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# Parental Support and Student Learning of Musical Instruments in Hong Kong

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## Abstract

*This paper examines students' perceptions of parental involvement in and support for their learning a musical instrument. It draws from a self-completed questionnaire given to 356 young instrumental learners attending Grades 4 to 13 in Hong Kong schools. The findings fall within three categories: the relationship between students' school grade and their perceived parental support for learning an instrument; the extent to which the students perceived their parents' involvement and support in terms of physical and financial assistance; and the extent of perceived parental support for students' desire to enter the music profession. Despite a general positive student perception of parental attitudes toward musical activities, students saw their personal interest in music, their motivation to practice, their intent to pursue a career in music, and the influence of their instrumental tutors as crucial factors to their learning an instrument.*

The research on parental involvement in young students' education addresses parents' activities in support of learning at home, in the school, and in the community. While agents of socialization vary from society to society, in most cases the family is influential and serves as a major socializing agent during early childhood (Kiecolt & Acock, 1988; Parsons & Bales, 1956; Pearson & Rao, 2003; Cooper, Crosnoe, Suizzo, & Pituch, 2010). Studies of the links between parental involvement and children's achievement have shown conclusively that parental involvement improves student achievement (Epstein, 1995; Mau, 1997; Hara, 1998; Fan, 2001; Driessen, Smit, & Slegers, 2005; Jeynes, 2007). For example, parental support has a positive effect on students' reading ability (Cushenbery, 1988; Morrison, 1988; Hawes, 2005; Hawes & Plourde, 2005) and students' mathematics achievement is significantly related to parental support (Shaver & Walls, 1998; Cai, 2003; Wang, 2004; Hong, Yoo, You, & Wu, 2010). Parents are also a significant factor in the development of children's leisure interests and values (Barnett & Chick, 1986; Kelly, 1983; Kleiber, 1999; Hutchinson, Baldwin, & Cladwell, 2003); parents' perceptions of children's after-school activities are related to the qualities with which they wish to inculcate their school-aged children as well as the hopes and aspirations they have for their school-aged children (Dunn, Kinney, & Hofferth, 2003).

Similar findings have suggested that musical achievement might be positively related to parental involvement in the learning process. Research has acknowledged the

importance of parents in young children's musical development as well as the ways in which sharing musical experience promotes a powerful bonding connection between parents and children (Suzuki, 1973; Freeman, 1974; Brand, 1986; Kelley & Sutton-Smith, 1987; Kemp, 1996; Corenblum & Marshall, 1998; Welch & Adams, 2003; Macmillan, 2004; Marjoribanks & Mboya, 2004; Sichivitsa, 2007; McPherson, 2009). Parents exert great influence over their children's musical development, as seen in the cases of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Clara Schumann and, more recently, Yehudi Menuhin and Jacqueline du Pré (Creech, 2010, p. 13). Parents in many mainland Chinese families will relocate to other provinces or countries in order to have their children attend better music schools or become prominent musicians or even "stars" (Pellegrini, 2008, p. 47).

In addition to covering the cost of instruments and lessons, parental involvement/support can take the form of shared musical experiences, home supervision, support for and assistance in children's concerts, provision of materials, and communications with instrumental teachers (Howe & Sloboda, 1991; Davidson, Howe, Moore, & Sloboda, 1996; Zdzinski, 1992, 1996; Creech & Hallam, 2009). Parental support and supervision has a particularly positive impact on students' musical awareness, approach to practice, and their musical achievement (McPherson & Davidson, 2002; Renwick & McPherson, 2002). Parents' interest and involvement in their children's music training affect whether children continue with music lessons and practice (Creech & Hallam, 2003; Moore, Burland, & Davidson, 2003).

Students' self-efficacy and other positive influences also increase the value students place on music and, consequently, their intentions to continue music learning and music participation. Louis Armstrong is an exceptional case, in that he attained great musical achievements and "musical intelligence without parental support" (Creech, 2010, p. 13). Burland and Davidson (2002) found that some children who had persisted in their music studies without any parental support and eventually become professional performers. Hallam (2002) and Sichivitsa (2004) also assert that students can develop an independent interest in music based on their own needs and aspirations without positive parental feedback.

Young learners' personalities and temperaments may strengthen their commitment to practice (McPherson & Davidson, 2002; Gouzouasis, Henrey, & Belliveau, 2008). Students should cultivate "an independent interest in music" based on their own desire, commitment, and passion, without any parental feedback (Sichivitsa, 2007, p. 56). Denny (2007) states that children's musical participation correlates positively with their future aspirations, but that parental pressure is not connected with their musical participation. Thus, those students who intend to continue with their music participation are those who value it most (Eccles, 1983; Sichivitsa, 2004; Southgate & Roscigno, 2009). Other studies show that students' performance or learning is closely related to their teachers' efficacy and level of effort (Howe & Sloboda, 1991; Davidson, Moore, Sloboda, & Howe, 1998; Woody, 2001; Georgiou, Christou, Stavrinides, &

Panaoura, 2002). In her examination of the differences between elementary student participants and non-participants in a choral festival, Hedden (2007) notes that parents, peers, teachers, and self-perception may combine to influence children's attitudes towards music participation (see Sichivitsa, 2007).

Several studies have found that the frequency of parental involvement diminishes when a child enters the middle grades of high school (Zill & Nord, 1994; Epstein & Connors, 1994; Epstein, 1995; Rutherford, 1995; Jackson & Davis, 2000; Jackson, Andrews, Holland, & Pardini, 2004). Wright and Wilfls (2003) remark that parental involvement diminishes substantially from elementary to middle school as young adolescents no longer desire their parents' presence in school. Zdzinski (1994, 1996) reports that parental involvement relates to students' performance level and cognitive musical progress at the elementary and secondary level. Overall, these effects are more evident at the elementary level than at the secondary level.

### **Background Information: Music Education and Learning to Play a Musical Instrument in Hong Kong**

Hong Kong schools offer compulsory music education in primary and junior secondary grades (grades one-nine). Primary schools usually provide up to two weekly music lessons for students; many secondary schools schedule only one weekly music lesson up to grade nine or even grade 10. Most schools do not offer general music

education in their senior school curriculum. The activities recommended in the curriculum guidelines include singing, performance, music appreciation, and composition (Curriculum Development Council, 2003; Curriculum Development Council and the Hong Kong Examinations and Assessment Authority, 2007). The current curriculum guidelines for grades one to nine (Curriculum Development Council, 2003) encourage teachers to offer students the opportunity to learn various instruments and to organize classes and orchestras to provide students with “systematic instrumental training and to enrich their performing experiences” (p. 57).

Instrumental learning in the form of extra-curricular activities has spread throughout Hong Kong’s primary and secondary schools over the last decade. In October 1997, the Hong Kong Special Administrative Government (HKSAR) set up the Quality Education Fund to finance projects promoting quality education and innovations in school education at all levels. The Fund has enabled many schools to establish instrumental groups, school bands, and orchestras. To enhance the quality of education, schools have been advised to employ part-time professionals to help run in-school musical instrument training and extra-curricular arts activities (School Activities Section, Advisory Inspectorate Division, Education Department, 1997). The Hong Kong Jockey Club Music and Dance Fund Grants, which come from a non-statutory trust fund, subsidizes student participation in extra-curricular music activities for training and performing purposes, pays part-time instructors to organize music classes, compensates

schools for the acquisition and repair of musical instruments, and funds the formation of orchestras.

