



Teachers' Perceptions of Blended Learning in K-12 Music Education

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# PERCEPTIONS OF BLENDED LEARNING

## **Abstract**

The purpose of this empirical study was to examine how K-12 music teachers perceived the concept of blended learning. Particular attention was given to two sub-questions: Did music teachers find blended learning to be an effective approach for their classroom? Additionally, was there a noticeable difference between how music teachers perceived blended learning for a general music class versus an ensemble? A survey was given to K-12 music teachers in order to collect data for this study. A majority of survey participants viewed blended learning favorably. These participants found that blended learning allowed them to utilize a greater amount of creativity and differentiation within their curriculum. However, many participants also noted that blended learning posed challenges for motivating students and building core ensemble skills. Accordingly, participants took a more favorable view of blended learning within the context of a general music class than an ensemble.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this empirical study is to examine how K-12 music teachers perceive the concept of blended learning. Particular attention will be given to two sub-questions: Do music teachers find blended learning to be an effective approach for their classroom? Additionally, is there a noticeable difference between how music teachers perceive blended learning for a general music class versus an ensemble? A survey will be given to K-12 music teachers in order to collect data for this study.

### **Rationale**

Despite its increasing popularity, the concept of blended learning remains an under-researched area of K-12 music education. To date, studies about blended learning in K-12 music education have largely focused on the efficacy of blended learning in one instructional context, such as elementary general music or secondary music technology classes. This study seeks to broaden the scope of blended learning research by exploring how teachers across the full K-12 music education spectrum perceive the benefits and disadvantages of blended learning.

As a secondary music technology teacher, I have experienced many benefits from implementing a blended learning approach within my classroom. However, I acknowledge that the central role of technology within my classes creates an ideal setting for a blended learning approach. I question whether my colleagues would experience the same benefits if they implemented blended learning within their own areas and specialties of music education. In an ideal circumstance, this would be explored when the relevant teachers felt ready to make such a change. Unfortunately, in the wake of COVID-19, school closure and reopening plans have forced many teachers to immediately adopt a blended learning approach. While these changes

are currently being implemented out of necessity, it is feasible to imagine that they will leave a lasting impact on music education. Some teachers might find welcomed surprises in using a blended learning approach while others might prefer to return to a more traditional instructional method. In order to chart a path forward, music teachers will need to consider the role of technology within their classrooms.

This study will help to support my efforts in implementing a blended learning approach within my music technology classes. Through identifying perceptions of blended learning across the K-12 music education spectrum, I will be able to better contextualize my use of blended learning. I will also be able to improve my ability to offer support to colleagues who are unfamiliar with blended learning. This will be beneficial to my growth as a teacher both in pandemic times and beyond.

### **Expected Findings**

Through informal conversations with colleagues, I have heard a range of opinions regarding blended learning. Some could not imagine returning to a time when students did not have easily accessible technology in the classroom. Others think that blended learning defeats the purpose of music education and would prefer to focus on in-person music making experiences. However, I have only had these conversations with teachers from my school district. In order to gain a broader perspective, I have designed a survey to allow a greater range of music teachers to share their thoughts on blended learning within music education.

I expect that the results from this survey will largely depend upon how teachers define the concept of musicianship. If a teacher maintains a rigid definition of musicianship, such as saying that musicianship only consists of performing and listening to music, then I expect the teacher will have a negative view of blended learning. If the teacher expands their definition of

musicianship to include concepts such as musical imagination or musical creativity (Abrahams, 2015), then I expect the teacher will have a more positive view of blended learning.

While I think that many teachers would like to consider themselves as being open-minded towards the concept of musicianship, I expect ensemble directors to have a more rigid definition that highly emphasizes performance. In turn, I expect that ensemble directors will view in-class blended learning opportunities as a waste of rehearsal time. However, I would imagine that some ensemble directors would be open to blended or flipped learning opportunities that occur at home on the student's own time. In contrast, I expect general music teachers to have a wider definition of what constitutes musicianship. Accordingly, I expect general music teachers to be more open to the idea of blended learning, including blended learning opportunities that occur in class.

Presently, teachers are in the midst of navigating the COVID-19 pandemic. Across the country, music teachers have needed to shift their classes online, often with little training, preparation time, or support. I am hopeful that teachers will find a silver lining to this situation through discovering new blended learning techniques or approaches that complement their work in the classroom. However, I would not be surprised if teachers cite pandemic-related school closures as a reason for not liking blended learning.



## Chapter 2: Background Information and Context

### Definitions

*Blended learning*: “A formal education program in which a student learns at least in part through online learning with some element of student control over time, place, path, and/or space” (Staker & Horn, 2012).

### Adapting to Change

In a 2015 article for the *Music Educators Journal*, Abrahams poses the question, “Are music teachers trying to mold the young 21st-century citizen into a child of past times” (p. 98)? Abrahams’ question touches upon a growing struggle for music teachers to make traditional school music programs seem relevant for students. He claims this struggle has caused students to feel a disconnect between the music they learn in school and the musical identities they construct for themselves outside of school (p. 98). There are many facets of music education that contribute to this issue. However, one aspect that deserves particular attention is the manner in which music teachers integrate technology into their classrooms.

In short, music teachers are slower to adapt to new technology in comparison to teachers from other content areas (Talsik, 2015). This can be seen in the manner in which music teachers utilize technology. Tobias asserts that music teachers often sequester technology to a particular aspect of the overall music program, such as a secondary music technology course, or utilize technology in a manner that upholds the status quo (2017). He goes on to state, “When operating from such mindsets, [music] educators may situate technology through assimilation strategies that conform to preexisting structures and ignore or reject technologies that do not fit within these paradigms” (2017, p. 298). It is possible to see how students might struggle to connect with their school music courses when the music teachers for those courses feel inclined to reject new

technology in favor of upholding the traditional status quo. This directly contradicts the manner in which professional musicians outside of schools view and utilize technology (Tobias, 2017). It creates an unproductive cycle in which students feel increasingly disconnected from their school music experience and come to view their school music classes as being irrelevant to the manner in which music outside of school is made. It reinforces Abrahams' concern that music teachers are stuck in past times.

As an increasingly popular instructional model in K-12 education, blended learning offers a way to address these issues. By entering online spaces, teachers are able to bring music closer to the environment in which students interact with music outside of school. However, this environment is still highly dependent upon the teacher who creates it. Tobias notes that technology on its own is neither inherently good or bad; rather, it is the manner in which educators choose to use technology that determines what benefits it brings to the classroom (2017). Similarly, blended learning technology is neither inherently good or bad. It is up to teachers to decide whether blended learning would benefit their particular classes.

### **Exploring the Benefits of Blended Learning within Music Education**

One of the most noteworthy benefits of blended learning is its ability to increase student engagement and participation within school music classes. In their personal lives, students largely consume music through digital means. This can range from dedicated music streaming services, such as Spotify and Apple Music, to music-related social media applications such as TikTok. The social nature of these platforms have reinforced music's ability to signify social identity for students (Ruthman & Hebert, 2012). When school music classes utilize blended learning, it can allow students to draw connections between the online nature of their music class and the digital manner in which students typically interact with music outside of school. This

creates a space in which students' formal identities and informal identities can live side by side. In turn, the merging of identities helps to establish an environment of trust and paves the way for greater collaboration within music classes (Kumpulainen et al., 2015). Crawford examined this connection in a study of middle school general music classes. After implementing a blended learning approach, the students in Crawford's study reported increased levels of satisfaction and engagement within their music class. This engagement often took the form of students voluntarily choosing to use an online music program outside of school hours (2017).

Increased engagement with music classes can lead to a greater sense of community within the classroom. In addition to motivating students to share and participate in their music classes, blended learning can provide students with more opportunities for interaction than traditional methods of instruction. Studies have found that this occurs both at the student-to-student level and the student-to-teacher level (Crawford, 2017; Tobias et al., 2015; Biasutti, 2015; Ruthmann, 2007). This is often supported by providing students with a platform to communicate with each other outside of traditional school hours; platforms of this nature are a hallmark of blended learning (Kumpulainen et al. 2015). Teachers may find unexpected benefits from developing this sense of community. In addition to increasing student morale, it can encourage students to utilize the collective body of knowledge of their peers rather than looking to the teacher as the sole source of knowledge (Tobias et al. 2015). This results in benefits not just in the online space of a blended learning music class, but in the in-person space as well.

