



Decreased Arts Course Enrolments: Examining Trends in Ontario Secondary Schools from 2015-2024

Authored By:

Rachel Burger, MEd Student, Queen's University

Julia Brook, Director and Associate Professor, DAN School of Drama and Music,
Queen's University

Benjamin Bolden, UNESCO Chair in Arts and Learning and Professor, Faculty of
Education, Queen's University

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the last decade, teachers, parents, and researchers alike have shared concerns about the dwindling presence of arts programming, specifically music programming, within secondary schools (see for example, People for Education, 2017; *Guilde des musiciens et musiciennes du Québec*, 2026).

Diminishing enrolment means fewer arts courses are being offered, leading in turn to students having fewer arts learning opportunities, and arts teachers losing jobs. Also during this time, Ontario secondary schools experienced major disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic with particular impacts on methods of course delivery and increased unease around music activities (see for example, Morin & Mahmud, 2021; People for Education, 2022; Barbeau et al., 2024).

This research examined arts course enrolment trends within Ontario secondary schools over ten academic years (2015-2024) as publicly reported in the Ontario Ministry of Education Data Catalogue, with a secondary focus on enrolment trends in music education course types. More specifically, it aimed to identify if and to what extent arts enrolments are diminishing, which arts courses and programs are most impacted, and if and to what extent diminishing enrolment links to the COVID-19 pandemic.

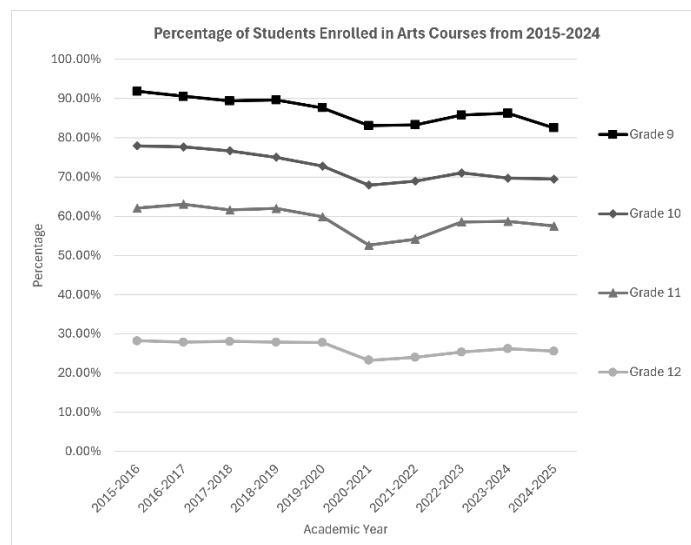
Enrolment in Arts Courses in Ontario Secondary Schools from 2015-2024

The [enrolment by grade in secondary schools](#) data sets from 2015-2024 were downloaded and compiled to determine the student enrolment in Ontario secondary schools (i.e., student population). It was found that student population increased by 34,046 students between 2015-2024. The [course enrolment in secondary schools](#) data sets included course codes, course descriptions, corresponding grade levels, pathways/destinations, and enrolment. For each academic year between 2015-2024, data sets were downloaded and values were determined for the total arts course enrolments and the enrolments for each arts discipline (per grade and total student population). Enrolment percentages were determined per arts discipline, per grade, and as a total of all arts enrolment by dividing the arts course enrolment of interest (e.g., Music, Visual Arts, etc.) by the appropriate student population (i.e., total or specific grade).

This research identified that arts enrolments have decreased over the past decade (see Figure ES-1).

As shown in Figure ES-2, the percentage of Ontario secondary school students who enrolled in arts courses in 2024 (56.90%) was approximately 5% less than in 2015 (61.94%). The lowest percentage of students enrolled in arts courses was in the 2020-21 academic year at 54.87%. Perhaps more significantly, the data suggest that while COVID-19 might have been a catalyst for declining arts enrolment in Ontario secondary schools, arts course enrolments were already decreasing pre-COVID and continue to decrease post-COVID.

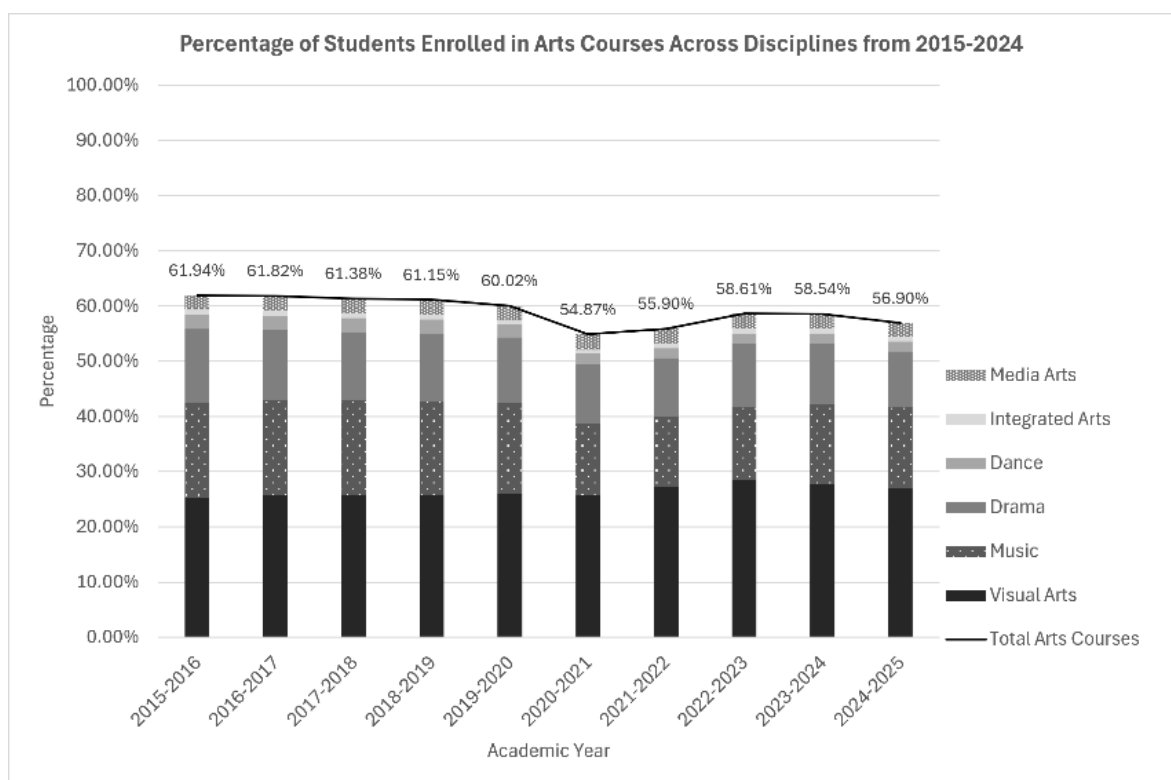
Figure ES-1.



Decreased enrolments were most significant in the performing arts disciplines including Music, Drama, and Dance. Notably, Visual Arts enrolments have *not* decreased over the past decade. The percentage of Ontario secondary school students who enrolled in Visual Arts courses in 2024 was approximately 2% *greater* than in 2015. Visual Arts courses are attracting a greater percentage of students now than they were a decade ago.

In summary, the overall arts enrollment is 5% lower than it was in 2015. This decrease is largely a result of lower enrolments in Music, Drama, and Dance courses, while Visual Arts courses have actually experienced increased enrolments (see Figure ES-2).

Figure ES-2.



Cohort Analysis

Four cohorts were created to examine associations between the COVID-19 pandemic and enrolment and retention between grades in arts courses (total) and each arts discipline (see Table ES-1).

When comparing across the cohorts, the data indicate that the percentage of students enrolled in arts courses in Grades 9 and 10 decreased during the COVID-19 pandemic and has not returned to pre-COVID enrolment. While the enrolment data was unavailable for the senior grades in more recent cohorts, the available information suggests similar trends for Grades 11 and 12. Comparing the difference of the percentage of students enrolled in arts courses between grades within each cohort indicates minimal impact of COVID-19 on retention of arts courses between grades. However, there is some suggestion that students taking an arts course in Grade 10 were more likely to continue to take an art course in Grade 11 during and post-COVID than they were pre-COVID.

Table ES-1.

Percentage of Students Enrolled in Arts Courses Pre-, During, and Post-COVID: Cohort Analysis

	Cohort A: Pre-COVID (start 2015-16)	Cohort B: During COVID (start 2020-21)	Cohort C: Post-COVID (start 2022-23)	Cohort D: Post-COVID (start 2023-24)
Percentage of Students Enrolled in Arts Courses (Total)				
Grade 9	91.83%	83.09%	85.77%	86.27%
Grade 10	77.67%	68.93%	69.69%	69.46%
Grade 11	61.59%	58.54%	57.49%	[pending]
Grade 12	27.82%	26.20%	[pending]	[pending]
Percentage of Students Enrolled in Visual Arts				
Grade 9	34.56%	35.36%	38.54%	36.53%
Grade 10	29.27%	31.53%	31.14%	30.38%
Grade 11	30.58%	32.93%	32.57%	[pending]
Grade 12	13.07%	13.48%	[pending]	[pending]
Percentage of Students Enrolled in Music				
Grade 9	28.29%	22.14%	21.53%	24.60%
Grade 10	21.89%	15.41%	17.46%	18.60%
Grade 11	14.88%	11.06%	11.91%	[pending]
Grade 12	7.26%	5.77%	[pending]	[pending]
Percentage of Students Enrolled in Drama				
Grade 9	23.57%	20.84%	20.47%	20.10%
Grade 10	16.37%	13.17%	12.56%	12.10%
Grade 11	9.30%	8.65%	7.30%	[pending]
Grade 12	4.59%	4.25%	[pending]	[pending]
Percentage of Students Enrolled in Dance				
Grade 9	3.01%	2.56%	2.05%	2.23%
Grade 10	3.69%	2.27%	2.35%	2.49%
Grade 11	2.64%	1.83%	1.82%	[pending]
Grade 12	1.35%	1.15%	[pending]	[pending]
Percentage of Students Enrolled in Media Arts				
Grade 9	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Grade 10	5.99%	6.05%	5.71%	5.46%
Grade 11	3.67%	3.84%	3.48%	[pending]
Grade 12	1.29%	1.27%	[pending]	[pending]
Percentage of Students Enrolled in Integrated Arts				
Grade 9	2.41%	2.18%	3.17%	2.81%
Grade 10	0.47%	0.49%	0.46%	0.43%
Grade 11	0.64%	0.24%	0.41%	[pending]
Grade 12	0.26%	0.28%	[pending]	[pending]

The cohort analysis for each discipline revealed:

- The percentage of students enrolled in the Visual Arts in all grades increased during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- While the COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted student enrolment in Music and Dance courses, it has been increasing post-COVID but has not yet returned to pre-COVID enrolment.
- The percentage of students enrolled in Drama courses decreased proportionally between each of the four cohorts for all grades.
- The enrolment percentages for Grade 10 and Grade 11 Media Arts courses increased slightly between the pre-COVID and during COVID cohorts before decreasing in the post-COVID cohorts suggesting that Grade 10 and 11 students were more likely to take Media Arts courses during the pandemic than post-pandemic.
- No apparent trends between the percentage of students enrolled in the Integrated Arts between cohorts or between grades within the same cohort suggesting minimal impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Enrolment in Music Course Types in Ontario Secondary Schools from 2015-2024

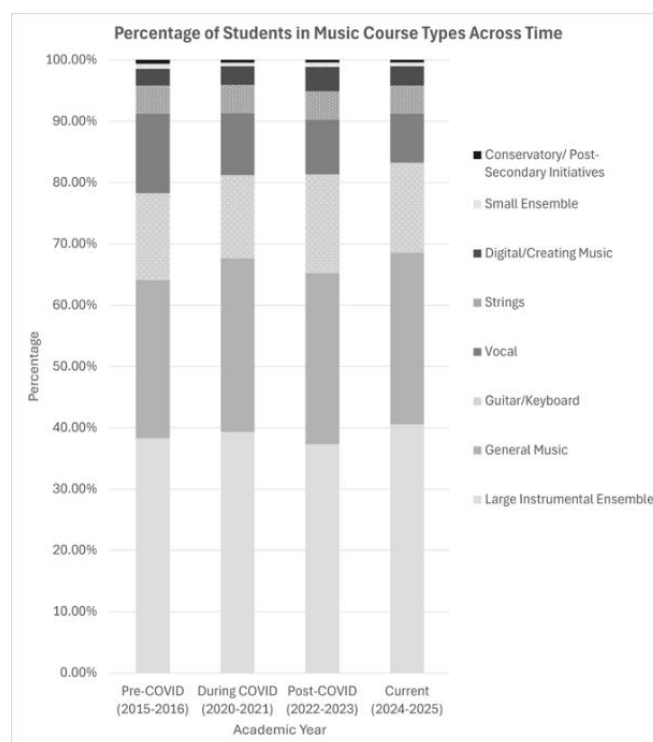
Finally, we isolated Music course enrolments to examine trends over the last decade by Music course type. We gathered all the Music course codes and divided them into eight different course type categories (see Appendix B). We then compared the enrolment across these groups at four points in time representing pre-COVID (2015-16), during COVID (2020-21), post-COVID (2022-23), and the most recent data (2024-25).

We found that while there were year-to-year fluctuations, the COVID-19 pandemic did not appear to have a notable impact on the types of Music courses that students were taking (see Figure ES-3).

In comparison to other music course types, Large Instrumental Ensemble and General Music course enrolments made up the largest proportion of music enrolments and increased slightly over the decade. Meanwhile, Vocal course enrolments, as a percentage of music course enrolments, decreased by 5% over the decade.

We note, however, that findings related to types of Music courses should be interpreted with caution, as there is likely significant variation in the kinds of music learning activities that students experience for any given course code, potentially differing greatly from school to school.

Figure ES-3.



Conclusions and Recommendations

This research has important implications for arts educators and secondary school administrators.

The decrease in percentage of students enrolled in arts courses over the last decade by approximately 5% may ultimately have an impact on course offerings and teacher jobs. As such, educators in arts disciplines (particularly the performing arts) should work alongside school leadership and administration to consider what kind of programming is most likely to build back enrolment. While the COVID-19 pandemic may have magnified the trend, the percentage of students enrolled in Music, Drama, Dance, and Media Arts were decreasing before, and continue to decrease after, the COVID-19 pandemic suggesting that it is not the sole reason for declining enrolment. In comparison, the percentage of students enrolled in Visual Arts increased over the last decade by approximately 2%. This prompts critical reflection on how arts programming can be adapted to meet the needs and interests of today's students.

A closer look at the Music enrolment trends by course type over the last decade indicated that Large Instrumental Ensemble and General Music course types consistently received the largest proportion of Music course enrolments. However, ambiguity in the course code system means we are unable to determine what is actually happening within music courses by course codes alone. Music educators, departments heads, and school administrators are encouraged to review their use of Music course codes to provide more accurate tracking metrics.