Outside of school education, the Hong Kong Government established the Music Office (MO) in 1977. The MO is responsible for promoting musical knowledge and providing musical training for school students, particularly instrumental and ensemble training. At present the MO operates over 800 training classes each year, in more than 30 Chinese and Western musical instruments, attended by some 4,500 students between the ages of 6 and 23 (Music Office, 2010). The number of string students rose from 1,460 in 2003-04 to 1,874 in 2005-06 and then dropped slightly to 1,738 in 2008-09; the number of wind and percussion students rose from 1,129 in 2003-04 to 1,205 in 2005-06 and then dropped slightly 1,114 in 2008-09<sup>1</sup>. Besides providing regular instrumental programs, the MO also organizes the Hong Kong Youth Music Camp, Youth Music Interflows, and other international music exchange programs. These programs help school students improve their standards of performance and provide high quality, integrated, and flexible music education programs. The number of schools participating in the Hong Kong Youth Music Interflows' symphonic band and symphony orchestra contests rose from 25 to 45 and from 8 to 12 respectively from 2003 to 2008.<sup>2</sup>

It is very common for Hong Kong parents to send their children for private music lessons in the hope that this will bring them both enjoyment and success. According to Choi, Chen, So, and Yeung (2005), Hong Kong parents are willing to pay for their



children to attend formal and informal music classes outside school hours (see Lam & Wong, 1997). Most Hong Kong parents would love to have their young children learn an instrument and take public examinations such as those of the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM) (Hiebert, 1993; Cheung, 2004). Data from a phone survey of 698 Hong Kong parents with children under the age of 18, conducted by the Chinese University of Hong Kong (2007), found that only 8.6% of these parents offered no financial support for their children's musical interests. Those parents who readily gave financial assistance funded their children's school tuition fees, English classes or tuition for classes outside school, music, swimming, and other interest classes (Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2007). Parents from the survey were willing to pay for these activities at rates ranging from HK\$1,000 (US\$ 128) to more than HK\$5,000 (US\$641); 35.7% were willing to spend between HK\$2,001 (US\$257) and HK\$5,000 (US\$641), and 18.9% over HK\$5,000 (Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2007).

However, Lam and Wong (1997) show that while parents are willing to lend financial assistance, 10.6% of elementary school students' parents and 26.0% of senior secondary students' parents were unwilling to devote their time to their children's extracurricular activities. Other studies carried out in Hong Kong (Chen, 2008; McCall, Beach, & Lau, 2000; Shek, 2007) have also found that parental support for extracurricular activities decreases as the students' grade level advances.

Most Hong Kong parents have high academic expectations of and aspirations for

their children's education (Hau & Salili, 1996; Shek & Chan, 1999; Chan & Chan, 2003; Phillipson & Phillipson, 2007). Hong Kong students study diligently and intend to do well in order to please both their families and themselves, as they believe that their success or failure affects those close to them (Hau & Salili, 1996). Hui's (2000) study of 2,103 Hong Kong secondary school students identifies academic achievement as their prime concern. Shek and Chan (1999) show how Hong Kong Chinese parents' expectations of their children's academic achievement reflect the values of traditional Chinese culture, especially "family-related" and "academic-related" attributes (p. 300). Owing to "examination pressures," many Hong Kong parents withdraw their children from the Junior Music Program of the Academy for the Performing Arts, one of the most comprehensive programs for the musical instruction of talented young people in Hong Kong, once they reach the age of "13 or 14" (Hiebert, 1993, p. 82). Similarly, 589 (39.45%) of the students in Law's and Ho's survey (2009) say that they had learned instruments, but had now given them up primarily because of pressure from academic work, had no plans to pursue music as a career, thought that they had no musical ability, and had no interest in continuing.

Although there is extensive published evidence demonstrating the value of parental involvement in general education and music education in particular, there is little research that specifically explores young students' perceptions of parental involvement in and support for their education in the Chinese context. Previous studies do not show the

extent to which the students perceived their parents' involvement and support in terms of physical and financial assistance in instrumental learning. In order to provide a more effective music education environment, this paper explores the attitudes of young Hong Kong students towards their instrumental learning and, particularly, how they perceive their parents' role in their assistance for and participation in instrumental learning and performances.

## **The Study**

### *Purpose and Research Questions*

“Parental support” refers to parents' support for and assistance with their children's instrumental instruction, learning, and practice. “Parental support” also refers to parents' support for and assistance with their children's musical activities, both at home and in school, as well as their interests in a musical career. This study reports on a quantitative questionnaire survey of young instrumental learners that examines their perceptions of the parental support they receive, and the extent and nature of that involvement. There are three main research questions:

1. Does parental involvement in Hong Kong students' learning to play an instrument vary with their grade levels?
2. What are the students' perceptions of their parents' involvement in their instrumental learning in terms of physical and financial assistance?

3. To what extent does perceived parental support for their children's learning an instrument affect students' intentions to develop a career in music?

#### *Procedures and Method*

For this study, the researcher selected school music teachers from a large sample of different types of Hong Kong schools and considered their availability and their willingness to distribute the questionnaires to their students. The researcher invited school music teachers, by phone or email, to participate in the survey. Classroom music teachers selected student participants and administered the surveys.

The questionnaire, which was written in traditional Chinese, included closed-ended questions, multiple choice questions, and five-point Likert-scale questions. All of the survey questions addressed students' musical interests, attitudes, and practice habits as well as their perceptions of their parents' involvement in their music studies and their instrumental learning. The questionnaire was divided into three sections: (1) general information about the participants; (2) information and students' attitudes concerning the students' and their families' instrumental learning; and (3) students' perceptions of their parents' support for and involvement in their music studies, practice, and instrumental learning (See Appendix).

## Findings

### *Demographic Information*

The researcher collected data from a questionnaire conducted with 356 Chinese students attending grades 4 to 13 in various school locations in Hong Kong. The survey participants had experienced in-school music education as well as learning to play an instrument. One hundred and eight (30.3%) of the respondents were boys and 248 (69.7%) girls. The participants ranged in age from 8 to 17 or older (see Figure 1) and attended Grade 4 to Grade 13 (see Figure 2).

