

## Canadian Music Teachers' Burnout and Resilience Through the Second Wave of the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Article abstract

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## Canadian Music Teachers' Burnout and Resilience Through the Second Wave of the COVID-19 Pandemic

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### Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic globally impacted teachers' wellbeing as they adjusted their practices to accommodate physical distancing, online learning, and hybrid models. Coinciding these changes, music teachers were impacted by local health regulations and school divisional policy revisions prohibiting singing and playing wind instruments indoors. Consequently, music teachers were required to abruptly change their practice, were displaced to alternative locations (e.g., gymnasiums), and/or were required to use travelling carts to teach. Research into the impacts that COVID-19 policy changes had on school music remains limited in Canadian contexts. To provide insight into this phenomenon, the research question was formulated: "What are music teachers' perspectives on how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted their sense of wellbeing?" To facilitate the inquiry, a mixed-methods approach was utilized via an online attitudinal survey, a questionnaire, and focus group discussions. In total, 218 music teachers across Manitoba, Canada participated in the online survey and completed the questionnaire while 21 music teachers participated in focus group discussions. Findings demonstrated that music teachers experienced significantly strenuous working conditions throughout the pandemic, resulting in many teachers considering early retirement or resignation. Despite these challenges, music teachers demonstrated considerable resilience as they navigated the educational landscape in the province.

*Keywords:* teacher wellbeing, music education, COVID-19

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers around the world reported increased work hours, stress, and difficulties adapting to physical distancing regulations and online teaching (Herman et al., 2021; Pattison et al., 2021; Sokal et al., 2021). Inquiry into teachers' wellbeing and risk of occupational burnout is well-established as the teaching profession is identified as a high stress profession (Clarà, 2017; Papastylianou et al., 2009; Yonezawa et al., 2011). Even prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, inquiry pertaining to teachers' stress (Falecki & Mann, 2015; Papastylianou et al., 2009), resilience (Ainsworth & Oldfield, 2019; de Wal et al., 2020; Granzera et al., 2015; Gu & Day, 2013), and organizational attrition (Beltman et al., 2011; Clarà, 2017; Falecki & Mann, 2015; Yonezawa et al., 2011) was investigated.

Despite the importance of investigating how teachers coped with significant changes to their teaching practices, inquiry into the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on teachers' wellbeing is limited but emerging (Chan et al., 2021). In the Canadian context, Sokal et al. (2021) found that Canadian teachers experienced high stress and faced difficulty adapting to new workplace expectations. Despite these challenges, Canadian teachers largely persevered and adapted to support students' learning (Sokal et al., 2020). There is limited inquiry into the impacts the pandemic has had on specialist educators (e.g., music and physical education). López-Fernández et al. (2021) found that physical education teachers experienced high levels of stress adapting to virtual learning contexts and they needed professional development to supplement their practices.

Research into the impacts that the pandemic-related policy changes have had on school music teachers' practice (Calderón-Garrido & Gustems-Carnicer, 2021; Gül, 2021; Okay, 2021; Shaw & Mayo, 2022) and sense of wellbeing (Cheng & Liam, 2021; Hash, 2021; Shaw & Mayo, 2022) is ongoing. As music education programs across Canada were affected, Choral Canada (2022) issued the statement: "Singing has been banned or heavily restricted in Canadian schools during the COVID-19 pandemic, leaving students without vital music programs in their school that not only benefit musical learning, but also student mental health and wellbeing" (para. 1). In the Ontario context, Public Health Ontario (2021) permitted singing and the playing of wind-instruments in schools but required students to physically distance (two meters separation) and wear masks, and mandated plexiglass barriers to be installed between students. If these protocols could not be accommodated, either outdoor learning spaces might be explored or music-making learning experiences would be prohibited. Conversely, the Québec Government (2020) did not implement any restrictive protocols specifically for music education but issued the conditional statement: "For music classes, physical education and other specialized activities, the same rules regarding groups apply, with the possibility of using rooms dedicated to these activities ... provided that the equipment is disinfected between groups" (p. 7). The Manitoba Government (2020) announced on October 22, 2020, the implementation of provincial health guidelines requiring physical distancing as well as the restriction on playing wind instruments and/or singing inside schools. There is limited investigation into how COVID-19 provincial health orders have impacted music teachers' practice and sense of wellbeing, particularly within the Manitoba context. These structural and policy changes led to the formulation of the research question: "What are Manitoba music teachers' perspectives on how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted their sense of wellbeing?" To facilitate inquiry into this research problem, a mixed-method approach was utilized, consisting of a quantitative data source (survey) as well as qualitative research data sources (open-ended questionnaire responses and focus group discussions) to explore the state of Manitoba music educators' wellbeing. To better understand the data collected, I integrated job demands-resource (JD-R) theory and the concept of teacher resilience to generate an interpretive conceptual framework for data analysis for this study.