Finally, blended learning can lead to new ways of developing musicianship. Technology allows students to engage in new methods of learning and music-making that were previously not possible in traditional music classrooms (Ruthmann & Hebert, 2012). An example would be for students to utilize emerging technology such as video editing software or computer coding

software as a means of developing musicianship (Ruthmann, 2017). Video editing and computer coding are a far step away from the activities traditionally associated with K-12 music education. However, they are skills that are increasingly utilized by professional musicians. In considering Abrahams' argument of music classes losing their relevance, emerging technology such as video editing and computer coding can provide a much-needed sense of authenticity. These newfound creative dispositions for exploring music are particularly well-suited for blended learning approaches (Cayari, 2020). Creative music-making of this nature provides students with a well-rounded view of what it means to be musical that extends beyond the limitations of a traditional music class.

### **Exploring the Drawbacks of Blended Learning in Music Education**

Despite the positive qualities outlined above, blended learning can pose several issues within music education. These issues are especially noticeable within traditional ensembles in both elementary and secondary settings. Within an elementary setting, or any beginner setting, music lessons largely focus on skilled-based training (Talsik, 2015). For example, elementary band lessons extensively cover the skills and techniques needed to play an instrument, such as instrument assembly or forming an embouchure. These skills require close supervision from a music teacher to ensure that students are building a solid foundation on their instrument (Edward et al., 2019). However, students may find that a blended learning approach does not allow them to receive the level of supervision they need. When surveying students who participated in an online instrumental music course, Talsik found that students felt frustrated when they could not receive immediate feedback from their teacher (2015). While the fully remote course in Talsik's study differs from blended learning (which by definition incorporates some element of face-to-

face instruction), it is easy to imagine that this issue could apply to blended learning contexts as well.

Blended learning poses issues for experienced students too. During COVID-19 school closures, many ensemble directors wondered if they could facilitate a synchronous online rehearsal with their students. These directors quickly learned that the available technology platforms and the varying quality of students' internet connections created many issues that prevented ensembles from having successful rehearsals. In a study designed to evaluate the effectiveness of online collaborative environments for music performance, Biasutti provided students with high-speed internet connections and a video conferencing program specifically designed to facilitate musical collaboration. Biasutti's students noted that they encountered issues when performing intricate rhythms through the video conferencing program (2015). This study represents an ideal situation in which every student had access to high quality software and internet connections. However, even under the optimal conditions of this study, there were still issues with performing music synchronously online. The technology available within many K-12 public schools is of a significantly lesser quality than the technology that Biasutti was able to utilize in his study. It is reasonable to expect that any issues encountered in Biasutti's study would be exacerbated within a K-12 public school.

However, it is important to note that these issues are largely dependent upon how teachers choose to implement blended learning. The scenarios outlined above are focused on contexts where the online portion of a lesson is designed to replace the in-person portion of a lesson. An example would be ensemble directors attempting to use an online synchronous rehearsal to replace an in-person rehearsal. This type of approach does not need to be the case in all blended learning contexts. For example, certain blended learning approaches, such as the

flipped classroom, maintain the entirety of a scheduled class period for face-to-face learning while implementing a separate, online component that is to be completed outside of school. This generally takes the form of students learning the content of a lesson online at home and focusing on the application of their knowledge in class (Zheng et al., 2020). An approach of this nature can allow for ensembles to utilize components of blended learning while still maintaining the entirety of a scheduled class period for face-to-face instruction.

Even without using technology, ensembles already utilize the core components of a flipped classroom approach. This occurs every time a student practices their individual part at home and then comes to rehearsal prepared to apply their individual part within the context of the full ensemble (Marcetti, 2017). In this sense, the student learned the bulk of the content (their individual instrument's part within a given work) at home and then focused on the application of the content (how the individual part fits within the full ensemble) at school. This process could be further improved if students had instructional videos or other blended learning resources to help guide their individual practice at home. In a study evaluating this idea with elementary instrumental students, Selfridge found that students who had access to instructional videos to help aid their practicing made significantly greater improvements than students who did not have access to instructional videos (2018). Further studies are needed in this area. However, Selfridge's study points to potential benefits of blended learning within an ensemble.

Finally, in considering the drawbacks of blended learning, it is also important to consider a teacher's comfort level with technology. While Staker and Horn's definition of blended learning dates back to 2012, blended learning is still a new concept in both music education and education at large. In Crawford's study of blended learning within middle school general music classes, only 30% of teachers reported a high level of confidence in their ability to facilitate

blended learning (2017). Similarly, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, many teachers have struggled with the learning curve that educational technology resources can pose. This signifies a major concern in regard to blended learning within music education. If school districts do not provide training and resources about blended learning and educational technology, many teachers will lack confidence in their ability to implement blended learning.

### **Chapter 3: Results and Findings**

#### **Survey Methods**

A survey was conducted to collect data for this study. The complete survey can be found in Appendix A. The participants in this survey were asked to consider several statements about blended learning through the perspective of a general music teacher. After reading each statement, the participants used a Likert scale to rank whether they agreed with the statement. The participants then considered the same set of statements through the perspective of an ensemble director. The participants were allowed to skip either the general music section or ensemble section if they did not teach that type of class. Finally, the participants were asked to respond to two open-ended questions.

The survey was sent to 45 music teachers in Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, Delaware, Montgomery, and Bucks counties. These counties were identified due to their proximity to my school district. The survey was sent in November 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, many school districts implemented virtual and hybrid models of instruction at the start of the 2020-2021 school year. By conducting the survey in November 2020, teachers were given time to experience their districts' new instructional models before being asked to reflect upon the efficacy of blended learning within this survey. 31 teachers responded to the survey.

#### **Survey Results**

##### ***Background Questions***

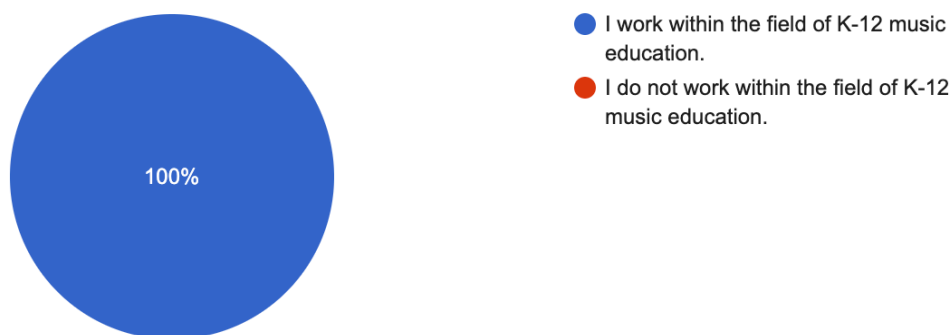
The first four questions of the survey were designed to provide background information about the participants. Participants were asked to verify that they work within the field of K-12



music education, identify the grade levels that they teach, describe the types of classes that they teach, and describe the current instructional model of their school.

### ***Question 1***

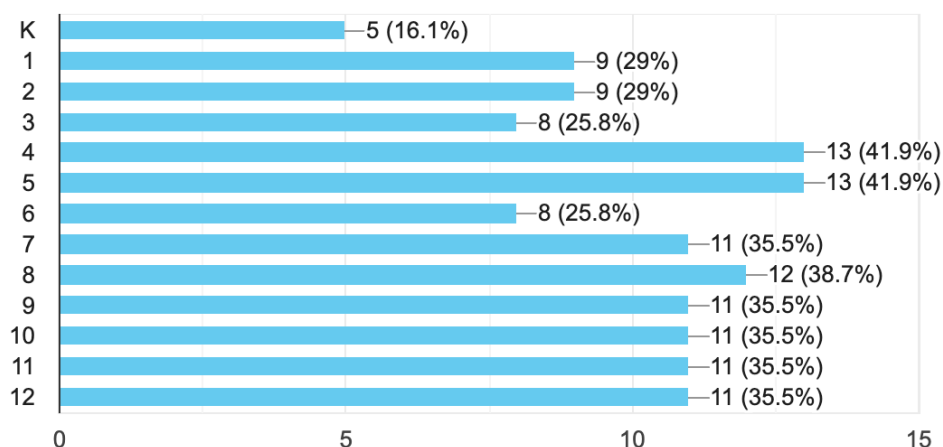
This survey is designed for K-12 music teachers. Please verify that you work within the field of K-12 music education.



