

Making Learning Groups (Cohorts) Work in Music Classes

On July 29, 2020 the Minister of Education, Rob Fleming, announced that schools will be organized into learning groups while operating during the pandemic. Since that time there has been much discussion about how to make this work in the music classroom. To provide clarity, guidance, and ideas, here is a non-exhaustive list of points to know:

1. Music teachers do not have to be assigned to a learning group and likely will not be due to the fact that we are often the only music teachers in the school, especially at the elementary level, and many operate as itinerant teachers. Please refer to the section on “Itinerant Staff and Specialists” in the [Provincial COVID-19 Health and Safety Guidelines for K-12 Settings](#) for information on how to protect yourself in this situation.
2. Students within the same learning group DO NOT need to be physically distanced (2m) according to the guidelines set out in the [Provincial COVID-19 Health and Safety Guidelines for K-12 Settings](#) but should avoid physical contact. Spread students out as much as possible within your classroom space.
3. Students in different learning groups DO need to be physically distanced (2m) according to the guidelines set out in the [Provincial COVID-19 Health and Safety Guidelines for K-12 Settings](#).
4. To run your ensembles, it is recommended that you organize students into their established learning groups and set out physical distancing markers (2m) between those groups. This may lead to unconventional seating arrangements and ensemble configurations.
5. If your classroom does not allow for these physical distancing measures it is important to have a discussion with your administrators about the possibility of using an alternative space for rehearsals.

Environmental Considerations for Music Classes

The "General Safety" and "Room Considerations" sections are adapted from the Ontario Music Educators' Association Framework document and updated with the latest guidance outlined in the Provincial COVID-19 Health and Safety Guidelines for K-12 Settings.

General Safety

Concern for the health and safety of all students and teachers is a top priority. It is of the utmost importance that the safety conditions, as described by your local and provincial Health Departments and School Board, are being applied and adhered to by the school. These are outlined in the BC Ministry of Education's Provincial COVID-19 Health and Safety Guidelines for K-12 Settings, the BC Centre for Disease Control, and the K-12 Education Restart Plan. Once those recommendations are met, we believe there are specific recommendations for music classrooms in order to ensure the continued safety of students and staff in this environment.

First and foremost, hand hygiene and physical distancing are the best and most important ways to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

The British Columbia Centre for Disease Control guidelines for regular cleaning of surfaces in public settings can be found here.

Music rooms should be equipped with the following supplies:

- A sink with running water, soap, and paper towels
- Hand sanitizer
- Wipes that contain one of the following: diluted bleach (in safe amounts), isopropyl alcohol (at least 70% alcohol), medical virox
- A recommended disinfection agent appropriate for use on instruments and mouthpieces