Taken together, this knowledge can enable arts education stakeholders to (a) strategically target appropriate advocacy to rebuild interest in arts learning and enrolments, and (b) direct resources, efficiencies, and efforts to mitigate diminishing arts enrolments.

Next steps for this research include:

- Comparing enrolments in other secondary school subject areas
- Examining course enrolment and offerings at the school/board level
- Comparing enrolments across Canada
- Enhancing understanding through interviews or observation
- Enriching findings through case studies
- Better understanding the role of elementary education on secondary school programming

We hope that by identifying and articulating these arts program enrolment trends within the provincial context, local conditions that arts educators are experiencing can be put into a broader perspective. This research highlights that decreasing arts course enrolments are part of a systemic trend and not a reflection of any one educator. Remedying the decrease in arts course enrolments in Ontario secondary schools will require larger conversations about what society wants from secondary school education.

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INTRODUCTION

The past ten years have seen a lot of changes in Ontario secondary schools – the emphasis on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2024a); societal changes in the role of secondary school as the beginning of career development (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2024a; Ontario Newsroom, 2024); and impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on methods of course delivery and particular unease around music activities such as singing and wind playing (see for example, Morin & Mahmud, 2021; People for Education, 2022; Barbeau et al., 2024). Little is known about the influence of these changes on student enrolment in the arts. Teachers, parents, and researchers alike have shared concerns about the dwindling presence of arts programming, specifically music programming, within public schools and that music educators are losing their jobs (see for example People for Education, 2017; Guilde des musiciens et musiciennes du Québec, 2026). As described by Elpus and Miller (2024), “high school music educators are often preternaturally concerned with their [annual student enrolment] ‘numbers’ and how their ‘numbers’ fluctuate from year to year” (p. 267), particularly because music teacher employment is often linked to student enrolment. Diminishing enrolment leads to arts courses not being offered, leading in turn to students having fewer arts learning opportunities, and arts teachers losing jobs.

The research reported here was designed to examine recent trends in Ontario secondary school arts course enrolment. Specifically, this research aimed to summarize arts course enrolment trends within Ontario secondary schools over ten years (2015-2024), with a secondary focus on enrolment trends in music education course types. Broadly, this research aimed to identify if and to what extent arts enrolments are diminishing, which arts courses and programs are most impacted, and if and to what extent diminishing enrolment links to the COVID-19 pandemic. This knowledge can enable arts education stakeholders to (a) strategically target appropriate advocacy to rebuild interest in arts learning and enrolments, and (b) direct resources, efficiencies, and efforts to mitigate diminishing arts enrolments (e.g., prioritize the scheduling of arts courses that are less impacted by diminishing enrolments).

Graduation Requirements for Ontario Secondary School Students

The last major revision to the Ontario secondary school diploma requirements came into effect in 1999 with the removal of the Ontario Academic Credit (optional fifth year, “Grade 13”) and the addition of community involvement (volunteer) hours (Ontario Newsroom, 2024). Students were required to earn a total of 30 credits (a mix of compulsory and optional), achieve the appropriate literacy requirement, and complete at least 40 hours of community involvement to receive their secondary school diploma. Of the compulsory courses that students were required to take, at least one credit was to be earned in the arts (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2026a). During that time, students were also required to complete one credit from each of three designated course groups, with Course Group 2 including the option of an additional arts credit as a compulsory course (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2026a). This structure has enabled students to complete optional credits in areas of their choosing, including the arts. These choices are made based on student interest, academic performance, course availability, future plans, and post-secondary prerequisites (Galotti & Umscheid, 2019; Khoramshahi, 2019).

In recent years, the Ontario Ministry of Education released new reforms. Students who started Grade 9 in the 2020-21 academic year or later must earn at least two online credits to get their secondary school diploma. However, students can opt out of the online graduation credit requirement with parent/guardian

consent (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2026a). Students who started Grade 9 in the 2024-25 academic year or later are required to earn at least one credit from the designated STEM-related course group and at least one credit in technological education (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2026a). For a full list of graduation requirements, see Appendix A. Of note, our research examines enrolment data from the 2015-16 academic year to the 2024-25 academic year. Accordingly, these enrolment data were only very slightly influenced by the reform that took effect for students entering Grade 9 in 2024-2025; only Grade 9 enrolments in 2024-2025 could have been influenced by this reform. In other words, the data analyzed and presented in this report basically represent a consistent set of government-imposed parameters for course choices between 2015 and 2024.

Arts Programming in Ontario Secondary Schools

The Ontario secondary school Arts curriculum (2010) offers arts programming in six disciplines:

- Dance
- Drama
- Music
- Visual Arts
- Media Arts
- Integrated Arts (Grade 9/10)/Exploring and Creating in the Arts (Grade 11/12)

As described in the 2010 Ontario secondary school curriculum documents, arts courses in Grades 9 and 10 are meant to appeal to students' interests and imagination and provide students with the foundation for more specialized study (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010a). The emphasis in Grade 11 and 12 arts courses shifts to advancing students' existing skills and applying them in complex ways and helping prepare students for a variety of careers (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010b). Courses are offered in three course types (university/college, workplace, or open) depending on the grade level. People for Education's 2018 Annual Report was based on survey responses from 1244 principals across Ontario and explored the impact of funding and policy choices in schools. They found that in 2018, 98% of reporting secondary schools offered a senior (Grades 11/12) Visual Arts class, 92% offered a senior Music class, 86% offered a senior Drama class, and only 32% offered a senior Dance class (People for Education, 2018).

Using the curriculum expectations as a guide, schools can develop courses that focus on a particular approach to addressing the artform (i.e., *focus courses*). For example, a dance course focusing on ballet, a drama course focusing on Canadian theatre, a visual arts course focusing on printmaking, or a music course focusing on electronic music. As such, focus courses may appeal to music teachers by providing them with creative license in their design and implementation of the course while also appealing to the interests of students in the local school area (Fitzpatrick, 2013). Traditionally, most secondary school music programs have implemented focus courses related to various large ensembles such as concert bands, jazz bands, or choirs (Beatty, 2001). Based on 2015 survey data from 56 music teachers from across Ontario, singing and playing music in preparation for performances (music not improvised or composed by students themselves), theory, and musicology represent the majority of the activities within secondary music classes (Bolden et al., 2015). Over time and through music teacher advocacy efforts, other courses have been introduced such as guitar, keyboard, repertoire, steel drum, and computer/digital music making.

In addition to for-credit courses, music programming in Ontario secondary schools often exists as co-curriculars such as large ensembles (e.g., band, orchestra, choir) or musical theatre productions. That said, data from People for Education’s Annual Ontario School Survey (2023-24) revealed that the percentage of secondary schools with arts opportunities decreased from 2014-2024. For example, opportunities to participate in a performance or exhibition decreased from 97% in 2014 to 82% in 2024, opportunities to participate in a choir, band, or orchestra decreased from 89% in 2014 to 75% in 2024, and opportunities to learn an instrument within school hours decreased from 94% in 2014 to 83% in 2024 (People for Education, 2024).

Impacts of COVID-19

Impacts of COVID-19 on Ontario Secondary Schools

It goes without saying that the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant and substantial impact on the experiences of students, educators, and families of those attending secondary school in Ontario (see Gallagher-Mackay et al., 2021). After an initial period of emergency remote learning between March and June 2020, the Government of Ontario established a basic educational delivery framework for the 2020-21 academic year. This included time requirements for synchronous and in-person instruction, expectations on delivering the existing Ontario curriculum in full, assessing students as per the existing *Growing Success* policy, and providing students with differentiated support (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2021; Gallagher-Mackay et al., 2023). Although curriculum and assessment were intended to be delivered “as normal,” school closures, online or blended learning, and restructured learning days (e.g., *quadmesters* and *octomesters*) were just a few of the disruptions to educational delivery associated with the COVID-19 pandemic (People for Education, 2022). Even when students returned to in-person learning, strategies to limit student exposure to COVID-19 like cohorting measures, masking policies, social distancing, and cancellations of extracurriculars and athletics had impacts on student learning and engagement well into 2022. In an update to the summary report published by Public Health Ontario, secondary students during the 2020-21 and 2021-22 academic years reported an increase in stress, boredom, loneliness, and anxiety throughout the COVID-19 pandemic (Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (Public Health Ontario), 2024).

Impacts of COVID-19 on Music in Schools

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many music-making activities were under scrutiny due to concerns related to increased transmission risks. Early on, group singing and choirs were connected to various COVID-19 clusters and outbreaks, resulting in increased precautions and in some cases, partial or complete restrictions (O’Keeffe, 2020; OMEA, 2021). A study on the use of singing in Canadian schools during the COVID-19 pandemic found severe and widespread impacts attributed to the health restrictions placed on regular and co-curricular music programs involving singing and choral experiences (Morin & Mahmud, 2021).

Group singing was not the only music programming that faced challenges associated with the pandemic. Music teachers throughout Canada and internationally reported that the abrupt transition to online/distance learning, policy revisions prohibiting singing and playing wind instruments, and a lack of support and training surrounding course delivery and assessment, had a negative impact on their teaching experiences and well-being (Calderón-Garrido & Gustems-Carnicer, 2021; Laidlaw, 2023; Shaw

& Mayo, 2022). A survey of elementary and secondary music teachers in Quebec who taught during the spring and fall of 2020 aimed to better understand the effects of the pandemic on music teaching in schools (Barbeau et al., 2023). They reported that while the interruption and continuation of music programs varied greatly from school to school, teachers working with large ensembles like band and orchestra experienced more interruptions in their music programs (Barbeau et al., 2023). Changes in physical space (e.g., teaching music in the homeroom, decrease in number of students per class, protective measures) and changes in teaching task (e.g., moving from high school to elementary school, teaching another subject, reduction of workload) were also identified as impacts to music programming in Quebec and Ontario schools (Arcand & Corbett, 2023; Barbeau et al., 2024).

Despite these concerns, to our knowledge no research has specifically addressed the impact, if any, of the COVID-19 pandemic on enrolment in arts and music courses in Ontario secondary schools.

Secondary School Arts and Music Enrolment Trends

This is not the first time there has been an interest in exploring student enrolment trends to better understand the impacts of educational reforms, curriculum changes, and disruptions. Vince (2005) used enrolment data as recorded by the Ontario Ministry of Education over a ten-year period (1993-2002) to determine if there were changes in music course enrolments after the implementation of the four-year secondary school curriculum. Vince cautioned that the curriculum change placed a larger emphasis on mathematics, science, and technology, resulting in a “[reduced] opportunity for diverse academic experience by experimentation with course options” (2005, p. 2). Music enrolment data were converted to percentages of total enrolment. Vince reported that while the percentage of Grade 9 and Grade 12 students taking music under the revised curriculum was generally increasing (from 1998-2001), a cohort analysis revealed that the retention rate between grades for cohorts starting in 1998, 1999, 2000, and 2001 decreased over time (Vince, 2005). Through a course analysis, they reported that the implementation of a Repertoire Credit increased overall student enrolment but noted that the feasibility of this option would be inconsistent throughout school districts and the province and that the content taught in a Repertoire Credit may not match government requirements, making it difficult to standardize (Vince, 2005). Vince acknowledged the difficulty in deriving meaning from enrolment statistics alone due to the inability to accurately account for multilevel classes, incorrectly labelled music courses, and a lack of standardization between schools on course offerings (Vince, 2005). Vince concluded the report with the somber statement, “If secondary school music program retention rates continue to decline, then in ten years there may not be enough students involved in secondary school music education for Grade 11 and 12 courses to be offered” (Vince, 2005, p. 215). This begs the question, what are the current music enrolment rates in Ontario secondary schools and what can they tell us about the state of public music education?

A more recent mixed-methods study by Fitzpatrick (2013) examined the perceptions of secondary school music educators from 20 different English public Ontario school boards through an online survey and follow-up interviews. When asked about music enrolment trends over the last five years, of the 134 survey responses 50% of participants reported a decrease in the number of Grade 9 students in music courses, 39% of participants reported a decrease in the number of Grade 10 students in music courses, and 39% of participants reported a decrease in the number of senior (Grade 11, Grade 12, 5th year) students in music courses (Fitzpatrick, 2013). Participants attributed decreasing enrolments to an overall decline in school populations, difficulties in elementary feeder school music programs, and scheduling conflicts.

Participants attributed retained or increasing enrolments to increases in school populations, the positive influence of strong feeder school music programs, students feeling a sense of belonging in the music department, and new courses being offered at the senior level (Fitzpatrick, 2013). The online survey also contained questions related to music course offerings at the participating schools. While the most common course offerings were traditional instrumental and vocal programs (e.g., 97% reported offering Wind Ensemble, 68.7% reported offering Guitar, 67.2% reported offering Vocal), other notable course types included Strings (20.9%), Keyboard (20.9%), Music Theatre (14.9%), Music and Computers (11.9%), and Percussion (11.9%) (Fitzpatrick, 2013).

Decreasing arts course enrolment is not unique to Ontario or Canada. In the USA, the Arts Education Data Project (AEDP) created and published the National Arts Education Status Report 2019 to provide a snapshot of the status and condition of arts education in the United States. Specifically, they reported on student access to and participation in the arts. They found that only 47.1% of high school students participated in any arts instruction during the school day (Morrison et al., 2022). The AEDP also looked at the percentage of high school students in each arts discipline, reporting that 25.8% participated in Visual Arts, 18.5% participated in Music, 4.7% participated in Theatre/Drama, 1.6% participated in Dance, and 4.3% participated in other arts instruction (Morrison et al., 2022).

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

Overall, there is a paucity of research that examines Ontario secondary school enrolments in the arts, including music. There has been growing concern that the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the increasing emphasis on STEM and trades education in secondary school may be impacting arts enrolment. Thus, the purpose of this research was to examine Ontario secondary school music course enrolments as recorded by the Ontario Ministry of Education for the years 2015-2024. While our particular interest was in music enrolments, we also looked at arts enrolments more broadly across disciplines (Visual Arts, Music, Dance, Drama, Integrated Arts, and Media Arts) to contextualize and compare the identified trends in music course enrolments. Specific attention was paid to the music course types being offered, overall trends in enrolment numbers, and any potential influences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As such, our research was guided by the following objectives and questions:

1. To explore available data

- a. What is the nature of the publicly available Ontario Ministry of Education data concerning student enrolment in arts courses in secondary schools?

2. To explore enrolment in arts courses in Ontario secondary schools from 2015-2024

- a. How does the percentage of overall student population enrolled in arts courses change over time?
- b. How does the percentage of students enrolled in courses associated with each of the different arts disciplines change over time?
- c. What are the cohort trends in arts enrolment over time (pre-, during, and post-COVID)?

3. To explore enrolment in music course types in Ontario secondary schools from 2015-2024

- a. How does the percentage of students enrolled in each of the different music course types change over time?
- b. What trends are observable in music course type enrolment pre-, during, and post-COVID?

