal way."[33]

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[29] Butnaru, et al., "The Effectiveness of Online Education during Covid 19 Pandemic," 5311.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ian Scott, "Education during COVID-19: pivots and consequences," *The Clinical Teacher* 17, iss. 4 (2020): 443- 444. https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1111/tct.13225

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid.

COVID-19 and Singing Safety

It has been well-established that singing generates aerosols and droplets. A 1968 study from Loudon and Roberts concluded that singing increased the spreading of tuberculosis compared to talking.[34] On April 29th, 2020, Germany set out rules for religious services including a ban on singing.[35] A study from Mürbe et al. demonstrated increase in particle emission during singing and emphasized the importance of risk management for singing.[36] In another study, aerosol concentrations produced by speaking, singing, and breathing were analyzed. It was found that speaking and singing showed steep increases in mass concentration with increase in volume.[37] This study found that at the quietest volume neither singing or speaking was significantly different than breathing; however, at the loudest volume, "a statistically significant difference was observed between singing and speaking, with singing generating a factor of between 1.5 and 3.4 more aerosol mass, further distinguishing the capability for aerosol production during singing."[38]

During the COVID-19 pandemic, there were multiple choir events cited with COVID-19 outbreaks. On March 29, 2020, the LA Times reported on a choir that decided to hold practice during the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Following a two-and-a-half-hour choir practice attended by 61 persons, including a symptomatic index patient, "32 confirmed and 20

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[34] Dylan Vance, Priyanka Shah, and Robert T. Sataloff, COVID-19: Impact on the Musician and Returning to Singing; A Literature Review. J Voice. 2021 Jan 14:S0892-1997(21)00003-5. doi: 10.1016/j.jvoice.2020.12.042. Epub ahead of print. PMID: 33583675; PMCID: PMC7808728.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid.

probable secondary COVID-19 cases occurred; three patients were hospitalized, and two died.

They found that transmission was likely facilitated by close proximity (within 6 ft) during

practice and augmented by the act of singing."[39] Although the COVID-19 pandemic is no longer

impacting how large groups gather at events, this research provides information on how groups

will safely sing together, should a similar pandemic occur in the future.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the American Choral Directors Association

released a 108-page document outlining protocols and suggestions for safely resuming choral

singing in a classroom and worship setting. The introduction to this document was as follows:

> As the national voice for choral musicians across the United States, the American Choral Directors Association serves to nurture the choral music culture, to move the culture forward, and to provide leadership on behalf of every choral conductor/educator to navigate through troubling times and/or unique challenges. Choral directors are resilient, resourceful, and exemplary leaders. During the Spring of 2020, we were asked to make enormous adaptations to our instruction as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In many cases, we were asked to do so with as little as one week of preparation. Directors passionate about their students/parishioners/community worked tirelessly to serve their singers and to keep them engaged with the choral art. In haste to transmit information, many organizations delivered and continue to deliver speculation and opinion. Data are not altogether clear, though the general consensus is that singing produces unique challenges in addressing the spread of the virus. Choir directors continue to seek answers that are not readily available and that continue to evolve as more empirical research is conducted. In the meantime, we remain cheerful advocates for one another and our art. We urge the choral community to resist sharing speculative or opinion-based information, but instead, participate in scenario planning, in consideration of all options before us, in hopeful anticipation that we will soon return to "normal" music making that inspires and sustains us. We monitor our local and CDC guidelines, understanding that there is no "one size fits all" approach, and that regions are differentially impacted. As new information arrives, we adjust our perception of the risk and our ensuing practices.[40]

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[39] Vance, Shah, and Sataloff, "COVID-19."

[40] American Choral Directors Association, "COVID-19 Response Committee Report," June 15, 2020, https://acda.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/ACDA-COVID-19-Committee-Report.pdf.

Since this was released, there has been further research and updated guidelines about safely

singing in the context of choral ensemble participation, but should there be future pandemics, the

protocols and suggestions could possibly be utilized once again.

Choral Singing and its Impact on Mental Health

Authors Laetitia Livesey, Ian Morrison, Stephen Clift, and Paul Camic stated that, "In

many cultures and times, music has been understood to have a beneficial impact on health.

Group singing may have particular and specific benefits for health over other forms of music-

making and music listening, as it involves using the body to produce sound in a synchronized

and coordinated way with other people."[41] Although Livesey et al., admitted that at the time this

article was written there was very little research about the positive effects choral singings has on

mental health, they stated that:

> Group singing might, for example, help to enhance 'social capital' with consequent
> benefits for wellbeing and health. Social capital refers to the engagement of the
> individual in community, personal and formal social networks, and the development of
> trust and reciprocity within those networks. A systematic review into the impact of social
> capital on mental health found that there was strong evidence that high social capital is
> associated with fewer common mental health problems.[42]

While there has been little formal research about the effects of choral singing on mental

health, according to Antje Bullack, Carolin Gass, Urs M. Nater, and Gunter Kreutz, "One

recurrent finding is that regular choral singing is associated with enhanced perceptions of

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[41] Laetitia Livesey, et al., "Benefits of Choral Singing for Social and Mental Wellbeing: Qualitative Findings from a Cross-National Survey of Choir Members." *Journal of Public Mental Health* 11, no. 1 (2012): 10-26, http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fscholarly-journals%2Fbenefits-choral-singing-social-mental-wellbeing%2Fdocview%2F1012280296%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D12085.

[42] Ibid.

positive affect, well-being, and quality of life."[43] Other research suggested these positive effects are not necessarily unique to choral singing. Adam J. Lonsdale and Evelyn R. Day wrote an article comparing the psychological benefits of six activity groups. Analysis indicated that participants who sang in a choir reported "similar levels of psychological well-being, happiness, anxiety, depression, and self-esteem to those who took part in the other five leisure activities."[44] However, significant differences were found on measures of autonomy and relatedness, but participants in all six groups also reported experiencing similar levels of competence when engaged in their chosen leisure activity. These findings suggest choral singing might not be "uniquely beneficial, and any leisure activity that offers opportunities for improvement, mastery of a new skill, or a sense of accomplishment might have a positive effect on our psychological well-being."[45]

While the research presented by Lonsdale and Day suggested that improved mental health is not unique to choral singing, it is still linked to choral singing. Jacques Launay, a postdoctoral researcher in experimental psychology at the University of Oxford wrote that the physiological benefits of singing, and music more generally, have long been explored. Launay attested that, "Music making exercises the brain as well as the body, but singing is particularly beneficial for improving breathing, posture and muscle tension. Listening to and participating in

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[43] Antje Bullack, et al., "Psychobiological Effects of Choral Singing on Affective State, Social Connectedness, and Stress: Influences of Singing Activity and Time Course," *Frontiers in Behavioral Neuroscience* (Sep 27, 2018), http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fscholarly-journals%2Fpsychobiological-effects-choral-singing-on%2Fdocview%2F2299520824%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D12085.

[44] Adam J. Lonsdale and Evelyn R Day, "Are the Psychological Benefits of Choral Singing Unique to Choirs? A Comparison of Six Activity Groups," *Psychology of Music* 49, no. 5 (September 2021): 1179–98, https://doi.org/10.1177/0305735620940019.

[45] Ibid.

music has been shown to be effective in pain relief, too, probably due to the release of neurochemicals such as β-endorphin (a natural painkiller responsible for the "high" experienced after intense exercise)."[46] Launay further stated, "There's also some evidence to suggest that music can play a role in sustaining a healthy immune system, by reducing the stress hormone cortisol and boosting the Immunoglobin A antibody."[47]

Launay's research outlined further benefits to singing as well, concluding that "Singing has also been shown to improve our sense of happiness and wellbeing."[48] Launay's research has found, for example, that "people feel more positive after actively singing than they do after passively listening to music or after chatting about positive life events. Improved mood probably in part comes directly from the release of positive neurochemicals such as β-endorphin, dopamine and serotonin."[49] It is also likely to be "influenced by changes in our sense of social closeness with others."[50] This research points to the positive impact singing has on mental health, and therefore the important role music could play in a post-COVID-19 world.

As stated by Launay, increasing evidence suggested that our "social connections can play a vital role in maintaining our health – a good social network, for example, can have more health benefits than giving up smoking. So, it's possible that singing can improve health by expanding our social group. Indeed, the rapid social bonding that choirs encourage could therefore be even

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[46] Jacques Launay, "Choir Singing Improves Health, Happiness – And is the Perfect Icebreaker," *University of Oxford,* accessed October 10, 2021, https://www.ox.ac.uk/research/choir-singing-improves-health-happiness-%E2%80%93-and-perfect-icebreaker.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid.

more beneficial."[51] While these benefits are not necessarily unique to choir, they are consistent with singing and being part of a choir. With the absence of choir during the COVID-19 pandemic, the social bonding gained in choir was non-existent.

The health and well-being benefits of singing with a choir were explored and then published in September 2017 by the Irish World Academy of Music and Dance in partnership with Sing Ireland, University of Limerick and Workplace Choir of the Year. First, "Irish singers reported an overwhelmingly positive response in terms of physical and physiological benefits, social benefits, psychological/emotional benefits and spiritual benefits."[52] Second, participants spanned a wide range of ages, from 18 to 90, suggesting that people of all ages find singing to be a beneficial activity for their health and well-being. This highlighted the potential for choirs to improve well-being in a myriad of settings, including but not limited to nursing homes, workplaces and educational institutions. Participants also cited a variety of choral experience, ranging from singing in a choir for all their adult life to singing with a choir for only one year, demonstrating that, "Irrespective of length of experience, responses remained overwhelmingly positive."[53]

Also of importance, "Gender differences were observed in responses. Reports of physical benefits, social benefits and emotional benefits were significantly higher for female participants than for male participants."[54] Equally significant to this research was that the ratio of female to male respondents was approximately 5:1, highlighting on a large-scale international study the

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[51] Ibid.

[52] Sing Ireland, "Benefits of Singing," accessed October 8, 2020, https://www.singireland.ie/participation/benefits-of-singing.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid.

gender imbalance that is often cited in choral settings, as well as many other performing arts activities. Potentially significant to this study is that professional singers scored higher across all domains than amateurs, with the difference being statistically significant within the physical, social, and spiritual categories. According to Sing Ireland, "this finding was not anticipated, as it was expected that amateur singers may report more social benefits than professionals as they pursue singing as a leisure activity or a social gathering as opposed to work."[55] Finally, the key benefits of singing in a choir were increased social connection, improved respiratory health, cognitive stimulation, improved mental health, and transcendence from everyday worries and pain.

Choral Singing and its Impact on Community Building

In a 2009 study called "The Chorus Impact Study," conducted by the Chorus America Foundation, it was determined that "an estimated 42.6 million Americans regularly sing in choruses today. More than 1 in 5 households have at least one singing family member, making choral singing the most popular form of participation in the performing arts for both adults and children."[56] Additionally, the study concluded that "singing in one of the 270,000 choruses in the U.S., such as a community chorus or a school or church choir, is strongly correlated with qualities that are associated with success throughout life."[57] The qualities and attributes fostered by singing in a choral ensemble include greater civic involvement, discipline, and teamwork.

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[55] Sing Ireland, "Benefits of Singing."

[56] "The Chorus Impact Study," Chorus America.

[57] Ibid.

This study presented research that highly correlated with the impact choral singing has on community building.

For example, it was determined that people who sing in choruses demonstrate characteristics that make them good citizens and who are more likely to be generous by volunteering in their communities and contributing money to philanthropic causes. Also, "[Choir members are] far more likely to take on leadership roles, too, and participate in the political process. For instance, 96% of adult choral singers who are eligible voters vote in national and local elections—compared to 70% of the general public who are voters. And an overwhelming number of choral singers report that singing in a chorus has helped them become better team members in other areas of their lives."[58]

As a result of all these perceived effects, the Chorus Impact Study concluded that:

91% of educators believe choruses add to a school's overall sense of community, with as many as 95% of the teachers whose schools have choral programs and 95% of those who teach in schools where chorus participation is high agreeing with this assessment. At a time in our nation's history when it has become critically important to solve the daunting challenges that face our schools and our society, it may be the impact of choral singing on overall school and community participation that proves the most important benefit of all.[59]

The research presented by Chorus America was conducted eleven years prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. This is significant to the research presented in this study, as it demonstrates the continued importance of choral music in building community.

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[58] "The Chorus Impact Study," Chorus America.

[59] Ibid.

Choral Singing and its Impact on Developing Resilience

The American Psychological Association (APA) defines resilience as "both the process and the outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences."[60] Per the APA, aspects of resilience include the mental, emotional, and behavioral flexibility and the ability to adjust to both internal and external demands.[61] Resilience does not mean that people do not experience stress, emotional upheaval, and suffering. Instead, resilience is the act of working through emotional pain and suffering. Katie Hurley states that being resilient demonstrates "your ability to withstand adversity and bounce back and grow despite life's downturns."[62]

Resilience theory refers to the ideas surrounding how people are affected by and adapt to things like adversity, change, loss, and risk. Resilience theory has been studied across different fields, including psychiatry and human development. Hurley notes that, "Resilience theory tells us that resilience isn't a fixed trait (you can grow your capacity to practice resilience). And it's not constant, in that you might demonstrate a lot of resilience when it comes to one challenge you're faced with, but struggle more with being resilient when it comes to another stressor you're up against."[63] Hurley also notes that flexibility, adaptability, and perseverance can help people demonstrate resilience by changing thoughts and behavior. Research shows that, "when students believe that both intellectual abilities and social attributes can be developed and

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[60] "Resilience," American Psychological Association, accessed July 6, 2023, https://www.apa.org/topics/resilience#:~:text=Resilience%20is%20the%20process%20and,to%20external%20and%20internal%20demands.

[61] "Resilience," American Psychological Association.

[62] Katie Hurley, "What is Resilience? Your Guide to Facing Life's Challenges, Adversities, and Crises," Accessed June 20, 2023, https://www.everydayhealth.com/wellness/resilience/

[63] Ibid.

improved they increase their own resilience, showing a lower stress response to adversity and improved performance."[64]

According to Hurley there are five factors that help build resilience. These factors include social support, self-esteem, coping skills, communication skills, and emotional regulation.[65] These factors, while possible to develop in many settings, can be developed through participation in a music ensemble. William James Baker, Anne-Marie Forbes, and Kim McLeod researched how group music making can develop skills beyond how to play an instrument or sing. Their study was based on data collected through initial interviews with players, managers, conductors, and teachers on a closed Facebook site along with eight follow-up interviews. The participants of this study were all members of the Tasmanian Youth Orchestras. Baker, Forbes, and McLeod's findings demonstrate how components of resilience such as teamwork, empathy and grit can be developed through group music making.

Baker, Forbes, and McLeod had this to say about teamwork:

In order for a group of players to make a piece of music work, they have to work together. People have to listen to each other, understand what is happening around them, and be prepared to change how they play something (slow or fast, loud or soft) depending on how the group is performing. You need to be able to value the contributions of other people, not just your own.[66]

Seclusion was a common factor during the COVID-19 pandemic. Students were forced to attend school remotely and therefore missed out on honing skills such as teamwork. Participation in a

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[64] Katie Hurley, "What is Resilience? Your Guide to Facing Life's Challenges, Adversities, and Crises," Accessed June 20, 2023, https://www.everydayhealth.com/wellness/resilience/.

[65] Ibid.

[66] William James Baker, Anne-Marie Forbes, and Kim McLeod, "If you want your child to be more resilient, get them to join a choir, orchestra, or band," accessed March 10, 2023, https://theconversation.com/if-you-want-your-child-to-be-more-resilient-get-them-to-join-a-choir-orchestra-or-band-190657.

music ensemble such as choir is one avenue for developing teamwork, an important facet of resilience.

Empathy is another skill that leads to resilience. Baker, Forbes, and McLeod state that:

> Players also need to be able to understand others in a group and share their feelings. In a choir or orchestra, the music making is a shared creative experience – that involves the whole body. And this is where empathy comes in. Empathy, like teamwork, can be cumulative, growing over time through rehearsals and performances, as players and teachers support one another.[67]

Empathy is a necessary skill to embody during times when a person's well-being is at risk, such as during a world-wide pandemic. Moving forward from the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, empathy will provide the support needed by many students and teachers.

Finally, Baker, Forbes, and McLeod's research implies the importance of grit in developing resilience:

> It is important for young people to develop a "growth mindset", where they understand effort makes them stronger and learning is a long-term commitment. This is where grit also comes in: pursing a goal and sticking with it even if it takes a lot of work or gets difficult. It can take many months to learn a piece of music up to performance standard. And learning an instrument requires practice every day. So commitment is a key part of learning music.[68]

A piece of music can take months to learn, and this learning process develops a quality of commitment in musicians. This type of commitment is similar to what is needed to persevere through a pandemic such as COVID-19.

Although young people work together in sporting teams and academic assignments, music fosters unique opportunities to develop resilience not found in sports or academic

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[67] William James Baker, Anne-Marie Forbes, and Kim McLeod, "If you want your child to be more resilient, get them to join a choir, orchestra, or band," accessed March 10, 2023, https://theconversation.com/if-you-want-your-child-to-be-more-resilient-get-them-to-join-a-choir-orchestra-or-band-190657.