## Conceptual Framework

There are plural perspectives on the concept of teacher wellbeing. Granzera et al. (2015) described teacher wellbeing as a "broad and multi-dimensional concept" and defines the term as "teachers' positive evaluations of and healthy functioning in their work environment" (p. 230). Falecki and Mann (2015) noted that "positive wellbeing is a stable emotional state and balances between the teacher and the school context and its demands" (p. 176). Job demands-resource theory (JD-R) is a highly used interpretive framework to understand the nature of workers' wellbeing and burnout (Granzera et al., 2015). Demerouti et al. (2001) formulated JD-R theory to understand this phenomenon, explaining that *job demands* "refer to the physical, social, or organizational aspects of the job that require physical or mental effort and are therefore associated with certain physiological and psychological costs (e.g., exhaustion)" (p. 501). Resources were diverse and could include professional development, workplace relationships, administrative support, and workers' sense of autonomy (Granzera et al., 2015). Job resources were the physical, psychological, and/or structural aspects that might support workers in: (a) functioning and being successful within the workplace; (b) reducing job expectations to support psychological and physiological wellness; and (c) providing opportunities to promote professional learning (Demerouti et al., 2001). de Wal et al. (2020) explained: "The JDR model states that learning of teachers will occur in work environments that hold more or higher job resources relative to job demands" (p. 18). Job resources included participation in decision-making, diverse tasks associated with the position, and occupational control (Demerouti et al., 2001). Administrative leadership styles, such as transformative leadership, could also be categorized as a job resource, as compassionate leadership styles generally correlated with lower rates of teacher burnout (de Wal et al., 2020; Granzera et al., 2015). There were also various personal resources that workers might possess that could be identified as a category of job resources, such as self-efficacy and strong mental/emotional competencies (Granzera et al., 2015).

Teachers experience among the highest rates of organizational burnout among all professions (Falecki & Mann, 2015), as teacher attrition remains a widespread systemic issue (Ainsworth & Oldfield, 2019; Beltman et al., 2011; Clarà, 2017; Munroe, 2021; Yonezawa et al., 2011). Russell et al., (2020) asserted:

“There is no debate—burnout is an organizational problem that is prevalent among educators” (p. 11). Specific to the teaching profession, Collie et al. (2017) identified three structural factors that needed to be optimal to prevent teacher burnout: (a) occupational support (school-based and system-level support from administration and/or government); (b) interpersonal relationships (which may include colleagues, students, and the community); and (c) educational policy changes (changes to structures affecting routine practices). Teachers needed to feel valued and supported in all three of these categories to function and be healthy within school systems. As Collie et al. (2017) explained: “When educators perceive that they are provided with adequate school-based and system-level support for their work, they are less likely to experience stress and more likely to experience well-being at/through work” (p. 5). Further, de Wal et al. (2020) observed that practitioners’ performance best occurred when there was a high level of job resources relative to job requirements.

Teacher resilience is a relatively recent area of academic inquiry (Beltman et al., 2011; Clarà, 2017), and is understood as “a way of understanding what enables teachers to persist in the face of challenges and offers a complementary perspective to studies of stress, burnout and attrition” (Beltman et al., 2011, p. 185). Interpretations of *resilience* vary, but Clarà (2017) described teacher resilience as “when a teacher adapts positively to an adverse situation” (p. 82). There are notable personality traits associated with higher levels of teacher resilience, such as intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy (Beltman et al., 2011), but resilience is also impacted by organizational leadership (Gu & Day, 2013). Ainsworth and Oldfield (2019) suggested that the nature of inquiry into teacher resilience has evolved throughout the years, transitioning from an exclusive focus on individual personality traits to focusing on the processes through which adversity was overcome by protective elements. Falecki and Mann (2015) noted that teachers needed better strategies to manage the ever-increasing stressors of the profession and suggested teachers should receive professional development in cultivating self-efficacy as well as learning to practice self-compassion and optimism as protective factors to ensure long term wellbeing in the profession. Munroe (2021) shared that organizations that cultivated teacher resilience through professional development also yielded lower levels of teacher burnout and attrition.

The conceptual framework of this study is premised upon job demand-resource theory (such as maintaining a healthy ratio of resources to demands of the profession) as well as teacher resilience (the individual and structural conditions to promote self-efficacy and wellness).

## Methodology

To better understand how the COVID-19 pandemic affected music teachers’ sense of wellbeing across the province of Manitoba, Canada, a mixed-methods approach was utilized to gather quantitative (attitudinal Likert survey) as well as qualitative (questionnaire and focus group discussions) data to learn of music teachers’ experiences.

## Participants

In total, 218 music teachers in Manitoba, Canada participated in the online survey and completed the questionnaire while 21 music teachers participated in focus group discussions. Eligibility to participate in this study included: (a) being employed as a public or private school teacher in Manitoba; and (b) instructing music as a portion of a participant’s job assignment. Manitoba is divided into five regional health authorities, and all regions were represented: Winnipeg Metro ( $n = 126$ ), Southern ( $n = 31$ ), Prairie Mountain ( $n = 23$ ), Eastern-Interlake ( $n = 17$ ), and Northern ( $n = 6$ ). There was a fairly even representation between novice and experienced teachers, including: 0-4 years of experience ( $n = 30$ ), 5-9 years of experience ( $n = 43$ ), 10-14 years of experience ( $n = 43$ ), 15-19 years of experience ( $n = 37$ ), and 20+ years of experience ( $n = 53$ ). There was representation of English ( $n = 178$ ) and French ( $n = 37$ ) music instruction, both public ( $n = 187$ ) and private ( $n = 15$ ) school teachers as well as teachers from early years music instruction ( $n = 101$ ), middle and senior years band ( $n = 93$ ), choir ( $n = 81$ ), guitar ( $n = 29$ ), in addition to classroom, fiddle, music technology, and various other teachable subject areas.