Figure 1  
*Age Distribution of Students*

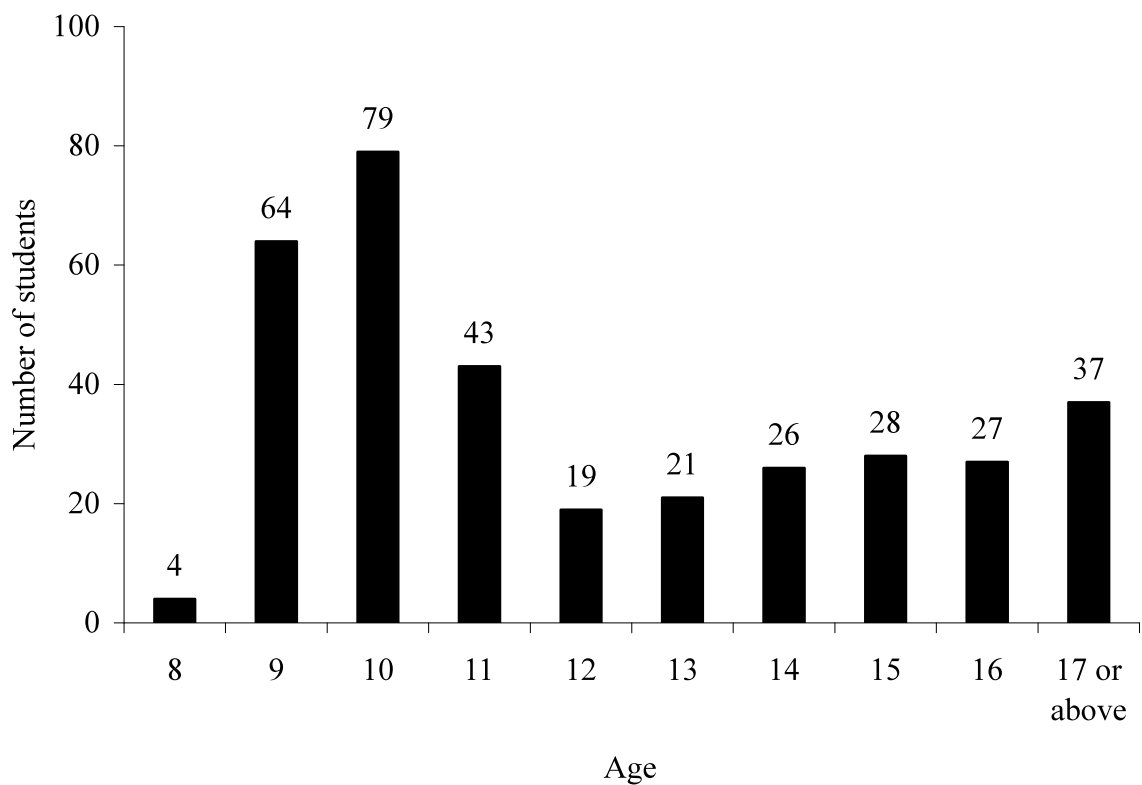
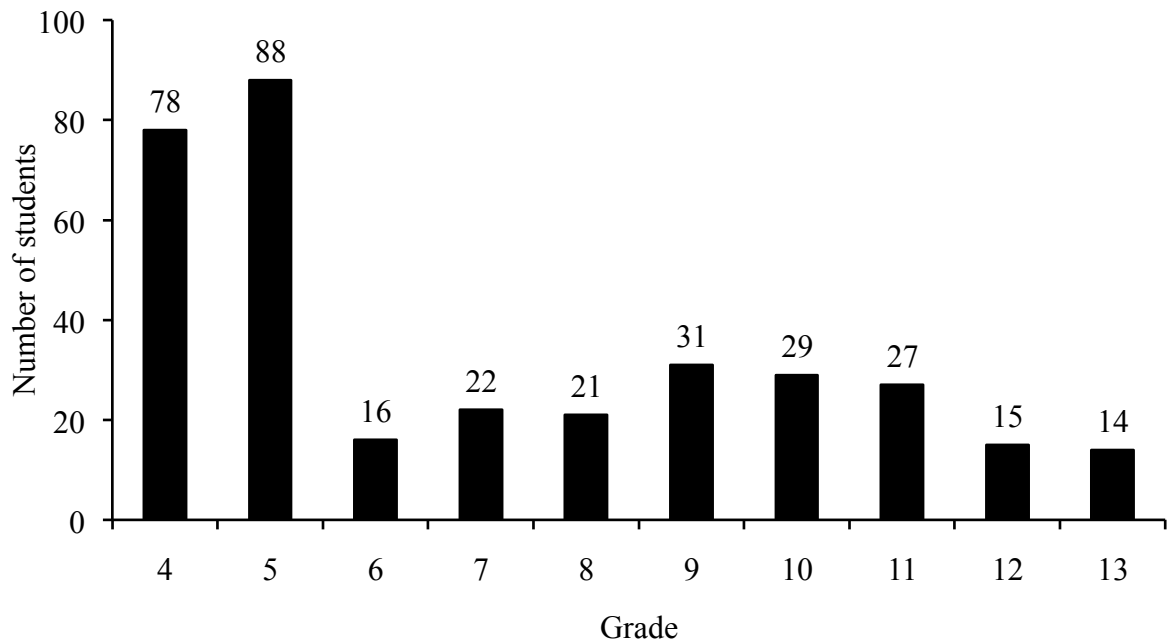


Figure 2  
*Grade Distribution of Students*



The sample includes more elementary than secondary school students due to two primary schools having many instrumental learners who volunteered to be involved in the survey.

#### *Sources of Musical Knowledge*

Of the 337 valid responses, 165 (48.9%) believed the main sources of their musical knowledge to be private instrumental tutors, 78 (23.1%) identified school music teachers, and 43 (12.8%) chose parents (see Table 1).

Table 1

*The Most Important Sources of Musical Knowledge as Perceived by Students*

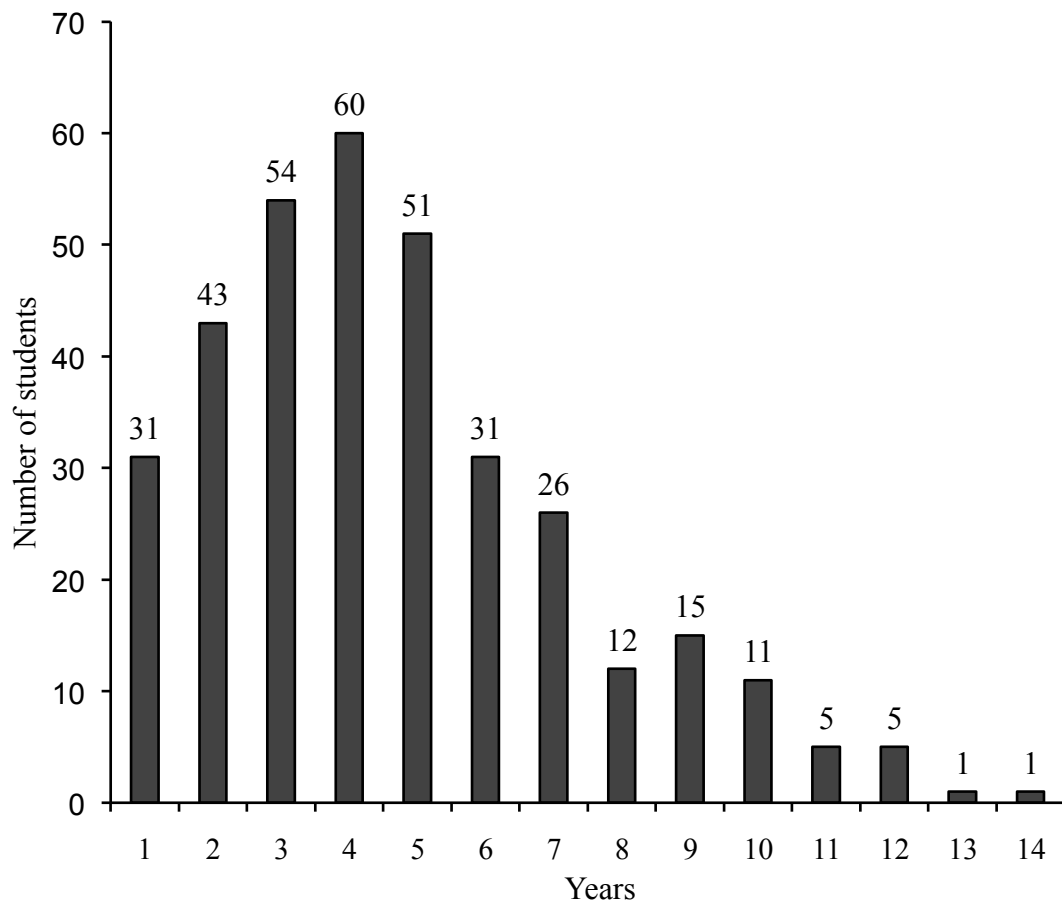
Rank	The most important sources of musical knowledge	Number of students (%)
1	Private instrumental tutor	165 (48.9%)
2	School music teacher	78 (23.1%)
3	Parents	43 (12.8%)
4	Orchestra conductor	17 (5.1%)
5	Others	12 (3.6%)
6	Brothers and sisters	10 (3.0%)
7	Friends	9 (2.7%)
8	Orchestral member	3 (0.9%)

*Background Information About Students Learning an Instrument*

The survey contained questions asking students whether their fathers, mothers, and siblings had learned musical instruments. Forty-five students (12% of valid responses) listed their fathers, 75 (21.1% of valid responses) listed their mothers, and 192 (54.7% of the valid responses) listed their siblings as having learned musical instruments.