[68] Baker, Forbes, and McLeod, "If you want your child to be more resilient."

assignments. Young people can also work together while playing games, but the research

developed by Baker, Forbes, and McLeod concludes the following:

> Playing music provokes activity in many different parts of the brain at the same time. Listening to music that we like triggers the pleasure/reward centre of the brain. Dopamine and serotonin are released, resulting in that "feel good" sensation, and providing an incentive to keep engaging with music. Learning a musical instrument also strengthens connections in the brain, linking the auditory cortex to parts of the brain involved in the processing of complex information. This link has been shown to improve memory, motor functions and learning in other subject areas. Making music with others also affects levels of the bonding hormone oxytocin, supporting a sense of togetherness, while reducing levels of the stress hormone cortisol, and boosting immune function. For young people, music can provide valuable respite from study and daily life, and help manage and express their emotions.[69]

The research presented by Baker, Forbes, and McLeod concludes that being involved in

choir helps students develop resiliency, which was a necessary trait during the COVID-19

pandemic. Baker, Forbes, and McLeod note that, "One of the most important qualities for a

young person to develop is resilience. This involves their ability to overcome adversity."[70] Many

students quit choir during the COVID-19 pandemic, which could have adversely impacted their

overall social and mental health. Resilience, according to Baker, et al, "is perhaps more

important now than ever. Today's young people have been facing adversity on a mass-scale,

thanks to COVID and all the disruptions to their education and social, home and working

lives."[71]

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[69] Baker, Forbes, and McLeod, "If you want your child to be more resilient."

[70] Ibid.

[71] Ibid.

Choir Recruitment Challenges and Strategies

Secondary choral music teachers were faced with recruitment challenges long before the COVID-19 pandemic. Julianna Ellen Frost presented research in her 2015 master's thesis about these challenges when trying to recruit students for instrumental or choral programs. She noted that, while recent studies have looked at recruitment challenges including socioeconomic issues, parental involvement, intellectual competency, music aptitude and extracurricular activities, "most students' music career does not start when they enroll in beginning band or choral ensembles, as they may have been exposed to music classes as early as kindergarten. General music teachers have the task of introducing students to singing, playing a variety of instruments and creating compositions."[72] Frost concluded that "with this early exposure to music and the methods used by the general music teacher, students can begin to create their own music preferences, which may influence their choice of ensembles at the secondary level."[73] Frosts research findings were not definitive, but do imply early exposure to music has a general impact on secondary students' ensemble participation.

In recruiting singers for choirs, no matter the age, setting, or type, Victoria Hopkins believed two things had to be in place: "First, potential members have to know about the choir. Second, they have to want to sing in the choir."[74] Hopkins also listed seven recruitment strategies directors could implement. The seven strategies are performing, word of mouth, local marketing, developing an online presence, demonstrating excellence, holding open rehearsals, and

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[72] Julianna Ellen Frost, "Recruitment and Retention: The Influence of General Music Teachers Methodology on Secondary Music Ensembles" (Master's thesis, University of Toledo, 2015), 3, https://etd.ohiolink.edu/apexprod/rws_etd/send_file/send?accession=toledo1449848590&disposition=inline

[73] Ibid.

[74] Victoria Hopkins, "Practical tips for recruiting new singers to your choir," *Total Choir Resources,* accessed May 30, 2022, https://www.totalchoirresources.com/blog/67431-practical-tips-for-recruiting-new-singers.

communicating the benefits of being in choir. These seven recruitment strategies were developed

prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, but likely still apply in a post-COVID-19 environment, but

with adaptations based on further research.

According to Hopkins, "every time your choir performs, new people are going to hear

about you. Performance raises your profile in the community, attracts singers and grows your

choir."[75] It is also vital to encourage potential members through word of mouth. Hopkins said

that, "In any community, word of mouth is a powerful way of reaching out to people. Encourage

choir members to help you attract new singers. Involving your existing membership in

recruitment gives them a sense of ownership."[76]

The third recruitment strategy Hopkins listed was to target local marketing: "Local

newspapers, magazines and websites are usually crying out for copy. Send them a timely,

succinct, well-written piece about what your choir's up to and it will probably be published.

Focus on community work and personal stories."[77] Beyond this, utilize a website and social

media. Hopkins concluded it is important that choir directors "don't assume that everyone you

reach online is in some far-flung place. Most people's Facebook connections include friends and

family who live in their area. Ask them to 'like' your Facebook page or follow you on Twitter."[78]

In her fourth recruitment strategy, Hopkins emphasized how important it was to "be

excellent… being excellent at what you do is probably the most important way of attracting new

singers. By 'excellent', I don't mean that you have to be running the most advanced, musically-

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[75] Victoria Hopkins, "Practical tips for recruiting new singers to your choir," *Total Choir Resources,* accessed May 30, 2022, https://www.totalchoirresources.com/blog/67431-practical-tips-for-recruiting-new-singers.

[76] Hopkins, "Practical tips for recruiting."

[77] Ibid.

[78] Ibid.

perfect choir in the world, just that you and your choir should aspire to do whatever you do to the best of your ability.[79] One way to demonstrate this excellence is to hold open rehearsals. Hopkins reiterated that:

> Open rehearsals are great fun for the choir and a chance for prospective members to dip a toe in the water without committing themselves to anything. Include some entertaining warm-ups and exercises that get people laughing and put them at their ease. You could sing some well-known repertoire that new singers are likely to know already or learn easily. Alternatively, you could resurrect pieces that your choir knows well, so that their confident singing can carry along your guests. Lay on some refreshments and plenty of chatting and mingling time and you have a great recipe for attracting new members.[80]

And finally, choir directors must communicate the benefits of being in choir. Hopkins said there are important questions to ask, including, "What do your choir members get out of being in the choir? Have you asked them? Gathering testimonials gives you the opportunity to communicate explicitly to prospective members the benefits they can hope to enjoy when they are part of your choir."[81] Hopkins suggested one should not be afraid to express their talents to others and that if there are exciting plans and projects on the horizon, let people know. She also attested that sometimes performing a particular piece on the next concert may be all the incentive a singer needs to make the leap. Ultimately, there's no magic formula to attracting new singers, and Hopkins believed that if a choir is led with integrity, authenticity and good humor, and strives to be excellent, it will be something that people will want to join.

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[79] Hopkins, "Practical tips for recruiting."

[80] Ibid.

[81] Ibid.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this convergent mixed methods study was to address and answer the research questions about the tools and strategies needed to rebuild secondary choral music classrooms post-COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, the findings of this study will be beneficial to the general school population if faced with another pandemic. This chapter explains the methodology used to conduct the study including the research design, setting, participants, procedures, and methods for data analysis, all in effort to answer the posed research questions.

Design

This convergent mixed methods study was applied to determine the impact that participation in a choral music class has on student's mental health and the impact of not being part of a choral music class due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This study provided necessary information about the rebuilding of secondary choral music programs that were disrupted because of the pandemic. According to Abraham C. Fischler of Southeastern University, there are several instances when the convergent mixed methods study approach is not only necessary, but effective. He provided three instances that were applicable to this study.

The first is "when both quantitative and qualitative data, together, provide a better understanding of your research problem than either type by itself."[1] For this thesis, the use of existing research coupled with survey and interview responses from secondary choral music educators and secondary choral music students was paramount to address the research questions.

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[1] Abraham C. Fischler, "Mixed Methods," accessed May 29, 2022, https://education.nova.edu/Resources/uploads/app/35/files/arc_doc/mixed_methods.pdf.

Data gathered from secondary choral music educators and students who endured the pandemic and then attempted to resume normalcy allowed for synergy between the two types of data.

Fischler stated that the convergent mixed methods study is also effective "when one type of research (qualitative or quantitative) is not enough to address the research problem or answer the research questions."[2] Although there was a substantial amount of stand-alone research related to mental health, choral music, and to an extent, COVID-19, research that addressed the impact COVID-19 has had on secondary choral music students and programs was limited. It was critical to gather both quantitative and qualitative data to best address the problems presented in this research project, as each type of data alone would not suffice to fully answer and address the research questions.

Fischler's final reason for the implementation of the convergent mixed methods study was rooted in pragmatism. This included "practicality; multiple viewpoints; biased and unbiased; subjective and objective."[3] The utilization of interview questions and student perception surveys allowed for this pragmatism. The use of multiple viewpoints for this research provided a more complete understanding of the ways COVID-19 impacted both secondary choral music educators and secondary choral music students. The inclusion of multiple viewpoints allowed for solutions with practical application.

The research strategy was chosen because it permitted a form of mixed methods design in which quantitative and qualitative data could be converged or merged in order to provide a comprehensive analysis of the research problem. This method allowed the opportunity to

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[2] Fischler, "Mixed Methods."

[3] Ibid.

combine current research with data from perception surveys. This combination of data and research informed the tools and strategies needed to rebuild secondary choral music programs.

Research Questions and Hypothesis

Research questions and hypotheses were formulated to support the necessary framework for investigating the tools and strategies needed to rebuild the secondary choral program during and after the COVID-19-Pandemic. The research questions addressed in this study were:

Research Question 1: What aspects of the in-person choral music classroom experience were valued most during the COVID-19 pandemic according to the perspectives of secondary choral students?

Research Question 2: What were some significant challenges students and educators faced in secondary school choral programs post-COVID-19?

Research Question 3: What strategies were used by secondary school choral music educators to overcome the unique challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure student success in the music classroom?

Research Question 4: What repertoire themes can be utilized by secondary school choral educators to help alleviate COVID-19 related student-anxiety issues?

To fully examine these questions and equip secondary choral music educators and administrators for their role rebuilding the secondary choral music classroom, the hypotheses for this study were:

Hypothesis 1: Aspects of the in-person choral music classroom experience were valued most during the COVID-19 pandemic according to the perspectives of secondary choral students included social interaction, the opportunity to sing, even with restrictions, musical creativity, and an intentional focus on mental and social health awareness.

Hypothesis 2: Some of the major challenges faced by students and educators of secondary school choral programs as in-person learning resumes and the COVID-19 pandemic continues may be a fear of singing, trust, unique social and emotional needs, and less rigor in the classroom.

Hypothesis 3: Strategies that may be used by secondary school choral music educators to overcome the unique challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure student success in the music classroom may include the implementation of safe singing practices, the adaptation of teaching strategies to meet unique student needs, and the utilization of community building strategies, so administrators, students, and constituents are directly involved in the restructuring process.

Hypothesis 4: Repertoire themes that can be utilized by secondary school choral music educators to help alleviate COVID-19-related student-anxiety issues include topics of hope, love, awareness, and community.

Participants

Participants for this study included secondary choral music educators as well as secondary choral music students. There were a total of 52 secondary choral music teachers from across the United States who responded to the research interview questions, and 114 secondary choral music students who participated in the research student perception survey. Choral directors were recruited through emails that contained information about the study, as well as through social media postings made to groups specific to secondary choral directors. The requirements for participation were that the classes taught by these individuals entail any grade level between seventh grade and twelfth grade. Teachers who participated in the questionnaire were asked to share the student perception survey with their students. These students had to be

enrolled in at least one choral music class in order to participate in the survey. The names of student participants were not collected, and the names of teacher participants were not included in this thesis, therefore, all participant responses for this research were kept anonymous.

Setting

Participants for this study completed interviews and surveys in settings of their choosing, but most were completed at their respective schools and homes. Secondary choir directors were emailed questions and given the opportunity to respond through email or to schedule a phone or virtual interview to answer the questions. The majority of teachers emailed their responses. Secondary choir students were provided a link to a perception survey and instructed to complete the associated Likert Scale.

Procedure

Prior to the study, permission from the Institution Review Board (IRB) was secured to conduct research. The IRB approved the convergent mixed-methods design, study procedures, and all required documents (e.g., informed consent). Permission from each district superintendent as well as each school principal was granted since secondary choir students need parental consent to participate. Once administrative permission and parental consent were granted, students were provided the survey link. Secondary choir directors are of legal age so parental consent was not required, and they participated at will.

Recruitment

Recruitment for this research was initially through a letter presented to school principals that explained the project and requested permission to conduct research among staff and students. Once permission was granted, letters were sent to secondary choir directors that invited

them to participate in a five-question interview and invited students to participate in a student

perception survey that included 15 statements to be answered using a Likert scale. Students were

not required to participate and were given the option to opt out of the experiment. As the design

of the experiment required anonymity, signatures were not included on the letter of consent.

Additionally, choir directors were also guaranteed anonymity.

Research Materials

The following interview questions were sent to secondary choral music educators:

1. Early observations indicate many secondary choral music programs suffered in terms of enrollment when in-person learning returned; how did the COVID-19 Pandemic affect student enrollment in your program?

2. What tools and strategies will you implement to address the social and emotional impact the COVID-19 Pandemic likely had on your students?

3. What tools and strategies will you implement to rebuild your choral program after the COVID-19 Pandemic?

4. What professional development do you need to successfully meet the needs of your students, post COVID-19?

5. Will you plan activities and music to specifically address mental health awareness? If so, how, and what?

The following student perception statements were sent to secondary choral music

students and they responded with Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree,

Agree, or Strongly Agree.

1. I felt emotionally impacted by the COVID-19 Pandemic.

2. I lost my passion for choral singing during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

3. During the COVID-19 pandemic I felt disengaged because of the various formats of teaching.

4. I need my choir teacher to make me feel safe moving back into the classroom.

5. I feel my growth as a singer and musician was negatively impacted because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

6. I need activities and music that promote positive mental health.

7. I need activities and music that develop a strong sense of community.

8. Now that we are back to in-person learning, I feel comfortable sharing mental health concerns with my choir teacher.

9. I feel comfortable singing in a group inside an actual classroom.

10. I am excited to be part of in-person rehearsals.

11. For me, choir provides a sense of belonging.

12. I am excited to be part of in-person concerts again.

13. During the pandemic, choir was a class I looked forward to attending.

14. During the pandemic, choir helped me cope with mental health challenges.

15. I feel that being in choir will provide necessary structure after the COVID-19 Pandemic.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of research relevant to rebuilding the secondary choral music classroom after the COVID-19 pandemic. The impact COVID-19 has had on society is far-reaching, and in the choral music classroom many programs suffered in terms of enrollment, performance opportunities, the mental health of students, and academic rigor. The research that pertained to mental health, the positive impact of choir participation, and the benefits of singing were bridged with data collected from interviews with secondary choral music teachers and a perception survey given to secondary choral music students. This synthesis of research and data was utilized to inform the four research questions presented in this paper.
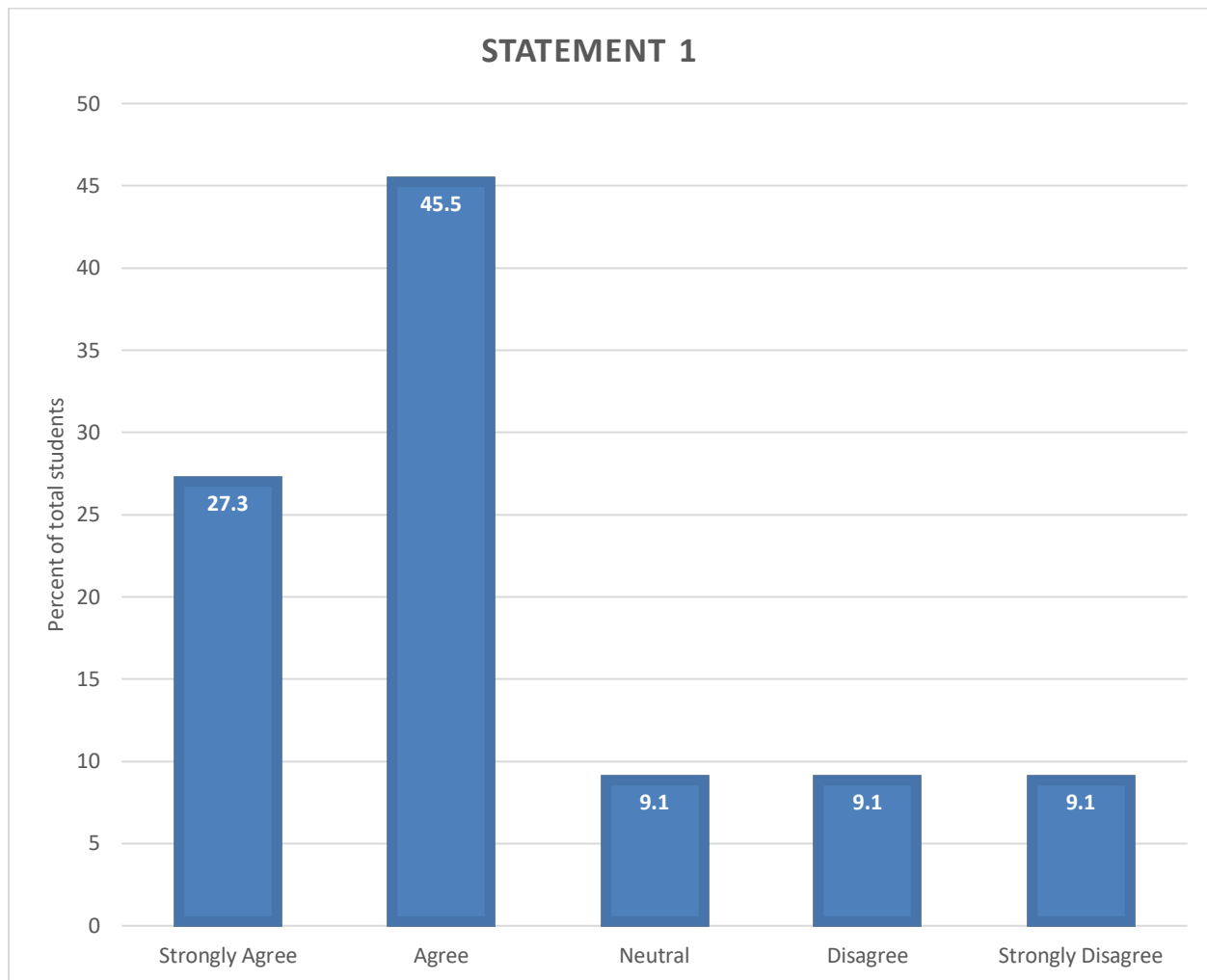
Student Perception Surveys

To address the research questions in this paper, it was critical to collect data from secondary students who endured the pandemic as choral music participants. Data was collected from a student perception survey that utilized a Likert scale. In total, 114 students responded to the survey and this information was used to inform the research questions and develop tools and strategies needed to rebuild secondary choral music programs.