## Data Collection and Analysis

Research data were gathered between January 2021 and May 2021. With the assistance of the Manitoba Music Educators’ Association (MMEA), the link to the survey and the questionnaire was distributed

to its membership mid-January 2021 and was closed early March 2021. The invitation email and link to participate in the survey, questionnaire, and focus group discussions were only distributed via the MMEA emailing list. Only members of the MMEA received the recruitment email. As such, there were an indefinite number of music teachers across Manitoba that did not formally receive the invitation to participate. However, being a member of the MMEA was not a condition for participation. The email and invitation links could be forwarded, and it is possible that the email link may have been shared among colleagues outside the professional association. SurveyMonkey was the platform chosen for data collection. Following data collection via the online survey and questionnaire, a subsequent recruitment email was delivered to MMEA members with the invitation to participate in a focus group discussion. The Likert-type attitudinal survey was analyzed via basic descriptive statistical analysis (McMillan, 2012) while thematic coding (Saldaña, 2013) was used to interpret participants' responses. Trustworthiness of findings was achieved through triangulation of sources (McMillan, 2012; Saldaña, 2013).

## Findings

Findings have been organized according to quantitative data (survey responses) and qualitative data (questionnaire and focus group discussions).

### Survey Findings

The survey consisted of two sections: (a) general information and demographics; and (b) an attitudinal Likert-type scale exploring music teachers' sense of wellbeing.

#### General Information and Demographics Section

This section collected data pertaining to participants' demographics, teaching experience and areas of expertise, and geographic location across the province. As singing and playing wind instruments indoors were prohibited by provincial health regulations, it was pertinent to collect information relating to teachers' pedagogical changes. When asked if participants were required to teach a new area of music programming due to COVID-19 restrictions, 107 participants indicated "yes" while 99 indicated "no". The most common areas of alternative instruction were percussion ensembles ( $n = 48$ ), music technology ( $n = 37$ ), guitar ( $n = 24$ ), and visual/performing arts ( $n = 24$ ). In an open-ended *other* section, participants further indicated their new job assignments also included music history, ukulele, and music theory among other arrangements. When asked if these participants received any professional development for these new areas of instruction, 16 indicated "yes", while 115 indicated "no". An additional question was included to explore how these pedagogical changes affected music teachers' number of hours working (displayed in Table 1).

**Table 1**

*Number of Hours Preparing Outside School Hours (n = 199)*

| Question/<br>Number of Hours  | 0         | 1-4         | 5-9         | 10-14       | 15+         |
|---|-----------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| 1. How many hours a week do you engage in work-related preparation outside of school hours? | 4<br>(2%) | 72<br>(36%) | 69<br>(35%) | 33<br>(17%) | 21<br>(11%) |

A subsequent question asked, "Have the number of hours you work at home for your teaching responsibilities increased?" Of 199 respondents, 130 (65%) indicated "yes" while 69 (35%) indicated "no".

Participants were further asked to specify the location of their teaching practice during provincial health restrictions. Of 202 responses in this section, 91 participants indicated they continued to teach in their music room while 110 indicated that they had been displaced. Further details of alternate arrangements are shared in Table 2.

**Table 2**  
*Alternative Teaching Arrangements*

| If you are not teaching in your music room, please specify your new teaching arrangement | Frequency |
|--|-----------|
| Travelling Cart  | 79        |
| Alternative space/classroom  | 21        |
| Online   | 8         |
| No music classes   | 3         |

In an open-ended section, participants further clarified that arrangements also included hybrid models (online/person), combinations of carts and gymnasiums/classrooms, multiple spaces throughout the day, and outdoors among other arrangements.

### **Attitudinal Likert-type Section**

In total, 199 of the 218 participants responded in part or in totality to the attitudinal Likert-type survey. Nineteen participants provided information relating to demographics, years of experience, teaching resources, and location during the pandemic, and provided information to the questionnaire but elected to not participate in the attitudinal section of the survey. Respondents were prompted to answer the statement best aligning with their attitude, including: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, or disagree. Each response was assigned a numerical value of 4, 3, 2, 1, and 0 respectively. Basic descriptive statistics including frequency of responses, percentages, and mean scores are displayed below in Table 3.