METHODS

To achieve our research aims, we conducted a descriptive analysis of publicly available enrolment data from the Ontario Ministry of Education. A description of the database and our analysis procedures are explained below.

Data Source

The data were compiled from the Ontario Ministry of Education's Data Catalogue and analyzed between May-June 2026. The data were made available through the [Open Government Licence – Ontario](#). The available data were reported by schools through the Ontario School Information System (OnSIS), October Submissions and include information from public non-denominational and public catholic schools. All publicly funded schools in Ontario are required to submit this information to the Ministry of Education. The data do not include enrolment information for students at private schools, publicly funded hospital and provincial schools, care and/or treatment programs, Education and Community Partnership Program (ECP) facilities, summer schools, night schools, or adult continuing education day schools.

To address our research aims, we relied on enrolment data by grade and by course.

Grade Enrolment Data

Data detailing student [enrolment by grade in secondary schools](#) for the academic years of 2015-16 through 2024-25 were downloaded and compiled to ascertain total enrolment per school year and the number of students enrolled per grade (i.e., total student population and student population per grade) (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2025). We note that the 2024-2025 data set used for this research was indicated preliminary as of November 7, 2025.

Data included student enrolment in secondary schools across the province, aggregated by grade and school board or school authority. Students in Temporary Remote Learning Schools (TRLS) were also included in enrolment counts. Students designated as "Pre-Grade 9" were included in the Grade 9 enrolment data. Each data set included the board number, board name, Grade 9 enrolment, Grade 10 enrolment, Grade 11 enrolment, Grade 12 enrolment, and total enrolment. Starting in the 2018-19 academic year, enrolment numbers were rounded to the nearest five.

Course Enrolment Data

Data detailing [course enrolment in secondary schools](#) for the academic years of 2015-16 through 2024-25 were also downloaded and compiled (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2026b). We note that the 2024-2025 data set used for this research was indicated preliminary as of February 20, 2026. These data included the number of students enrolled in ministry-defined secondary school courses at the provincial level in Grades 9 to 12. Data sets included course codes, course descriptions, corresponding grades, pathways/destinations, and enrolment.

Students enrolled in a course more than once were counted each time they enrolled. Where fewer than 10 students were enrolled in each category, the data were depicted with <10. We note that the computer spreadsheet does not acknowledge "<10," making arts enrolment data totals appear slightly lower than

actual enrolment. Starting in the 2018-19 academic year, enrolment numbers were rounded to the nearest five.

For each academic year, values were determined for the total arts course enrolment and the enrolment for each arts discipline (per grade and total student population). The research team determined the categorization of each of the courses into one of the six disciplines. Through discussion and as per the 2010 arts curriculum document, we categorized the course titled “Exploring and Creating in the Arts” with the Integrated Arts discipline data (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010b).

Determining the Percentage of Students Enrolled in Arts Courses

A percentage for arts course enrolment was determined by dividing the total arts course enrolment by the total student population. These percentages were determined per arts discipline, per grade, and as a total of all arts enrolment. We acknowledge that the relationship between school or grade population to course enrolment may not be a one-to-one relationship because it is possible that students enrolled in more than one music course per year. Through discussion, it was determined that this would have an overall minimal impact and that the percentages would be accurate enough to meaningfully indicate enrolment trends.

Cohort Analysis

Using the previously described percentages of student enrolment in arts courses, we conducted a cohort analysis to look more specifically at student enrolment in the different arts disciplines across their secondary school careers. Four cohorts were created to examine associations between the COVID-19 pandemic and enrolment and retention between grades in these courses. Cohort A (pre-COVID) represented students who entered Grade 9 in 2015, Cohort B (during COVID) represented students who entered Grade 9 in 2020, Cohort C (post-COVID) represented students who entered Grade 9 in 2022, and Cohort D (post-COVID) represented students who entered Grade 9 in 2023.

These cohorts were based on student enrolments. It is not known if the exact same students are in each year of the data set (e.g., students may have moved; students may have taken a course outside of their designated grade level). Nevertheless, the research team felt they provided a reasonably reliable representation of enrolment activity over time.

Categorizing Music Courses

Using the *course enrolment in secondary schools* data sets, Music course enrolments were isolated for the academic years of 2015-16 through 2024-25 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2026b). Through discussion, the research team identified eight different Music course types: Large Instrumental Ensemble, General Music, Guitar/Keyboard, Vocal, Strings, Digital/Creating Music, Small Ensemble, and Conservatory/Post-Secondary Initiatives. Courses were tagged based on course type (see Appendix B for a full list of courses and their tags). Student enrolments were determined for each course type by grade and overall total student population. The percentage of students in each course type was determined by dividing enrolment in the specific Music course type by the enrolment in Music (per grade and total music student population). Data for four points in time representing pre-COVID (2015-16), during COVID (2020-21), post-COVID (2022-23), and the most recent data (2024-25) were compiled and compared.

ANALYSIS

Grade Enrolment Data: Ontario Secondary School Student Population

Table 1 summarizes the student enrolment data in Ontario secondary schools aggregated by grade and in total. The total Ontario secondary school student population increased by 34,046 students between 2015-2024. Overall, student population in Grades 9-11 also increased between 2015-2024. The Grade 12 population followed a decreasing trend through 2015-2022 school years. Since 2022, however, Grade 12 enrolments have been increasing. Enrolment did not seem significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 1.

Ontario Secondary School Student Population from 2015-2024

Year	Grade 9 Population	Grade 10 Population	Grade 11 Population	Grade 12 Population	Total Student Population
2015-2016	144,688	144,217	149,589	197,265	635,759
2016-2017	141,381	147,349	147,204	193,605	629,539
2017-2018	144,471	144,303	150,415	188,787	627,976
2018-2019	146,805	147,265	146,775	190,610	631,455
2019-2020	147,945	149,310	148,775	184,880	630,915
2020-2021	149,295	148,790	149,390	183,745	631,220
2021-2022	152,450	150,215	149,595	183,870	636,130
2022-2023	154,750	155,005	152,480	183,705	645,945
2023-2024	156,230	157,895	157,710	189,015	660,845
2024-2025	156,120	158,880	160,350	194,455	669,805

Percentage of Students Enrolled in Arts Courses Across Disciplines and Time

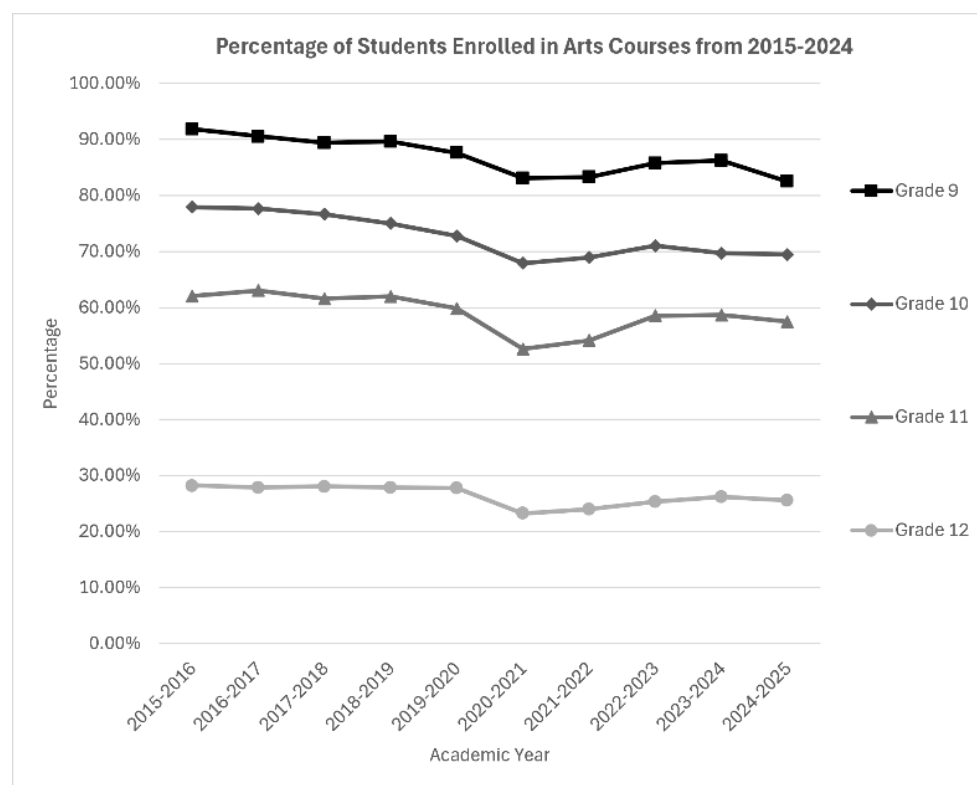
Arts Courses (Total)

Figure 1 represents the percentage of students enrolled in arts courses from the 2015-2016 to 2024-2025 academic years. Enrolment decreased across the grades with the highest enrolment in Grade 9 courses and the lowest in Grade 12 courses. The percentage of students enrolled in arts courses from 2015-2024 presents as a downward trend overall for all grades:

- Grade 9 arts course enrolment decreased from 91.83% in 2015-16 to 82.50% in 2024-25
- Grade 10 arts course enrolment decreased from 77.93% in 2015-16 to 69.46% in 2024-25
- Grade 11 arts course enrolment decreased from 62.04% in 2015-16 to 57.49% in 2024-25
- Grade 12 arts course enrolment decreased from 28.24% in 2015-16 to 25.59% in 2024-25

A more significant decrease in the 2020-21 academic year was observed (corresponding to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic). For all grades, percentages slightly increased throughout the 2021-22 and 2022-23 academic years but did not return to the pre-COVID values. Percentage decreases in the 2023-24 and 2024-25 academic years suggest that proportional enrolment in arts courses is decreasing in Ontario secondary schools beyond what can be explained by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 1.



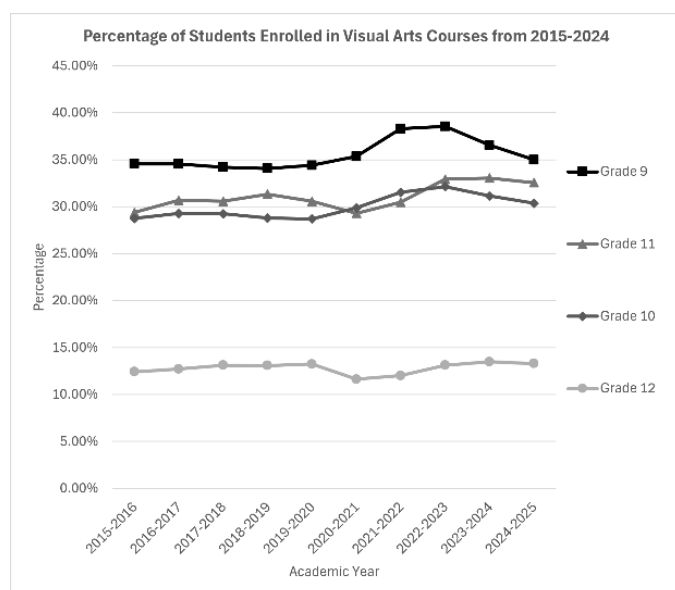
Enrolment percentages were also determined for each arts discipline (Visual Arts, Music, Dance, Drama, Integrated Arts, and Media Arts) to explore if and how enrolments for specific disciplines changed over time (see Figures 2-7).

Visual Arts

Figure 2 illustrates the percentage of students enrolled in Visual Arts. Enrolment increased across all grades with the highest enrolment in Grade 9 courses (2015-16, 34.56%; 2024-25, 34.99%) and the lowest enrolment in Grade 12 courses (2015-16, 12.41%; 2024-25, 13.30%). Grade 11 courses (2015-16, 29.38%; 2024-25, 32.57%) had a higher enrolment than Grade 10 courses (2015-16, 28.76%; 2024-25, 30.38%). Taken together, the percentage of Ontario secondary students who enrolled in Visual Arts courses across all grades increased from 25.15% in 2015-2016 to 27.02% in 2024-2025, an increase of 1.87% over the last decade, representing an increase of 21,066 course enrolments.

When we examined enrolment across years, we found that the Grade 11 and 12 Visual Arts enrolment percentages decreased in the 2020-21 academic year (Grade 11, 29.30%; Grade 12, 11.63%), corresponding to the COVID-19 pandemic. Interestingly, the Grade 9 enrolment percentage significantly increased from 35.36% in 2020-21 to 38.30% in 2021-22, and again in 2022-23 to 38.54%. Similarly, the percentage of Grade 10 students enrolled in Visual Arts increased from 29.87% in 2020-21 to 31.53% in 2021-22, and again in 2022-23 to 32.15%. By the 2022-23 academic year, the enrolment percentages had increased higher than their pre-COVID values in all grades. That said, enrolment percentages in the 2024-25 academic year for all grades decreased (see Figure 2).

Figure 2.

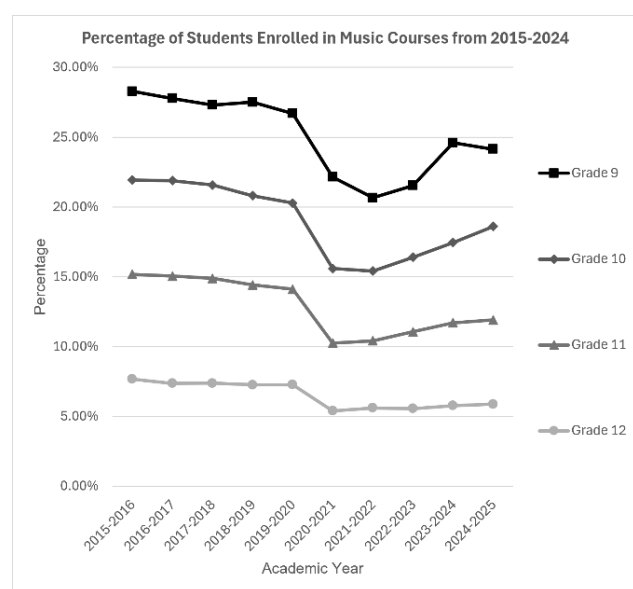


Music

Figure 3 illustrates the percentage of enrolment in Music courses. Enrolment decreased across the grades, with the highest enrolment in Grade 9 courses (2015-16, 28.29%; 2024-25, 24.14%), then Grade 10 courses (2015-16, 21.93%; 2024-25, 18.60%), Grade 11 courses (2015-16, 15.17%; 2024-25, 11.91%), and the lowest in Grade 12 courses (2015-16, 7.67%; 2024-25, 5.87%). Taken together, the percentage of Ontario secondary students who enrolled in Music courses across all grades decreased from 17.36% in 2015-2016 to 14.59% in 2024-2025, a decrease of 2.77% over the last decade, representing a decrease of 12,636 course enrolments despite a consistently increasing number of students in Ontario secondary schools.