The following bar graphs detail the results of the 15 student perception survey statements, exhibiting the percentage of the 114 student participants who either strongly agree, agree, are neutral, disagree, or strongly disagree with each statement.

The first statement to which secondary choral music students responded was: "I felt emotionally impacted by the COVID-19 Pandemic." The importance of monitoring this cannot be overstated, and the results are detailed in Figure 1.

**Figure 1. Statement 1, I felt emotionally impacted by the COVID-19 Pandemic.**

The second statement of the student perception survey was: "I lost my passion for choral singing during the COVID-19 Pandemic." The results, found in figure 2, indicated that 72.8 percent of students either disagreed or were neutral in their feelings about this statement.

**Figure 2. Statement 2, I lost my passion for choral singing during the COVID-19 Pandemic.**
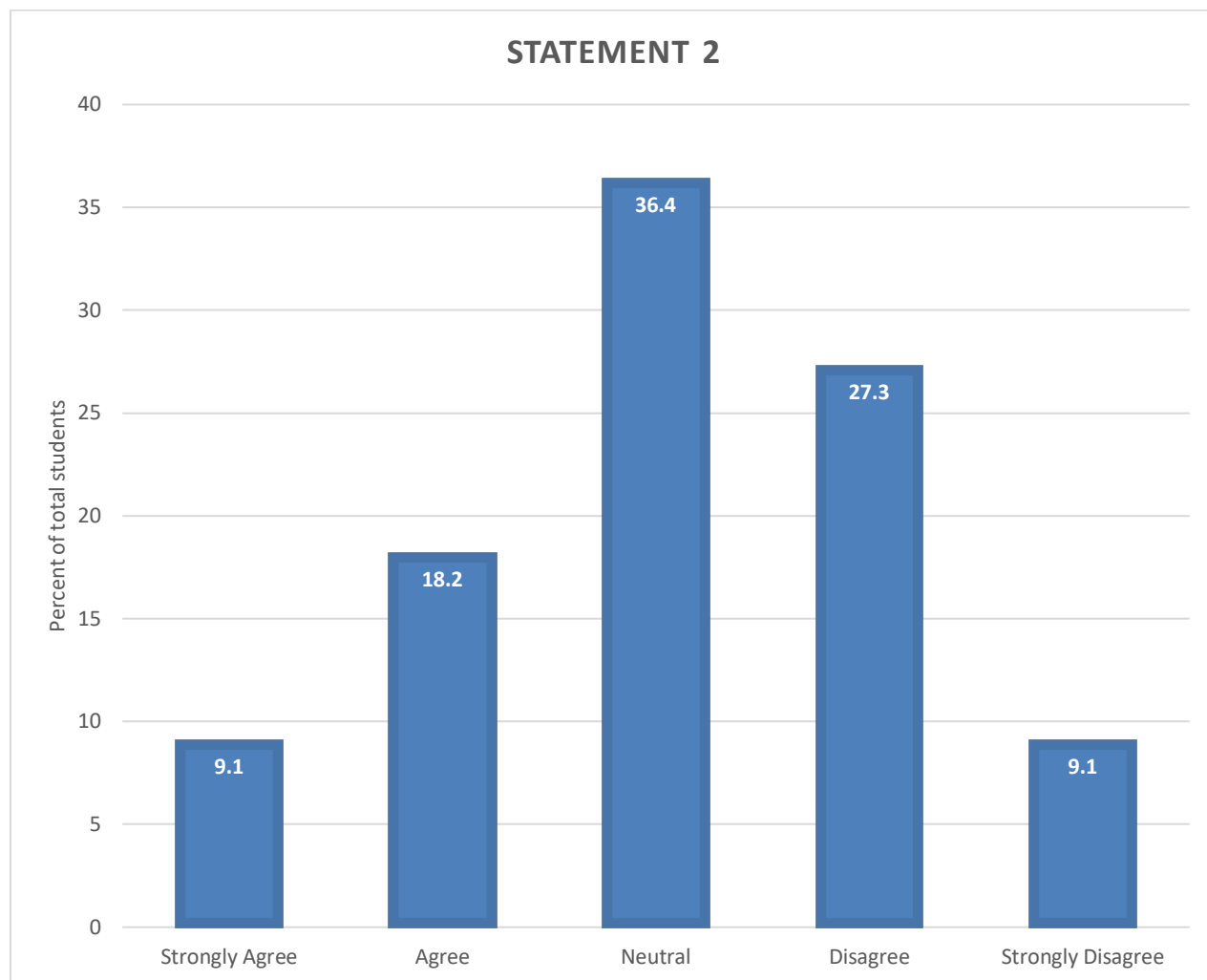
The third statement of the student perception survey was: "During the COVID-19 pandemic I felt disengaged because of the various formats of teaching." As indicated, 72.8 percent of students either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement and the results are detailed in figure 3.

Figure 3. Statement 3, During the COVID-19 pandemic I felt disengaged because of the various formats of teaching.
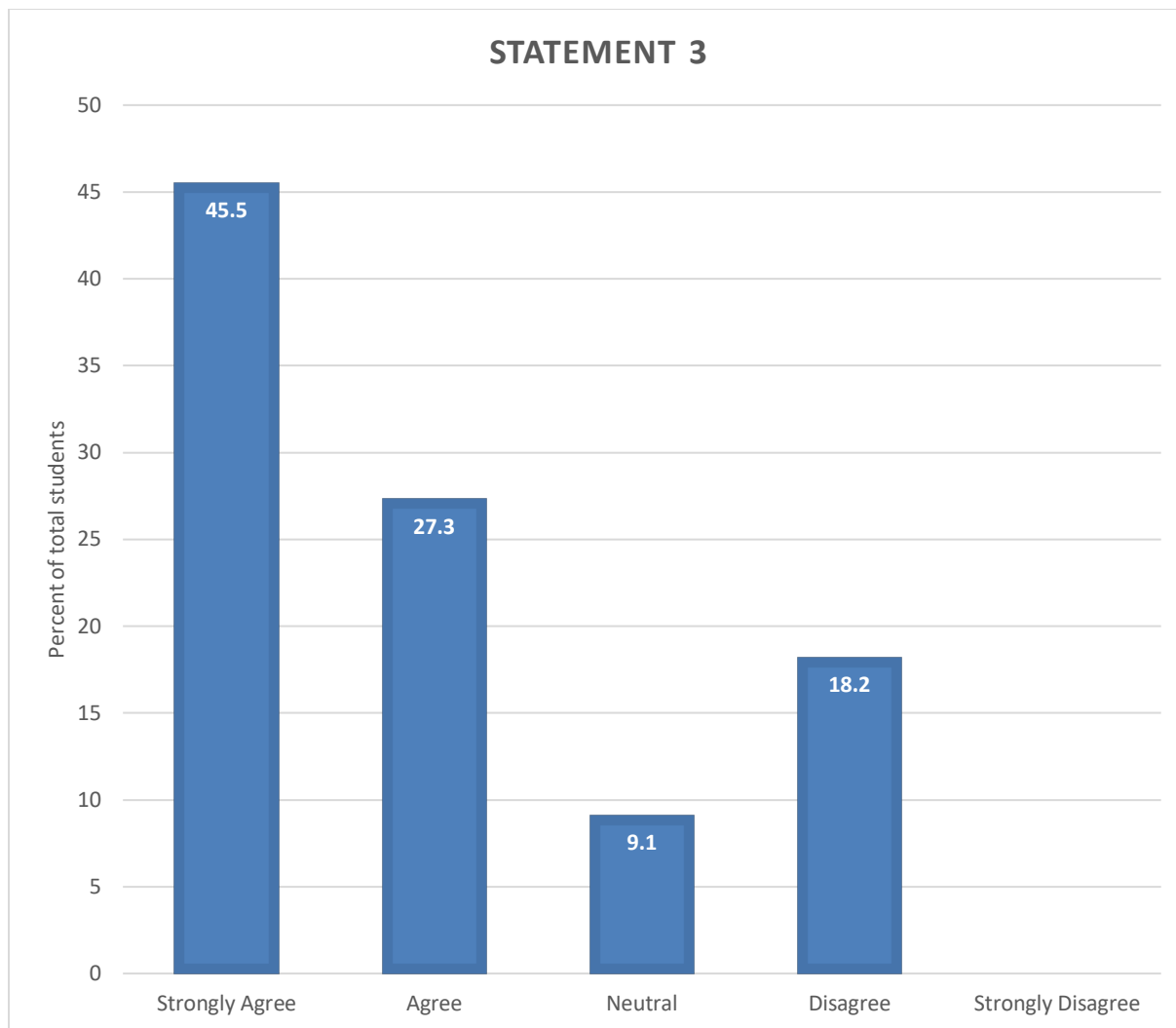
Statement four was: "I need my choir teacher to make me feel safe moving back into the classroom." Despite the majority of students feeling emotionally impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, only twenty-four percent of students surveyed agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. The results of statement four are found in figure 4.

Figure 4. Statement 4, I need my choir teacher to make me feel safe moving back into the classroom.
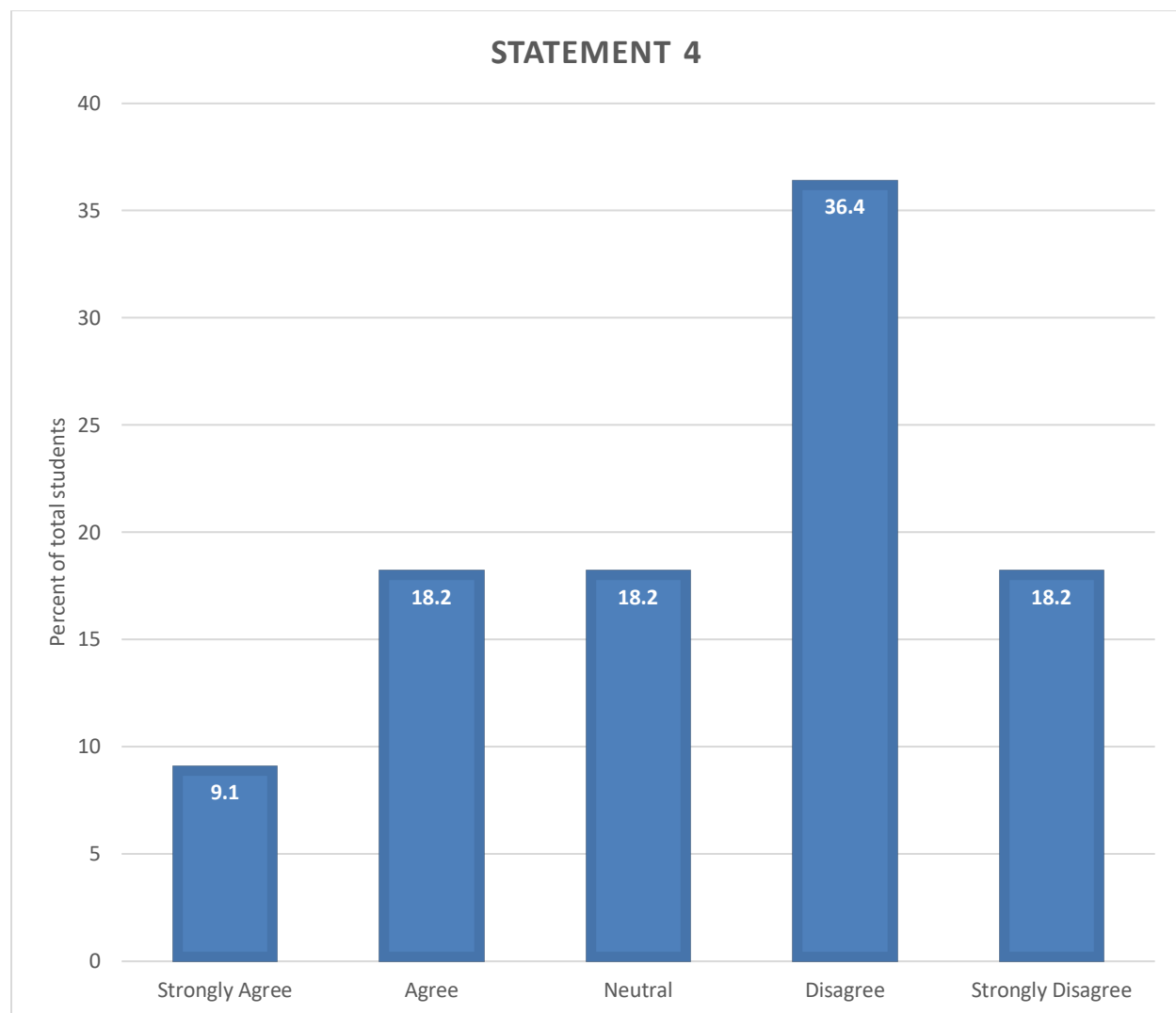
The fifth statement of the student perception survey read, "I feel my growth as a singer and musician was negatively impacted because of the COVID-19 pandemic." As seen in figure 5, 45.5 percent of students interviewed either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.

Figure 5. Statement 5, I feel my growth as a singer and musician was negatively impacted because of the COVID-19 pandemic.
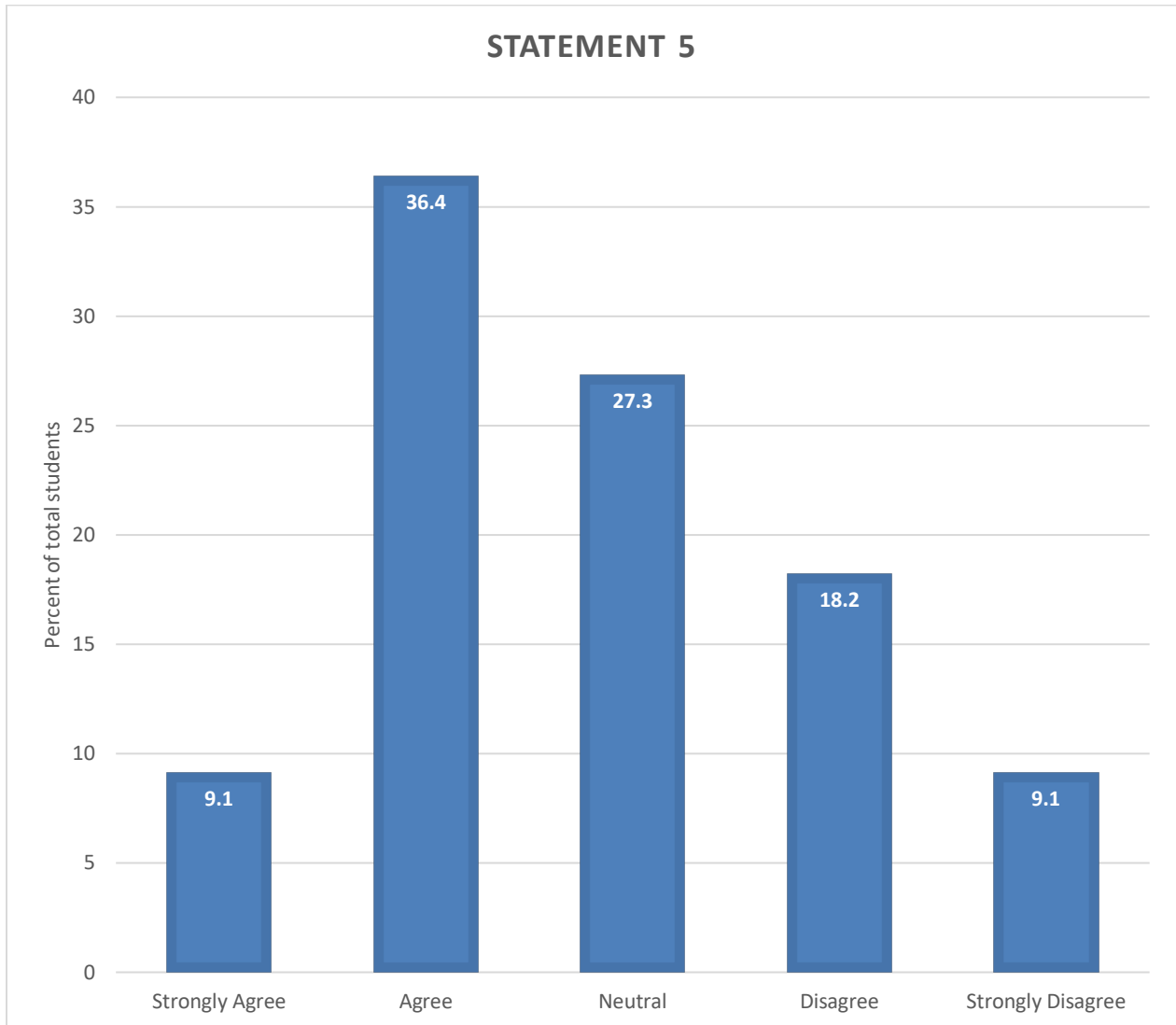

STATEMENT 5

Statement six was: "I need activities and music that promote positive mental health." As seen in figure six, 72.7 percent of students either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, reiterating the overwhelming necessity of positive mental health activities in the music classroom.