All participants verified that they work within the field of K-12 music education.

### ***Question 2***

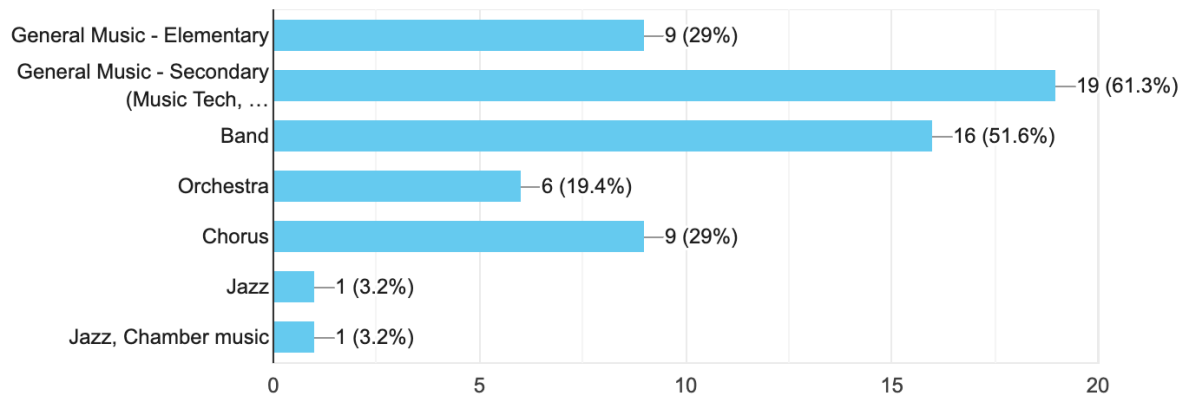
Which grade levels do you currently teach? Check all that apply.



Responses varied more within the elementary level than the secondary level. Within the elementary level, several teachers only taught fourth and fifth grade instrumental music. Additionally, several elementary general music teachers did not teach kindergarten. Within the secondary level, several teachers did not teach sixth grade.

### ***Question 3***

What sort of classes do you teach? Check all that apply.

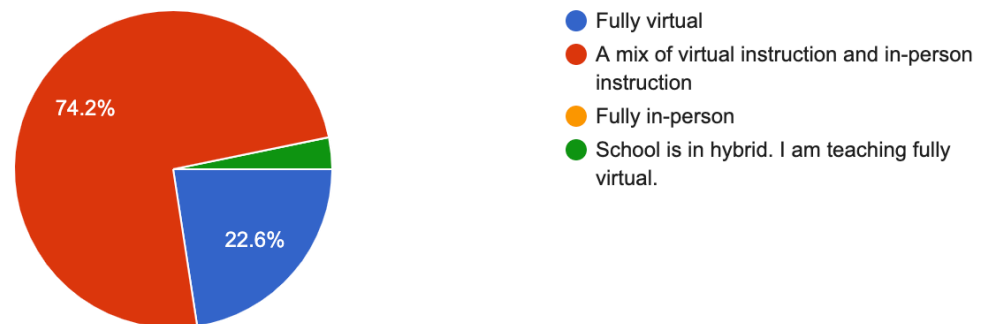


The first five answer choices were provided to all participants. Participants were allowed to add an answer if they taught a class that was not represented by the first five answer choices.

The final two answer choices were submitted by participants.

#### ***Question 4***

Which option best describes the current instructional model of your school(s)?



Similar to the previous question, the green answer choice was submitted by a participant. The results from this question show that all participants have taught in either virtual or hybrid settings.

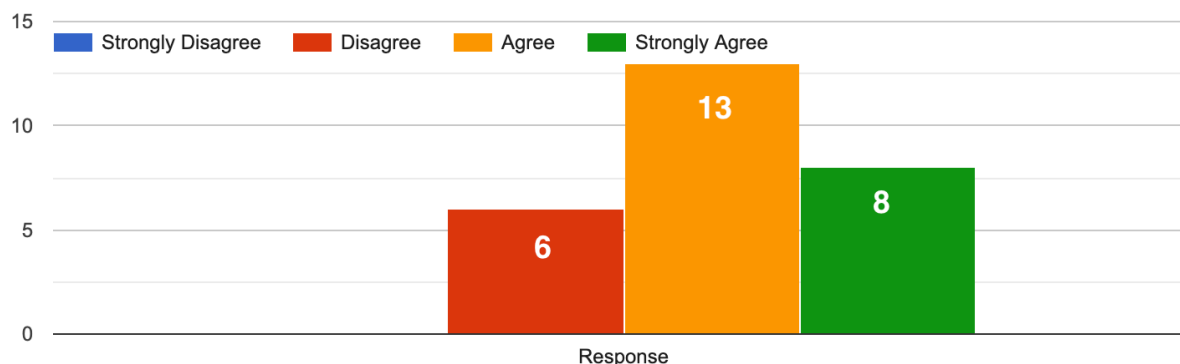
#### **Likert Scale Questions**

In this section of the survey, participants read several statements through the perspective of a general music teacher. The participants then used a Likert scale to indicate whether they agreed with the statement. After completing all of the questions in this segment, the participants

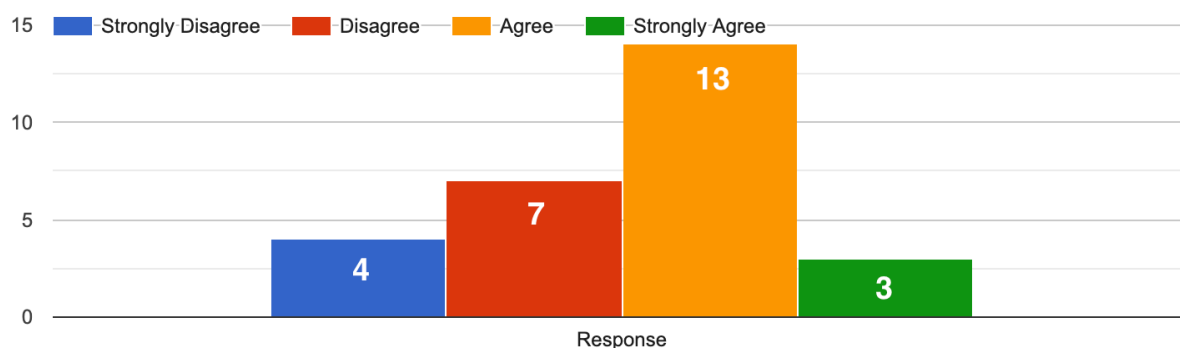
were then asked to consider the same set of statements through the perspective of an ensemble director. Participants were allowed to skip the general music or ensemble section if they did not teach that type of class.

### ***Question 5***

I believe that blended learning can be utilized as an effective instructional approach within a general music class.



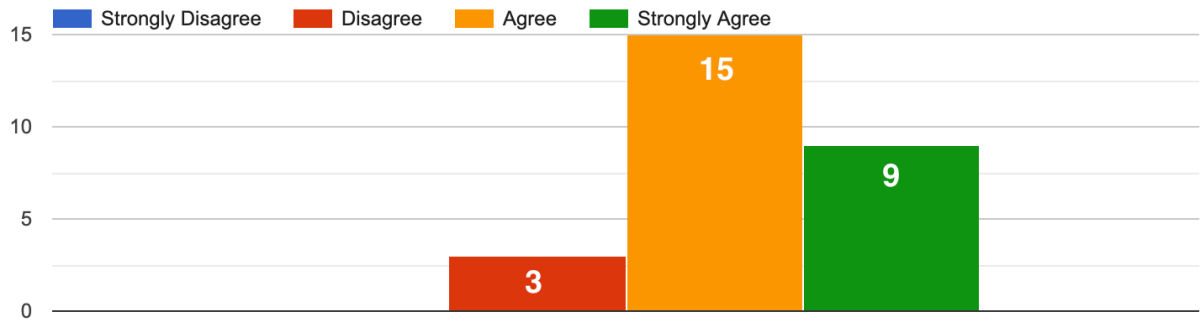
I believe that blended learning can be utilized as an effective instructional approach within an ensemble.