When we examined enrolment across years, we found that all grades displayed a significant dip in enrolment percentages in the 2020-21 and 2021-22 academic years, corresponding to the COVID-19 pandemic. Most significantly, the percentage of Grade 9 students enrolled in Music courses decreased from 26.70% in 2019-20 to only 20.66% in 2021-22 (representing a decrease in 8,000 enrolled students). The enrolment percentages for all grades increased immediately following the pandemic. However, they did not reach their pre-COVID values.

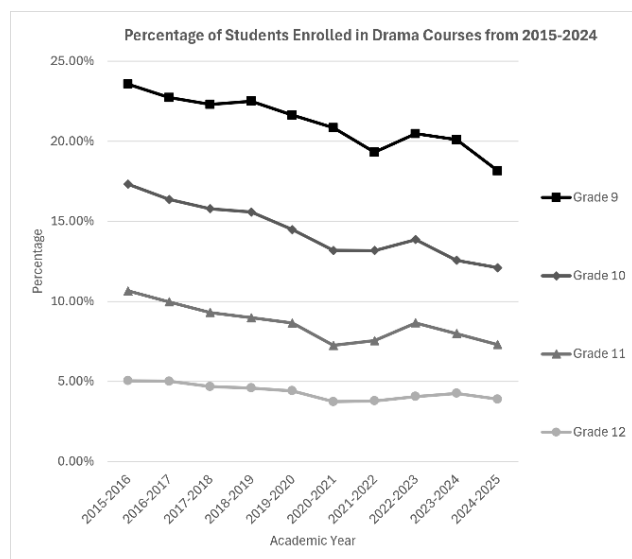
Figure 3.



Drama

Figure 4 illustrates the percentage of students enrolled in Drama courses. The enrolment percentage steadily decreased across the grades, with the highest enrolment in Grade 9 courses (2015-16, 23.57%; 2024-25, 18.16%), and the lowest in Grade 12 courses (2015-16, 5.04%; 2024-25, 3.89%). The percentage of Grade 10 students enrolled in Drama courses decreased from 17.32% in 2015-16 to 12.10% in 2024-25. The percentage of Grade 11 students enrolled in Drama courses decreased from 10.65% in 2015-16 to 7.30% in 2024-25. Taken together, the percentage of Ontario secondary students who enrolled in Drama courses across all grades decreased from 13.36% in 2015-2016 to 9.98% in 2024-2025, a decrease of 3.38% over the last decade, representing a decrease of 18,092 course enrolments despite a consistently increasing number of students in Ontario secondary schools.

Examining enrolment in Drama courses across the years for all grades showed a dip in the percentages of student enrolment corresponding to the start and early years of the COVID-19 pandemic (2020-21 and 2021-22 academic years). While all grades experienced an increase in the percentage of student enrolment in the 2022-23 academic year, since then they have declined to equal to or lower than their COVID-19 percentages.

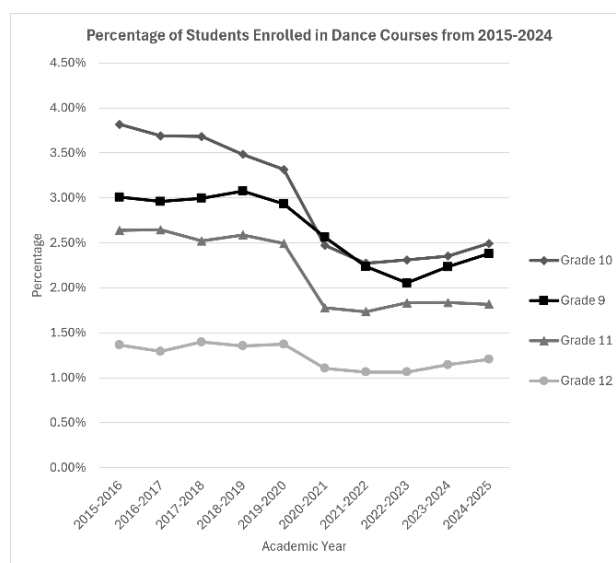
Figure 4.

Dance

Figure 5 illustrates the enrolment in Dance. Enrolment decreased for all grades, with the highest enrolment in Grade 10 courses (2015-16, 3.82%; 2024-25, 2.49%), and the lowest in Grade 12 courses (2015-16, 1.36%; 2024-25, 1.21%). Grade 9 had the second highest enrolment (2015-16, 3.01%; 2024-25, 2.38), followed by Grade 11 (2015-16, 2.64%; 2024-25, 1.82%). Taken together, the percentage of Ontario secondary students who enrolled in Dance courses across all grades decreased from 2.59% in 2015-2016 to 1.93% in 2024-2025, a decrease of 0.66% over the last decade, representing a decrease of 3,562 course enrolments despite a consistently increasing number of students in Ontario secondary schools.

Examining enrolment across the years showed a decrease in the percentage of student enrolment in Dance courses in the 2020-21 academic year (corresponding to the COVID-19 pandemic). The Grade 10 enrolment percentage decreased from 3.32% in 2019-20 to as low as 2.27% in 2020-21 (representing a decrease in 1,535 enrolled students).

The percentage of Grade 9 students enrolled in Dance courses decreased over a longer period of time (from 3.08% in 2018-19 to 2.05% in 2022-23). The enrolment percentages for all grades slowly increased or levelled off following the pandemic. However, they did not reach their pre-COVID values.

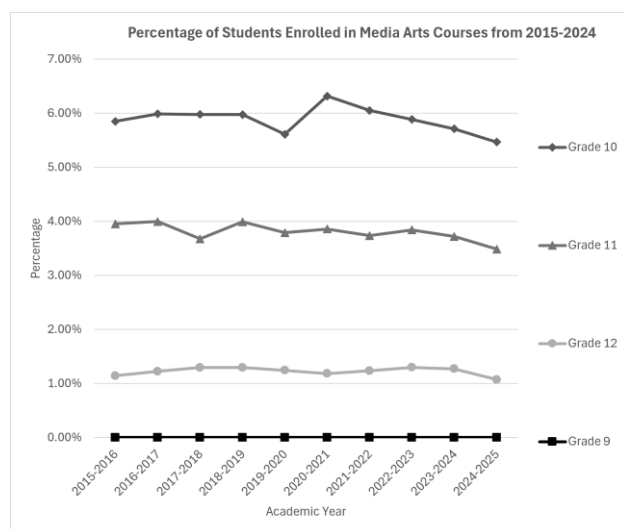
Figure 5.

Media Arts

Figure 6 illustrates the percentage of students enrolled in Media Arts courses. The Media Arts enrolment percentages remained largely unchanged between 2014-2025 with a slight decrease overall. Media Arts was not offered in Grade 9 throughout the examined timeframe. The highest percentage of enrolment was in Grade 10 courses (2015-16, 5.85%; 2024-25, 5.46%), followed by Grade 11 courses (2015-16, 3.95%; 2024-25, 3.48%), and the lowest in Grade 12 (2015-16, 1.14%; 2024-25, 1.07%). Taken together, the percentage of Ontario secondary students who enrolled in Media Arts courses across all grades decreased from 2.61% in 2015-2016 to 2.44% in 2024-2025, a decrease of 0.17% over the last decade, representing a decrease of 249 course enrolments despite a consistently increasing number of students in Ontario secondary schools.

When we examined enrolment across years, we found that the Grade 10 enrolment percentage increased from its lowest point in 2019-20 at 5.61% to its highest point in 2020-21 at 6.31% corresponding to the COVID-19 pandemic (representing an increase of 1,020 enrolled students). There did not appear to be any other significant impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the percentage of students enrolled in Media Arts courses.

Figure 6.

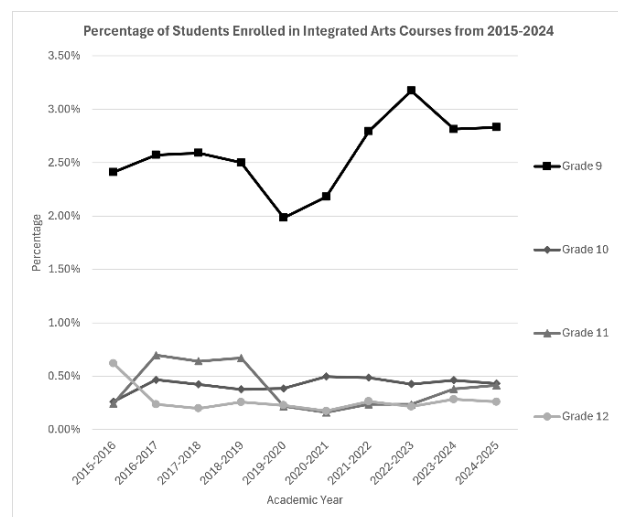


Integrated Arts

Figure 7 illustrates the percentage of students enrolled in Integrated Arts courses. Grade 9 had the highest enrolment percentage (2015-16, 2.41%; 2024-25, 2.83%), followed by Grade 10 (2015-16, 0.26%; 2024-25, 0.43%), Grade 11 (2015-16, 0.24%; 2024-25, 0.41%), and Grade 12 with the overall lowest percentage (2015-16, 0.62%; 2024-25, 0.26%). With the exception of Grade 12, the percentage of students enrolled in the Integrated Arts from 2015-2024 slightly increased; however, the Integrated Arts represented a very small percentage of enrolment in arts courses particularly in Grades 10, 11, and 12. Taken together, the percentage of Ontario secondary students who enrolled in Integrated Arts courses across all grades increased from 0.86% in 2015-2016 to 0.94% in 2024-2025, an increase of 0.08% over the last decade, representing an increase of 823 course enrolments.

When examining enrolment across the years, the percentage of students enrolled in Grade 10 and Grade 12 Integrated Arts courses remained relatively consistent between the 2016-17 and 2024-25 academic years with only minor fluctuations. The Grade 11 enrolment experienced a brief increase throughout the 2016-17 to 2018-19 academic years. The percentage of Grade 9 enrolment shows the most drastic changes throughout the timeframe studied. Grade 9 enrolment decreased from 2.50% in 2018-19 to 1.98% in 2019-20. It then increased, reaching peak enrolment in 2022-23 at 3.17%. The percentage of Grade 9 students enrolled in Integrated Arts decreased slightly between 2022-23 to 2024-25; however, it is still higher than the pre-COVID values.

Figure 7.



Summary

To see how student enrolment in the different arts courses stacked up against each other, the arts courses enrolments as percentages of total student population across disciplines and time were compiled. As a reminder, the enrolment percentages were determined by dividing the arts course enrolment values by the total student population, meaning that the percentages can be compared from year to year even as the total student population increases (as outlined in Table 1).

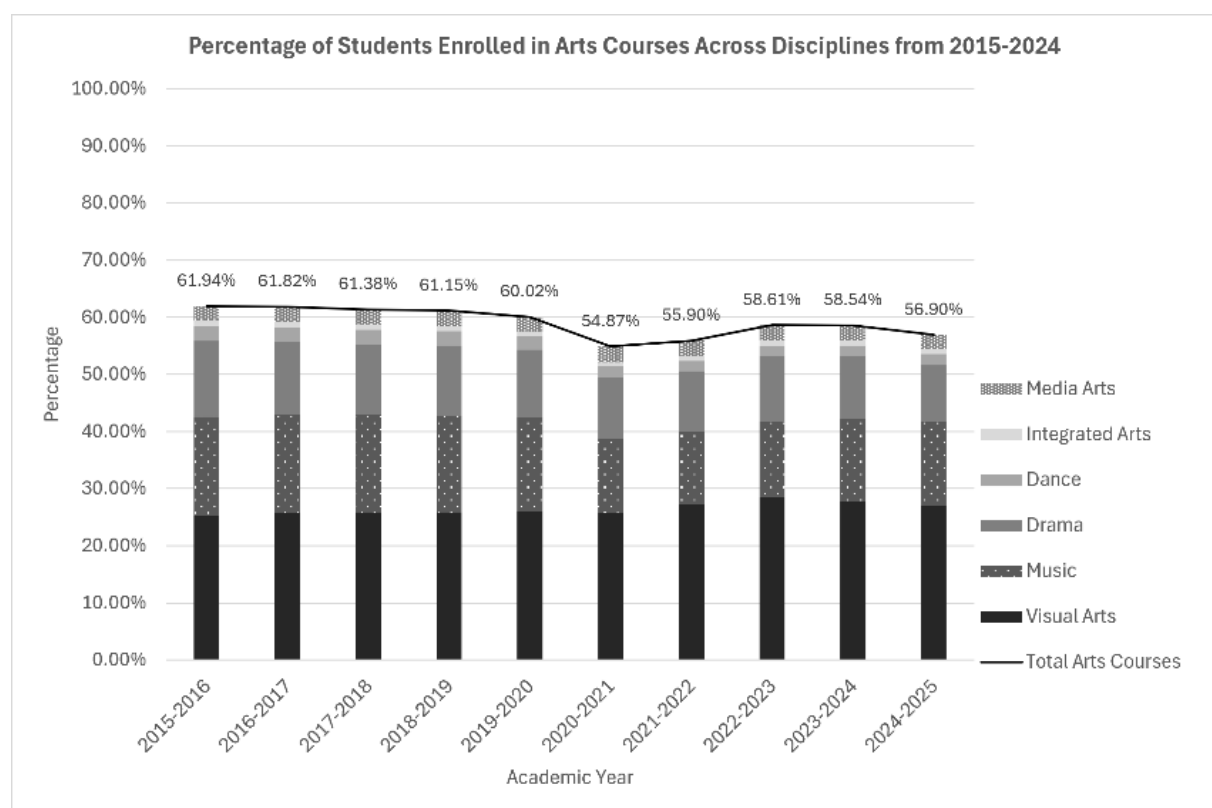
As demonstrated in Figure 8, the percentage of overall student population enrolled in arts courses in Ontario secondary schools decreased from 61.94% in 2015-16 to 56.90% in 2024-25. There was an approximate 5% drop between the 2019-20 and 2020-21 academic years from 60.02% to 54.87%, corresponding to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Percentages slightly increased through the 2021-22 and 2022-23 academic years but did not return to the pre-COVID values. Enrolment percentages decreased in the 2023-24 and 2024-25 academic years, again suggesting that proportional enrolment in arts courses is decreasing in Ontario secondary schools beyond what can be explained by the COVID-19 pandemic. This total decrease in arts course enrolment percentage indicates that students are selecting courses outside of the arts to fulfill their graduation requirements rather than switching between arts disciplines.

However, it is crucial to note that Visual Arts enrolments have *not* decreased over the past decade. The percentage of Ontario secondary students who enrolled in Visual Arts courses across all grades increased from 25.15% in 2015-2016 to 27.02% in 2024-2025, an increase of 1.87% over the last decade.

In contrast to the other arts disciplines, Visual Arts courses attracted a greater percentage of students in 2024-2025 than they did a decade earlier.

Further, when considering the percentage of students enrolled in each art discipline, Visual Arts course enrolments consistently represented the largest percentage of enrolments, followed by Music and then Drama. Dance and Media Arts represented smaller but similar enrolment percentages, and Integrated Arts courses represented the smallest percentage of enrolments (see Figure 8).

Figure 8.