**Table 3**  
*Attitudinal Survey Findings*

| Question/Response  | Strongly Agree | Agree        | Neutral      | Disagree     | Strongly Disagree | Mean |
|--|----------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|-------------------|------|
|  | (4)            | (3)          | (2)          | (1)          | (0)               |      |
|  | <i>n</i> (%)   | <i>n</i> (%) | <i>n</i> (%) | <i>n</i> (%) | <i>n</i> (%)      |      |
| 1. I am happy going to work.   | 11<br>(5%)     | 73<br>(37%)  | 47<br>(24%)  | 51<br>(26%)  | 17<br>(8%)        | 2.05 |
| 2. My current teaching assignment has contributed to stress in my personal life. | 71<br>(36%)    | 86<br>(43%)  | 20<br>(10%)  | 16<br>(8%)   | 6<br>(3%)         | 3.01 |
| 3. I feel physically safe in my current working conditions.                      | 18<br>(9%)     | 80<br>(40%)  | 39<br>(20%)  | 47<br>(24%)  | 15<br>(7%)        | 2.20 |
| 4. I feel my emotional needs have been supported by my school division.          | 11<br>(6%)     | 46<br>(23%)  | 56<br>(28%)  | 58<br>(29%)  | 27<br>(14%)       | 1.78 |
| 5. I feel fatigued from my current teaching assignment.                          | 97<br>(49%)    | 71<br>(36%)  | 15<br>(7%)   | 14<br>(7%)   | 2<br>(1%)         | 3.24 |



| Question/Response   | Strongly     | Agree        | Neutral      | Disagree     | Strongly     | Mean |
|---|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|------|
|   | Agree        | (3)          | (2)          | (1)          | Disagree     |      |
|   | (4)          | (3)          | (2)          | (1)          | (0)          |      |
|   | <i>n</i> (%) | <i>n</i> (%) | <i>n</i> (%) | <i>n</i> (%) | <i>n</i> (%) |      |
| 7. I am in need of counselling as a result of my teaching assignment.   | 18<br>(9%)   | 29<br>(15%)  | 55<br>(28%)  | 74<br>(37%)  | 23<br>(11%)  | 1.72 |
| 8. I have used music to support my wellbeing.   | 46<br>(23%)  | 91<br>(46%)  | 26<br>(13%)  | 32<br>(16%)  | 4<br>(2%)    | 2.72 |
| 9. My use of cannabis and/or alcohol has increased.   | 9<br>(4%)    | 56<br>(28%)  | 38<br>(19%)  | 45<br>(23%)  | 51<br>(26%)  | 1.63 |
| 10. I am confident that I will be able to continue teaching (under current conditions) for the long-term.   | 7<br>(4%)    | 44<br>(22%)  | 36<br>(18%)  | 70<br>(35%)  | 42<br>(21%)  | 1.56 |
| 11. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I have concerns for the future of my music program in my school.  | 94<br>(47%)  | 60<br>(30%)  | 24<br>(12%)  | 17<br>(9%)   | 4<br>(2%)    | 3.12 |
| 12. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I have concerns relating to my future employment in music education.  | 52<br>(26%)  | 60<br>(30%)  | 34<br>(17%)  | 45<br>(23%)  | 8<br>(4%)    | 2.52 |
| 13. My current working conditions and/or teaching assignment during the COVID-19 pandemic have led me to consider early retirement and/or other career paths. | 25<br>(12%)  | 69<br>(35%)  | 39<br>(20%)  | 54<br>(27%)  | 12<br>(6%)   | 2.21 |

Findings are further categorized based on mean scores and organized under the headings: high scoring (*agreeing with the statement*), moderate scoring (*neither agreeing or disagreeing*), and low scoring items (*disagreeing*).

**High Scoring Items.** From the analysis, the highest scoring statement was Item 5 (3.25), followed by Items 11 (3.12), 2 (3.01), and 8 (2.72). These results strongly suggest that most participants were fatigued from their current teaching assignment, and felt work negatively impacted their wellbeing in their personal lives. Further, participants were very concerned for the future of their music programs in their school communities. There was also a strong indication of resilience, as many music educators used music-making as a coping mechanism throughout the pandemic.

**Moderate Scoring Items.** Moderate scoring statements included Items 12 ( $M = 2.52$ ), 13 ( $M = 2.21$ ), 3 ( $M = 2.20$ ), and 1 ( $M = 2.05$ ). Many participants indicated a moderate satisfaction in going to work, felt a general sense of physical safety in schools, were somewhat concerned for future employment in the school system, and had considered either early retirement and/or resigning from the profession.

**Low Scoring Items.** The lowest scoring statement of the survey was Item 10 ( $M = 1.56$ ), followed by Items 9 ( $M = 1.63$ ), 7 ( $M = 1.72$ ), 6 ( $M = 1.73$ ), and 4 ( $M = 1.78$ ). Based on the survey responses, participants resoundingly indicated that the teaching conditions for the 2020/2021 school year were not sustainable in the long term. The survey further suggested that a high number of participants operated while

being sleep deprived and expressed concerns for a lack of support from their school administration. Despite these tribulations, it is encouraging to report that Item 9 (self-medication through cannabis/alcohol), as well as Item 7 (the need for counselling) were not particularly high scoring statements among the general population.

### *Questionnaire and Focus Group Findings*

In total, 180 participants engaged in the questionnaire while 39 participants elected to provide no response. The questions distributed in the questionnaire are displayed in Table 4.