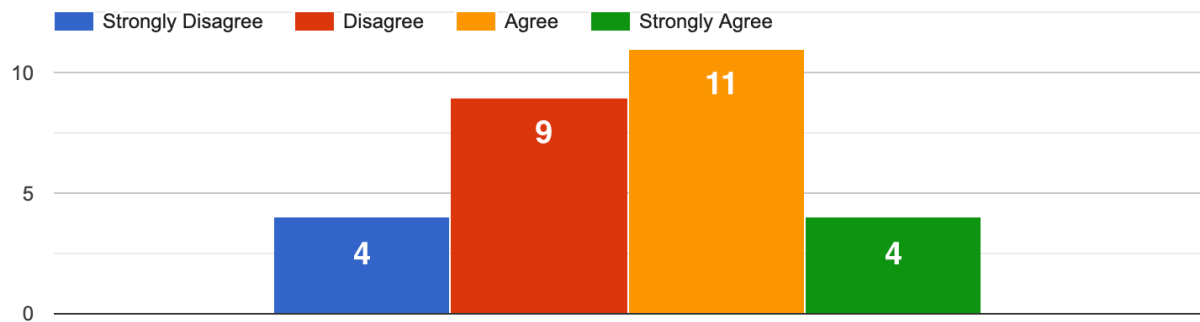
While a majority of participants were receptive toward the idea of blended learning as an effective instructional approach within music education, participants were more receptive to blended learning within general music classes. No participants strongly disagreed that blended learning could be used as an effective instructional approach within a general music class.

### ***Question 6***

I believe that online learning activities can be a valuable use of class time within a general music class.



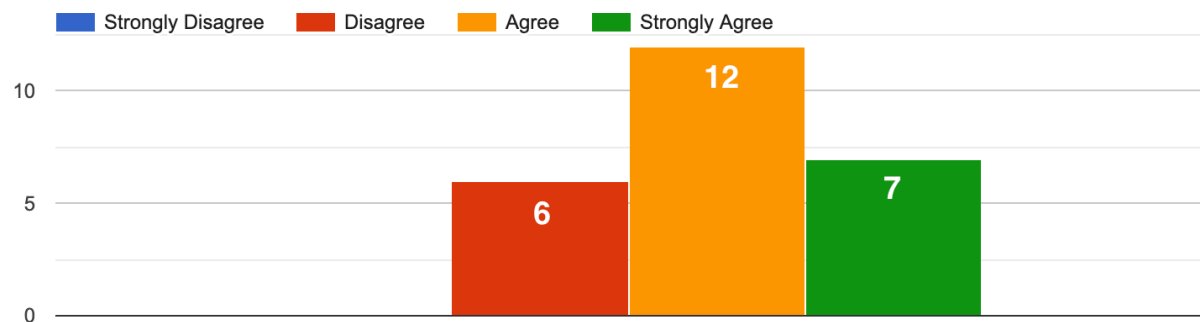
I believe that online learning activities can be a valuable use of class time within an ensemble.



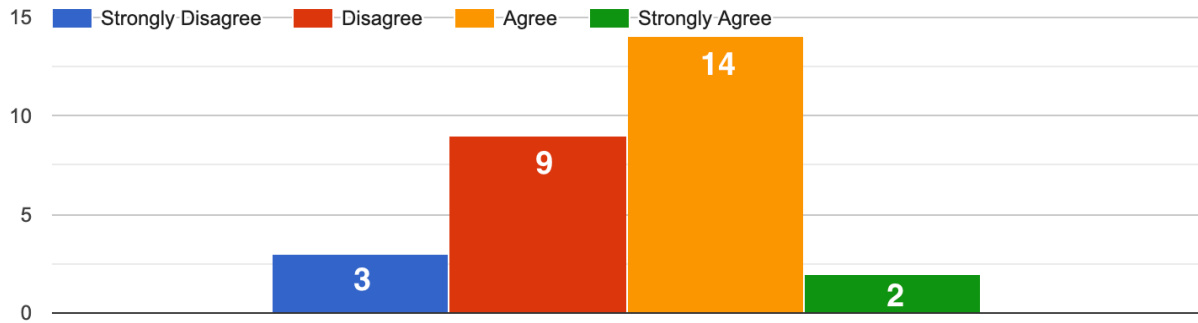
In comparison to the last question, slightly more general music teachers agreed with this question. The opposite occurred for ensemble directors.

### ***Question 7***

I believe that online learning activities could help students to feel more engaged with the content in my general music class.



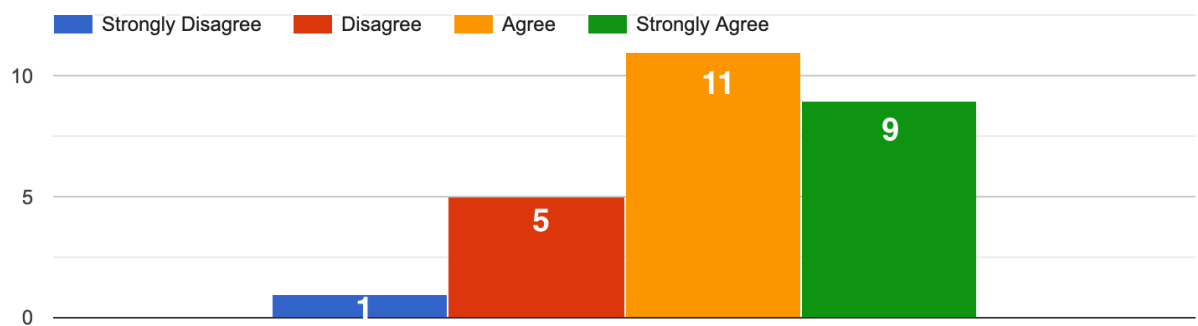
I believe that online learning activities could help students to feel more engaged with the content or repertoire in the ensemble.



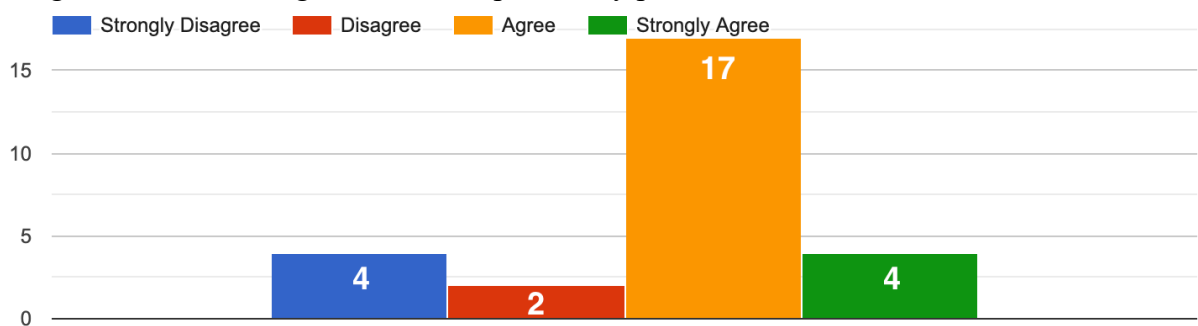
A larger proportion of general music teachers agreed with this statement than ensemble directors.

### Question 8

I believe that blended learning allows general music students to partake in new methods of learning and music-making that were not previously possible in traditional music classrooms.



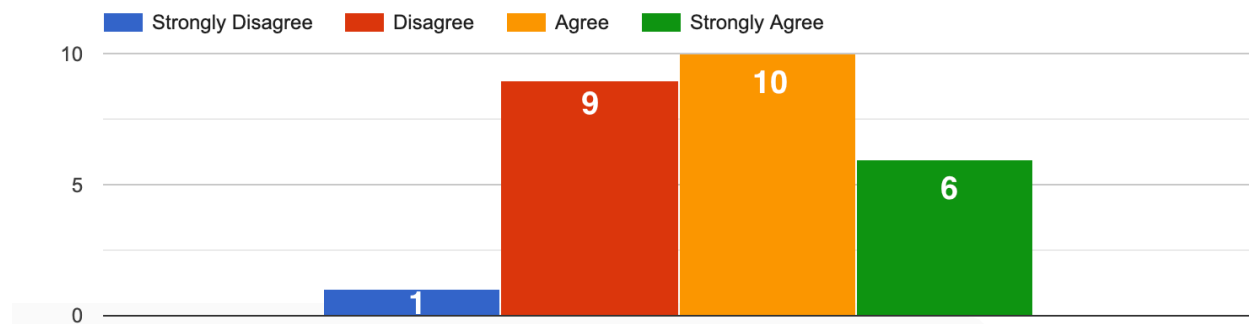
I believe that blended learning allows ensemble music students to partake in new methods of learning and music-making that were not previously possible in traditional music classrooms.