Questions on the survey asked students to identify their primary instruments based on the amount of time spent practicing that instrument compared with others. The most popular primary instruments were piano (211 entries), flute (35 entries), violin (21 entries), clarinet (18 entries), percussion (13 entries), and cello (13 entries). Most students had studied their primary instrument between two and five years (see Figure 3).

Figure 3  
*Number of Students by Years of Instrumental Learning*

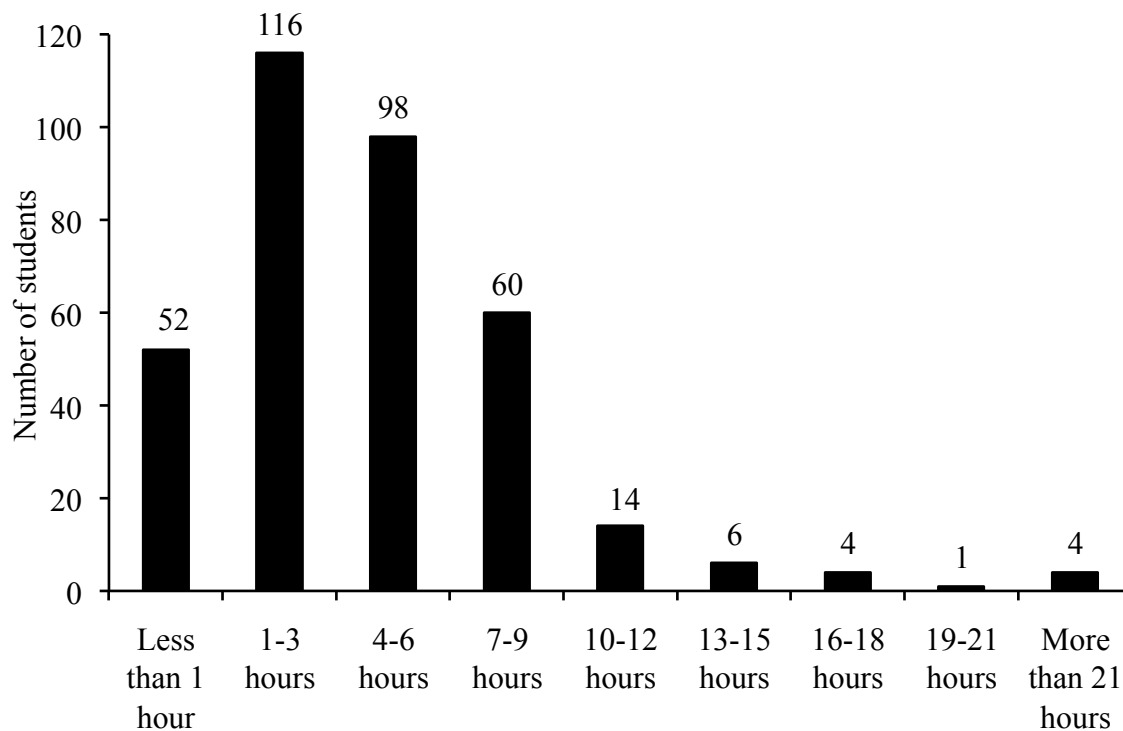


Two hundred and three students (62.7%) said that they had received private, one-on-one instrumental lessons. Forty-three students reported (13.3%) participating in their school's extra-curricular activities, which were usually conducted on a group basis. Thirty-nine students reported (12%) participating in instrumental classes offered by the Music Office.

Most students said that their home environment always allowed them to practice their instruments effectively. When asked, most students reported practicing between one and nine hours per week (see Figure 4).



Figure Four  
*Hours that Students Spend Practicing Music Each Week*



Pearson Correlation analyses determined a significant interdependence between the number of years students spent learning a primary instrument and the number of hours that they practiced (0.204,  $p < 0.005$ ).

The survey asked students to identify the most recent examinations they had taken on their primary instruments. The most common response for public examinations was mainly from the Associate Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM). Most students completed examinations in 2007, while 141 students (43.1%) did not. Five students, made up of two learning piano, one clarinet, one saxophone, and one horn, had passed the Associated Diploma (ATCL) certified by Trinity College London<sup>3</sup>. When asked, nearly 60% of students said they had participated in the annual Hong Kong Music

Festival, a major local annual music competition, with frequencies varying from one to 13 times.

*Reasons for Learning to Play Musical Instruments*

The survey asked students to rate their main reasons for taking instrumental classes (see Table 2). The three most popular reasons were “interest in music” (165 responses), “parental encouragement” (64), and “to play my favorite music” (27) (see Table 2).

Table 2  
*Reasons for Learning Music Instruments*

Rank	Reasons	Number of students (%)
1	Interest in music	165 (48.4%)
2	Parental encouragement	64 (18.8%)
3	To play my favorite music	27 (7.9%)
4	Compulsory in school to learn at least one instrument	20 (5.9%)
5	For leisure	16 (5.3%)
6	I find that I have musical ability	12 (3.5%)
7	To learn with schoolmates/friends	12 (3.5%)
8	To pursue a professional career in music	8 (2.4%)
9	Playing an instrument is common to every student	4 (1.2%)
10	Others	3 (0.9%)
11	My instrumental teacher’s encouragement	2 (0.6%)
11	My school music teacher’s encouragement	2 (0.6%)
11	To fill up time	2 (0.6%)
14	Influenced by the mass media	2 (0.6%)

### *Attitudes Toward Instrumental Learning*

Students expressed their attitude towards learning to play an instrument by using a Likert-type scale, ranging from 1, meaning “highly dislike,” to 5, meaning “highly like.” Students used this scale to rate the following two statements: “Overall, I have a great interest in learning my primary instrument”, and “Overall, I enjoy practicing my music.” The mean values for the two statements were 4.02 ( $SD = 0.81$ ) and 3.95 ( $SD = 0.80$ ) respectively. Using the Pearson Correlation analysis, this study displayed a correlation of 0.253 ( $p < 0.005$ ) between interest in learning to play an instrument and willingness to practice.

### *Perception of Future Instrumental Learning*

One hundred and forty-five (50.8%) students said that they “highly disagreed” that they would stop learning their primary instruments when they moved to a higher grade in school, while only 8 (2.3%) “highly agreed”. The overall mean for students’ intention to stop learning was 2.01 ( $SD = 1.04$ ). Both chi-square and t-test revealed no significant difference between whether students’ parents or siblings were instrumental learners and students’ intention to stop learning their musical instruments in the future. Twenty students (5.6%) “highly disagree” that they would pursue music or their instrumental playing as a professional career, while 26 (7.3%) “highly agree”. The overall mean for students intending to continue to study music or to have a career in music was 3.03 ( $SD = 0.95$ ). The Pearson Correlation analysis shows a significant

dependence (0.365,  $p < 0.005$ ) between students' desire to pursue a career in music and their liking of music practice.