Figure 6. Statement 6, I need activities and music that promote positive mental health.
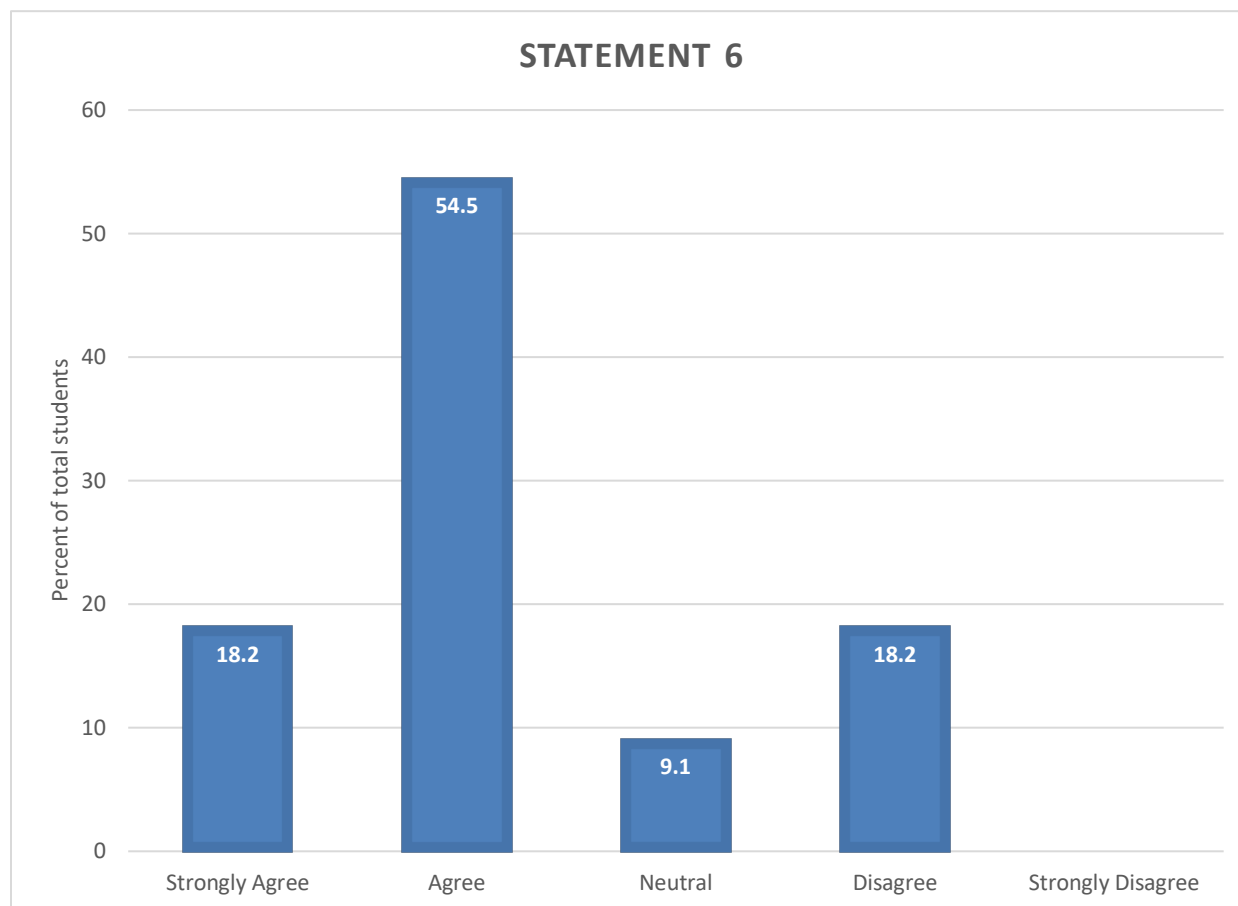
Statement 7, "I need activities and music that develop a sense of community," indicated that most students agreed, with only 18.2% of students disagreeing.

Figure 7. Statement 7, I need activities and music that develop a strong sense of community.

STATEMENT 7
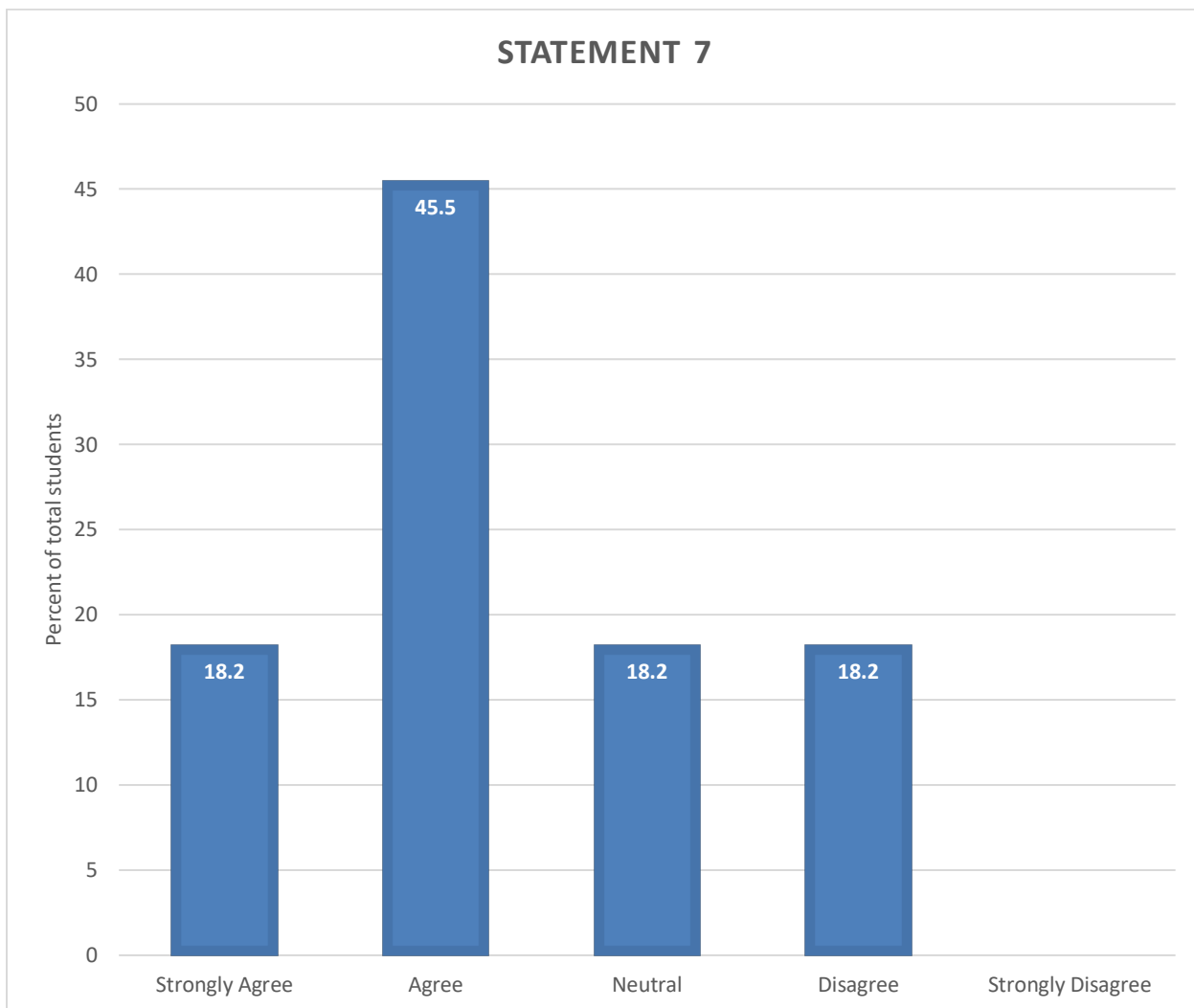
Less than half of the students who responded to the student perception survey indicated that they now feel comfortable sharing mental health concerns with their teacher. However, it should also be noted that eighteen percent of students had a neutral response to statement 8: "Now that we are back to in-person learning, I feel comfortable sharing mental health concerns with my choir teacher."[1]

Figure 8. Statement 8, Now that we are back to in-person learning, I feel comfortable sharing mental health concerns with my choir teacher.

STATE ENT 8

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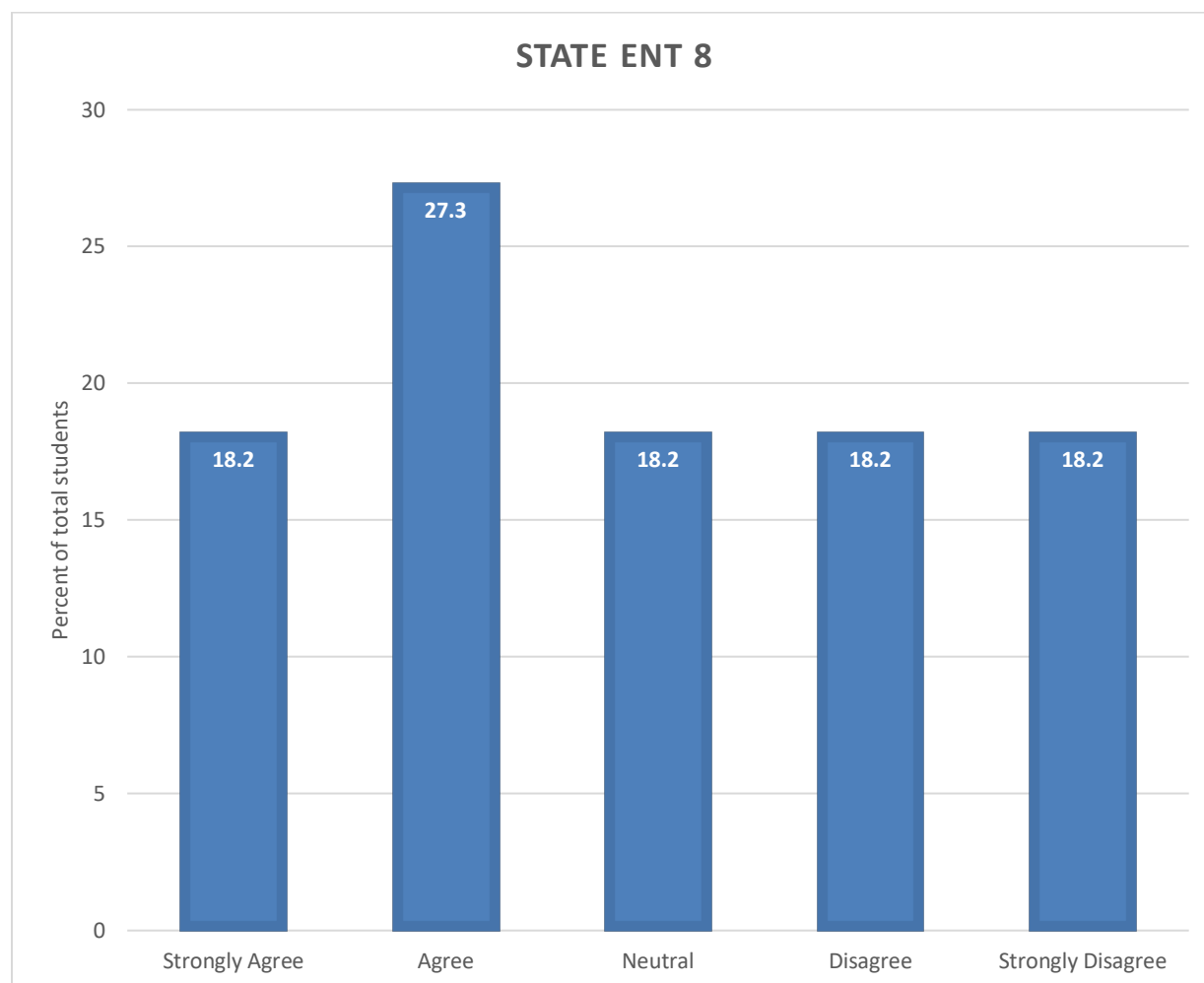
[1] Brandon Stroup, Original data chart.

Statement nine, "I feel comfortable singing in a group inside an actual classroom," determined that 81.8 percent of students who responded agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. The remaining 18.2 percent of students disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement.

Figure 9. Statement 9, I feel comfortable singing in a group inside an actual classroom.
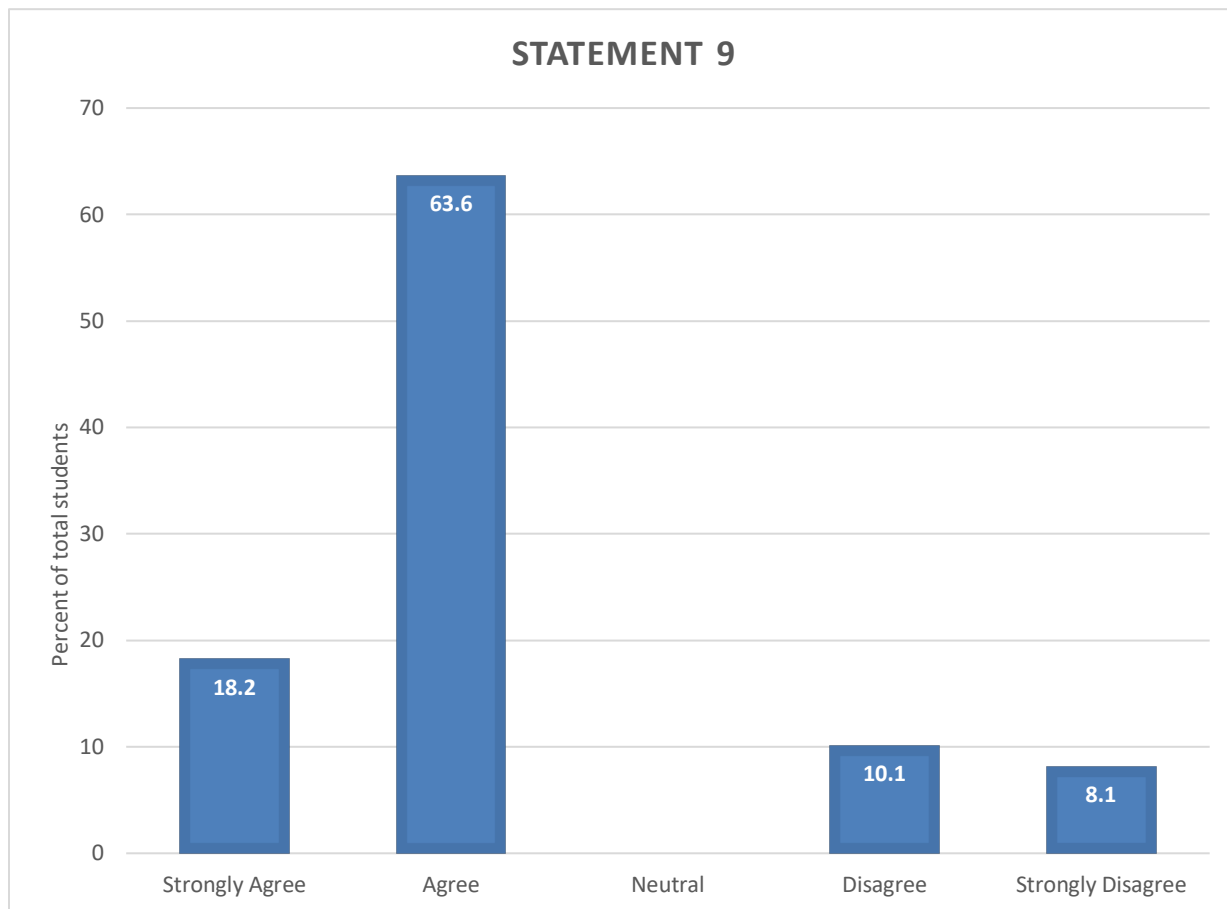
STATEMENT 9

Data gathered from statement ten, "I am excited to be part of in-person choir rehearsals,"
indicated that only 9.1 percent of students strongly disagree with this statement.