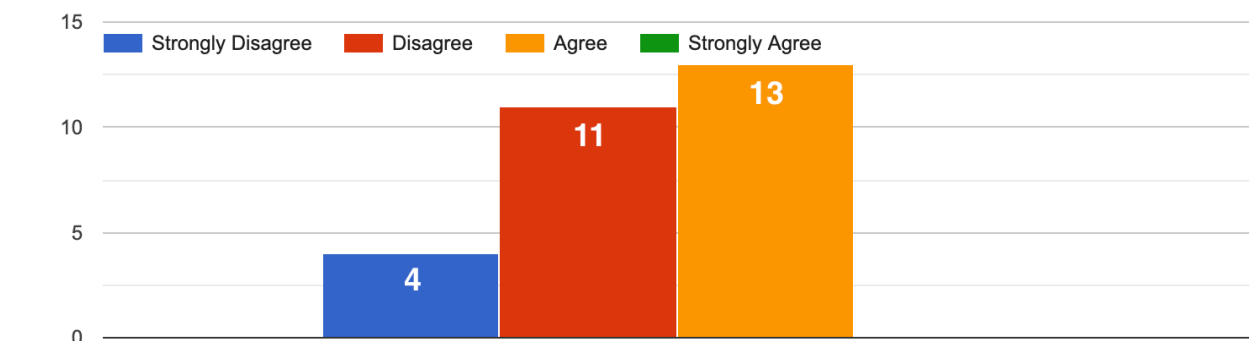
A large majority of teachers agree with this statement in both general music and ensemble contexts. However, general music teachers more readily indicated that they strongly agree with the statement.

### Question 9

I believe that blended learning activities within a general music class can lead to increased interactions at either the student-to-student or student-to-teacher level.



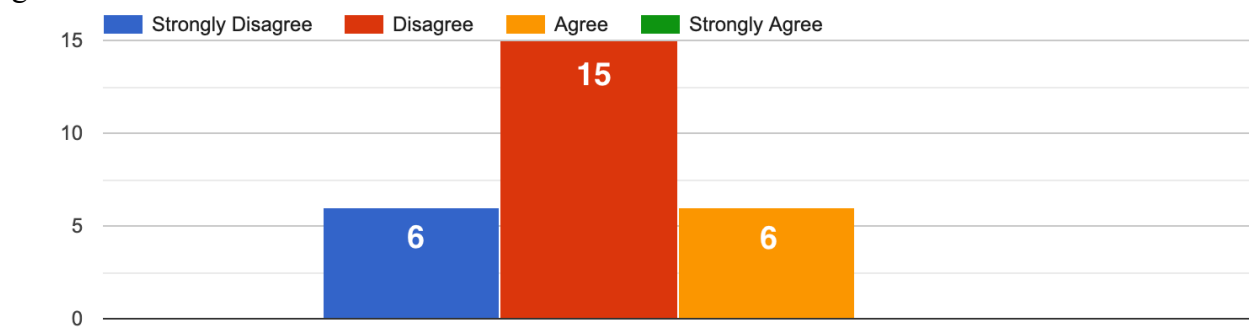
I believe that blended learning activities within an ensemble can lead to increased interactions at either the student-to-student or student-to-teacher level.



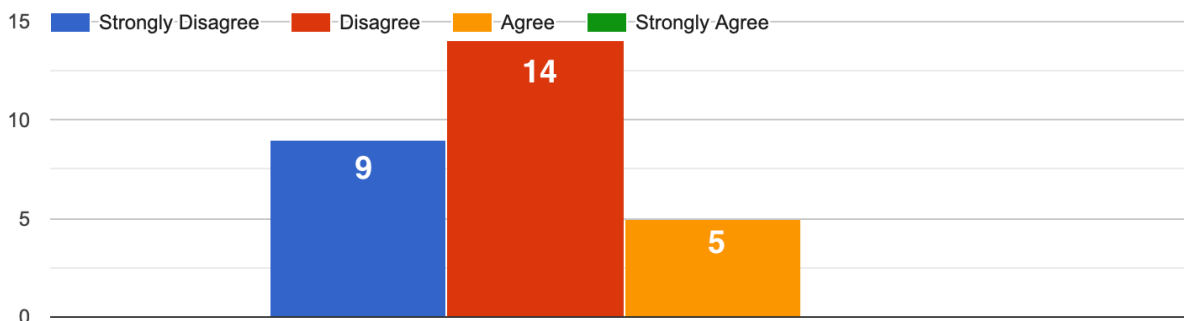
This question proved to be controversial from both general music and ensemble perspectives. Despite slimmer margins, a majority of teachers agreed with this statement in the context of general music but disagreed with this statement in the context of ensembles.

### ***Question 10***

I am provided with enough training and resources to implement blended learning within my general music class.



I am provided with enough training and resources to implement blended learning within my ensemble.



Fewer than 25% of teachers selected “Agree” for either the general music or ensemble contexts.

### Open-Ended Questions

After completing the Likert scale questions, teachers were asked two open-ended questions. The complete responses for both questions are included in Appendix B. Five teachers elected not to answer one or both of the open-ended questions.

#### *Question 11: Positive Aspects of Blended Learning*

“...allows students to work at their own pace.”
“...allow for more individualized instruction. I’ve been able to work one on one with kids much more.”
“...provides opportunities for students to take greater ownership of their learning.”
“...allows for further scaffolding and differentiation.”
“...ability to address a wider range of topics.”
“Students can progress at their own pace.”
“More opportunities for differentiation between students.”
“Adding a virtual component to my classes has also made it easier for me to assess, evaluate, and grade students.”
“Since I base my grading more on playing assignments now than before... I think the students do more practicing at home. I do hear improvements in their playing.”
“Some of my students who were shy to participate in class seem to feel more comfortable singing and performing on FlipGrid [a website that posts student videos in a discussion board

format].”
“Incorporation of techniques and resources that we would not have typically tried.”
“...helped to provide a more enriched background... that we have not had the opportunity for in a normal year.”
“...seems to offer more lessons on ‘creating’ (NCAS) like composition.”
“...allowed teachers to explore avenues in their teaching that they would not have explored before.”
“...develop creative lessons that utilize music I might not have covered, otherwise.”

In the first open ended question, teachers were asked to consider the positive aspects of blended learning. Two clear themes emerged in their responses. Many teachers found that blended learning allowed them to differentiate instruction to a greater degree than traditional instructional models. Teachers also appreciated how blended learning allowed students to engage in new methods and forms of musicianship.

Out of 26 responses, 13 teachers claimed that blended learning led to an increased ability to differentiate instruction. Some teachers claimed that further differentiation was made possible through reframing their approach toward assessments. When teaching in a blended learning model, these teachers placed greater emphasis on assessments that allowed them to hear the individual progress of their students. Examples include asking students to make individual recordings or holding one-on-one meetings with students. Teachers were then able to use this assessment data to provide individualized support for students.

Other teachers claimed that further differentiation was made possible through a greater emphasis on self-paced learning. These teachers found that the flexible nature of blended learning allowed advanced students to explore topics of interest in greater depths. Given the online nature of blended learning, these students are encouraged to extend their learning by engaging with additional resources online outside of what the teacher provides. Similarly,



teachers noted that the emphasis on self-paced learning has allowed students who might struggle in a traditional instructional model to work at a more comfortable pace.