**Table 4**  
*Questionnaire Questions*

| Item No. | Questionnaire Question  |
|----------|---|
| 1.       | What workplace concerns do you have related to your physical well-being?  |
| 2.       | What workplace concerns do you have related to your emotional well-being?   |
| 3.       | What avenues for self-care have you explored during the COVID-19 pandemic?  |
| 4.       | What strategies have you found to be most beneficial to your well-being during the COVID-19 restrictions?                 |
| 5.       | What resources would you like to see to improve your well-being during current teaching restrictions?                     |
| 6.       | What resources do you wish you had to support your teaching practice under current COVID-19 restrictions?                 |
| 7.       | What specific professional development or additional training do you need to be more successful in your current teaching? |
| 8.       | Are there any further thoughts on your well-being that you would like to share?   |

Participants' questionnaire responses were text-based and documented participants' experiences, feelings, and attitudes toward teaching music during the COVID-19 pandemic and the impact such conditions had on their wellbeing.

Following the distribution of the survey and the questionnaire, a subsequent email invitation was sent to MMEA members to participate in focus group discussions. Twenty-one participants engaged in five focus group discussions in May 2021 using the Zoom digital platform. Focus groups were organized by participants' backgrounds in music education: (a) band ( $n = 5$ ); (b) band ( $n = 4$ ); (c) guitar and band ( $n = 4$ ); (d) early years music ( $n = 4$ ); and (e) choir and miscellaneous music programs ( $n = 4$ ). There was not a notable difference between music teaching groups and their impacts on wellbeing. The questions utilized to facilitate discussion for the focus group discussions are displayed in Table 5.

**Table 5**  
*Focus Group Questions*

| Item No. | Focus Group Question  |
|----------|---|
| 1.       | How have changes to your teaching responsibilities impacted your physical, emotional, mental, and/or spiritual health?  |
| 2.       | What are some of the strategies you have explored to support your well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic?  |
| 3.       | How valued do you feel by the government and/or your employer for engaging in professional learning and accommodating students' needs during the COVID-19 pandemic? |



| Item No. | Focus Group Question   |
|----------|--|
| 4.       | What are some of the challenges you may worry about for the future of your music program or your employment as a music educator? |
| 5.       | Do you have any final thoughts, comments, or concerns you would like to share?   |

Through thematic coding between the questionnaire responses and focus group discussion transcripts, four major themes emerged concerning the impact of the COVID19 pandemic on music teachers' well-being: (a) stress in the workplace; (b) stress in personal lives; (c) reliance on self-efficacy and self-care practices; and (d) feeling under-supported by leadership.

### ***Stress in the Workplace***

Participants across Manitoba expressed various organizational stressors that negatively impacted their wellbeing while at work. These stressors included: teaching in alternative spaces, social isolation from colleagues, fear of contracting COVID-19, feeling undervalued as a music educator, missing music-making in schools, exhaustion from enforcing public health regulations, feelings of resistance against music education, concern for future employment and/or music programs, low organizational morale, and feeling overworked and under-supported. These concerns were so prevalent that 94 of 199 respondents (47%) in the survey indicated that they had considered early retirement and/or resignation because of the teaching conditions during the pandemic. Questionnaire responses and focus group discussions provided a more in-depth understanding of this phenomenon.

**Stress of Teaching in Alternative Spaces.** Participants expressed exhaustion from having to teach in alternative spaces (such as gyms, classrooms, on travelling carts, hybrid online/in-person, and so forth). Consequently, many participants felt fatigued from having to adapt to these arrangements. In the online questionnaire, one participant commented:

I am feeling very emotionally unstable after being displaced from my music room. Pushing into classrooms on a cart has been very hard on me emotionally because I feel like most of my normal teaching practice is no longer possible.

These challenges were widespread in the music education community. 110 respondents (55%) indicated that they were teaching in alternative spaces (e.g., classrooms or gyms), on travelling carts, exclusively online, or via hybrid online/in-person arrangements. In addition to the physical demands of commuting throughout the day, many participants expressed various challenges of sharing classroom spaces, including resistance from colleagues around sharing resources and learning spaces, interruptions and classroom management issues, and difficulty maintaining cleanliness and hygiene.

**Stress of Social Isolation from Colleagues.** A common theme in both the questionnaire and focus group discussions was participants' feelings of social isolation and general disconnection from the rest of school staff. One participant noted: "It's lonely. Music teachers already find themselves on an island so to speak. This year and part of last has been especially so." Another participant similarly wrote: "[It's] hard to connect when we are so segregated in the school." Due to provincial health regulations, many schools adopted staggered recesses to limit COVID-19 exposure among student cohorts; many participants expressed that these arrangements negatively impacted their ability to converse, collaborate, and bond with other staff members.

**Fear of Contracting COVID-19 in the Workplace.** Another theme was the fear among music teachers of contracting COVID-19 while working in Manitoba schools and concern for the lack of physical distancing accommodations. One participant commented: "Classes are small in regular classrooms, but not small for music. Students are being put in the music room with less than 2m of distance, and I have been told that this is the best we can do." Many participants expressed concerns of contracting COVID-19 as they commuted on travelling carts, instructed hundreds of students on a regular basis, and worked in conditions where distancing and other public health protocols could not be achieved. Other areas of concern related to workplaces not being adequately disinfected and behavioral challenges with

students defying mandates (e.g., not wearing masks or not physically distancing). This theme is corroborated by the survey findings under Item 3, where 101 of 199 respondents (51%) indicated that they did not feel physically safe in the workplace.