Enrolment percentages for the total arts courses and each arts discipline (separately) were also determined per grade to allow a closer look at any change in percentage and/or distribution (see Appendix C1-C4). The percentage of enrolment in arts courses for each grade decreased over the span of 10 years from 91.83% to 82.50% in Grade 9, 77.93% to 69.45% in Grade 10, 62.04% to 57.49% in Grade 11, and 28.24% to 25.59% in Grade 12.

In all grades, there was a significant dip in the percentage of enrolment in arts courses in the 2020-21 academic year, corresponding to the COVID-19 pandemic, as follows:

- **Grade 9:** 87.64% (2019-20) to 83.09% (2020-21)
- **Grade 10:** 72.78% (2019-20) to 67.92% (2020-21)
- **Grade 11:** 59.83% (2019-20) to 52.59% (2020-21)
- **Grade 12:** 27.76% (2019-20) to 23.22% (2020-21)

The enrolment percentages increased slightly throughout the 2021-22 and 2022-23 academic years; however, they did not return to their pre-COVID values. Beginning in 2023-24 for Grade 10 and 2024-25 for Grades 9, 11, and 12, the percentage of students enrolled in arts courses decreased. Most significantly, the percentage of Grade 9 students enrolled in arts courses decreased from 86.27% in the 2023-24 academic year to 82.50% in the 2024-25 academic year (see Appendix C1). The Grade 9 arts disciplines most negatively impacted were Visual Arts (36.53% in 2023-24 to 34.99% in 2024-25), Drama (20.10% in 2023-24 to 18.16% in 2024-25), and Music (24.60% in 2023-24 to 24.14% in 2024-25). While it cannot be determined through this data alone, the decrease in the percentage of Grade 9 students enrolled in arts courses observed in the 2024-25 academic year may, in part, be explained by the STEM-group and technological education graduation requirements that came into effect in that same year (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2024a).

The distribution between arts disciplines for each grade was relatively similar, with Visual Arts representing the largest percentage of enrolment followed by Music and Drama. Dance and Media Arts represent similar percentages of enrolment. In Grade 9 (where no Media Arts courses were offered) and in Grade 12, Dance represented a higher percentage than Media Arts; in Grades 10 and 11, Media Arts represented a higher percentage than Dance. The highest percentage of Integrated Arts enrolment was observed in Grade 9, where Media Arts is not offered. The proportion of students enrolled in Integrated Arts decreased significantly in Grade 10 when compared to that of Grade 9, corresponding to the first year that Media Arts was offered (see Appendix C2).

Cohort Analysis

A cohort analysis was completed at four different points in time to compare the percentage of students enrolled in the arts pre-, during, and post-COVID (see Table 2). The cohort analysis was also used to explore if and how retention of arts courses as students advance through grades was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 2.

Percentage of Students Enrolled in Arts Courses Pre-, During, and Post-COVID: Cohort Analysis

	Cohort A: Pre-COVID (start 2015-16)	Cohort B: During COVID (start 2020-21)	Cohort C: Post-COVID (start 2022-23)	Cohort D: Post-COVID (start 2023-24)
Percentage of Students Enrolled in Arts Courses (Total)				
Grade 9	91.83%	83.09%	85.77%	86.27%
Grade 10	77.67%	68.93%	69.69%	69.46%
Grade 11	61.59%	58.54%	57.49%	[pending]
Grade 12	27.82%	26.20%	[pending]	[pending]
Percentage of Students Enrolled in Visual Arts				
Grade 9	34.56%	35.36%	38.54%	36.53%
Grade 10	29.27%	31.53%	31.14%	30.38%
Grade 11	30.58%	32.93%	32.57%	[pending]
Grade 12	13.07%	13.48%	[pending]	[pending]

Percentage of Students Enrolled in Music				
Grade 9	28.29%	22.14%	21.53%	24.60%
Grade 10	21.89%	15.41%	17.46%	18.60%
Grade 11	14.88%	11.06%	11.91%	[pending]
Grade 12	7.26%	5.77%	[pending]	[pending]
Percentage of Students Enrolled in Drama				
Grade 9	23.57%	20.84%	20.47%	20.10%
Grade 10	16.37%	13.17%	12.56%	12.10%
Grade 11	9.30%	8.65%	7.30%	[pending]
Grade 12	4.59%	4.25%	[pending]	[pending]
Percentage of Students Enrolled in Dance				
Grade 9	3.01%	2.56%	2.05%	2.23%
Grade 10	3.69%	2.27%	2.35%	2.49%
Grade 11	2.64%	1.83%	1.82%	[pending]
Grade 12	1.35%	1.15%	[pending]	[pending]
Percentage of Students Enrolled in Media Arts				
Grade 9	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Grade 10	5.99%	6.05%	5.71%	5.46%
Grade 11	3.67%	3.84%	3.48%	[pending]
Grade 12	1.29%	1.27%	[pending]	[pending]
Percentage of Students Enrolled in Integrated Arts				
Grade 9	2.41%	2.18%	3.17%	2.81%
Grade 10	0.47%	0.49%	0.46%	0.43%
Grade 11	0.64%	0.24%	0.41%	[pending]
Grade 12	0.26%	0.28%	[pending]	[pending]

Arts Courses (Total)

The percentage of Grade 9 students enrolled in arts courses decreased between Cohort A and B, and then increased again for Cohorts C and D as follows:

- Cohort A: Pre-COVID (start 2015-16) at 91.83%
- Cohort B: During COVID (start 2020-21) at 83.09%
- Cohort C: Post-COVID (start 2022-23) at 85.77%
- Cohort D: Post-COVID (start 2023-24) at 86.27%

A similar profile was observed in Grade 10, with a large decrease in the percentage of enrolment between Cohort A (77.67%) and Cohort B (68.93%), and a slight increase and levelling off in Cohort C (69.69%) and Cohort D (69.46%). Grades 11 and 12 show a much smaller decrease in the percentage of enrolment between Cohort A and B (61.59% to 58.54% in Grade 11; 27.82% to 26.20% in Grade 12), however less information is known for Cohorts C and D. The data suggest that the proportion of enrolment in the arts in Grades 9 and 10 has not returned to pre-COVID enrolment.

Looking at the difference of the percentage of students enrolled in the arts courses between grades within each cohort and rounding up to the nearest whole numbers, there was a reduction of 14% between Grades 9 and 10 in Cohort A and in Cohort B, suggesting a minimal impact of COVID-19 on retention of arts courses between Grades 9 and 10. In Cohort C, the decrease from Grade 9 to Grade 10 arts course

enrolment was 16% and in Cohort D the decrease between Grade 9 and 10 arts course enrolment was 17%, indicating a slightly more significant drop in the percentage of arts enrolment between Grade 9 and 10 post-COVID. The percentage of students enrolled in arts courses between Grade 10 and 11 decreased by 16% in Cohort A, 10% in Cohort B, and 12% in Cohort C, possibly suggesting that students taking an arts course in Grade 10 were more likely to take an arts course in Grade 11 during and post-COVID than they were pre-COVID. While the Grade 11 and 12 data is incomplete, the percentage of students enrolled in arts courses between Grade 11 and 12 decreased by 34% in Cohort A and 32% in Cohort B.

Visual Arts

The percentage of Grade 9 students enrolled in Visual Arts courses increased between Cohort A, Cohort B, and Cohort C before decreasing in Cohort D as follows:

- Cohort A: Pre-COVID (start 2015-16) at 34.56%
- Cohort B: During COVID (start 2020-21) at 35.36%
- Cohort C: Post-COVID (start 2022-23) at 38.54%
- Cohort D: Post-COVID (start 2023-24) at 36.53%

The Grade 10, 11, and 12 profiles show similar but less pronounced changes, with an increased percentage in enrolment between Cohort A and Cohort B (Grade 10, 29.27% to 31.53; Grade 11, 30.58% to 32.93%; Grade 12, 13.07% to 13.48%), followed by a slight decrease in Cohorts C and D for grades with available data (Grade 10, 31.14% and 30.38%, respectively; Grade 11, 32.57%). This data shows that the percentage of students enrolled in the Visual Arts increased during the COVID-19 pandemic and has maintained an increased enrolment post-COVID.

The difference in the percentage of students enrolled in Visual Arts between Grade 9 and 10 within each cohort and rounding to the nearest whole number was a decrease of 5% in Cohort A, 4% in Cohort B, 7% in Cohort C, and 6% in Cohort D. Pre-COVID, during COVID, and post-COVID cohorts showed an increase of approximately 1% in the percentage of students enrolled in Visual Arts between Grade 10 and 11, suggesting little impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on student retention. The percentage of students enrolled in Visual Arts courses between Grade 11 and 12 decreased by 18% in Cohort A and Cohort B reinforcing the interpretation that the COVID-19 pandemic had minimal impact on student retention between grades in Visual Arts courses.

Music

The percentage of Grade 9 students enrolled in Music courses decreased between Cohort A, Cohort B, and Cohort C before increasing in Cohort D as follows:

- Cohort A: Pre-COVID (start 2015-16) at 28.29%
- Cohort B: During COVID (start 2020-21) at 22.14%
- Cohort C: Post-COVID (start 2022-23) at 21.53%
- Cohort D: Post-COVID (start 2023-24) at 24.60%

The Grade 10, 11, and 12 profiles show proportionally similar changes between cohorts, with a decreased percentage in enrolment between Cohort A and Cohort B (Grade 10, 21.89% to 15.41%; Grade 11, 14.88% to 11.06%; Grade 12, 7.26% to 5.77%), followed by a slight increase in Cohorts C and D for grades with

available data (Grade 10, 17.46% and 30.38%, respectively; Grade 11, 11.91%). These data show that the percentage of students enrolled in Music courses decreased during the COVID-19 pandemic and, while it has increased post-COVID, it has not yet returned to pre-COVID enrolment.

The difference in the percentage of students enrolled in Music courses between Grade 9 and 10 within each cohort and rounding to the nearest whole number was a decrease of 6% in Cohort A, 7% in Cohort B, 4% in Cohort C, and 6% in Cohort D. There was a decrease of 7% between Grades 10 and 11 in Cohort A compared to a decrease of 4% in Cohort B (corresponding to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic). Similarly, there was a decrease of 8% between Grades 11 and 12 in Cohort A compared to a decrease of 5% in Cohort B. While there was a significant decrease in Music course enrolment between Cohorts A and B, the data suggest that the students who were taking Music courses in Cohort B were more likely to keep taking Music courses than those in Cohort A despite the COVID-19 pandemic. There were not enough available data to observe if this trend continued within the post-COVID cohorts.

Drama

For all grades, the percentage of students enrolled in Drama courses decreased proportionally between each of the four cohorts (see Table 2).

The difference in the percentage of students enrolled in Drama courses between Grade 9 and 10 within each cohort and rounding to the nearest whole number was a decrease of 7% in Cohort A and 8% in Cohorts B, C, and D suggesting that the COVID-19 pandemic had minimal impact on drama course retention between Grades 9 and 10. There was a decrease of 7% between Grades 10 and 11 in Cohort A compared to a decrease of 5% in Cohort B (corresponding to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic) and Cohort C (post-COVID). Similarly, there was a decrease of 5% between Grades 11 and 12 in Cohort A compared to a decrease of 4% in Cohort B. This suggests that the Grade 10 and 11 students who were taking Drama courses in Cohort B were more likely to keep taking Drama courses than those in Cohort A despite the COVID-19 pandemic. There were not enough available data to observe this trend within the post-COVID cohorts.

Dance

The percentage of Grade 9 students enrolled in Dance courses decreased between Cohort A, Cohort B, and Cohort C before increasing in Cohort D as follows:

- Cohort A: Pre-COVID (start 2015-16) at 3.01%
- Cohort B: During COVID (start 2020-21) at 2.56%
- Cohort C: Post-COVID (start 2022-23) at 2.05%
- Cohort D: Post-COVID (start 2023-24) at 2.23%

Similarly, in Grade 10, there was a decreased percentage in enrolment between Cohort A and Cohort B (3.69% to 2.27%, respectively). In comparison, in Grade 10 there was an increased percentage in enrolment through Cohort C (2.35%) and Cohort D (2.49%). The percentage of students enrolled in Dance courses decreased between Cohorts A and B for Grades 11 and 12 implying that the COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact on Drama enrolment. There were not enough available data to observe trends in Grade 11 and 12 within the post-COVID cohorts. Overall, the data suggest that while the COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted student enrolment in Dance courses, it has been increasing post-COVID.

There did not appear to be any trends in the difference in the percentage of students enrolled in Dance courses between Grade 9 and 10 within each cohort. However, there was a decrease of approximately 1% between Grades 10 and 11 in Cohort A compared to a decrease of approximately 0.5% in Cohort B (corresponding to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic). The same was true for the difference in the percentage of students enrolled in Dance courses between Grade 11 and 12. While this change was small, it may suggest that despite the decrease in Dance course enrolment between Cohorts A and B, the students who were taking Dance courses in Cohort B were more likely to keep taking Dance courses in later grades than those in Cohort A despite the COVID-19 pandemic. There were not enough available data to observe this trend within the post-COVID cohorts.

Media Arts

Media Arts was not offered in Grade 9. The enrolment percentage for Grade 10 Media Arts course increased slightly between Cohort A and Cohort B before decreasing in Cohort C and Cohort D, as follows:

- Cohort A: Pre-COVID (start 2015-16) at 5.99%
- Cohort B: During COVID (start 2020-21) at 6.05%
- Cohort C: Post-COVID (start 2022-23) at 5.71%
- Cohort D: Post-COVID (start 2023-24) at 5.46%

The Grade 11 profile between cohorts was similar to that of Grade 10. The percentage of students enrolled in Grade 11 Media Arts courses increased between Cohort A and Cohort B (3.67% and 3.84%, respectively) and decreased moving into Cohort C (3.48%). In comparison, the Grade 12 Media Arts enrolment percentage decreased between Cohort A (1.29%) and Cohort B (1.27%). These data suggest that Grade 10 and 11 students were more likely to take Media Arts courses during the COVID-19 pandemic than post-pandemic.

For all cohorts, the difference in the percentage of students enrolled in Media Arts courses between grades within the same cohort was a decrease of approximately 2% suggesting that the COVID-19 pandemic did not have an impact on Media Arts enrolment retention.

Integrated Arts

The percentage of Grade 9 students enrolled in the Integrated Arts was as follows:

- Cohort A: Pre-COVID (start 2015-16) at 2.41%
- Cohort B: During COVID (start 2020-21) at 2.18%
- Cohort C: Post-COVID (start 2022-23) at 3.17%
- Cohort D: Post-COVID (start 2023-24) at 2.81%

For all grades, there were no apparent trends between the percentage of students enrolled in the Integrated Arts between cohorts. In general, the percentage of Integrated Art enrolment is low (less than 1% for Grade 10, Grade 11, and Grade 12).

There were also no apparent trends in the difference in the percentage of students enrolled in Integrated Arts courses between grades within the same cohort.