Finally, teachers appreciated that blended learning encouraged them to engage with new forms of musicianship. For some teachers, this took the form of exploring relatively new concepts within the field, such as drawing connections between music and video games. For other teachers, this took the form of exploring aspects of the National Core Arts Standards that are often ignored when their class operates in a traditional instructional model. An example of this would be placing a greater emphasis on the artistic process of creating within a performing ensemble.

***Question 12: Negative Aspects of Blended Learning***

“Far less opportunities to work on ensemble balance, ensemble intonation, or any other kind of ensemble-based concept.”
“...reduces the total group rehearsal time to build ensemble skills used in successful performances.”
“No good ways of developing ensemble nuances like blend, balance and intonation.”
“As we are beginning to rehearse, it is hard to lead a rehearsal with somewhere between a half and two-thirds of a group online and muted.”
“...technology difficulties, decreased concept of "ensemble" sound and function.”
“The pace of large group instruction is greatly reduced due to common technology issues: lag, equipment malfunction or underperformance, inadequate internet connection, etc.”
“...hurdles of technology: small laptop mics that can't handle sounds of instruments, internet lag, etc.”
“...lack of training and reliable technology.”
“In Covid-19 blended learning, the dependence on zoom in live instruction is challenging.”
“Blended learning can lead to technology fatigue for students.”
“The inability to hear other students. In ensemble playing, students are motivated and excited by the performance of other students.”

“...[students] can lose interest faster in this model.”
“They have very quickly lost motivation, even for the project-based assignments that involve playing their horns, it's just not the same as playing in an ensemble.”
“...caused enthusiasm for band to drop and has led to students leaving the band program.”
“Most students don't seem to have as much intrinsic motivation with online learning than in person.”

In the second open ended question, teachers were asked to consider the negative aspects of blended learning. The responses to this question largely focused on ensembles. Three themes emerged: ensemble skills, technology issues, and motivation. Teachers often included more than one of these themes in their responses and noted how one theme may influence another.

Teachers found that current blended learning models were inadequate for addressing traditional ensemble skills. In this sense, ensemble skills refer to concepts such as balance, blend, or intonation within an ensemble setting. Several teachers noted that they have not found a suitable method for addressing this issue and have needed to spend considerably less time teaching traditional ensemble skills as a result.

Teachers experienced many technology issues when implementing blended learning. These technology issues include internet lag times, poor quality microphones on student devices, and faulty video conferencing software. These issues are closely related to the ensemble issues described above. Many teachers identified technology issues as the main reason as to why they could not work on ensemble skills in the first place. For example, internet lag, poor quality microphones, and faulty video conferencing software all prohibit teachers from having a virtual synchronous rehearsal in which all ensemble members have their microphones unmuted.

Finally, teachers state that they have seen a lack of motivation in their students since switching to a blended model. Teachers described this lack of motivation in two distinct ways.

Some teachers noted that students feel unsatisfied with what they consider to be a subpar ensemble experience. This lack of satisfaction then quickly leads to a lack of motivation to practice their instrument or engage with the ensemble while learning virtually. Other teachers noted that students are experiencing fatigue from a dramatic increase in their daily time spent in front of a computer screen. This technology fatigue has led students to not put forth their best effort in class. Teachers worry that these motivation issues will cause ensemble enrollment to decrease.

## **Chapter 4: Conclusions**

### **Key Findings**

This study seeks to examine how K-12 music teachers perceive the concept of blended learning. Two sub-questions were posed to help further examine this topic: Do music teachers find blended learning to be an effective approach for their classroom? Additionally, is there a noticeable difference between how music teachers perceive blended learning for a general music class versus an ensemble? Upon analyzing the results of the survey implemented within this study, a majority of teachers believe that blended learning can be utilized as an effective instructional approach within music education. Music teachers were more receptive to blended learning within general music classes than ensembles. However, ensemble directors were more receptive to blended learning than I initially anticipated.

### **Interpreting Results**

Before viewing the survey results, I expected to see that general music teachers would be generally supportive of blended learning while ensemble directors would be strongly opposed to blended learning. After viewing the results, I learned that ensemble directors were not as strongly opposed to blended learning as I anticipated. Instead, ensemble directors showed a lukewarm support for blended learning. For example, Question 5 of the survey directly asked if teachers felt like blended learning could be used as an effective instructional approach within general music or ensemble classes. 78% of general music teachers agreed with Question 5 in comparison to 59% of ensemble directors. While a majority of teachers agree with the statement from both general music and ensemble perspectives, teachers more readily agreed to the statement within the context of general music. General music teachers were also more likely to select “Strongly

Agree” in Question 5 than ensemble directors. This theme proved to be common throughout the survey.

The open-ended questions allowed teachers to explain the rationale behind their thoughts about blended learning. When asked about the positive aspects of blended learning, teachers wrote about the new possibilities that blended learning can create in the music classroom. This included specific mentions of assessment practices and opportunities for new forms of musicianship. When asked about the negative aspects of blended learning, teachers wrote about how blended learning restricts their ability to engage in the same activities as traditional instruction, especially in regard to ensemble rehearsals.

Upon viewing the open-ended questions, I was immediately struck by the influence of COVID-19 within the responses. Under the current safety guidelines that many school districts have implemented in response to COVID-19, music teachers are not allowed to engage in the same type of rehearsal atmosphere to which they are accustomed. Instead of having fully in-person ensemble rehearsals, safety guidelines dictate that ensembles have a limited number of in-person participants who are socially distanced and wearing personal protective equipment. When coupled with current technology issues, ensemble directors are not able to have a traditional rehearsal in either in-person or online spaces. However, if an alternate blended learning scenario existed without COVID-19 restrictions, it is feasible that ensemble directors could have in-person days where all ensemble members engage in a traditional in-person rehearsal and online days where all members of the ensemble are virtual. Additionally, ensemble directors could utilize other blended learning approaches, such as the flipped classroom, to preserve the entirety of their available class time for in-person rehearsals. The ensemble directors might have

answered the open-ended questions differently if they were not also contending with COVID-19 restrictions.

### **Impacts on Music Education**

As outlined in Chapter 2, music teachers face a growing struggle to make school music programs seem relevant for students. Through heavy emphasis on traditional ensemble experiences, music teachers may inadvertently neglect the ways in which musicians create and perform music outside of school settings. Blended learning offers a way to address these issues. In Question 8, a large majority of respondents agreed that blended learning allows students to partake in new methods of learning and music-making that were not previously possible in traditional music classrooms. I was encouraged to see that many teachers acknowledged these new opportunities. Many educators have predicted that COVID-19 will inspire changes in education that will persist long after the pandemic has ended. Accordingly, one such change may be a greater reliance on blended learning approaches within K-12 education. I sincerely hope that music teachers utilize these changes as a chance to promote new methods of musicianship in school programs that have long neglected contemporary practices in music.

Additionally, I hope that music teachers can utilize aspects of blended learning in traditional models of instruction as well. In the open-ended questions, I was encouraged to see music teachers write about the positive effects of formative assessment data within their instruction. Through rethinking their assessment practices, music teachers have been able to further differentiate their instruction and provide more individualized support for students. While these assessment practices are a hallmark of blended learning, they can be easily adapted to traditional teaching scenarios. In reflecting upon my own teaching practices, I find that informal assessment has played a large role within my teaching. When directing ensembles prior to the

COVID-19 pandemic, I would constantly listen to groups of students and make mental notes about their progress. I did not have many ways to document these informal assessments, however they helped me to see which sections of the ensemble needed improvement. Many of the survey respondents reported similar experiences and claimed that blended learning tools have allowed them to easily document these informal assessments. These respondents generally pointed to a newfound ease in collecting individual recordings from students and some respondents even identified specific tools, such as Flipgrid, that they have used within their classes. I hope that ensemble directors continue to use these tools as a regular part of their instruction within traditional ensembles. Even if they are not being used to their fullest extent, blended learning tools can provide a welcomed update to traditional instructional methods, particularly for assessments.

### **Reflection and Future Research**

This study ultimately serves to improve my own teaching practices. Having completed this study, I now approach blended learning with a new sense of understanding. Most importantly, I am able to contextualize my use of blended learning within the thoughts of music teachers spanning the full K-12 spectrum. I understand areas in which I might push ahead of the curve in regards to technology integration and areas in which I might fall behind. As I continue to collaborate and provide support for colleagues within my district, I now do so with a broader perspective. I am more aware of the challenges that my colleagues and myself may face when using blended learning approaches. I am also able to place greater emphasis on the positive aspects of blended learning that music teachers have identified.