**Stress Over the Future of School Music Programs.** A significant stressor among participants was the expressed concern for the future vitality of their school music programs. One participant noted her concerns, stating:

I am in the last leg of my career and have spent the last decade building a music program with my colleagues. I don't know if I have it in me to start from scratch again. I probably will find the energy but it is so challenging to see the numbers we created together just fall away.

Many participants explained that they had invested years into 'building' their school programs (achieving high student enrolment numbers). Music-making being compromised by public health protocols left many participants concerned for the future of their school programs. These themes were consistent with the findings in the survey, where 154 respondents (77%) indicated that they were concerned for the future of their school music programs while 112 respondents (56%) noted concerns for future employment.

**Feeling Overwhelmed and Exhausted from Teaching Circumstances.** In both the questionnaire responses and focus group discussions, teachers described being overwhelmed and exhausted from work. Many participants mentioned their exasperation with working conditions, which included teaching new subject areas, teaching in new spaces, and/or generally upholding public health protocols. Reflecting on their experiences teaching during the pandemic, one participant comments:

I often feel exhausted even before the school day is over. I am being asked to teach band, teach in the classroom, and teach remote learners and the timetable has me all over the school. The load is heavy and there doesn't seem to be an end in sight.

Many participants felt that teaching arrangements during the pandemic were not sustainable, and they were overwhelmed. This finding is consistent with Item 10 of the survey, which indicated that only 26% of respondents expressed confidence in being able to sustain such teaching conditions for the long term. Some participants were unable to continue and required leaves of absence from work, realizing they needed a break from their teaching responsibilities.

**Missing Music-Making in Schools.** A theme that arose to a lesser extent was the notion that the absence of music-making in schools was having a negative impact on teachers' wellbeing. In the questionnaire, 16 respondents explicitly described missing music-making in their buildings, as demonstrated by the sentiment of one participant: "Not being able to sing and make music like we regularly do is taking a toll on mental health. I've never felt this low in spirits teaching music before." This theme corroborated survey results, as Item 1 of the survey indicated that only 42% of respondents were happy going to work. It appears that the inability to create music in schools negatively affected some participants and their wellbeing in the workplace.

### ***Workplace Stress Affecting Personal Life***

There was a strong indication that occupational stressors were negatively impacting teachers' wellbeing at home and in their personal lives. In the questionnaire, one participant noted: "I try to get most of my work done at school, even if it means staying for 2 or 3 hours after school each day. That way, when I go home I can have time for myself and my family." Respondents in the focus groups and online questionnaire noted that working conditions were having a negative impact on their personal lives, impinging on their time at home and with their families. In the survey, 130 of 199 respondents (65%) indicated that their work hours had increased during the pandemic, and under Item 2, 157 of 199 respondents (79%) indicated that their working conditions were contributing to stress in their personal life. Further, Item 6 also revealed that only 32% of respondents reported receiving adequate sleep.

### ***Feeling Under-Supported by Leadership***

The theme of feeling unappreciated emerged within focus group discussions and was also triangulated among survey and questionnaire responses. Some participants expressed concern for the lack of compassionate leadership from their immediate school administration and/or a lack of assistance from the provincial government.

**Lack of Supports and Resources.** Several participants felt that they received inadequate support from the provincial government and/or their school administration. Through the online questionnaire, one music teacher outlined:

This is not sustainable. I am concerned about how educators have been working so hard to make sure they are meeting the needs of their students which they should be doing and how their wellness needs are not being supported by their school divisions (depending on how they chose to designate online teaching responsibilities) and the Province of Manitoba.

Many participants felt they needed additional wellbeing supports but were not provided such resources. This finding is corroborated with Item 4 on the survey, where only 29% of respondents felt their emotional needs were being supported by their school division. The responses suggested that the arrangements during the COVID-19 pandemic were highly strenuous and not conducive to long-term teacher wellbeing or students' success.

**Feeling Unappreciated by Leadership as a Music Teacher.** Another recurring theme was the feeling of being unappreciated as a music teacher. Many participants had to modify their practices, adapt to new learning spaces, and be hypervigilant around public health protocols and guidelines. In the online questionnaire, one participant stated: "I do not feel valued or appreciated for all the additional work I have done to support my practice and students' learning. I feel very taken for granted by the leadership in my division." The lack of dialogical decision-making between music teachers and administration was noted, as a participant in a focus group mentioned:

What will help with wellbeing is just to be considered before a decision is made as opposed to after a decision is made or to consult right at the last minute to be like: 'Can you rubberstamp our decisions so that we say that we've consulted with you?' That's not meaningful and that doesn't make you feel very valid or heard.

Participants felt that many administrators lacked understanding or compassion for music teachers' struggles and were not dialogical in their decision-making. Some participants were emotionally depleted as they felt their contributions as a music educator were of lesser importance compared to other school subject areas.

### ***Music Teachers' Self-Care, Self-Efficacy, and Resilience***

As participants discussed their experiences teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, the themes of teachers' self-efficacy, self-care, and resilience emerged.