Figure 10. Statement 10, I am excited to be part of in-person choir rehearsals.
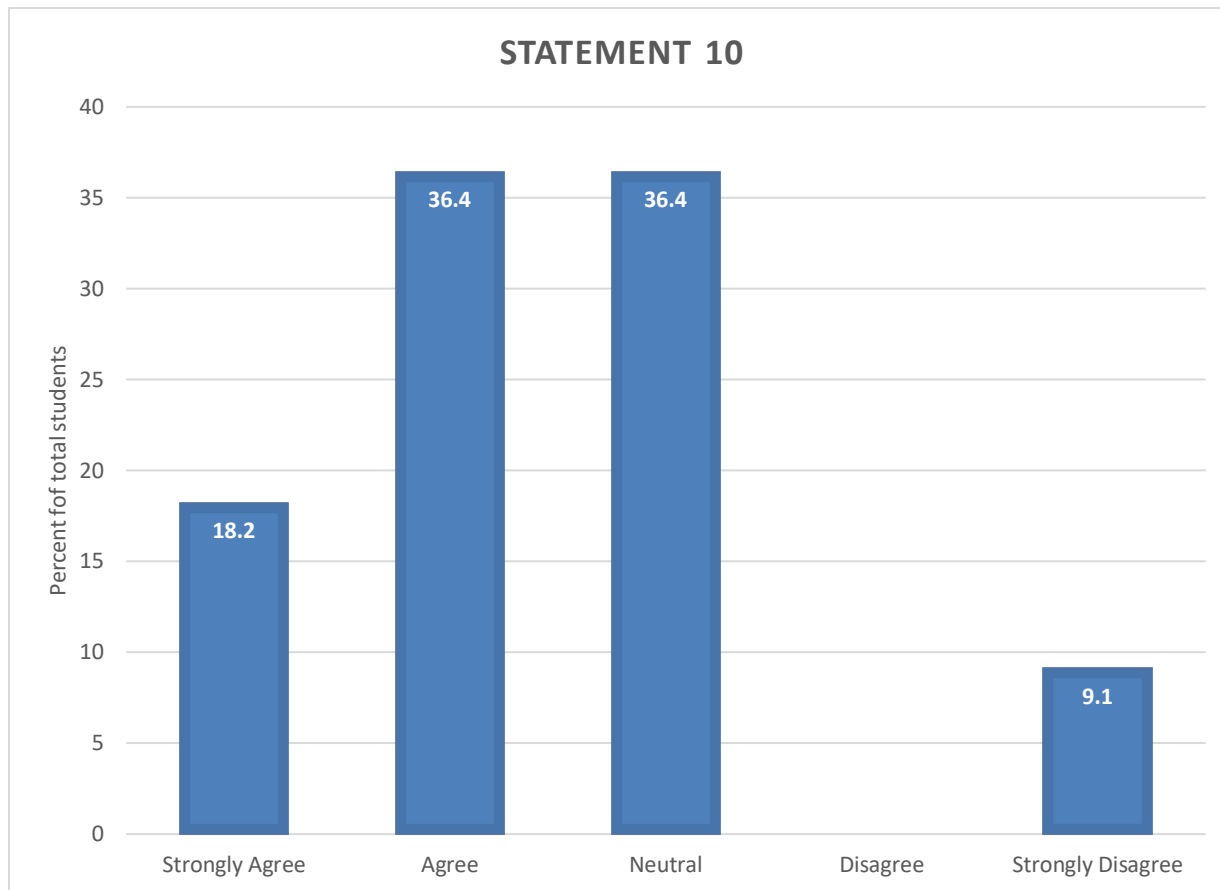
It is well-documented that feeling a sense of belonging is an important facet of positive mental health, and the data collected through statement eleven, "for me, choir provides a sense of belonging," demonstrates that a class such as choir provides this needed sense of belonging, with 63.7 percent of students agreeing or strongly agreeing with this statement.

Figure 11. Statement 11, For me, choir provides a sense of belonging.
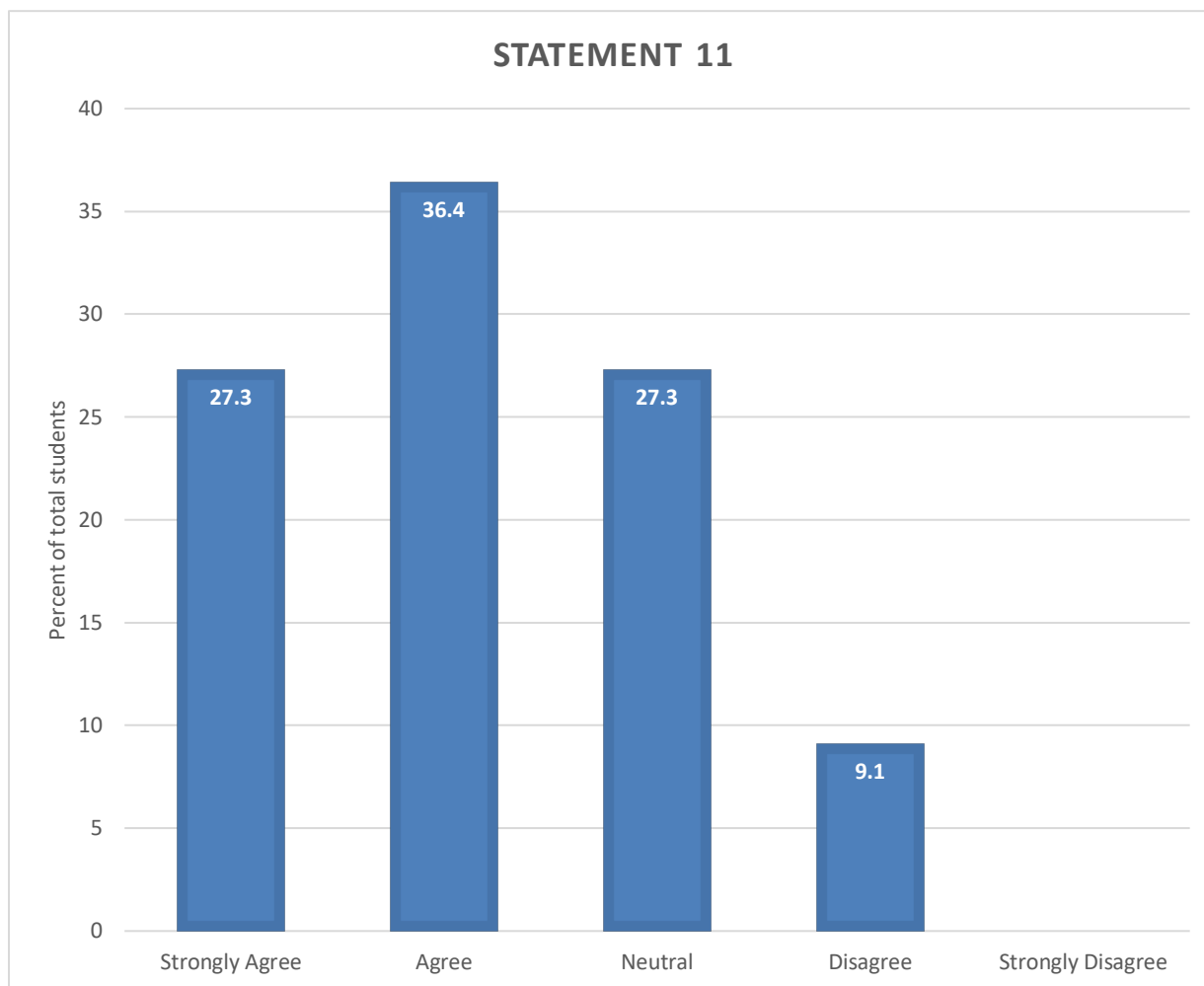
The same 9.1 percent of students who did not feel safe returning to the classroom, and who were not excited for in-person rehearsals also disagreed with statement twelve, "I am excited to be part of in-person concerts again."

Figure 12. Statement 12, I am excited to be part of in-person concerts again.
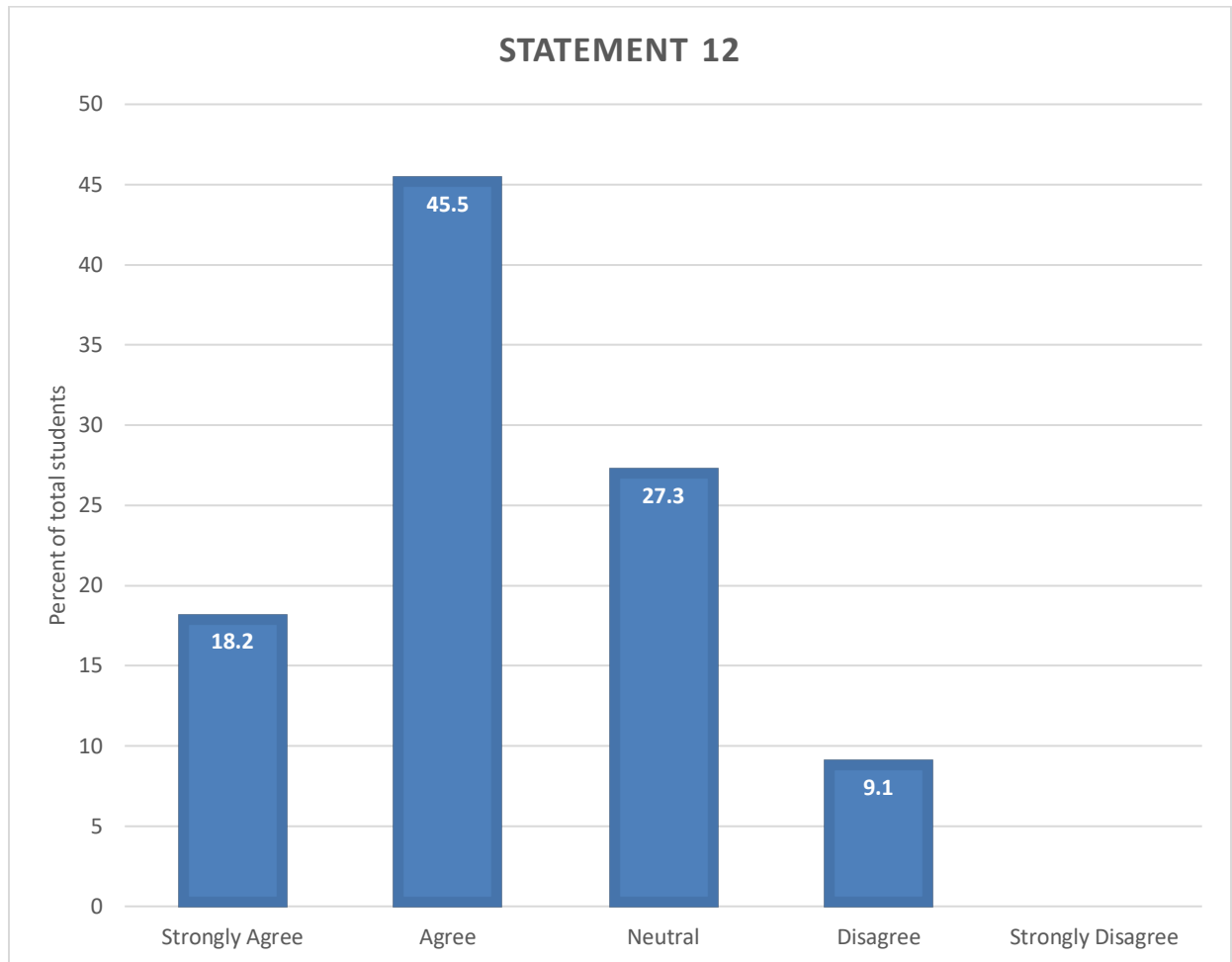
Nearly sixty-four percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with statement 13, "during the pandemic, choir was a class I looked forward to attending." While 18.2% of students disagreed with this statement, the reason why these students did not look forward to choir was not addressed.

Figure 13. Statement 13, During the pandemic, choir was a class I looked forward to attending.
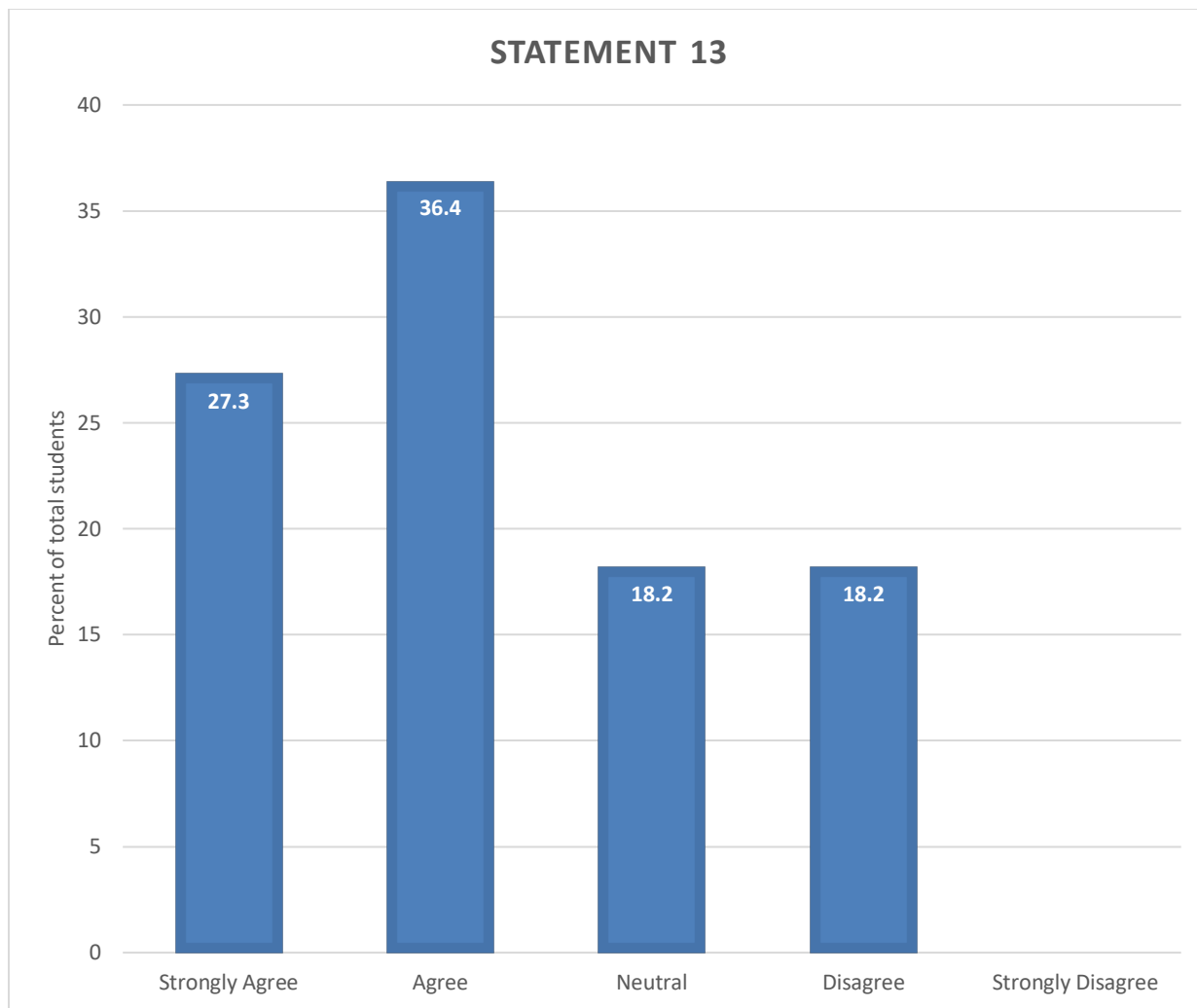
STATEMENT 13

Strongly Agree: 27.3
Agree: 36.4
Neutral: 18.2
Disagree: 18.2
Strongly Disagree: (none)

(Y-axis: Percent of total students)

Statement fourteen, "during the pandemic, choir helped me cope with mental health challenges," provided data that was largely inconclusive with its implications. The same number of students either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement as did the number of students who were neutral in their feelings.

Figure 14. Statement 14, During the pandemic, choir helped me cope with mental health challenges.
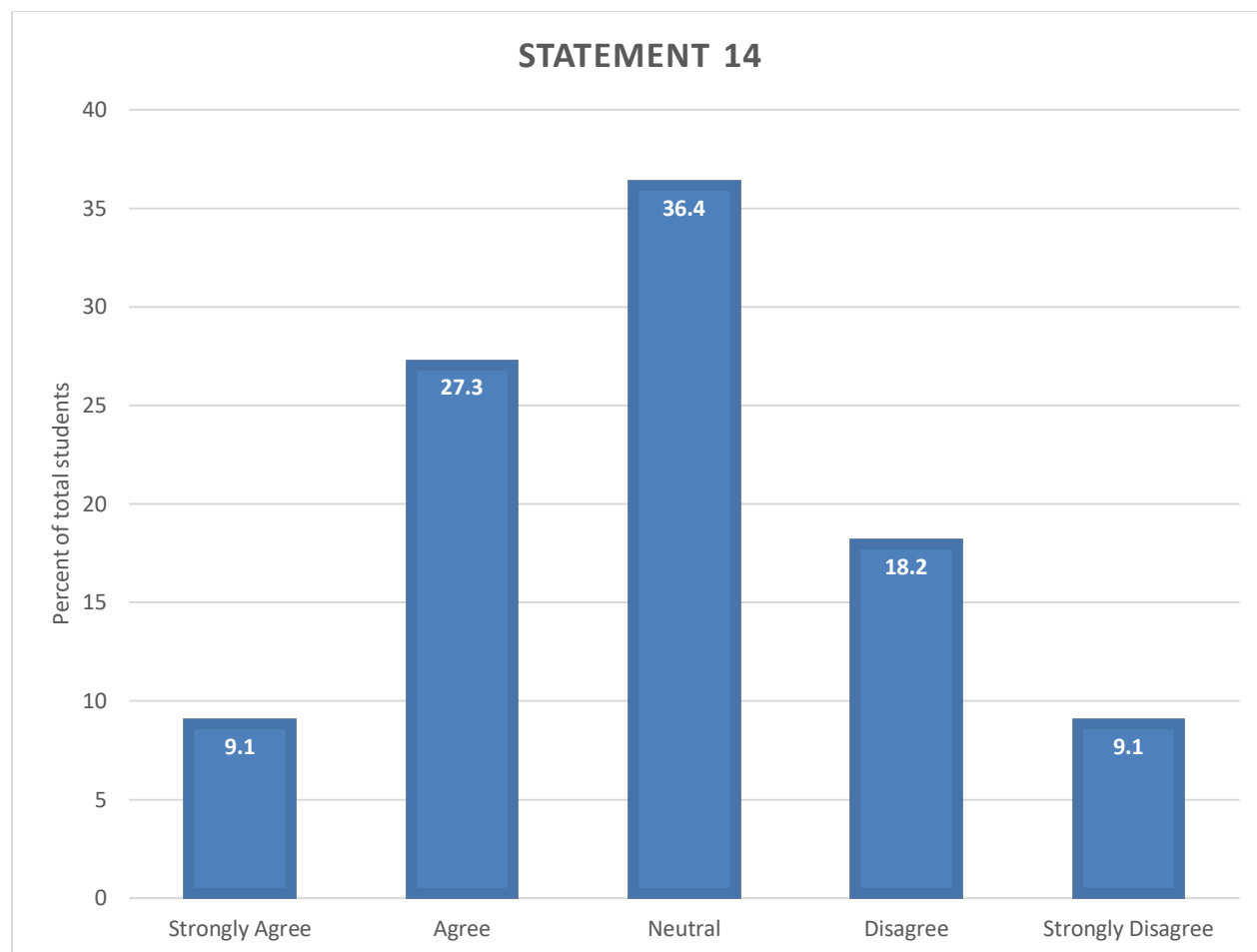
Nearly 73 percent of respondents of statement fifteen, "I feel that being in choir has provided necessary structure now that in-person learning has resumed," were neutral, agreed, or strongly agreed, but still there were nearly 27.5 percent of students who disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. As with other statements in the student perception survey, the reason they responded accordingly was not considered.