### *Highly Influential People in Students' Instrumental Learning*

The survey asked students to rate the people whom they thought most strongly supported their instrumental studies. The three most important people were parents (with 162 responses), private instrumental tutors (with 89), and school music teachers (with 26) (see Table 3).

Table 3

#### *Students' Perceptions of the Most Influential People for Their Learning an Instrument*

Rank	The most influential people for instrumental learning	Number of students (%)
1	Parents	162 (47.4%)
2	Private instrumental tutor	89 (26%)
3	School music teacher	26 (7.6%)
4	Friends/classmates	25 (7.3%)
5	Brothers and sisters	12 (3.5%)
5	Orchestra conductor	12 (3.5%)
7	Orchestra member	10 (3.0%)
8	Others	6 (1.8%)

Cross-tabulation analysis found that 64 students considered their private instrumental tutors to be both their most important source of musical knowledge and the greatest supporters of their instrumental learning. Thirty-four students said this of their school music teachers, 17 of their parents, four of their orchestral conductors, three of

their siblings, two their friends or classmates, and two of orchestral members. A chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) test detected a significant dependence between student's source of musical knowledge and the people who most influenced their instrumental learning:

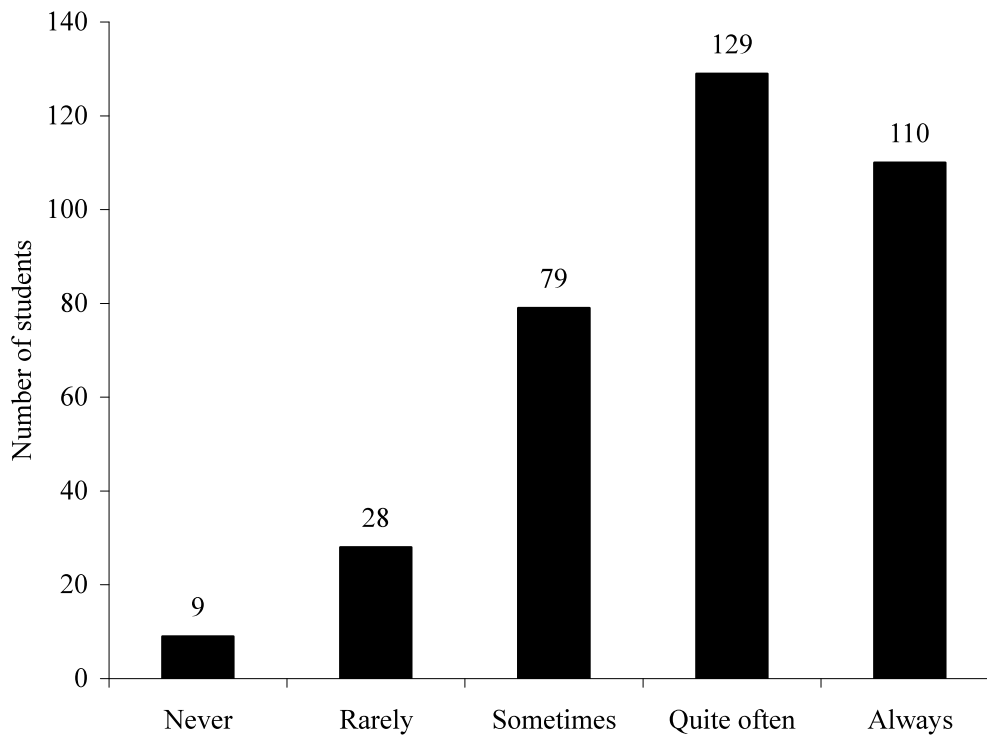
$\chi^2(49, N = 356) = 102.402, p < .005$ .

#### *Perceived Parental Involvement in Students' Instrumental Learning and Music Activities*

The questionnaire assessed parental support for students' participation in music activities, inside and outside school. The survey asked students to what extent they agreed with the following six statements: (1) "My parent(s) generally support my pursuit of music activities inside and outside school;" (2) "When I perform my parent(s) encourage me to do so in community halls, school halls and other performing venues;" (3) "When I perform my parent(s) attend the concerts;" (4) "My parent(s) accompany me to classical concerts to perfect my instrumental playing;" (5) "My parent(s) give their oral comments on my practice at home;" and (6) "My parent(s) enjoy watching or listening to music programs with me at home." Analysis of these statements adopted the five-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1, meaning "never," to 5, meaning "always." Most students recognized their parents as generally supportive of their music participation inside and outside school (see Figure 5).

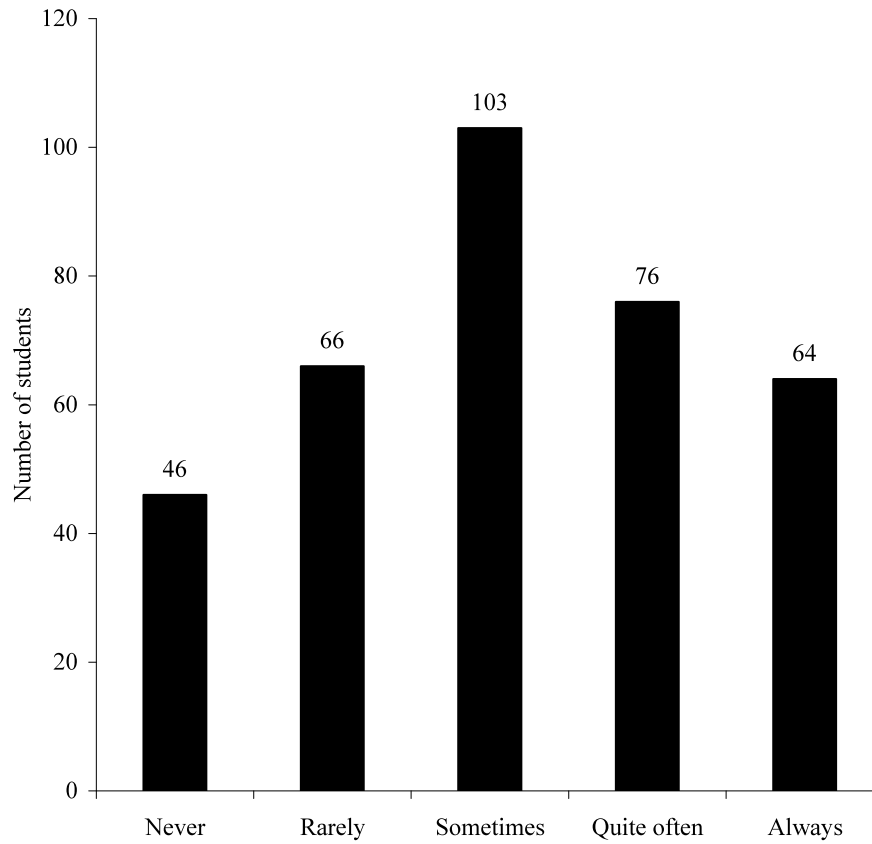
Figure Five

*Students' Perceptions of How Frequently Their Parents Support Their Music Participation Inside and Outside School*