**Teacher Self-Care Practices.** Given the stress of abrupt organizational change during the pandemic, many participants independently initiated various avenues for self-care during the pandemic to support their physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual wellbeing. Participants expressed various positive avenues for self-care (e.g., improved diet and exercise). Although the survey results indicated that 32% of respondents reported increased alcohol and/or cannabis consumption during this teaching period, few participants discussed these somewhat negative avenues for self-care in the questionnaire and focus group discussions. To alleviate the feelings of stress, participants described a wide variety of activities they practiced during their personal time. These activities included: yoga, improved diet and exercise routines, recreational music-making, leisurely walks, therapy, meditation, bonding with family, and re-connecting with spirituality/religion, among many other approaches to improving wellbeing. One participant commented:

Nutrition and exercise have been essential for my wellbeing. I have also found that including

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daily meditation and having meaningful conversations with friends, family, and colleagues to be valuable. Other strategies involve avoiding / limiting my consumption of news, social media, and junk food.

As indicated in both the questionnaire responses and focus group discussions, many participants made a conscientious effort to improve or at least stabilize their wellbeing while teaching during the pandemic.

**Teacher Resilience and Growth.** Despite the challenges of teaching music in schools during the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a sense of resilience and growth among many participants. Some participants remained optimistic for both their current job arrangements and for the future of their programs. One participant commented:

No matter how difficult we find each day or a specific challenge we have to recognize that we are not alone. Our isolation does not help but putting things into a proper perspective is very important. I realize my role as a teacher in school and my purpose to connect and support students, and staff through these times.

There were some participants who enjoyed teaching alternative programming (e.g., percussion, guitar, music technology) and found value in these new pedagogical ventures.

## Discussion

Many of the findings drawn from this study correspond with existing literature on teacher stress, burnout, self-efficacy, and resilience. Perhaps the most significant and surprising finding pertained to the advanced state of music teachers' burnout across the province, as nearly half (47%) of survey respondents had considered either early retirement or resignation from the profession entirely. Through a job demands-resource theoretical lens, workers' burnout occurs when job demands outweigh the job resources (Demerouti et al., 2001; Granzera et al., 2015; Hilger et al., 2021). Many participants felt over-exerted, both physically and emotionally, from their teaching conditions. The feelings of anxiety, exhaustion, and feeling under-valued among the participants in this study are consistent with the findings of Cheng and Liam (2021), Okay (2021), and Shaw and Mayo (2022).

As schools across Canada implemented various policies, such as physical distancing and enhanced cleaning procedures to ensure school safety (Manitoba Government, 2021; Public Health Ontario, 2021; Québec Government, 2020), school leaders were required to creatively repurpose schools' learning spaces to accommodate such provincial health guidelines. As such, many music rooms and gymnasiums were repurposed as classrooms to reduce class sizes and achieve physical distancing mandates. Eliminating music rooms as a consistent, designated space for instruction caused a significant physical and emotional toll on participants' wellbeing. Fifty-five percent of respondents indicated that they were no longer permitted to teach in their music room, and were consequently required to teach in alternative spaces, on travelling carts, online, or via hybrid models of teaching. This practice was not sustainable, as only 26% of respondents indicated feeling confident to sustain such practices in the long term. Music teachers were uniquely impacted by provincial health regulations during the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, as they were not permitted to engage in singing or wind instrument pedagogies (Manitoba Government, 2021) which is a core component of many school music programs (Choral Canada, 2022). Many music teachers were required to instruct new areas of music education (e.g., percussion ensembles) or other subject areas to accommodate this mandate. Despite 52% of participants sharing that they were required to teach alternative programming during the COVID-19 pandemic, only 8% of participants reported receiving any formal professional development from their employer. Participants shared that they struggled to perform their teaching responsibilities. The lack of professional development in music education throughout the COVID-19 pandemic was consistent with the research conducted by Calderón-Garrido and Gustems-Carnicer (2021), Gül (2021), and Shaw and Mayo (2022). These scholars noted that music teachers lacked professional development and resources to support their changes in technological requirements, change of music instrumentation and pedagogies, and how to support teaching and learning through transient teaching models (e.g., hybrid models, travelling carts etc.). One finding from this study was that 65% respondents reported increased work hours to accom-

modate provincial health mandates and policy changes, which is consistent with earlier research (Shaw & Mayo, 2022). Shaw and Mayo (2022) further reported that music teachers experienced increased work hours outside of the school day to fulfil job requirements. Other findings from this study, such as participants' anxiety over being unable to achieve physical distancing mandates, align with other scholars' findings (Pattison et al., 2021). There was a significant imbalance between job demands and the resources offered to support Manitoba music teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Job ambiguity has been associated with teacher stress and is recognized as a potential cause for workers' burnout (Chan et al., 2021; Papastylianou et al., 2009). Participants in this study expressed concern for the vitality of the future of their school music programs and exhaustion from teaching new subjects, often on travelling carts or in alternative spaces. Participants noted declining student enrolment in their music classes and expressed fear for the future vitality of their future job designation and/or employment.