Percentage of Music Students Enrolled in Music Course Types Across Time

As described in the Methods section, we then focused on the Music course types that were offered each year.

The number of music courses (differentiated by course code) offered each academic year ranged between 95 to 103 (see Table 3). A large contributor to the difference between the number of courses offered each year was the offering of different dual credit courses. For example, in the 2015-16 academic year, six dual credit courses were offered but in the 2021-22 academic year, only one dual credit course was offered. There were also changes in the number of Large Instrumental Ensemble courses offered from year to year. In the 2015-16 academic year, *Grade 11 Music – Woodwinds* was offered in both the university/college designation and the open designation (AMW3M and AMW3O) but starting in the 2016-17 academic year *Grade 11 Music – Woodwinds* was only offered in the university/college designation (AMW3M). Similarly, from 2015-16 through 2020-21, *Grade 11 Steel Drum* was offered in both the university/college designation and the open designation (AMQ3M and AMQ3O) but starting in the 2021-22 academic year *Grade 11 Steel Drum* was only offered in the university/college designation (AMQ3M). From 2015-16 to 2022-23, *Grade 11 Instrumental Music – Orchestra* was offered in the university/college designation and the open designation (AMO3M and AMO3O) but starting in the 2023-24 academic year it was only offered in the university/college designation (AMO3M).

Table 3.

Music Course Types Offered Per Year

	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
Large Instrumental Ensemble	34	33	33	32	33	33	32	32	32	32
General Music	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
Guitar/Keyboard	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
Vocal	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15
Strings	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	9	9
Digital/Creating Music	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15
Small Ensemble	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	5
Conservatory/Post-Secondary Initiatives	8	6	4	4	4	5	3	3	5	5
Total Music Courses Offered	103	100	98	97	98	99	95	96	97	97

The percentage of music students enrolled in each of the eight different music course types was graphed over four points in time: pre-COVID (2015-16), during COVID (2020-21), post-COVID (2022-23), and most recent data (2024-25).

Total Music Students

Figure 9 shows the percentage of total music students in the different course types across time. For all years included in this research, Large Instrumental Ensemble courses had the majority of music student enrolment followed by General Music, Guitar/Keyboard, Vocal, Strings, Digital/Creating Music, Small Ensemble, and then Conservatory/Post-Secondary Initiatives.

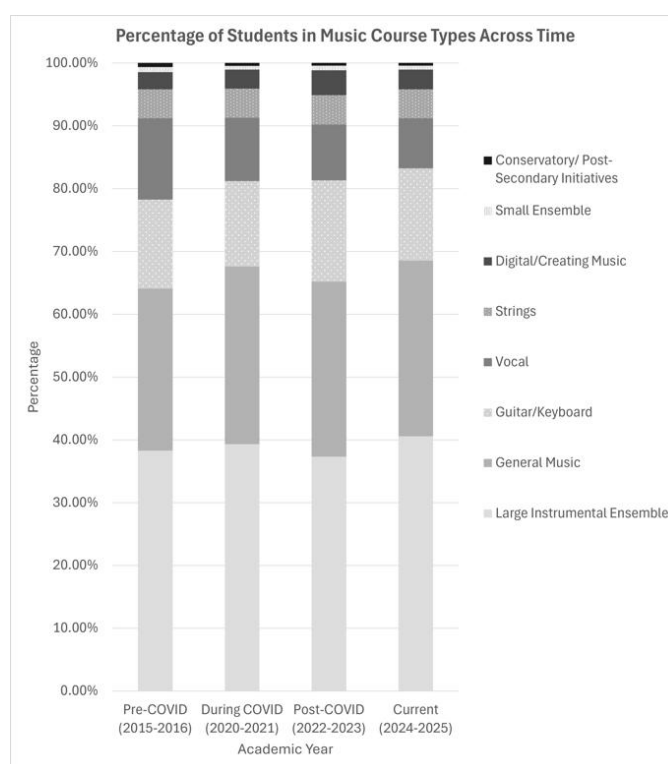
Overall, between the 2015-16 to 2024-25 academic years, there was a slight increase in the percentage of students enrolled in Large Instrumental Ensemble courses (2015-16, 38.28%; 2024-25, 40.55%) and General Music courses (2015-16, 25.80%; 2024-25, 27.97%). During the same timeframe, there was a decrease in the percentage of students enrolled in Vocal courses (2015-16, 12.95%; 2024-25, 7.95%). The other course types showed minimal changes over time. The percentage of students enrolled in the other course types fluctuated within the range of 13.60% to 16.12% for Guitar/Keyboard, 4.62% to 4.70% for Strings, 2.73% to 3.95% for Digital/Creating Music, 0.58% to 0.79% for Small Ensemble, and 0.41% to 0.66% for Conservatory/Post-Secondary Initiatives.

Despite the fact that the percentage of students enrolled in Music courses was significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and experienced decreasing enrolments between the 2015-16 to 2024-25 academic years, the COVID-19 pandemic did not seem to have a large impact on the types of music courses that students were taking.

Large Instrumental Ensemble and General Music courses remained the most popular, and more specialized courses like Strings, Small Ensemble, and Conservatory/Post-Secondary Initiative courses remained less popular.

That said, it is uncertain how different schools and music teachers are using or interpreting the different course codes in practice (e.g., a general music course could focus on vocal or digital or instrumental music making or on all of these).

Figure 9.



Music Course Types per Grade

Separating the percentage of students in the different Music course types by grade provides similar results to the analysis of total music students in that it does not present any significant impacts or trends related to Music course type enrolments as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, it does show unique distributions between Music course types.

Figure 10 shows the breakdown of Grade 9 students in the different Music course types over time. Rounded to the nearest whole number, Music course type enrolment in Grade 9 was as follows:

- Large Instrumental Ensemble courses represented 41-45%
- General Music courses represented 36-37%
- Guitar/Keyboard courses represented 6-8%
- Vocal courses represented 5-9%
- Strings courses represented 5-6%
- Digital/Creating Music courses represented 1-2%
- Small Ensemble courses represented less than 1%
- Conservatory/Post-Secondary Initiatives represented 0% (not offered)

Figure 11 shows the breakdown of Grade 10 students in the different Music course types over time. Rounded to the nearest whole number, Music course type enrolment in Grade 10 was as follows:

- Large Instrumental Ensemble courses represented 34-38%
- General Music courses represented 21-24%
- Guitar/Keyboard courses represented 23-26%
- Vocal courses represented 7-12%
- Strings courses represented approximately 4%
- Digital/Creating Music courses represented 2-3%
- Small Ensemble courses represented less than 1%
- Conservatory/Post-Secondary Initiatives represented 0% (not offered)

When comparing the Grade 9 and Grade 10 Music course type distributions, Large Instrumental Ensemble courses made up a large proportion of music enrolment in both Grade 9 and Grade 10. However, in Grade 10 General Music represented a much smaller proportion, and the proportion of Guitar/Keyboard course enrolment significantly increased. The proportion of Vocal course enrolment slightly increased between Grade 9 and Grade 10. Strings, Digital/Creating Music, and Small Ensemble courses remained at a relatively small proportion. Again, Conservatory/Post-Secondary Initiatives represented 0% as they were not offered in Grade 10.

Figure 10.

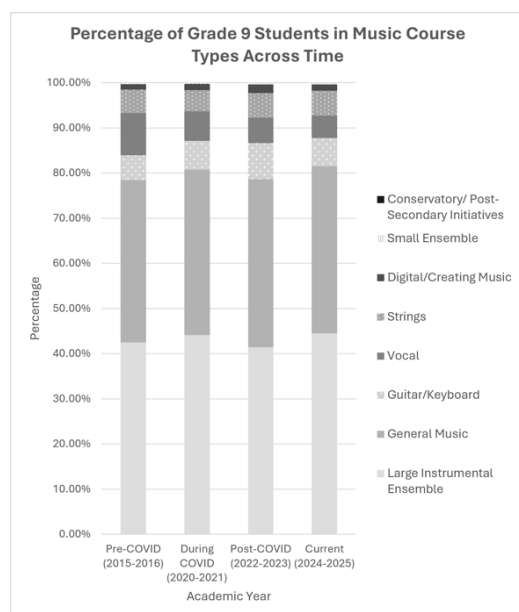


Figure 11.

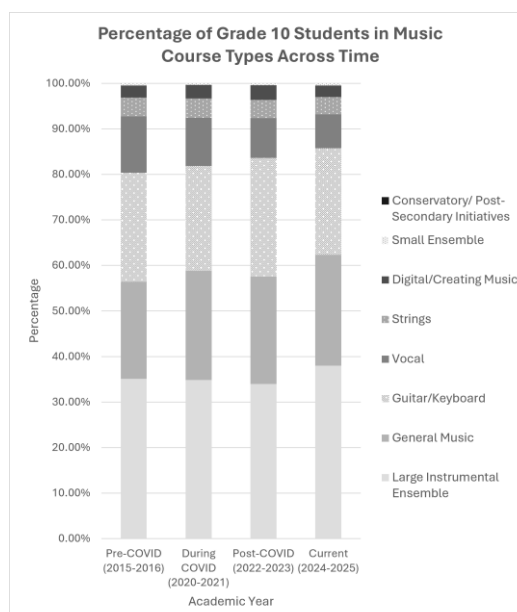


Figure 12 shows the breakdown of Grade 11 students in the different Music course types over time. Rounded to the nearest whole number, Music course type enrolment in Grade 11 was as follows:

- Large Instrumental Ensemble courses represented 34-37%
- General Music courses represented 19-21%
- Guitar/Keyboard courses represented 18-21%
- Vocal courses represented 11-17%
- Strings courses represented approximately 4%
- Digital/Creating Music courses represented 5-8%
- Small Ensemble courses represented 1-2%
- Conservatory/Post-Secondary Initiatives represented less than 1%

Figure 13 shows the breakdown of Grade 12 students in the different Music course types over time. Rounded to the nearest whole number, Music course type enrolment in Grade 12 was as follows:

- Large Instrumental Ensemble courses represented 38-40%
- General Music courses represented 18-22%
- Guitar/Keyboard courses represented 9-11%
- Vocal courses represented 14-18%
- Strings courses represented 4-6%
- Digital/Creating Music courses represented 4-7%
- Small Ensemble courses represented 1-2%
- Conservatory/Post-Secondary Initiatives represented 2-3%

Figure 12.

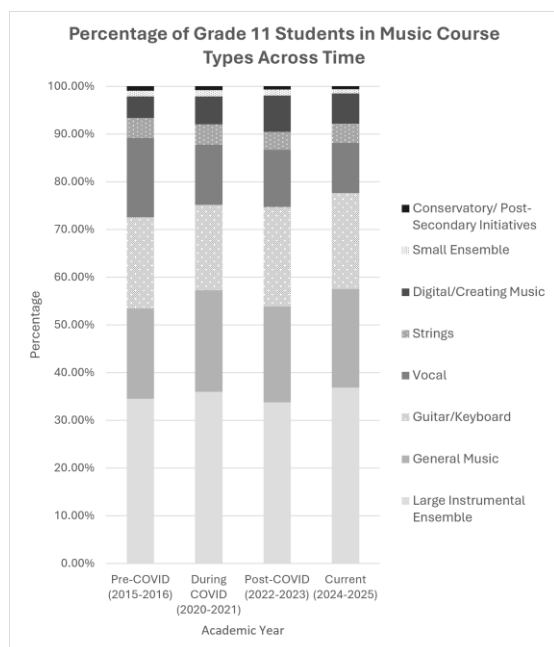
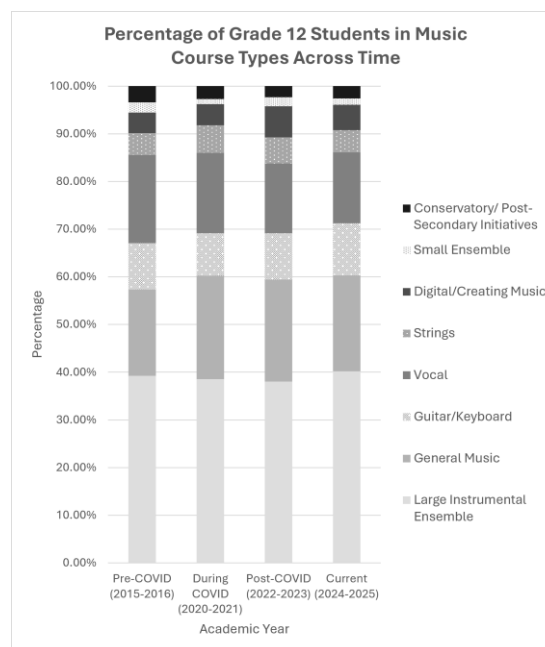


Figure 13.



Throughout Grade 11 and Grade 12, the percentages of music students enrolled in Large Instrumental Ensemble courses remained the highest proportion followed, to a lesser extent, by General Music course enrolment. When compared to Grade 10, the proportion of Grade 11 and Grade 12 students enrolled in

Guitar/Keyboard courses decreased. When comparing Grade 11 and Grade 12 enrolment proportions to Grade 9 and Grade 10 enrolment proportions, more Grade 11 and Grade 12 students opted to enroll in more specialized course types such as Vocal courses, Strings courses, Digital/Creating Music courses, and Small Ensemble courses. Conservatory/Post-Secondary Initiative courses (including dual credit courses) were first offered in Grade 11, however represented less than 1% of enrolment. Conservatory/Post-Secondary Initiative courses were most popular in Grade 12 (2-3%).

The change in distribution between different music course types between grades is likely largely influenced by when different schools offer specialized focus courses based on their music program structures, teaching staff, or student interest. As mentioned earlier, it is unclear how different schools or music teachers are using or interpreting the different course codes in practice, making it difficult to draw firm conclusions.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

To fill the gap in research examining Ontario secondary school enrolments in the arts, we conducted a descriptive analysis of enrolment data from the Ontario Ministry of Education for the 2015-16 to 2024-25 academic years. Focus was placed on secondary school enrolment, course enrolment across the six arts disciplines, and enrolment in different Music course types. Special attention was paid to overall trends in enrolment numbers and any potential influences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Objective 1: To Explore Available Data

The *enrolment by grade in secondary schools* data sets from 2015-2024 were downloaded from the Ontario Ministry of Education Data Catalogue. The data sets included student enrolment in secondary schools across the province, aggregated by grade and school board or school authority. The data were compiled to determine the student enrolment in Ontario secondary schools (i.e., student population). It was found that student population increased by 34,046 students between 2015-2024.

The *course enrolment in secondary schools* data sets from 2015-2024 were downloaded from the Ontario Ministry of Education Data Catalogue. The data sets included course codes, course descriptions, corresponding grades, pathways/destinations, and enrolment for ministry-defined secondary school courses at the provincial level in Grades 9 to 12. For each academic year, values were determined for the total arts course enrolments, the enrolments for each arts discipline (per grade and total student population), and enrolments in different Music course types.