Figure 15. Statement 15, I feel that being in choir has provided necessary structure now that in-person learning has resumed.
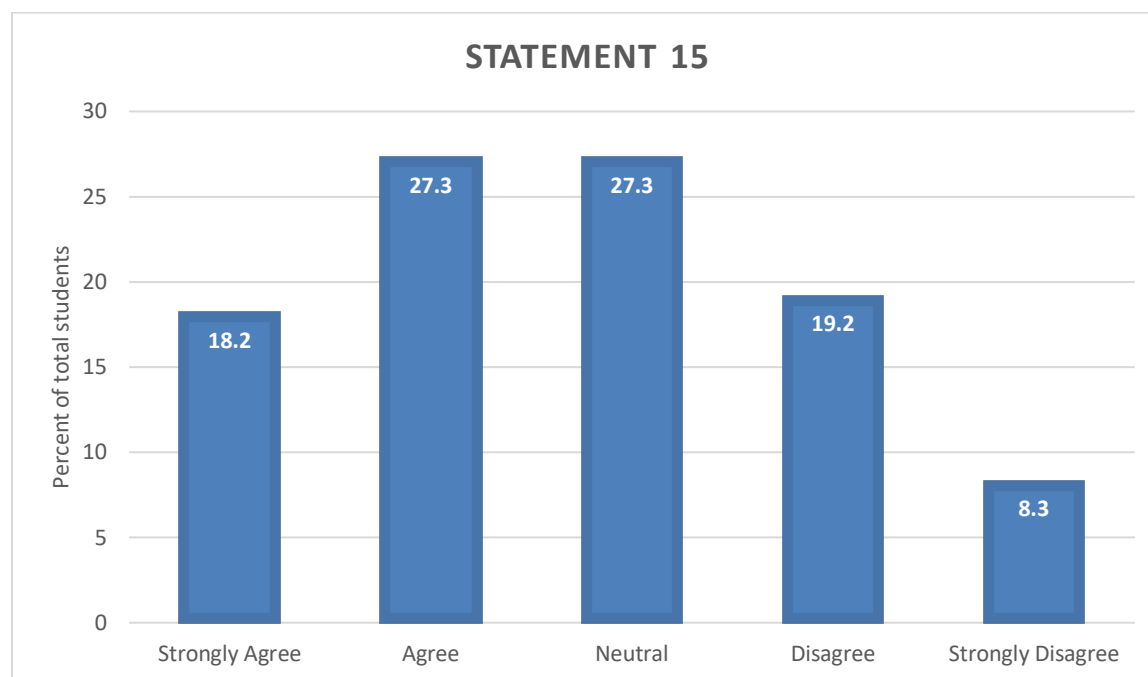
Teacher Questionnaire

In addition to the student perception survey, information was collected from a five-question interview given to secondary choral music teachers. The responses from the 52 respondents were analyzed to develop strategies necessary to rebuild choral music programs that have suffered due to the COVID-19 pandemic; strategies that could also be implemented during and after future pandemics or disruptions to education. The following is a summation of the 52

choir directors' responses, as well as bar graphs to provide a visual representation of this summation.

  The first question was: "Early observations indicate many secondary choral music programs suffered in terms of enrollment when in-person learning returned; how did the COVID-19 Pandemic affect student enrollment in your program?" Although student enrollment can be an indicator of the success of a program, the purpose of this question was not to suggest a correlation between student enrollment and program success.

  As seen in Figure 16, 22 percent of respondents stated that the COVID-19 pandemic had minimal effect on their programs, but several directors said this was perhaps related to increased recruitment efforts. Five percent of directors stated that the pandemic had no impact on their programs in terms of enrollment. Seventy-three percent of directors indicated the COVID-19 pandemic had a detrimental impact on their choral programs.

Figure 16. Question 1, Early observations indicate many secondary choral music programs suffered in terms of enrollment when in-person learning returned; how did the COVID-19 Pandemic affect student enrollment in your program?
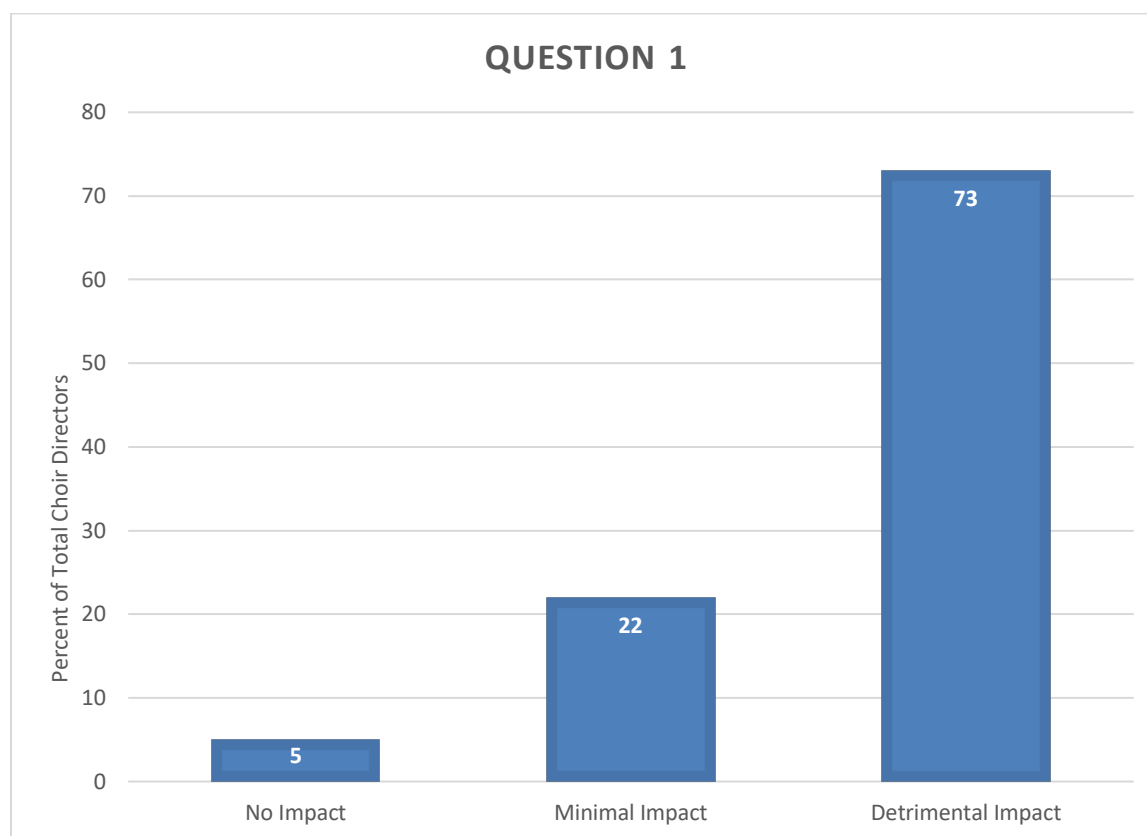
One director responded with the following:

> I saw the largest impact in my advanced group. I had a solid thirty advanced choir members before the pandemic. Schools shut down, and many of these students graduated. The students in my beginning groups that might have been able to move up to the advanced level did not audition after schools shut down, or they only stayed through the first year where we didn't sing at all. Those students are not in my choir now. Students that did stay and become part of my advanced group did not receive the same skills training as in years past. My advanced group sits at sixteen currently, and I had to combine it with orchestra to save the classes.[2]

Additionally, another director stated, "We went from a program of 225 pre-covid to a program of 88. We are a 5A school with a very strong program and director that travels yearly

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[2] Brandon Stroup, Original teacher questionnaire.

and is competitive in the top varsity groups."[3] Although 27 percent of directors indicated that

their enrollment numbers were not impacted, 73 percent indicated the COVID-19 pandemic

created a negative, lasting impact on enrollment numbers in their programs.

      The second question was: "What tools and strategies will you implement to address the

social and emotional impact the COVID-19 Pandemic likely had on your students?" This

question was based on the assumption that students were socially and emotionally impacted. As

detailed in Figure 17, four percent of the directors did not feel their students were socially and

emotionally impacted, but 96 percent of directors did indicate that the social and emotional

health of their students were impacted because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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[3] Brandon Stroup, Original teacher questionnaire.

Figure 17. Question 2, What tools and strategies will you implement to address the social and emotional impact the COVID-19 Pandemic likely had on your students?
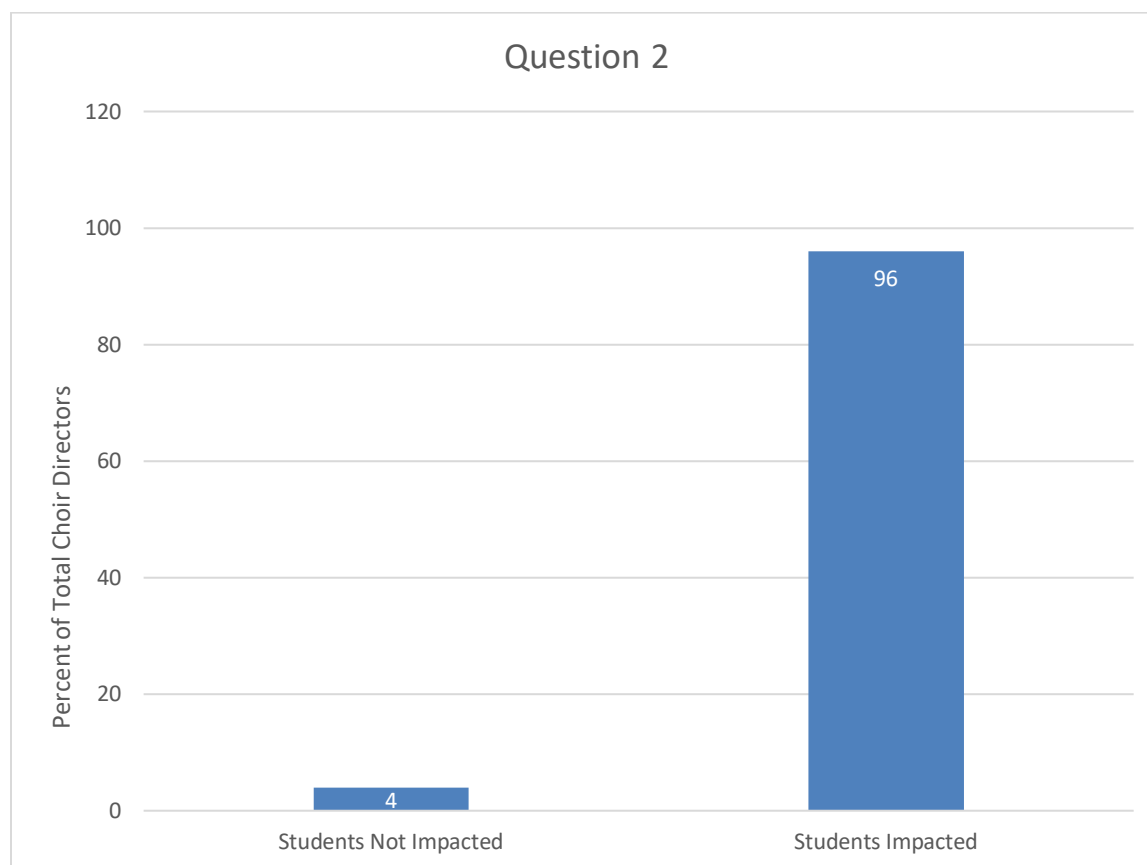
The directors who felt their students were socially and emotionally impacted largely agreed that they needed to provide more opportunities for their students to express their feelings. Additionally, several directors suggested keeping the repertoire less challenging, so students did not feel an additional sense of being overwhelmed. Of the 52 directors' responses to this question, 29 said they would implement SEL strategies in the classroom. One director wrote that they would use:

> Every single tool in the box. We have talked, we have been okay with a step back, with allowance for tremendous learning gaps. We have established a new normal. We have rearranged choir names, combined groups, and channeled positive energy through games and physical relaxing activities. You name it, we've tried it. Kids must be taught again

that it's ok to fail so that you can learn, so the strategy is to normalize failure! Keep the bar high but know when to push and when to just breathe.[4]

To address the social and emotional needs of their students, another director stated, "We spend way more time letting students check in on a personal level (large group, small group, lunch support group.) I've given a lot more consideration to exactly what each choir wants to sing - Trying to keep most music hope-filled and optimistic, and now late in the year, we are moving into more sentimental, profound, poignant works again."[5]

Not all directors had a plan for new approaches, but it was apparent there was a need for SEL strategies in the choral classroom. The director's responses were overwhelmingly inclusive of community-building, student check-ins, and student-teacher interactions, with more focus on the importance of strong mental health practices. The responses also indicated an emphasis on much more effort to connect with students outside the classroom as well.

The third question of the teacher questionnaire was: "What strategies will you implement to rebuild your choral program after the COVID-19 Pandemic?" The expectation is that these strategies could be used during or after any major event or pandemic that disrupts student learning. Detailed in Figure 18, 12 percent of directors indicated they would continue doing what they always did, with no need to adjust after the COVID-19 pandemic. The remaining 88 percent of directors stated they would utilize improved strategies to rebuild their programs.

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[4] Brandon Stroup, Original teacher questionnaire.

[5] Ibid.

Figure 18. Question 3, What strategies will you implement to rebuild your choral program after the COVID-19 Pandemic?
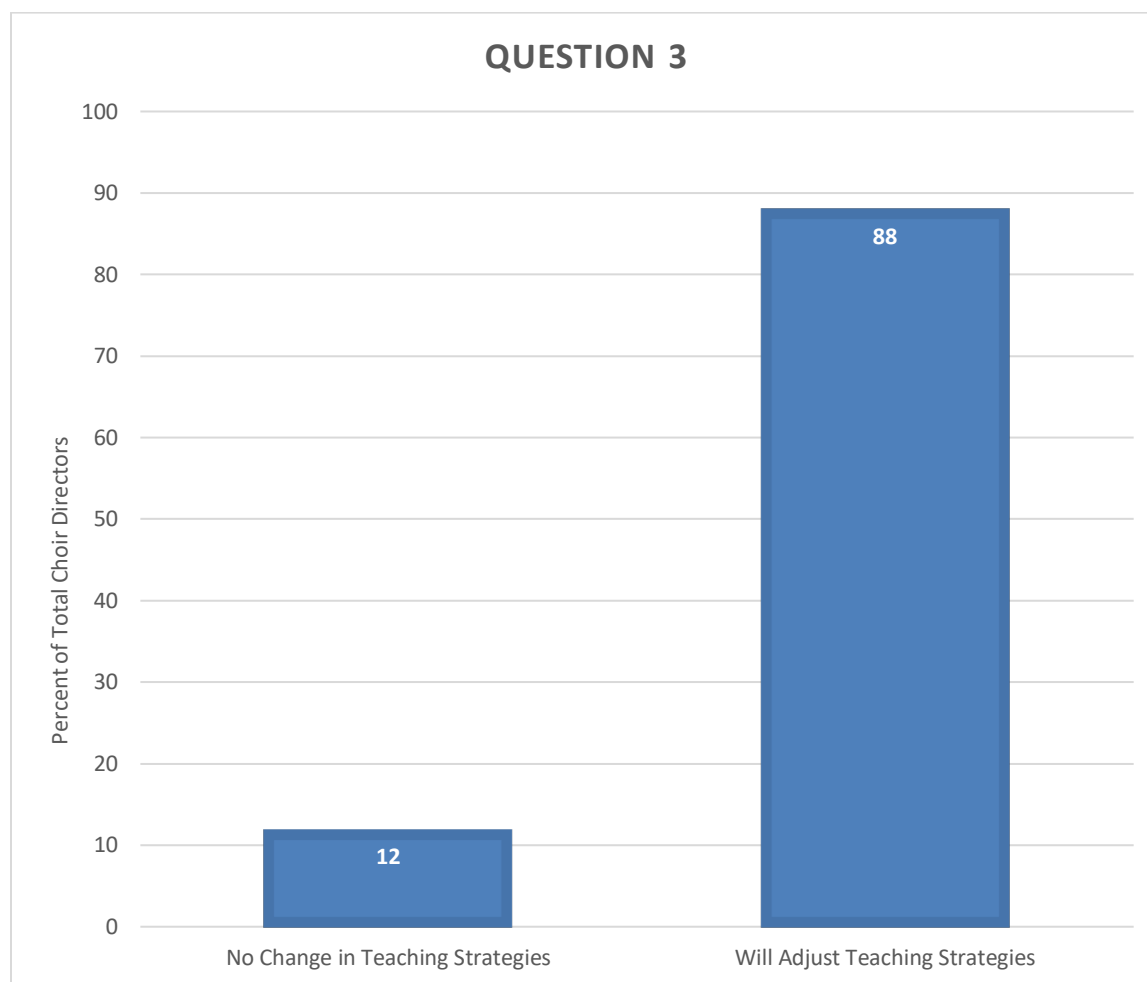
One of the respondents said:

We made a recruitment video. We also made a Google classroom for chats and questions, as well as allowed video auditions instead of live ones. We have added some lighter songs to concerts. We will travel again next year, and we are having get-togethers before the next semester begins for question and answer sessions. Additionally, we have brought in more clinicians, as well as watched other choirs sing at exchange concerts.[6]

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[6] Brandon Stroup, Original teacher questionnaire.