Participants further perceived that their relationships, either with colleagues or students, had been compromised due to these abrupt organizational changes. Questionnaire responses and focus group discussions demonstrated that many participants felt a sense of alienation from colleagues and expressed concerns for their relationship with students. The feeling of social isolation may be a contributing factor to the decline of music teachers' wellbeing, as healthy relationships is an attributed job resource in job demands-resource theory (Collie et al., 2017; Munroe, 2021). Compromised relationships may contribute to organizational burnout. This phenomenon is consistent with the research of Okay (2021), who also found that music teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic expressed concern for being unable to maintain healthy relationships with students, specifically voicing concerns of decreased student motivation to participate in music ensembles and programs.

A prominent theme that emerged was teachers' resilience during times of adversity. Resilient teachers often engage in self-care practices, maintain positive outlooks, and maintain self-efficacy through challenging circumstances (Ainsworth & Oldfield, 2019; Beltman et al., 2011; Falecki & Mann, 2015; Gu & Day, 2013). Teacher resilience is often defined as teachers' abilities to persevere through chaotic work situations over an extended period of time (Gu & Day, 2013). Participants described a variety of self-care practices, such as meditation, walks, improved diet, and exercise. Unique to music teachers was their ability to engage in music-making as a method to support their wellbeing, as 67% of respondents indicated their engagement in this self-care practice.

Participants' compromised wellbeing and burnout may be understood through other findings, such as their negative perception of leadership. Participants stated that they felt undervalued and needed improved leadership strategies to support their practice. This corroborates prior research that identifies leadership as a valuable resource to support workers' wellness (Clarà, 2017; de Wal et al., 2017; Gu & Day, 2013; Herman et al., 2021; Munroe, 2021). Participants' negative perspective of leadership approaches may have contributed to music teachers' declining state of wellbeing. As many participants were reassigned to alternative teaching spaces or on travelling carts without consultation or were tasked to lead entirely new programs without any professional development opportunities, it is understandable why leadership strategies may have negatively contributed to music teachers' declining states of wellbeing. One participant succinctly noted that there was a "lack of trust between teachers and administration, and poor communication". The feelings of inadequate support from school leadership are consistent with the findings of Shaw and Mayo (2022). Participants in this study expressed frustrations with their school administration, specifically over issues of lack of communication and shared decision-making, growing distrust, unrealistic expectations in scheduling, and feelings of a lack of compassion and understanding for music teachers' experiences. As organizational changes may negatively impact workers' feeling of self-efficacy and ability to perform routine functions, leadership is essential to support and encourage staff during periods of adversity (Clarà, 2017; Collie et al., 2017; Gu & Day, 2013). Participants in this research negatively viewed school leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic, notably only 29% of respondents indicating that they felt emotionally supported by their employers. However, despite these increased emotional and organizational challenges, participants shared their commitment to their teaching practice, their students, and the vitality of their school music program. These participants expressed sentiments of resilience and commitment during this period of adversity. The resilience of music teachers reported in this study are consistent with the findings shared by Cheng and Liam (2021).



### *Recommendations, Implications, and Conclusions*

Job demands-resource theory suggests that workers generally experience burnout and organizational attrition when workplace demands significantly outweigh resources provided to ameliorate such tensions. As such, I have generated three recommended resources which school administrators and districts may provide their music teachers moving forward during the COVID-19 pandemic and/or other circumstances requiring abrupt organizational change. These three recommended resources include: (a) a consistent, designated space for instruction; (b) professional development opportunities to support new instructional practices; and (c) compassionate leadership to support to teachers.

Music teachers need a consistent, designated space to plan and implement learning experiences for students. While it is understandable the considerable strain school leaders were under to ensure provincial health regulation mandates during the COVID-19 pandemic, expelling music teachers from a consistent teaching space significantly contributed to music teachers' exhaustion and overall negative sense of wellbeing. For future scenarios (regardless of the underlying circumstances) requiring teachers to navigate multiple teaching spaces, travelling carts, online, and/or hybrid models was a significant request and was akin to teacher burnout. Permitting teachers to stay in one designated space to plan for teaching and learning should be a paramount priority for potential future situations.

While 52% of respondents indicated that policy and health regulation changes required them to engage in alternative teaching practices, only 8% of respondents indicated receiving any formal professional development from their employer. Consequently, participants were required to learn new musical techniques and pedagogies outside work hours, which increased their weekly number of hours of labor. To support music teachers' wellbeing during future periods of adversity, professional learning opportunities need to be provided to teachers during school hours to support their evolving practices.

Lastly, there was a recurring theme of feeling undervalued shared among many participants. Eliminating established music programs, being ejected from their music rooms, and being required to professionally learn outside work hours were significant contributors to these feelings. While it must be acknowledged that educational administrators (both at the school and senior-based levels) had limited input regarding provincial health regulations, there was a general lack of communication between teachers and administration and often no dialogical decision-making on school changes. These factors fostered attitudes of distrust and resentment among participants toward their administration. Participants described their frustration with administrators' unrealistic workplace expectations (e.g., simultaneously teaching in-person, on carts, and/or online). It would be recommended for administrators at the senior and school-based levels to exercise compassionate leadership approaches to emotionally support music teachers during periods of drastic change. Regular check-ins, engaging with music teachers in dialogical decision-making, adjusting educational and workplace expectations, and other avenues to emotionally support music teachers would be recommended.

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