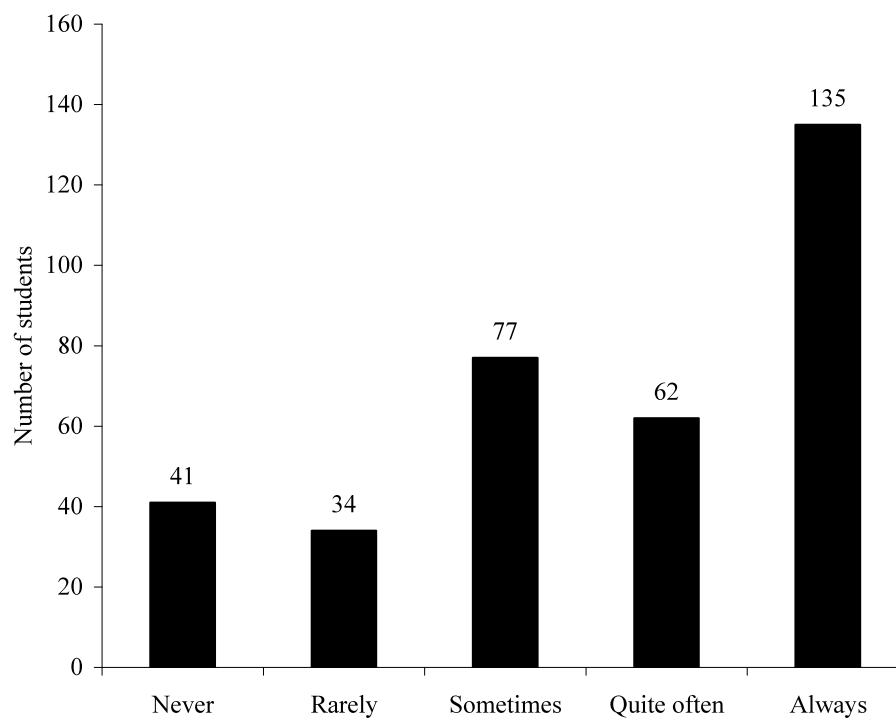


Sixty-four students maintained that their parents always encouraged them to perform in public venues such as community halls and school halls (see Figure 6). When asked, 135 students said that their parents would always attend their concert performances (see Figure7).

**Figure Six**  
*Students' Perceptions of How Frequently Their Parents Encourage Them to Perform in Public Venues*



**Figure Seven**  
*Students' Perceptions of How Frequently Their Parents Attend Their Concert Performances*



Sixty-eight students reported that their parents always accompanied them to classical concerts (see Figure 8), while 89 said that their parents always made oral comments about their music practice at home (see Figure 9). Only 33 students felt that their parents always enjoyed watching or listening to music programs with them at home (see Figure 10).

Figure Eight

*Students' Perceptions of How Frequently Their Parents Accompany Them to Classical Concerts*

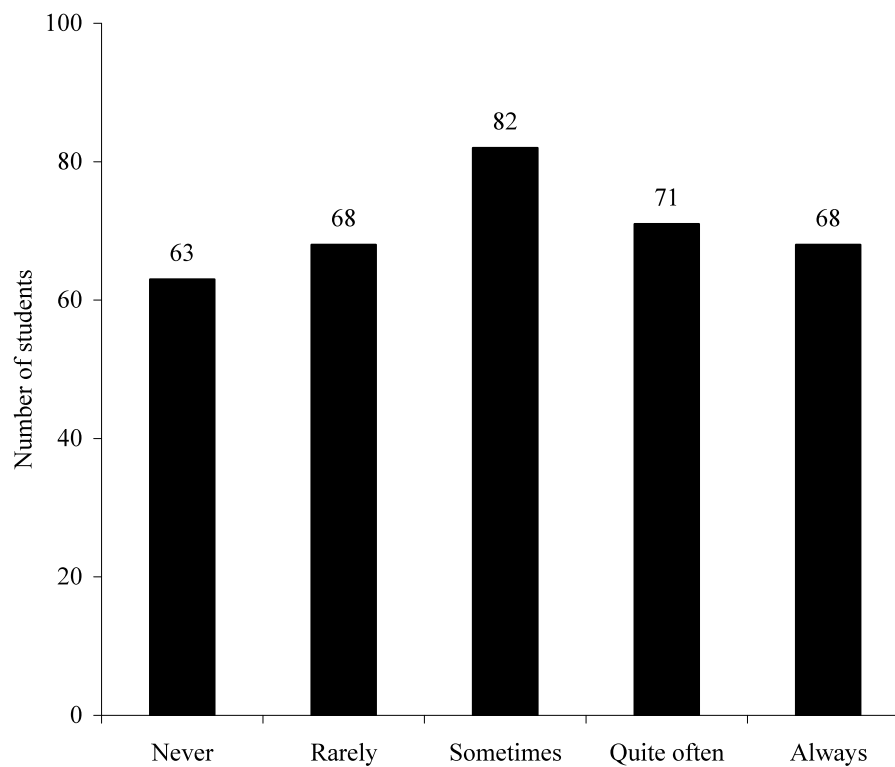




Figure Nine

*Students' Perceptions of How Frequently Their Parents Offer Oral Comments on Their Practice at Home*

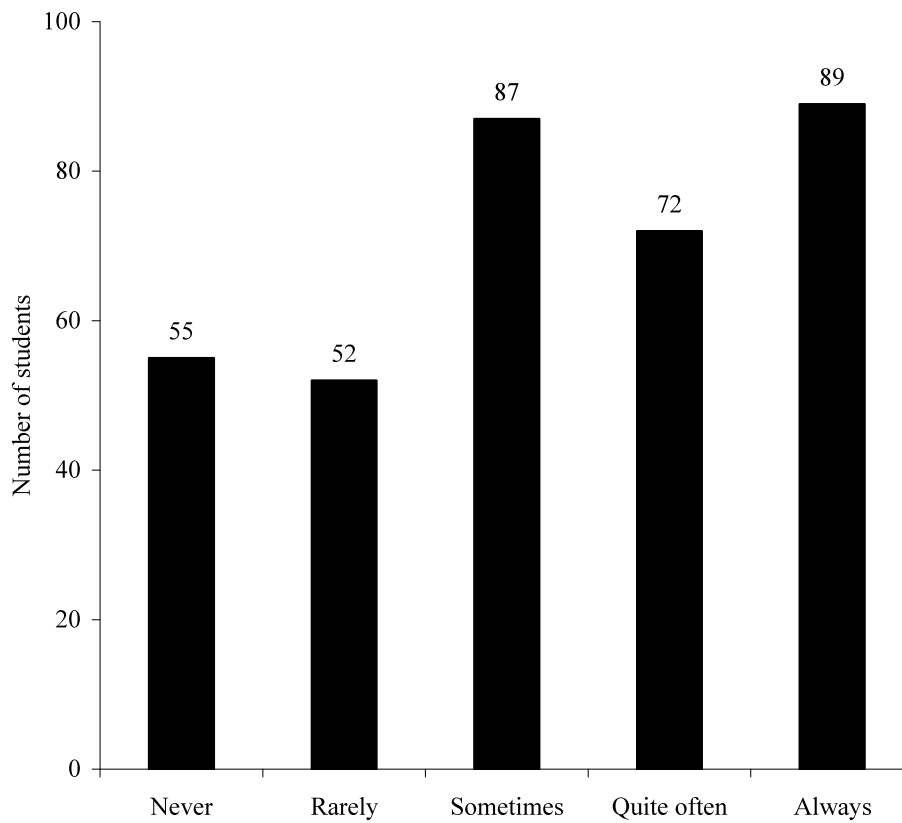
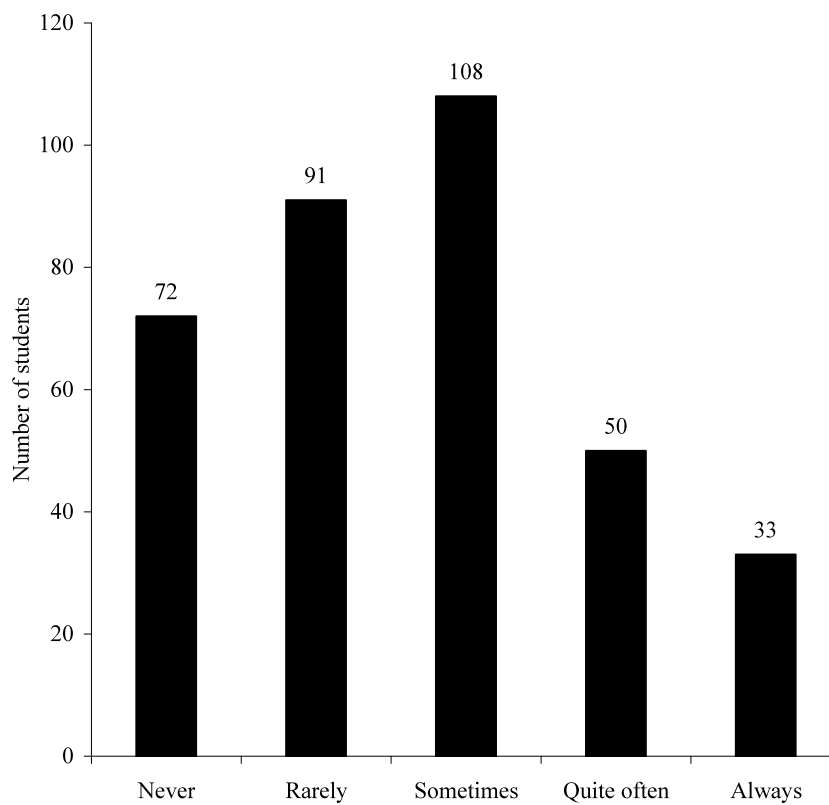