In looking ahead to the future, I will seek to examine the relationship between blended learning and other aspects of music education. This study has made me keenly aware of how

certain music teachers seek to uphold the status quo while others seek to disrupt and innovate. This mindset seems to play a large role in how teachers utilize technology within their classrooms. Some teachers seek to use technology to replicate traditional instruction to the greatest extent possible while others seek to use technology to redefine their instruction entirely. Given that many teachers in this study reported that their school districts provided inadequate technology training, I am interested in exploring how teachers have come to develop their educational technology skills and philosophies. As a technology-minded teacher, I hope that we can reach a future in which music teachers feel empowered to leverage technology to provide meaningful, relevant, and innovative learning experiences for students.



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## APPENDIX A

### *Survey*

12/28/2020

Blended Learning in Music Education Survey

## Blended Learning in Music Education Survey

My name is Zach Winger and I am pursuing a master's degree in music education at The University of the Arts. I am currently collecting data for my master's thesis project about how K-12 music teachers perceive the concept of blended learning. To help me gain further insight, I invite you to take the following survey. It should take approximately 10 minutes to complete. I greatly appreciate your participation.

\* Required

### K-12 Music Teachers

1. This survey is designed for K-12 music teachers. Please verify that you work within the field of K-12 music education. \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ I work within the field of K-12 music education.
- ☐ I do not work within the field of K-12 music education.

### Background Information

12/28/2020

Blended Learning in Music Education Survey

2. Which grade levels do you currently teach? Check all that apply.

*Check all that apply.*

- ☐ K  
☐ 1  
☐ 2  
☐ 3  
☐ 4  
☐ 5  
☐ 6  
☐ 7  
☐ 8  
☐ 9  
☐ 10  
☐ 11  
☐ 12

3. What sort of classes do you teach? Check all that apply.

*Check all that apply.*

- ☐ General Music - Elementary  
☐ General Music - Secondary (Music Tech, Music Theory, Guitar/Piano Lab, etc.)  
☐ Band  
☐ Orchestra  
☐ Chorus

Other: ☐ \_\_\_\_\_

4. Which option best describes the current instructional model of your school(s)?

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Fully virtual  
☐ A mix of virtual instruction and in-person instruction  
☐ Fully in-person  
☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

12/28/2020

Blended Learning in Music Education Survey

### Defining "Blended Learning"

#### Defining "Blended Learning"

This survey defines blended learning as a combination of in-person learning and online learning. While the ratio of in-person learning to online learning may vary, both must be present to some degree in order for the context to be considered blended learning.

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, many school districts have implemented blended learning plans in which teachers instruct students in person and online simultaneously. By definition, this type of plan is considered to be blended learning. However, this type of plan is driven by the demands of the COVID-19 pandemic as opposed to the best practices of blended learning.

In a more typical situation, a blended learning class might have designated days in which all students would attend virtually or all students would attend in person (as opposed to having students in both categories simultaneously). A blended learning class could also meet in person everyday and not have any virtual days. The class would still be considered "blended" so long as a portion of the instruction was delivered through online learning. This might look like students watching an instructional video at their own pace while the teacher individually meets with a student.

If you have experience teaching in a blended learning setting, you are welcome to draw upon your experience while answering the following survey questions. If you do not have experience teaching in a blended learning setting or if you feel that your blended learning experience is not representative of what a properly implemented blended learning setting should look like, you are welcome to use either situation from the previous paragraph as a mental guide while answering the following survey questions.

### General Music

#### General Music

Please skip this section if you do not teach general music classes. Additionally, please answer these questions as they pertain to your specific grade levels. For example, if you teach general music at the high school level, please answer these questions with high school students in mind.

5. I believe that blended learning can be utilized as an effective instructional approach within a general music class.

*Mark only one oval per row.*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Response	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

12/28/2020

Blended Learning in Music Education Survey

6. I believe that online learning activities can be a valuable use of class time within a general music class.

*Mark only one oval per row.*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Response	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

7. I believe that online learning activities could help students to feel more engaged with the content in my general music class.

*Mark only one oval per row.*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Response	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

8. I believe that blended learning allows general music students to partake in new methods of learning and music-making that were not previously possible in traditional music classrooms.

*Mark only one oval per row.*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Response	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

9. I believe that blended learning activities within a general music class can lead to increased interactions at either the student-to-student or student-to-teacher level.

*Mark only one oval per row.*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Response	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

12/28/2020

Blended Learning in Music Education Survey

10. I am provided with enough training and resources to implement blended learning within my general music classes.

*Mark only one oval per row.*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Response	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

### Ensembles

#### Ensembles

Please skip this section if you do not direct an ensemble. Additionally, please answer these questions as they pertain to your specific grade level. For example, if you direct an ensemble at the elementary level, please answer these questions with elementary students in mind.

11. I believe that blended learning can be utilized as an effective instructional approach within an ensemble.

*Mark only one oval per row.*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Response	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

12. I believe that online learning activities can be a valuable use of class time within an ensemble.

*Mark only one oval per row.*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Response	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



12/28/2020

Blended Learning in Music Education Survey

13. I believe that online learning activities could help students to feel more engaged with the content or repertoire in the ensemble.

*Mark only one oval per row.*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Response	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

14. I believe that blended learning allows ensemble students to partake in new methods of learning and music-making that were not previously possible in traditional music classrooms.

*Mark only one oval per row.*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Response	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

15. I believe that blended learning activities within an ensemble can lead to increased interactions at either the student-to-student or student-to-teacher level.

*Mark only one oval per row.*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Response	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

16. I am provided with enough training and resources to implement blended learning within my ensemble.

*Mark only one oval per row.*

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Response	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

### Open-Ended Questions

12/28/2020

Blended Learning in Music Education Survey

17. What do you believe are the positive aspects of blended learning (if any)?

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18. What do you believe are the negative aspects of blended learning (if any)?

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**APPENDIX B**  
*Open-Ended Responses*

**What do you believe are the positive aspects of blended learning (if any)?**

Students can move at their own pace, students can be more comfortable in their own home, students who have behavior challenges may not feel the need to disrupt virtual instruction, students who usually don't engage in person may engage virtually

I like that it easily allows for more differentiated instruction.

Blended learning allows for further scaffolding and differentiation, particularly in ensemble settings.

The ability to reach students on a different level. Most of my students are lovers of video games and cell phones and the most effective virtual teaching tools utilize and exploit our students' interests to help them learn. I believe that in time and given the correct situation, blended learning may actually be the best way for some students to learn.

Smaller class sizes allow for more individualized instruction. I've been able to work one on one with kids much more. The use of technology has become a necessity which has taught many kids essential 21st century skills. We are lucky to have kids that are all able to have access.

Blended learning has certainly allowed teachers to explore avenues in their teaching that they would not have explored before. We, as teachers, have become much more engaged with technology and have committed ourselves to learning more strategies and lessons in order to engage our students in a blended learning setting.

It has forced students and teachers alike to think out of the box and draw on more creative ways to work together.

Blended learning provides opportunities for students to take greater ownership in their learning, becoming less dependent on the teacher to see the project through. In addition to in-class instruction, reinforcement through repetition of new concepts via online assignments can be achieved in a greater variety of contexts, beyond the time limitation of the "class's scheduled time" at school. Students have a greater opportunity to listen to recordings they make of themselves and self-reflect prior to submitting the assignment.

A highly motivated student can take a concept and explore various extension activities at their own pace and of their own choosing. This helps with personal engagement and builds their own musical knowledge through exploration rather than direct teaching.

Incorporation of techniques and resources that we would not have typically tried

Students have immediate resources pertaining while learning virtually and blended. Having the chromebook at their fingertips is the number one reason why.

Students can progress at their own pace. Less teacher led, more student driven.

Blended learning creates easier opportunities for teachers to look at and provide individual performance feedback. Blended learning also seems to welcome more lessons on “creating” (NCAS) like composition. Students get to experience more variety in lesson structure.

Classroom management is a lot easier.

With restrictions on playing wind instruments and singing, blended learning has helped to provide a more enriched background of music theory, ear training, music history, and general listening assignments to our students that we have not had the opportunity for in a normal year.