Objective 2: To Explore Enrolment in Arts Courses in Ontario Secondary Schools from 2015-2024

The percentage of overall student population enrolled in arts courses in Ontario secondary schools decreased from 61.94% in 2015-16 to 56.90% in 2024-25. There was an approximate 5% drop between the 2019-20 and 2020-21 academic years from 60.02% to 54.87%, corresponding to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Percentages slightly increased throughout the 2021-22 and 2022-23 academic years but did not return to the pre-COVID values. Enrolment percentages decreased in the 2023-24 and 2024-25 academic years, suggesting that proportional enrolment in arts courses is decreasing in Ontario

secondary schools beyond what can be explained by the COVID-19 pandemic. The data suggest that while COVID-19 might have been a catalyst for declining arts enrolment in Ontario secondary schools, arts course enrolments were already decreasing pre-COVID and continue to decrease post-COVID. Additionally, the decrease in arts course enrolments indicates that students are selecting courses outside of the arts to fulfill their graduation requirements rather than solely switching between arts disciplines.

Notably, Visual Arts enrolments did *not* decrease over the past decade. The percentage of Ontario secondary students who enrolled in Visual Arts courses across all grades increased from 25.15% in 2015-2016 to 27.02% in 2024-2025, an increase of 1.87% over the last decade. In contrast to the other arts disciplines, Visual Arts courses are attracting a greater percentage of students now than they were a decade ago.

When considering the percentage of students enrolled in each art discipline, Visual Arts consistently represented the largest percentage of enrolment followed by Music and then Drama. Dance and Media Arts represented smaller but similar enrolment percentages, and Integrated Arts represented the smallest percentage.

The findings for each of the different arts disciplines were as follows:

- **Visual Arts:**

- Percentage of enrolment increased across the grades with the highest enrolment in Grade 9 courses (2015-16, 34.56%; 2024-25, 34.99%) and the lowest enrolment in Grade 12 courses (2015-16, 12.41%; 2024-25, 13.30%).
- Overall, the percentage of students enrolled in Visual Arts courses increased by 1.87% from 2015-2024, representing an increase of 21,066 student enrolments.
- Percentage of enrolment for Grade 9 and Grade 10 Visual Arts courses increased in the 2020-21 academic year (corresponding to the COVID-19 pandemic), while the percentage of enrolment for Grade 11 and Grade 12 Visual Arts courses decreased.
- Percentages of enrolment in Visual Arts courses for all grades decreased in the 2024-25 academic year (but still remain above their pre-COVID values).

- **Music:**

- Percentage of enrolment decreased across the grades, with the highest enrolment in Grade 9 courses (2015-16, 28.29%; 2024-25, 24.14%) and the lowest in Grade 12 courses (2015-16, 7.67%; 2024-25, 5.87%).
- Overall, the percentage of students enrolled in Music courses decreased by 2.77% from 2015-2024, representing a decrease of 12,636 student enrolments, despite consistent growth in overall student population in Ontario.
- Percentage of enrolment for all grades significantly decreased in the 2020-21 and 2021-22 academic years, corresponding to the COVID-19 pandemic. The percentage of Grade 9 Music enrolment was the most impacted, decreasing from 26.70% in 2019-20 to 20.66% in 2021-22 (representing a decrease in 8,000 student enrolments).
- Percentage of enrolment in Music courses for all grades increased after the pandemic but have not returned to their pre-COVID values.

- **Drama:**

- Percentage of enrolment decreased across the grades, with the highest enrolment in Grade 9 courses (2015-16, 23.57%; 2024-25, 18.16%), and the lowest in Grade 12 courses (2015-16, 5.04%; 2024-25, 3.89%).
- Overall, the percentage of students enrolled in Drama courses decreased by 3.38% from 2015-2024, representing a decrease of 18,092 student enrolments, despite consistent growth in overall student population in Ontario.
- Percentage of enrolment for all grades decreased in the 2020-21 and 2021-22 academic years, corresponding to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Percentage of enrolment in Drama courses for all grades increased slightly in the 2022-23 academic year but have since declined to equal to or lower than their COVID-19 values.

- **Dance:**

- Percentage of enrolment decreased for all grades, with the highest enrolment in Grade 10 courses (2015-16, 3.82%; 2024-25, 2.49%), and the lowest in Grade 12 courses (2015-16, 1.36%; 2024-25, 1.21%).
- Overall, the percentage of students enrolled in Dance courses decreased by 0.66% from 2015-2024, representing a decrease of 3,562 student enrolments, despite consistent growth in overall student population in Ontario.
- Percentage of enrolment for all students decreased throughout 2020-21 corresponding to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Percentage of enrolment in Dance courses increased slightly in the 2022-23 academic year but have since declined to equal to or lower than their COVID-19 values.

- **Media Arts:**

- Percentage of enrolment remained largely unchanged between 2014-2025 with only a slight decrease. The highest enrolment was in Grade 10 courses (2015-16, 5.85%; 2024-25, 5.46%) and the lowest in Grade 12 courses (2015-16, 1.14%; 2024-25, 1.07%).
- Overall, the percentage of students enrolled in Media Arts courses decreased by 0.17% from 2015-2024, representing a decrease of 249 student enrolments, despite consistent growth in overall student population in Ontario.
- Percentage of enrolment for Grade 10 Media Arts courses increased to its highest point in the 2020-21 academic year (corresponding to the COVID-19 pandemic) before decreasing to lower than pre-COVID values.

- **Integrated Arts:**

- Integrated Arts represented a very small percentage of arts course enrolment (less than 1% for Grades 10-12).
- Percentage of enrolment slightly increased for all grades except Grade 12 with the highest enrolment in Grade 9 courses (2015-16, 2.41%; 2024-25, 2.83%) and the lowest in Grade 12 courses (2015-16, 0.62%; 2024-25, 0.26%).
- Overall, the percentage of students enrolled in Integrated Arts courses increased by 0.08% from 2015-2024, representing an increase of 823 student enrolments.
- Percentage of enrolment for Grade 9 Integrated Arts courses increased throughout the years associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, reaching its highest point in 2022-23.

Cohort Analysis

The percentages of student population enrolled in arts courses in Ontario secondary schools was sorted and analyzed in four cohorts: Cohort A represented pre-COVID students who started Grade 9 in 2015; Cohort B represented students who started Grade 9 in 2020 during the COVID pandemic; Cohort C represented the first group of post-COVID students who started Grade 9 in 2022; and Cohort D represented the second group of post-COVID students who started Grade 9 in 2023.

When considering the percentages of student population enrolled in arts courses (total), the percentage of Grade 9 students enrolled in arts courses decreased between Cohort A and B and then increased again for Cohorts C and D. Similar profiles were observed for Grades 10-12. The data suggest that the proportion of enrolment in the arts in Grades 9 and 10 decreased during the COVID-19 pandemic and has not returned to pre-COVID enrolment. Looking at the difference of the percentage of students enrolled in the arts courses between grades within each cohort there appears to be a minimal impact of COVID-19 on retention of arts courses between grades. However, there is some suggestion that students taking an arts course in Grade 10 were more likely to continue to take an art course in Grade 11 during and post-COVID than they were pre-COVID.

Cohort trends for each of the different arts disciplines were as follows:

- **Visual Arts:**
 - The percentage of Grade 9 students enrolled in Visual Arts courses increased between Cohort A and Cohort B, peaked in Cohort C, and slightly decreased in Cohort D.
 - Overall, the percentage of students enrolled in the Visual Arts in all grades increased during the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - Analysis of the difference in the percentage of students enrolled in Visual Arts between grades in each cohort suggests that the COVID-19 pandemic had minimal impact on student retention between grades.
- **Music:**
 - The percentage of Grade 9 students enrolled in Music courses decreased between Cohort A, Cohort B, and Cohort C before increasing in Cohort D.
 - Overall, the percentage of students enrolled in Music courses decreased during the COVID-19 pandemic and, while it increased post-COVID, did not return to pre-COVID enrolment.
 - While there was a significant decrease in Music course enrolment between Cohorts A and B, the data suggest that the students who were taking Music courses in Cohort B were more likely to keep taking Music courses between grades than those in Cohort A despite the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Drama:**
 - For all grades, the percentage of students enrolled in Drama courses decreased proportionally between each of the four cohorts.
 - Analysis of the difference in the percentage of students enrolled in Drama between grades in each cohort suggested that the COVID-19 pandemic had minimal impact on student retention between grades.

- There was some suggestion that Grade 10 and 11 students who were taking Drama courses in Cohort B were more likely to keep taking Drama courses than those in Cohort A despite the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Dance:**
 - The percentage of Grade 9 students enrolled in Dance courses decreased between Cohort A, Cohort B, and Cohort C before increasing in Cohort D.
 - Overall, data suggested that while the COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted student enrolment in Dance courses, it has been increasing post-COVID.
 - No significant trends were observed in the difference in the percentage of students enrolled in Dance courses between grades indicating that the COVID-19 pandemic did not impact Dance enrolment retention.
- **Media Arts:**
 - The enrolment percentage for Grade 10 Media Arts courses increased slightly between Cohort A and Cohort B before decreasing in Cohort C and Cohort D.
 - Overall, data suggested that Grade 10 and 11 students were more likely to take Media Arts courses during the COVID-19 pandemic than post-pandemic.
 - No significant trends were observed in the difference in the percentage of students enrolled in Media Arts courses between grades indicating that the COVID-19 pandemic did not impact Media Arts enrolment retention.
- **Integrated Arts:**
 - There were no apparent trends between the percentage of students enrolled in the Integrated Arts between cohorts or between grades within the same cohort suggesting minimal impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Integrated Arts enrolment.

Objective 3: To Explore Enrolment in Music Course Types in Ontario Secondary Schools from 2015-2024

This research categorized the types of Music courses offered in Ontario secondary schools into eight different Music course types: Large Instrumental Ensemble, General Music, Guitar/Keyboard, Vocal, Strings, Small Ensemble, Digital/Creating Music, and Conservatory/Post-Secondary Initiatives. The number of Music courses (differentiated by course code) offered in Ontario secondary schools from 2015-2024 remained relatively stable and ranged between 95-103, with the largest proportion being in the Large Instrumental Ensemble category (32-34 different courses by course code). For all years included in this study, Large Instrumental Ensemble courses had the majority of Music student enrolments followed by General Music, Guitar/Keyboard, Vocal, Strings, Digital/Creating Music, Small Ensemble, and then Conservatory/Post-Secondary Initiatives.

Over the last decade there was a slight increase in the percentage of students enrolled in Large Instrumental Ensemble courses (2015-16, 38.28%; 2024-25, 40.55%) and General Music courses (2015-16, 25.80%; 2024-25, 27.97%). During the same timeframe, there was a decrease in the percentage of students enrolled in Vocal courses (2015-16, 12.95%; 2024-25, 7.95%). The other course types showed minimal changes over time. When comparing the distribution across grades, Guitar/Keyboard courses

gained popularity in Grade 10 and Grade 11, Vocal courses were the most popular in Grade 12, and Digital/Creating Music courses represented increased proportions in Grade 11 and Grade 12. Conservatory/Post-Secondary Initiatives were most likely to be taken in Grade 12.

Despite the fact that the percentage of students enrolled in Music courses was largely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and experienced decreasing enrolments between the 2015-26 to 2024-25 academic years, the COVID-19 pandemic did not seem to have had a large impact on the types of music courses that students were taking. Described in more detail in the Limitations section, findings related to the types of Music courses that students prefer to engage with are speculative as it is unclear how different schools or music teachers are using or interpreting the different course codes in practice.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This research has important implications for arts educators of all arts disciplines, including music teachers, as well as secondary school administrators. Here we describe our conclusions and some implications of this research.

Decreasing Enrolments May Impact Teacher Jobs

This research demonstrated that the percentage of students enrolled in arts courses decreased between the 2015-16 to 2024-25 academic years. More specifically, the percentage of students enrolled in the disciplines of Music, Drama, Dance, and Media Arts showed an overall downward trend. At the same time, the number of students attending Ontario secondary schools (i.e., the school student population) increased by a total of 34,046 students. This means that while class sizes may appear to be stable, because the total student population is increasing, the proportion of students enrolled in arts courses is decreasing.

Course enrolment can serve as a data point for administrators to make decisions about whether or not a course, discipline, or program can proceed. Classes with smaller enrolments are at risk of being combined with other grades or cancelled. As described by Vince (2005), if senior grade classes are cancelled by administration, more junior students may be less inclined to enroll in similar or prerequisite courses if they know it will not lead to a more advanced course, creating a cycle of reduced enrolment. While this cannot be proved with the findings of this research alone, one can use the changes in enrolment to speculate on their impact on arts educators. For example, if a typical Ontario secondary school class has 25 students and there was a decrease in Music course enrolments between the 2015-16 and 2024-25 academic years of approximately 12,000 students, then one can speculate that approximately 480 Music classes were combined or cancelled over the last decade, thus resulting in a decrease in jobs for secondary school Music teachers. Declining student enrolment has also been found to be an indicator of attrition among secondary school music teachers, making it a useful metric for administrators to keep track of (Elpus & Miller, 2024).

Educators in arts disciplines with declining enrolment (i.e., Music, Drama, Dance, and Media Arts) along with school leadership and administration should consider what kind of programming is most likely to build back enrolment.

COVID-19 is Not Completely to Blame for Decreasing Enrolments

Ontario secondary school educators who taught during the COVID-19 pandemic would likely agree that the pandemic had significant and lasting impacts on both the teaching profession and student behaviours. Anecdotally, many music educators attribute the COVID-19 pandemic to decreasing student enrolments. This research found that while the COVID-19 pandemic may have magnified the trend, the percentage of the total student population enrolled in Music courses was decreasing before the COVID-19 pandemic and continues to decrease post-pandemic. This trend was not unique to Music enrolment and was also observed in Drama, Dance, and Media Arts (to a lesser extent). In light of these findings, music educators and administrators in Ontario secondary schools need to think critically about their Music programming and consider ways it can be adapted to meet the needs and interests of students in their schools.

The Types of Arts Disciplines Students are Enrolling in are Changing

This research found that the percentage of total students enrolled in Visual Arts increased over the last decade, while the percentages of total students enrolled in Music, Drama, and Dance decreased. What this research cannot show is if Visual Arts enrolment increased because more schools offered it (e.g., was it easier for schools to offer Visual Arts courses during the COVID-19 pandemic due to the restrictions placed on music making activities?) or if Visual Arts enrolments increased because secondary school students were genuinely more interested in taking Visual Arts courses than courses in the other arts disciplines. When speculating why Visual Arts enrolment increased while enrolment in performance-based arts disciplines decreased, one might consider:

- a) A post-COVID landscape where there is an increased student desire for individual activities.
- b) A possible erosion of elementary school Music, Drama, and Dance programs resulting in a trickle-down effect on secondary school enrolments.
- c) Increased anxiety throughout the COVID-19 pandemic (Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (Public Health Ontario), 2024) may have resulted in a decreased desire for high school students to put themselves on display and be vulnerable through the performance arts or trying something new.