Figure Ten

*Students' Perceptions of How Frequently Their Parents Watch or Listen to Music Programs with Them at Home*



Compared to other types of parental involvement in students' music participation, parental support for music activities inside and outside school achieved the highest average mean (see Table 4).

Table 4

*Parental Involvement in Students' Musical Activities and Performances*

Rank	Types of music participation/involvement	*Mean	SD
1.	My parent(s) generally support my pursuit of music activities inside and outside school.	3.85	1.03
2.	When I perform my parent(s) attend the concerts.	3.62	1.38
3.	My parent(s) offer oral comments on my practice at home.	3.25	1.38
4.	When I perform my parent(s) encourage me to do so in community halls, school halls and other performing venues.	3.13	1.28
5.	My parent(s) accompany me to classical concerts to perfect my instrumental playing.	3.04	1.37
6.	My parent(s) enjoy watching or listening to music programs with me at home.	2.66	1.21

\*1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often, 5 = always There is a significant correlation between students' interest in learning an instrument and whether their parents encourage them to perform in public ( $p < 0.01$ ). However, there is no significant correlation between students' interest in learning an instrument and their parents' willingness to attend their performances.

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed statistically significant differences between students' grades, with respect to parents' accompanying their children to

classical concerts ( $F = 3.329, p < 0.005$ ), parents' oral comments on students' music practice at home ( $F = 12.952, p < 0.001$ ), and parents' attendance at their children's concert performances ( $F = 5.576, p < 0.001$ ). ANOVA also revealed marginally significant differences in parental support for their children's music participation inside and outside school ( $F = 1.877, p = 0.055$ ) (see Table 5).

Table 5

*ANOVA Statistics of Parental Involvement in Students' Musical Activities and Performances Between the Ten Grades*

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Types of parents' music participation/involvement as perceived by students	ANOVA statistics
My parent(s) generally support my pursuit of music activities inside and outside of school.	$F(9, 333) = 1.877, p = 0.055$
When I perform, my parent(s) attend the concerts.	$F(9, 327) = 5.576, p = 0.000$
My parent(s) offer oral comments on my practice at home.	$F(9, 333) = 12.952, p = 0.000$
When I perform, my parent(s) encourage me to do so in community halls, school halls and other performing venues.	$F(9, 333) = 2.485, p = 0.130$
My parent(s) accompany me to classical concerts to perfect my instrumental playing.	$F(9, 330) = 3.329, p = 0.001$
My parent(s) enjoy watching or listening to music programs with me at home.	$F(9, 332) = 1.737, p = 0.080$

---

To determine if the "grade effect" was due to students' division into too many groups, the researcher conducted ANOVA by regrouping the ten grades into three categories: elementary (Grades 4-6), junior secondary (Grades 7-9), and senior secondary

(Grades 10-13). The results revealed statistically significant differences in students' perceptions of the support their parents offered by participating in their music activities inside and outside of school ( $F = 3.742, p < 0.05$ ), attending their concert music performances ( $F = 19.873, p < 0.001$ ), giving oral comments on their music practice at home ( $F = 51.321, p < 0.001$ ), encouraging their performances in school halls and other public performing venues ( $F = 3.447, p < 0.05$ ), accompanying them to classical concerts ( $F = 11.216, p < 0.001$ ), and watching or listening to music programs with them at home ( $F = 4.575, p < 0.05$ ) (see Table 6).

Table 6

*ANOVA Statistics of Parental Involvement in Students' Musical Activities and Performances Among Elementary, Junior Secondary, and Senior Secondary School Students*

Types of parents' music participation/involvement as perceived by students	ANOVA statistics
My parent(s) generally support my pursuit of music activities inside and outside of school.	$F(2,340) = 3.742, p = 0.025$
When I perform, my parent(s) attend the concerts.	$F(2,334) = 19.873, p = 0.000$
My parent(s) offer oral comments on my practice at home.	$F(2,340) = 51.321, p = 0.000$
When I perform, my parent(s) encourage me to do so in community halls, school halls and other performing venues.	$F(2,340) = 3.447, p = 0.033$
My parent(s) accompany me to classical concerts to perfect my instrumental playing.	$F(2,337) = 11.216, p = 0.000$
My parent(s) enjoy watching or listening to music programs with me at home.	$F(2,339) = 4.575, p = 0.011$

*Parents' Financial Support for Instrumental Lessons and Other Musical Activities*

The survey asked students about their parents' financial support for their instrumental lessons and other musical activities. Students responded to questions regarding whether their parents were willing to pay monthly tuition fees and to purchase or rent instruments. These questions used a Likert-type scale, ranging from 1, meaning "never," to 5, meaning "always." The respective means, based on student responses, were 4.48 ( $SD = 0.82$ ) and 4.21 ( $SD = 1.07$ ). However, the mean value of to what extent parents helped students to buy CDs or DVDs in order to improve their instrumental playing was 2.83 (2.84) based on a Likert-type scale, ranging from 1, meaning "never," to 5, meaning "always." ANOVA results did not indicate significant differences ( $F = 1.700, p > 0.05$ ) between students' perception of their parents' financial support in paying their instrumental fees throughout the ten grades. Results showed differences ( $F = 6.699, p < 0.005$ ) among the three categories of elementary, junior secondary, and senior secondary school students. Results did not indicate significant differences over parental financial assistance in buying music CDs or other audio-visual items between the ten grades or the three categories of grades.