It gives an outlet for students who may not be comfortable asking questions in front of others out of a fear of looking stupid or other social anxieties. It also allows some students to work at their own pace, which may promote positive learning experiences, especially for students with IEPs or any documented or undocumented learning disability.

More individual attention at times due to breakout rooms and individualized assignments

Since I base my grading more on playing assignments now than before (my other grading categories are not as relevant now), I think the students do more practicing at home. I do hear improvement in their playing.

Also, I found that I have taken to including small-chunk playing assignments more than previously, not just large performance-type assignments of entire works. For example, I might assign 16 bars of a particular etude each week. The students then submit this for my feedback and completion of their sectional grade for that week.

A built-in opportunity to focus on solo repertoire and guided practice in addition to ensemble repertoire. More opportunities for differentiation between students.

I have had some nice 1-on-1 interactions with my students in Zoom breakout rooms. These interactions have been the most fulfilling experiences of virtual learning.

Compared to fully virtual, it will be easier to understand where students are in their learning having a portion of them in front of me. Under virtual, all of the feedback I get is time consuming and not always an accurate reflection of a student's in-the-moment capabilities. The smaller class size will likely help with management.

Blended learning allows for the exploration of music technology tools and software that can expand student opportunities for meaningful music making.

I have been challenged to develop creative lessons that utilize music I might not have covered, otherwise.

I believe one of the greatest benefits of blended learning is the increased focus on students to take ownership of their learning. When working independently on assignments students may not have access to their teacher immediately increasing their motivation to both pay attention to instructions before work and seek answers to questions about virtual learning by contacting a teacher or finding solutions independently.

Additionally, in the ensemble setting I'm finding an ability to address a broader range of topics including scales, intonation, technical exercises, and sight reading by using online resources where students need to practice and complete assignments at home. The individuality blended learning offers is valuable in ensemble classes when the focus is often on rehearsing repertoire together.

Adding a virtual component to my classes has also made it easier for me to assess, evaluate, and grade students.

I have been using FlipGrid in various ways to engage with my students virtually. I feel that this has been a very positive experience. Some of my students who were shy to participate in class seem to feel more comfortable singing and performing on FlipGrid. This gives students an opportunity to perform who may have been too shy to do so in-person.

It is much easier to get a hold of students now.

**What do you believe are the negative aspects of blended learning (if any)?**

Certain schedules prohibit a full learning experience (in an A/B schedule, teachers spend two days teaching the same material, etc.)

In Covid-19 blended learning, the dependence on zoom in live instruction is challenging. I have been kicked out of meetings I was hosting with students still there.

Blended learning can lead to technology fatigue for students and may be difficult particularly for students that learn kinesthetically, or have a learning disability that prevents them from fully grasping the information through a screen.

The inability to hear other students. In ensemble playing, students are motivated and excited by the performance of other students. As teachers, we can share videos and performances that we want them to hear and be inspired by, however, LIVE performance will always be the best way to experience music.

The blended / hybrid aspect has been a double edge sword. I have found some students that would have had trouble focusing in class have been able to work better at home. The other side is I've noticed students who struggled before are struggling even more. Many of those students also lack accountability from their own parents. The parental aspect seems much more important in motivating the the younger student consistently at home.

The consistency and face-to-face aspect of teaching is considerably lower in blended learning. Students have a tougher time paying attention and can lose interest faster in this model. Also, in the blended model teachers have to move about twice as slow in order to cover material for several different virtual and in-person cohorts.

It lowers the bar for expectations for everyone

The mind-body-emotion connection is gone in the blended model. We are no longer teaching to the full student to give them the same intrinsic and emotional opportunities we would be able to offer in person. They are no longer aware of their internal and external surroundings as they would be if they were with their peers. The practice is now "...in theory, because" rather than "this is how... because"

Less motivated students and those with low levels of confidence will struggle and/or fall behind because they are embarrassed by their work. Some students submit merely for completion, rather than for the quality of their work.

Many students do not have the stamina and fortitude necessary to thrive in the blended environment. They need the structure of in-person learning.

Many students need the direct engagement of a teacher to remain on task and on schedule in their learning

It is not ideal for teaching ensemble performance. Latency is the biggest factor. No good ways of developing ensemble nuances like blend, balance and intonation. It's ok for individual practice. However, students need to be together in order to make music.

Students can fall behind if not checked on.

While performance isn't everything, it frequently is the most valued public outcome of music programs. Blended learning reduces the total group rehearsal time to build ensemble skills used in successful performances. Teachers are often left doing more prep work to set up learning in BL environments.

It is harder to build relationships with students. It is also hard to keep (younger) students focussed.

As we are beginning to rehearse, it is hard to lead a rehearsal with somewhere between a half and two-thirds of a group online and muted. Without the feedback of being together and hearing students play, it is increasingly difficult to know how to help students who may need help.

To be honest, I think music classes suffer the most from our current blended learning models. Students are still not used to/adapting to the expectations. The school makes it unbearably easy for a student to "pass" or for their attendance to be counted, so students have no incentive to actually do more than just log on, turn their cameras off, and respond maybe once in class.

Our performance-based classes do not transfer well to the blended-learning model, ESPECIALLY in elementary grades. There is no unified way to keep 22 first graders focused or to actually assess whether or not they are grasping the content, let alone comfortable enough for some simple formative assessments.

HS band students that signed up for my band class did so for 1 primary reason: they want to play their horns. Our current blended model does not really allow for that; even if we do play, their mics have to be off due to natural latency issues. They have very quickly lost motivation, even for the project-based assignments that involve playing their horns, it's just not the same as playing in an ensemble.

Decreased face-to-face interaction with students, can only choose repertoire that works in a blended learning situation, must have some kind of external tool to teach everyone simultaneously, technology difficulties, decreased concept of "ensemble" sound and function

Far less opportunities to work on ensemble balance, ensemble intonation, or any other kind of ensemble-based concept (blend, uniform style...the list goes on and on). I see half of my groups at a time, and we're spaced far apart, and playing in a very large space.

Though we do study pieces together (whether we get to perform them in a concert or not), this whole experience has become more of the teacher guiding the student through their individual study and progress on their instrument. There are also hurdles of technology: small laptop mics that can't handle sounds of instruments, internet lag, etc.

From a motivation standpoint:

Most students don't seem to have as much intrinsic motivation with online learning than in person. Hybrid and virtual models do shift the bulk of the onus and accountability to the student. Some succeed (and thrive), but others do not.

Less time on learning/actually playing instruments. Lack of consistency (playing/rehearsing every day) if students are not actively practicing at home. It takes much longer to teach and reinforce new concepts. Students do not get as much active group music making.

I miss the casual interactions with students. Many of my students keep their cameras/microphones off and I do not get a chance to see or hear them. Some of my students are very engaged while others have done little work. For those that are doing little work, it is very difficult to get them back on track.

Balancing in an ensemble without all students present will be incredibly difficult. Managing the needs of both virtual and physically present students simultaneously will be quite demanding. Safety of students is a concern. Students will also be tempted to touch instruments, which we are still not allowed to use when they are shared, and that temptation may become frustration. Students in class may feel awkward about their audio being broadcast to the students at home.

The pace of large group instruction is greatly reduced due to common technology issues: lag, equipment malfunction or underperformance, inadequate internet connection, etc. Additionally, it is extremely difficult to make music as a large ensemble with all students being heard together using blended learning. If someone were able to create a software that could sync connections in real time that would be a game changer (but I think that's probably a long time away...unless there is something I don't know about!).



The most negative aspect of blended learning is the teacher's divided attention. It is incredibly challenging to balance in-person and online classroom management.

Some of the negative aspects of blended learning are the lack of training and reliable technology. Both within the district and at home, many technical errors make virtual learning components difficult and sometimes bring it to a complete halt.

While blended learning can certainly give students a safe space to perform and participate, I do feel that some students already have so much screen time as part of their day. I believe that there are some amazing opportunities within blended learning, however, it does increase the amount of screen time that students are participating in which may or may not have harmful effects.

I feel very disconnected to my band students right now especially with ones I am not familiar with. This has caused enthusiasm for band to drop and has led to students leaving the band program.