As well, it was stated that there would be "more focus on a positive learning atmosphere and experiences, along with the need to visit many more schools than in the past. I will also plan to be more visible on campus."[7]

It did not appear that recruitment and rebuilding strategies necessarily changed, but directors were recruiting with more intent. Moreover, directors mentioned having a greater awareness of the importance of a positive learning environment and its impact on the social and emotional needs of their students. Many directors also mentioned more choir trips as a recruitment tool, more involvement at feeder schools, and much more visibility outside their classrooms.

The fourth question of the teacher questionnaire allowed teachers to define and express their professional development needs moving forward. The fourth question was: "What professional development do you feel is needed to successfully meet the needs of your students post-COVID-19?" As seen in Figure 19, the most common responses to this question pertained to the need for SEL training (78 percent), collaboration (82 percent), and for administrators to understand that rebuilding will take time (67 percent). As noted by one director, "I feel support and communication from the administration from various districts is necessary. There are many inconsistencies between districts in terms of regulations and what is being allowed for each campus. I believe these inconsistencies are causing most of the discourse and drop in enrollment for all performing arts-based classes."[8]

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[7] Brandon Stroup, Original teacher questionnaire.

[8] Ibid.

Figure 19. Question 4, What professional development do you feel is needed to successfully meet the needs of your students post-COVID-19?
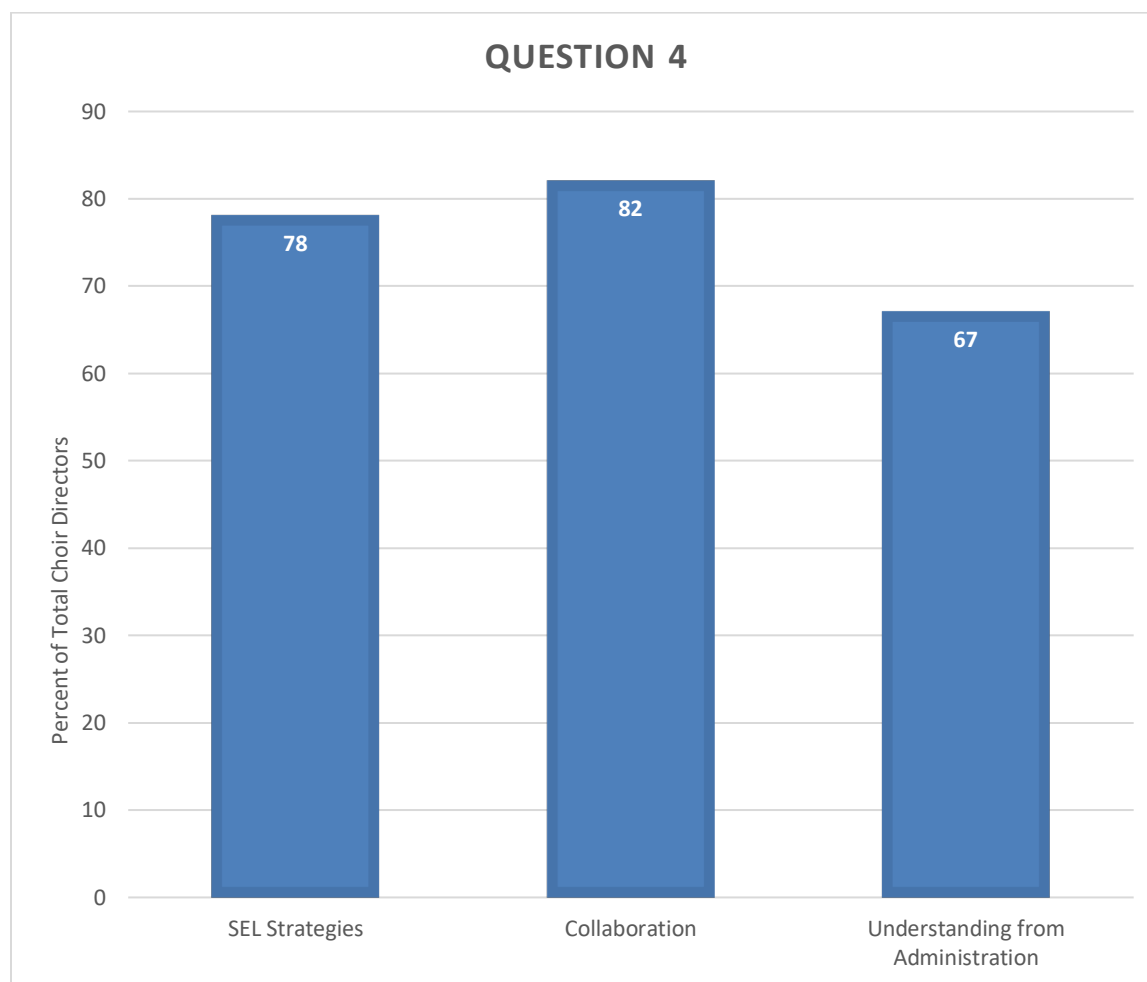
One director acknowledged the need for professional development but also acknowledged that they were at a loss as to what they specifically needed. They stated, "I need help figuring out how to motivate every single one of these non-motivated kids. I can get them working, and two seconds after I walk away, they are back to doing something on their phone. There is no drive to work hard outside of class or practice at home either. Students are just doing the bare minimum in general. How do we reactivate this intrinsic motivation?"[9] Another teacher expressed concern for their own mental health: "Honestly, I feel that I need to put more emphasis

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[9] Brandon Stroup, Original teacher questionnaire.

on personal mental health. Make sure my own cup is full. Post and during this pandemic it has been drained."[10]

The fifth question of the teacher questionnaire was: "Will you plan activities and music to specifically address the social and emotional impact COVID-19 had on your students? If so, how, and what?" Figure 20 reveals that although 88 percent of directors indicated that they would plan activities and music to address the social and emotional needs of students, the same 12 percent that did not feel the need to adjust their teaching strategies also did not feel they needed to specifically address the SEL needs of their students. As seen in the following response, for some, their response was based on their surroundings: "Probably not. In rural Iowa, most people didn't acknowledge the pandemic as a real thing, so any mention of it makes community members angry."[11]

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[10] Brandon Stroup, Original teacher questionnaire.

[11] Ibid.

Figure 20. Question 5, Will you plan activities and music to specifically address the social and emotional impact COVID-19 had on your students? If so, how, and what?
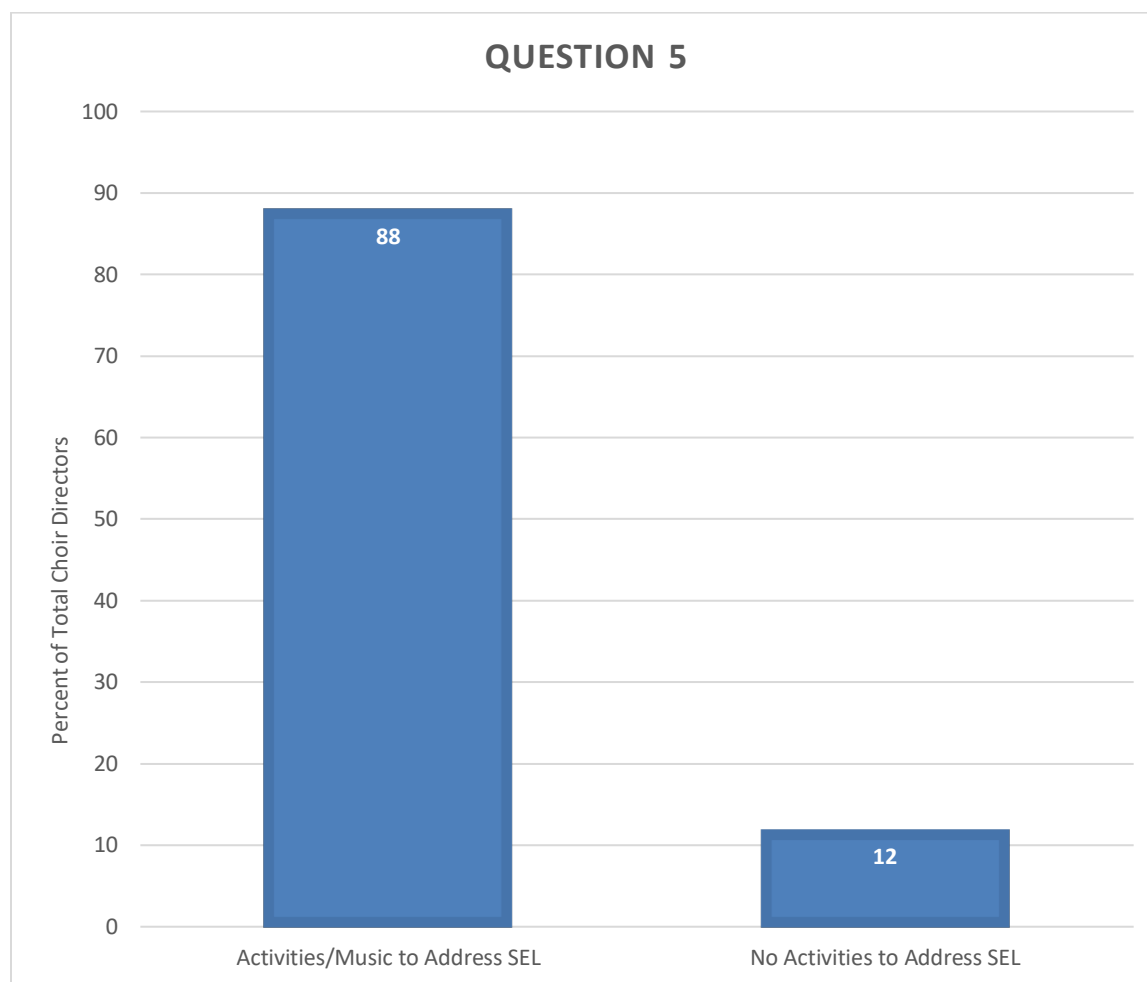
The majority of directors stated they would plan activities and music to address the social and emotional needs of their students. As indicated by one director, "I will absolutely plan more activities that focus on the social and emotional health of the students. I hope to be able to have more social events and fundraisers where they students can hang out without feeling like it is school related (Movie nights, Karaoke events, caroling, etc)."[12] Another director said they wanted to plan activities and music to help with the social and emotional needs of their students, but also said, "I haven't been as intentional with this as I want to be. We need more bonding/face

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[12] Brandon Stroup, Original teacher questionnaire.

to face activities. We could really benefit from some mindfulness techniques in the classroom as well. Some of the music I considered programming for my students was a bit above their ability level for this year coming out of the pandemic."[13]

The responses to question five varied greatly. This is likely a reflection of the general consensus in each community on the seriousness and validity of COVID-19. However, several directors do see the need for the intentional planning of activities related to addressing the social and emotional impact COVID-19 had on their students.

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[13] Brandon Stroup, Original teacher questionnaire.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Introduction

Facets of K-12 education have been altered by the coronavirus pandemic in several ways. Specifically, secondary choral music education has been impacted. Based on the limited publications about COVID-19's impact on music education, along with data collected through student perception surveys and teacher interviews, secondary choral classrooms have seemingly been affected by the coronavirus pandemic. The data did not indicate that all students and teachers were impacted, or that they were impacted similarly; however, it does indicate a significant number of students and teachers were affected.

Data shows that classroom enrollment, interest in choir, academic rigor, and the social and emotional health of many students and teachers declined during the coronavirus pandemic. This decline confirms that COVID-19 affected the overall success of existing secondary choral music programs. It is likely that the lasting effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on secondary choral music programs will not be realized until the students who were involved in these programs during the COVID-19 pandemic have graduated high school.

Through student perception surveys and interviews with secondary choral music educators, it is evident that rebuilding the secondary choral program post-COVID-19, emphasis was placed on the social and emotional health of students. It is also evident that for teachers to successfully rebuild their programs, mental health must be considered. The many facets of rebuilding a program include increasing choir enrollment, reestablishing academic rigor in the classroom, and developing the necessary skills to demonstrate music competency and the ability to sing with proper vocal technique.

This study included four research questions and corresponding hypotheses surrounding the rebuilding of the secondary choral music classroom due to the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic. The following is a summation of the results of this study as related to each research question and hypothesis.

Research Question 1 was: What aspects of the in-person choral music classroom experience were valued most during the COVID-19 pandemic according to the perspectives of secondary choral students? The hypothesis was that aspects of the in-person choral music classroom experience valued most during the COVID-19 pandemic according to the perspectives of secondary choral students included social interaction, the opportunity to sing (even with restrictions), musical creativity, and an intentional focus on mental and social health awareness. The data gathered in this study pointed to these aspects as being highly valued by most students.

The second research question of this study was, what were some significant challenges students and educators faced in secondary school choral programs post-COVID-19? The hypothesis for this question was that some significant challenges students and educators faced in secondary school choral programs post-COVID-19 included fear of singing, trust, unique social and emotional needs, and less rigor in the classroom. The data gathered in this study indicated this hypothesis was largely accurate, but many students did not have a fear of returning to singing in the classroom.

Research question three was, what strategies were used by secondary school choral music educators to overcome the unique challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure student success in the music classroom? The hypothesis was that strategies that may be used by secondary school choral music educators to overcome the unique challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure student success in the music classroom may include the implementation of

safe singing practices, the adaptation of teaching strategies to meet unique student needs, and the

utilization of community building strategies, so administrators, students, and constituents are

directly involved in the restructuring process. According to the data surrounding this research

question, the most significant implication is that teachers will utilize community building

strategies in their classrooms, but mostly with their students, rather than with administrators and

constituents.

The fourth research question was, what repertoire themes can be utilized by secondary

school choral educators to help alleviate COVID-19-related student anxiety issues? The

hypothesis was that repertoire themes that can be utilized by secondary school choral music

educators to help alleviate COVID-19-related student-anxiety issues include topics of hope, love,

awareness, and community. When given the opportunity to detail how they would use activities

and music to address the COVID-19 related student-anxiety issues, only two directors mentioned

the use of music as a way to meet these student needs, and neither listed topics of hope, love,

awareness, or community.

Significance of Data

The data suggests that the COVID-19 pandemic had a considerable negative impact on

the secondary choral music classroom in terms of mental health, rigor, and student enrollment.

The data indicates that there was a considerable decline in student enrollment and a decline in

terms of academic rigor. Most students surveyed felt their mental health was significantly

impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, and most felt that being involved in a class such as choir

would benefit their overall mental and social well-being; however, students and teachers were

both impacted. The interviews revealed that teachers are reevaluating their approach to teaching,

as well as the desire for professional development to help them better serve their students' complex needs, especially in a post-COVID-19 environment.

The data gathered signaled that COVID-19 negatively impacted secondary choral music programs, but there were also indications that a large number of students were unaffected. This study did not address subsets of data such as whether students were already dealing with anxiety or depression or whether the secondary choral music programs were previously suffering in terms of enrollment and academic rigor. It is evident that most teachers feel it will be beneficial to plan while being mindful of the mental health of all students.

Limitations

As with any research study, this thesis had limitations, but these limitations did not necessarily inhibit the study's implications. The research presented in this study will be applicable to any future disruptions in education. This section will expand on the five ways the study was limited and provide guidance for future researchers to address these limitations.

First, the COVID-19 pandemic was recent enough that there was limited research. Even as this study was occurring, new research was developed, which sometimes countered the conclusions from previous research. The body of COVID-19 research is continually growing, but it will be years until researchers will fully understand the long-term impact it has had on students or society in general. The subset of research as it pertains to rebuilding the secondary choral music classroom will also take years to develop, further limiting the available research.