In comparison, the percentages of total students enrolled in Media Arts and Integrated Arts remained relatively consistent over the past decade.

Music, Drama, and Dance educators may benefit from exploring the type of arts programming that is enticing the students in their schools and adapting their own programming to meet their students' interests and comfort levels.

Music Course Types: Is No Change Good Change?

The proportions of music students enrolled in the eight different Music course types outlined in this study have remained relatively stable over the last decade with only minor fluctuations. This research indicates that Large Instrumental Ensemble and General Music course types consistently received the largest proportion of Music course enrolments from 2015-16 to 2024-25. Described more in the Limitations section, the ambiguity in the Music course code system means that using enrolment data to identify the

types of Music courses that students prefer is problematic, as course codes do not tell the whole story of what is actually happening within those music courses. As such, music educators, departments heads, and school administrators are encouraged to review their use of Music course codes to provide more accurate tracking metrics.

A further consideration is that if the types of Music courses that music students are enrolling in are staying the same but Music enrolment as a percentage of school population is decreasing, it is difficult to know if the decrease in Music enrolment is the result of a disinterest in the Music courses that are being offered or a reflection of external pressures on students to take courses in other subject areas.

Within the four-year secondary school curriculum, students only need to complete one compulsory credit in the arts to graduate with their secondary school diploma. Anecdotally, many students and educators believe that there is not much room for students to experiment with different course options like arts programming, particularly if they enter secondary school with plans for careers in STEM or the trades. Many STEM-focused post-secondary programs have very specific entrance prerequisites in Grade 11 and Grade 12 that in turn have their own prerequisites in Grade 9 and Grade 10. It may not be a coincidence that the same year that changes to the Ontario secondary school graduation requirements stipulating that students must complete one credit from the designated STEM-related course group and one credit in technological education in Grade 9 or 10, the student enrolment in Visual Arts, Drama, and Music decreased. In light of these changes, educators in the various arts disciplines, department heads, and secondary school administrators may want to explore opportunities for interdisciplinary or cross-curricular arts programming (e.g., STEAM).

Decreasing Arts Enrolment is Not on Any One Teacher

By examining arts course enrolments across the province, local conditions can be put into a broader perspective as music educators, department heads, and leadership consider their own arts programming and enrolments. This research highlights that decreasing arts course enrolments or decreasing music course enrolments are part of a systemic trend and not a reflection of any one music educator. Remedying the decrease in arts course enrolments in Ontario secondary schools will require a bigger conversation about secondary school diploma requirements and their impact on course selection and offerings, and what society wants from secondary school education.

LIMITATIONS

This research provides an overview of the arts course enrolments and enrolments in Music course types in publicly funded non-denominational and catholic Ontario secondary schools from 2015-2024. It does not include data on private schools, publicly funded hospital and provincial schools, care and/or treatment programs, Education and Community Partnership Program (ECP) facilities, summer schools, night schools, and adult continuing education day schools. This research does not distinguish enrolment at the school level (i.e., based on location, language spoken, type of school, etc.). As a result, it is difficult to tell if the identified enrolment trends are representative of what is actually happening within individual schools depending on their specific characteristics (e.g., a rural school versus an urban school; an arts school versus a non-arts school).

This research does not specify the number of courses offered at each school in each discipline or Music course type. It also does not provide any specific information on class size. As such, while it is possible to speculate, we are unable to determine with accuracy the impact of declining enrolment on teacher jobs or student access to arts programming.

As discussed throughout the Analysis section, another limitation of this research is that we do not know how different schools or teachers are using, defining, or implementing the different music course codes within practice. While focus courses should be assigned an appropriate course code as outlined in the Course Codes for Focus Courses in the Arts, Grades 9-12 (2010) resource (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2024b), there is often ambiguity surrounding the course codes used by schools and music educators (Vince, 2005; Fitzpatrick, 2013). Using an example provided by Fitzpatrick (2013), “students participating in their school jazz band could earn a general music credit (*AMU*), a stage-band credit (*AMH*), a small ensemble credit (*AME*), or a repertoire credit (*AMR*)” (p. 7-8). Vince then goes on to explain that the student could also receive no academic credit at all for their participation in the jazz band if it was considered an extracurricular activity. This ambiguity makes it difficult to use provincial enrolment data to make conclusions about the state of music education in secondary schools.

Finally, this research does not capture any of the co-curricular or extracurricular arts programming occurring in Ontario secondary schools. It is unknown if or how students’ access to or engagement with extracurricular arts programming has changed over the past decade. This research also does not capture any interdisciplinary arts opportunities.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This research shows that, despite a growing student population in Ontario, arts course enrolments are decreasing. Notably, Visual Arts course enrolments are resisting this trend, and are increasing. Music, Drama, and Dance course enrolments, however, are decreasing. While COVID-19 might have been a catalyst for declining performing arts enrolment in Ontario secondary schools, performing arts course enrolments were already decreasing pre-COVID and continue to decrease post-COVID. The types of Music courses that students are enrolling in most predominantly include Large Instrumental Ensemble courses and General Music courses. Further research to nuance these findings is necessary. We provide some suggestions for further research:

- **Comparing Enrolments in Other Secondary School Areas:** To help provide a more comprehensive picture of what is happening in Ontario secondary schools, researchers could compare the arts course enrolments summarized in this research to enrolments in other secondary school areas like mathematics, science, or other social sciences. If less students are enrolling in arts courses, taking a closer look at the other secondary school areas may provide information on the types of courses that students are taking instead.
- **Examining Course Enrolment and Offerings at the School/Board Level:** While this research provided useful insights at the provincial level, it may be helpful to examine enrolment data and course offerings at the school or board level to better understand the role of school location (e.g., rural versus urban) or school type (e.g., arts schools versus non-arts schools).

- **Comparing Enrolments Across Canada:** A pan-Canadian study would help contextualize Ontario secondary school arts course enrolments (or music enrolments specifically) within the larger Canadian landscape.
- **Enhancing Understanding Through Interviews or Observation:** Interviews with arts and music educators and/or school administrators may be helpful to confirm, clarify, or expand this research's findings. Helpful questions may focus on the participants' perspectives and experiences with arts education in Ontario secondary schools over the past 10 years and whether/how they have experienced change in their class sizes, course offerings, or course content. Interviews may also be used to better understand how different schools and teachers are using and interpreting the Music course codes in practice and to describe what types of Music courses their students are engaging with the most. Classroom observations may also be helpful to see what type of music education is happening in different course codes.
- **Enriching Findings Through Case Studies:** Case studies of specific schools or music programs (e.g., schools with different types of music programs) can be used to enrich and build upon the findings presented in this study. Researchers can examine if/how specific music programs have changed in terms of program/course/content offerings over the past decade, and how corresponding course enrolments in those schools have or have not changed.
- **Understanding the Role of Elementary Education:** Research seeking a better understanding of students' access to and experiences with arts (or specifically music) programming in Ontario elementary schools may help explain the changes that are being seen in Ontario secondary school arts programs.

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Appendix A - Graduation Requirements: Ontario Secondary Schools

If you started Grade 9 in or between Fall 1999 and Fall 2023:	If you started Grade 9 in or after Fall 2024:
18 compulsory credits • 4 credits in English (1 credit per grade) • 3 credits in mathematics (at least 1 credit in Grade 11 or 12) • 2 credits in science • 1 credit in Canadian history (Grade 10) • 1 credit in Canadian geography (Grade 9) • 1 credit in the arts • 1 credit in health and physical education • 1 credit in French as a second language • 0.5 credit in career studies • 0.5 credit in civics and citizenship • 3 credits for group 1, 2 and 3 courses (1 credit in each group)	17 compulsory credits • 4 credits in English (1 credit per grade) • 3 credits in mathematics (Grade 9, Grade 10, and 1 credit in Grade 11 or 12) • 2 credits in science • 1 credit in Canadian history (Grade 10) • 1 credit in Canadian geography (Grade 9) • 1 credit in the arts • 1 credit in health and physical education • 1 credit in French as a second language • 0.5 credit in career studies • 0.5 credit in civics and citizenship • 1 credit from STEM-related course group • 1 credit in technological education (Grade 9 or Grade 10)
Group 1 • English or French as a second language • Native languages • First Nations, Métis, and Inuit studies • Classical studies and international languages • Social sciences and the humanities • Canadian and world studies • Guidance and career education • Cooperative education • American Sign Language • Langue des signes québécoise Group 2 • Health and physical education • The arts • Business studies • French as a second language • Cooperative education • American Sign Language • Langue des signes québécoise langue Group 3 • Science (Grade 11 or 12) • Technological education • French as a second language • Computer studies • Cooperative education • American Sign Language • Langue des signes québécoise	STEM-Related Course Group • Business studies • Computer studies • Cooperative education • Mathematics (in addition to compulsory credits) • Science (in addition to compulsory credits) • Technological education (in addition to compulsory credit)
12 optional credits	13 optional credits
N/A	Financial literacy requirement
Literacy requirement	
2 online learning credits (as of 2020; students can opt out with parental consent)	
At least 40 hours of community involvement activities (volunteering)	

Reference: Ontario Ministry of Education. (2026). *Earning your high school diploma*. Government of Ontario.

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/earning-your-high-school-diploma>

Appendix B - Example Course Type Sorting (2024-2025)

Course Type	Course Code/Description
Large Instrumental Ensemble	Instrumental Music – Brass (AMB1O, AMB2O, AMB3M, AMB4M); Music – Woodwinds (AMW1O, AMW2O, AMW3M, AMW4M); Instrumental Music – Percussion (AMP1O, AMP2O, AMP3M, AMP3O, AMP4M); Stage-Band Music (AMH1O, AMH2O, AMH3M, AMH3O, AMH4M); Music – Steel Drum (AMQ1O, AMQ2O, AMQ3M, AMQ4M); Repertoire (AMR1O, AMR2O, AMR3M, AMR3O, AMR4M); Instrumental Music – Band (AMI1O, AMI2O, AMI3M, AMI3O, AMI4M)
General Music	Music (AMU1O, AMU2O, AMU3M, AMU3O, AMU4E, AMU4M)
Guitar/Keyboard	Keyboard Music (AMK1O, AMK2O, AMK3M, AMK3O, AMK4M); Guitar Music (AMG1O, AMG2O, AMG3M, AMG3O, AMG4M)
Vocal	Vocal Jazz (AMJ1O, AMJ2O, AMJ3M, AMJ3O, AMJ4M); Music Theatre (AMT1O, AMT2O, AMT3M, AMT3O, AMT4M); Music – Vocal/Choral (AMV1O, AMV2O, AMV3M, AMV3O, AMV4M)
Strings	Instrumental Music – Orchestra (AMO1O, AMO2O, AMO3M, AMO4M); Instrumental Music – Strings (AMS1O, AMS2O, AMS3M, AMS3O, AMS4M)
Digital/Creating Music	Electronic Music (AMD1O, AMD2O, AMD3M, AMD3O, AMD4M); Music and Computers (AMM1O, AMM2O, AMM3M, AMM3O, AMM4M); Music for Creating (AMC1O, AMC2O, AMC3M, AMC3O, AMC4M)
Small Ensemble	Small Ensemble (AME1O, AME2O, AME3M, AME3O, AME4M)
Conservatory/Post-Secondary Initiatives	Music – External (Conservatory) (AMX3M, AMX4M); History of Popular Music (Dual Credit) (AHA4T); Music and Movement (Dual Credit) (AHC4T); Music and Society (Dual Credit) (AHE4T)

Appendix C – Percentage of Students Enrolled in Arts Courses Across Disciplines and Time (per Grade)

Figure C1.

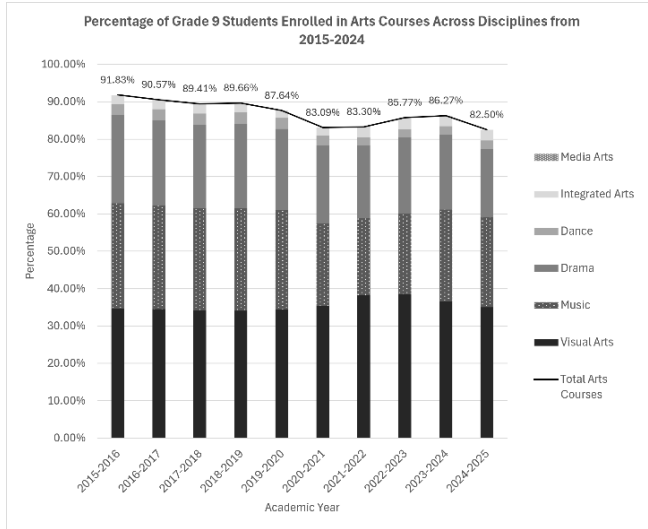


Figure C2.

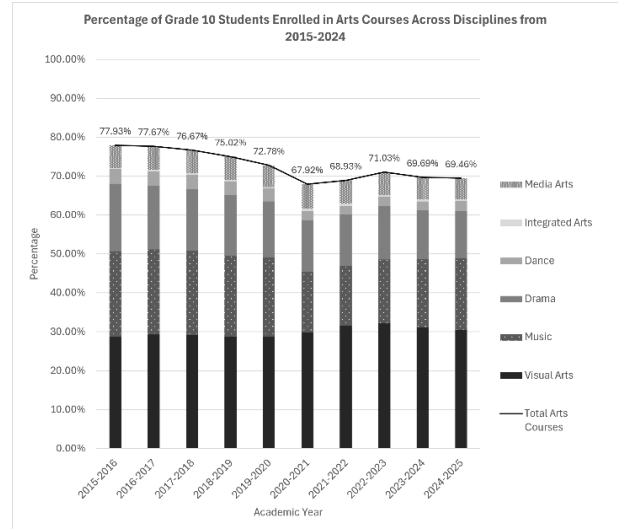


Figure C3.

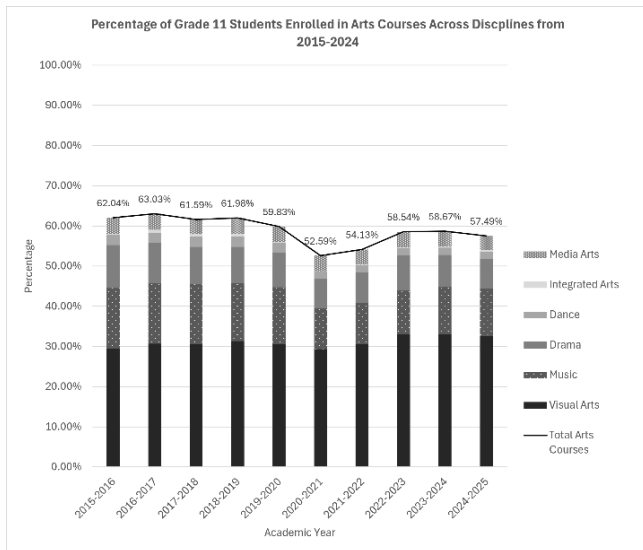


Figure C4.