A second limitation pertained to recruitment, as it was difficult to recruit students and teachers to participate in this study. A total of 114 secondary choral music students and 52 secondary choral music educators did participate, but this is a small percentage of the existing secondary choral students and secondary choral educators throughout the United States of

America. According to Career Explorer, there are currently over 122,000 music teachers in the United States.[1] This data does not break down content areas such as band or choir, or grade level, but it does give insight to the large number of music teachers that did not participate in this study. This is not to suggest that the data these participants provided does not represent a bigger picture, but this small number of participants does limit the available data collected.

The third limitation was the design of the student perception survey and the teacher questionnaire. This study was non-experimental; therefore, one should interpret the results of these surveys and questionnaires with caution. The surveys and questionnaires were designed to gather data about the effects of COVID-19 on secondary choral music programs. This included the impact on the social and emotional health of secondary choral music students and how secondary choral music educators will rebuild their programs, but outside factors were not considered. It is plausible that some students already dealt with struggles associated with their social and emotional health. It is also plausible that there were other factors that impacted the overall success of a teacher's choral music program.

The fourth limitation is the distinctive context of the COVID-19 pandemic. This limitation may imply that the findings in this study are not only connected to the COVID-19 pandemic but that other factors are also present. These factors could have easily impacted the rebuilding of secondary choral music programs along with the overall mental health of both teachers and students. It is likely that these factors and the COVID-19 pandemic are related.

Fifth, research for this study began during the pandemic and concluded after the pandemic had passed. When this study began, most schools were still fully virtual or in a hybrid

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[1] Career Explorer, "The job market for music teachers in the United States," accessed June 19, 2023, https://www.careerexplorer.com/careers/music-teacher/job-market/.

format. At the conclusion of this study, schools were back to a traditional setting, and the original research questions and hypotheses were less relevant than when initially posed. This does not negate the results of the study, as the relevance of this study could still apply to future disruptions to education.

Recommendation for Future Study

A recommendation for future study is to recruit a larger number of participants, representing a wider demographic range, in order to fully realize the impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the secondary choral music classroom. This research should also include surveys and questionnaires that provide data about the overall social and mental health of students prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. This data would provide a greater breadth of information, and a comparative analysis could be completed to determine if there were existing factors that affected both students and choral music programs.

A second recommendation for future study is for professional music conferences, such as those provided by the American Choral Directors Association programs, to allow participants to collaborate as a large professional learning community. Through this collaboration, educators could work collectively to further develop tools and strategies to aid with meeting the social and emotional needs of students during and after a world-wide pandemic such as COVID-19. Furthermore, teachers could further develop strategies to help with the retention, enrollment, and recruitment of students into their programs, with breakout professional learning communities of specialized content areas. In this professional learning environment, music educators can provide more in-depth, intentional methods on how to rebuild their affected programs through recruitment, retention and motivation, and methods on how to meet the social and emotional

health of their students. These methods could then be published for the larger music community, including teachers and administrators, to implement accordingly at each respective school.

Third, researchers could follow a cohort of selected programs that includes students who were part of these programs at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, throughout their educational careers until high school graduation. An analysis of students and teachers in these programs would provide greater insight into the long-term impact COVID-19 has had on secondary choral music education. This research could then be used to prepare for potential future disruptions.

Fourth, the focus of this study included only secondary choral music education classrooms. It would benefit the performing arts community to collect a greater range of data as it relates to the impact of COVID-19 on the performing arts. Data collected could include students from all grade levels, and students from all performance disciplines such as dance, orchestra, and musical theater. This scope of research would provide a greater understanding of the impact COVID-19 had on the performing arts as a whole, which would inform future pedagogical practices during disruptions to education.

Finally, with permission, researchers could collect data from the secondary choral music students and secondary choral music teachers that were included in this thesis to determine if the tools and strategies implemented once back in the classroom were effective to rebuild the programs. Researchers could analyze the overall mental and social health of these students and teachers, the current state of the programs in terms of enrollment and rigor, and what professional development, if any, has been created and offered. Additionally, researchers could look further into why students responded the way they did to the student perception survey. This

information would be crucial to effectively and proactively planning for future disruptions to the classroom.

Implications

The findings in this study have various implications for music educators. The first statement of the student perception survey was, "I felt emotionally impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic," and the importance of monitoring the mental health of students cannot be overstated. Researchers Lígia Passos, et al. state that, "Mental health effects in the general population secondary to the pandemic phenomenon were till recently considered less important or were neglected. However, in the near future, an increase in mental health research is expected and a consequent change in health care provision and policy, as the significant impacts of COVID-19 on mental health are recognized."[2] While not directly related to the choral music classroom, it was crucial to determine the emotional impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on students to then determine if this also impacted their feelings about singing in a choir.

The data retrieved from this student perception survey is consistent with existing research about parental concerns for their child's mental health. An article written by Emma Dorn, et al. noted that, "In our recent survey of 16,370 parents across every state in America, 35 percent of parents said they were very or extremely concerned about their child's mental health, with a similar proportion worried about their child's social and emotional well-being."[3] Even more alarming is their research that roughly 80 percent of parents had some level of concern about

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[2] Lígia Passos, et al., "Impact on Mental Health Due to COVID-19 Pandemic: Cross-Sectional Study in Portugal and Brazil," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 17, no. 18 (September 2020): 6794, https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17186794.

[3] Emma Dorn, et al., "Covid-19 and Education: The Lingering Effects of Unfinished Learning," accessed July 3, 2022, https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/education/our-insights/covid-19-and-education-the-lingering-effects-of-unfinished-learning

their child's mental health or social and emotional health and development since the pandemic began. Dorn et al., concluded that parental concerns about mental health span grade levels but are slightly lower for parents of early elementary school students.

The data collected from statement two, "I lost my passion for choral singing during the COVID-19 pandemic," implicates that the emotional impact of the COVID-19 pandemic did not affect most students who responded. This could have also implied that because of the nature of music and singing, this is what kept students inspired and motivated. According to Sarah Elizabeth Adler, a report in *Music on Our Minds*, released by the Global Council on Brain Health, "highlights research showing music's positive effect on emotional well-being, including improving mood, decreasing anxiety, and managing stress."[4]

Researchers Tiffany M. Jones, Anne Williford, and Michael S. Spencer et al. write that, "the COVID-19 pandemic has upended the way that students learn and engage with school through the transition to online learning. As a result, a substantial number of students disengaged from school during the spring 2020 semester. School disengagement is a critical factor that will likely exacerbate long-standing educational disparities based on income, race, and ethnicity during the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic."[5] The analysis of the perception results of statement three, "I felt disengaged because of the various formats of teaching," reinforced the findings detailed in the Jones et al., research, and implied that students were strongly impacted

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[4] Sarah Elizabeth Adler, "Music Can Be a Great Mood Booster," accessed July 5, 2022, https://www.aarp.org/health/brain-health/info-2020/music-mental-health.html#:~:text=Their%20latest%20report%2C%20E2%80%9CMusic%20on,decreasing%20anxiety%2C%20and%20managing%20stress.

[5] Tiffany M. Jones, et al, "School Mental Health Providers' Perspectives on the Impact of COVID-19 on Racial Inequities and School Disengagement," *Children & Schools* cdab009 (31 May, 2021): 97-106., doi:10.1093/cs/cdab009.

by the online teaching format. Most students either agreed or strongly agreed, and none of the students strongly disagreed.

Only 24 percent of students agreed or strongly agreed with statement four, "I need my choir teacher to make me feel safe moving back into the classroom." This could be due to other factors, such as how connected they feel with their choir teachers or if they are pursuing other avenues for help with the mental impact COVID-19. The fifth student perception statement was, "I feel my growth as a singer and musician was negatively impacted because of the COVID-19 pandemic." Nearly half the students responded that they agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. The implications of this data – that students were negatively impacted by the pandemic – are indicative of one of the many reasons secondary choral music programs suffered because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Seventy-six percent of students agreed or strongly agreed with statement six, "I need activities and music that promote positive mental health." It can be concluded that opportunities for students to participate in these activities is paramount to their well-being. It is well-documented that most people recognize the relationship between music and emotional health. Experiencing a dampened or elevated mood while listening to music is a common experience. Detailed in a report by the Community Music Center of Boston, music and mental health research has shown that, "while passively listening to music certainly has its benefits, actively performing it has even more." [6] While students may not recognize the research behind their need for activities and music that promote positive mental health, most do recognize the need based on personal experience.

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[6] Community Music Center of Boston, "The Positive Effects of Music on Mental Health," accessed March 12, 2023, https://cmcb.org/news/the-positive-effects-of-performing-music-on-mental-health/.

The National Alliance on Mental Illness stated that, "a sense of community provides elements that are critical to mental health, the most beneficial ones being belonging, support, and purpose."[7] As seen in figure six, well over half the students indicated they needed activities and music that promoted positive mental health, so it is logical that nearly 68 percent of students also indicated they need activities and music that promoted a strong sense of community. This research and data concluded that to promote positive mental health, most choral music students desire a strong sense of community.

Although less than half of student respondents indicated they were comfortable sharing mental health concerns with their choir teacher, this should not be seen as a positive or negative research point. The purpose of this statement was to determine whether students were open to sharing their mental health concerns with their choir teacher, and was not intended to suggest students should be comfortable sharing. This data could be useful to determine the role a choir teacher might have in the classroom beyond teaching music.

Statement nine, "I feel comfortable singing in a group inside an actual classroom," revealed that eighty-two percent of students agreed or strongly agreed. This information should assist choir directors in the planning process. While the majority of students are comfortable, 18 percent of a class is a significant number of students, and their level of comfort should be considered when determining how to best move forward with in-person singing.

Upon the disaggregation of data from statement ten, "I am excited to be part of in-person choir rehearsals," it was determined that these students are the same students who disagree or strongly disagree that they feel comfortable singing in a group inside an actual classroom. There

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[7] Caroline Cox, "Why community is key to good mental health," accessed March 9, 2023, https://global.venn.city/venn-journal/belonging/why-community-is-key-to-good-mental-health/.

is a clear connection between their level of comfort returning to the classroom and their excitement to be back in the classroom singing. Only 9.1 percent of students disagreed with statement eleven, but it is possible that other factors, such as being placed in choir without choosing the class, impacted their feelings on choir placement. The same 9.1 percent of students who did not feel safe returning to the classroom, and who were not excited for in-person rehearsals also disagreed with statement twelve, "I am excited to be part of in-person concerts again." There is a clear correlation between feeling safe, and exhibiting excitement about singing together, whether in rehearsal or a concert.

While 18.2 percent of students disagreed with the statement, "I am excited to be part of in-person concerts again," the reason why these students did not look forward to choir was not addressed. The student's lack of excitement could be due to factors surrounding mental health. However, the student's lack of excitement could also be due to a lack of interest in choir, or struggling to enjoy a performing arts class in an online format.

Statement fourteen, "during the pandemic, choir helped me cope with mental health challenges," provided data that largely lacked any solid implication. There were 63.7 percent of students who stated they needed activities and music that developed a sense of community (statement 7), 63.7 percent of students responded with neutral, disagree, or strongly disagree that choir helped them cope with mental health challenges. With only 27.5 percent of students disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with statement fifteen, "I feel that being in choir has provided necessary structure now that in-person learning has resumed," it is evident that choir has been beneficial for the overall mental health of students, providing needed structure to their lives.

The implications of the data collected through the fifteen student perception survey statements provided useful information for teachers as they went back into the classroom. This information was helpful in planning student instruction and developing strategies to meet the social and emotional needs of students. The data collected through the teacher interviews implied that many programs suffered in terms of enrollment. It was also revealed that professional development in the area of SEL strategies is needed for most directors. Recruitment strategies have not necessarily changed since pre-COVID, but most directors agree that they must recruit with more intent.

Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic had a direct impact on secondary education, and data suggested this included the secondary choral music classroom. It is documented that future pandemics of similar or worse magnitude will likely take place. Michael Penn attests that, "The most important takeaway is large pandemics like COVID-19 and the Spanish flu are relatively likely…and, understanding that pandemics aren't so rare should raise the priority of efforts to prevent and control them in the future."[8] Thomas Kenyon writes that the next COVID-like pandemic could strike any day. Before it does, Kenyon believes it is critical that the U.S. establishes a national program to rapidly deliver effective new vaccines to avert cataclysmic levels of mortality, economic destruction, social upheaval, and insecurity.

Kenyon's research details the importance of being forward-thinking and proactive with preparations for similar pandemics as COVID-19. Though COVID-19 tragically killed more than 400,000 Americans in its first year alone, Kenyon says that the next new pandemic virus could

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[8] Michael Penn, "Statistics Say Large Pandemics are More Likely than we Thought," accessed March 11, 2023, https://globalhealth.duke.edu/news/statistics-say-large-pandemics-are-more-likely-we-thought.

be "even more transmissible and lethal."[9] Kenyon states that, "COVID-19 has damaged economies, compromised our children's development, and threatened our future as a nation. But even more alarming is the reality that many scientists have long predicted a pandemic that would claim tens of millions of lives. It hasn't happened yet, but it's just a matter of time."[10]

The COVID-19 pandemic may be the deadliest viral outbreak the world has seen in more than a century, but statistically, such extreme events aren't as rare as one might think, asserts a new analysis of novel disease outbreaks over the past 400 years.[11] The study, appearing in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, used a newly assembled record of past outbreaks to estimate the intensity of those events and the yearly probability of them recurring. It found: "…the probability of a pandemic with similar impact to COVID-19 is about 2% in any year, meaning that someone born in the year 2000 would have about a 38% chance of experiencing one by now. And that probability is only growing, which the authors say highlights the need to adjust perceptions of pandemic risks and expectations for preparedness."[12]

There are varying opinions on the likelihood of a future pandemic, how the world should have responded to the COVID-19 pandemic, the seriousness of the disease, and what precautions should have been taken. Despite these opinions, research and data indicates a correlation between the pandemic and the impact it had on mental health. The data collected in this study

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[9] Thomas Kenyon, "COVID-19 has taught us hard lessons about our nation's pandemic readiness. If we are willing to take action, we can avoid repeating them," accessed June 17, 2023, https://www.projecthope.org/the-one-thing-we-must-get-right-before-the-next-pandemic/02/2021/?utm_source=googlegrants&utm_medium=cpc&utm_term=global%20pandemic&utm_campaign=Paid&gclid=Cj0KCQjwy9-kBhCHARIsAHpBjHhJsYmiFnutIHiCDewRzfURnI6YI7EI4LDhzbYp8rB14n2bN70j23saAqxmEALw_wcB.

[10] Kenyon, "COVID-19 has taught us hard lessons."

[11] Ibid.

[12] Penn, "Statistics Say Large Pandemics are More Likely than we Thought."

was gathered just as schools were developing plans to return to the classroom, and although it is specific to the secondary choral music classroom, the data still holds significance on how to be proactive in planning for future disruptions to the classroom and the importance of addressing the social and emotional needs of students, which can include a stronger sense of community.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, society as a whole was forced to make adjustments to everyday life, and many were also forced into solitude. Kathy Katella of Yale Medicine reported that "People who were part of a community during the pandemic realized the importance of human connection, and those who didn't have that kind of support realized they need it."[13] Katella continued, stating that "Many of us have become aware of how much we need other people—many have managed to maintain their social connections, even if they had to use technology to keep in touch, there's no doubt that it's not enough, but even that type of community has helped people."[14] Community can be found within the secondary choral music classroom and this kind of community can be an integral piece to maintaining positive social and emotional health during possible future disruptions in education.

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[13] Kathy Katella, "8 Lessons We Can Learn from the Covid-19 Pandemic," accessed May 27, 2023, https://www.yalemedicine.org/news/8-lessons-covid-19-pandemic.

[14] Ibid.

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APPENDIX A: Student Perception Survey

Please select the response that most closely aligns with how you feel about each of the following statements. The response options are:

Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Agree, or Strongly Agree

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1. I felt emotionally impacted by the COVID-19 Pandemic.

2. I lost my passion for choral singing during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

3. During the COVID-19 pandemic I felt disengaged because of the various formats of teaching.

4. I need my choir teacher to make me feel safe moving back into the classroom.

5. I feel my growth as a singer and musician was negatively impacted because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

6. I need activities and music that promote positive mental health.

7. I need activities and music that develop a strong sense of community.

8. Now that we are back to in-person learning, I feel comfortable sharing mental health concerns with my choir teacher.

9. I feel comfortable singing in a group inside an actual classroom.

10. I am excited to be part of in-person rehearsals.

11. For me, choir provides a sense of belonging.

12. I am excited to be part of in-person concerts again.

13. During the pandemic, choir was a class I looked forward to attending.

14. During the pandemic, choir helped me cope with mental health challenges.

15. I feel that being in choir will provide necessary structure after the COVID-19 Pandemic.

APPENDIX B: Teacher Questionnaire

1. Early observations indicate many secondary choral music programs suffered in terms of enrollment when in-person learning returned; how did the COVID-19 Pandemic affect student enrollment in your program?

2. What tools and strategies will you implement to address the social and emotional impact the COVID-19 Pandemic likely had on your students?

3. What tools and strategies will you implement to rebuild your choral program after the COVID-19 Pandemic?

4. What professional development do you need to successfully meet the needs of your students, post COVID-19?

5. Will you plan activities and music to specifically address mental health awareness? If so, how, and what?