The relationship between students' attendance in lower grades and their parents' financial support was statistically highly significant. Results suggest that parents' musical aspirations had a strong influence on elementary school students, and parents' musical aspirations might affect instrumental learning more in elementary schools than in middle

schools. However, results did not indicate a significant correlation between parents' financial support and their children's intentions to pursue a career in music.

*Student Perceptions of Parental Attitudes Towards Instrumental Progress, Academic Achievement, and Prospective Careers in Music*

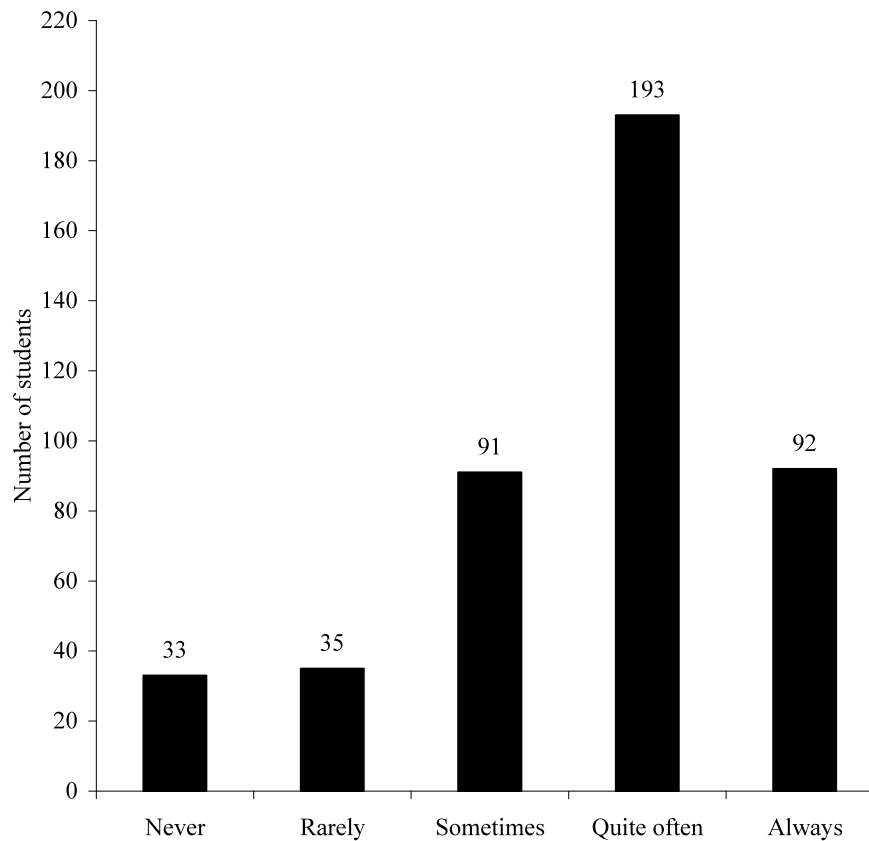
When asked whether their parents believed their instrumental progress were equally as important as their academic success, 110 out of 352 students (31.3%) said that their parents valued both. Most students thought their parents would not strongly support them if they chose a career in music; the overall mean of expected parental support for such a choice was 2.71 ( $SD = 1.30$ ) based on a Likert-type scale, ranging from 1, meaning "never," to 5, meaning "always." ANOVA revealed statistical differences between students attending the 10 grades ( $F = 3.927, p < 0.001$ ) and among the groups of elementary, junior secondary, and senior secondary school students ( $F = 15.144, p = 0.000$ )

*Overall Parental Support for Instrumental Learning*

The last survey question asked students whether their parents' involvement was generally helpful for their instrumental learning. The overall mean value of the responses was 3.54 ( $SD = 1.24$ ) based on a Likert-type scale, ranging from 1, meaning "never," to 5, meaning "always" (see Figure 11).

Figure Eleven

*Students' Perceptions of the Frequency of Overall Parental Support for Instrumental Learning*



When divided into groups of elementary, junior secondary and senior secondary school students, the average means were, respectively, 3.84 ( $SD = 1.18$ ), 3.21 ( $SD = 1.26$ ), and 3.21 ( $SD = 1.36$ ). ANOVA revealed statistical differences in parental support for instrumental learning between students attending the 10 grades ( $F = 2.810, p < 0.01$ ), and among the three groups ( $F = 11.663, p = 0.001$ ).

The Pearson Correlation analysis showed a significant correlation between greater overall parental support for instrumental learning and student willingness to enter the music profession. The Pearson Correlation analysis also showed that students' attendance

in lower grades and their age correlate significantly with their perceived overall parental support for instrumental learning ( $-.229, p < 0.005$ ). However, when students entered higher grades, overall parental support for instrumental learning was perceived to be less.

### **Discussion**

The students' perceptions of parental attitudes towards their participation in musical activities were found to be an important influence on students' learning to play an instrument. While students believed that their parents were quite willing to pay for their instrumental lessons, this financial support bore no relationship to their intention to pursue a career in music. The data of this study also indicate that students' interest in learning to play a musical instrument positively affected both their willingness to practice and their determination to become professional musicians. This discussion follows the sequence of the data's three research questions concerning: (1) perceived parental support for their children learning an instrument relative to their grade attendance in school; (2) how involved students thought their parents were in their instrumental learning, particularly with respect to how much physical support and financial assistance they offered for lessons and performances; and (3) the extent to which perceived parental support is related to their children's intentions to take up a career in music.

First, the influence of family background and parents' support for their children's education has a curious place within the sociology of music education. Early and



consistent parental involvement is critical (Sloboda & Howe, 1991; McPherson, 2009; Southgate & Roscigno, 2009). Children who participate in early childhood music classes have a unique opportunity to grow socially and emotionally through the intimate connections they make through shared music experiences with parents (Davidson et al., 1996; Welch & Adams, 2003; Southgate & Roscigno, 2009). This study showed that parental support is important to children's instrumental learning, but that support changes as children grow older. Survey findings indicate that parental support may decline as students enter higher grades and parents expect students to devote more time to their academic development (Hau & Salili, 1996; Hiebert, 1993; Phillipson & Phillipson, 2007).

The Hong Kong education system is very exam-orientated. Primary school students are assigned to secondary schools based mainly on their performance in Grade 5 and 6 school examinations. Schools are extremely competitive and most parents prefer that their children enter a secondary school of high quality. Hong Kong parents have always had high academic expectations of their children and expect them to study diligently (Hau & Salili, 1996; Shek & Chan, 1999; Phillipson, & Phillipson, 2007). As Choi (1999) says, a university degree is a significant doorway to better employment in Hong Kong (p. 405). Two public examinations – the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE), taken by students at the end of Grade 11, and the Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination<sup>4</sup>, taken at the end of Grade 13, – are both “high-stakes”

examinations that determine students' further education (Choi, 1999; Leung, Salili, & Baber, 1986). The pressure that Hong Kong parents place on their children to achieve good grades in school is the biggest reason children play their instruments less (Hong Kong Institute of Certified Public Accountants, 2006). This may explain why this study found that perceived parental support is comparatively higher at the elementary school level than at the secondary school level.

Second, most students surveyed thought that their parents' support was the most significant factor influencing them to learn their musical instruments (see Table 3).

Parental encouragement is a significant factor in children's musical success, and consistency of support is critical for their developing skills in and enthusiasm for music.

Financial assistance seems to be the most common form of parental involvement and support. However, 41 students reported that their parents never attended their concert performances; 34 students reported that their parents rarely attended their concert performances (see Figure 7). Furthermore, 63 students said that their parents never accompanied them to classical concerts; 68 students said that their parents rarely accompanied them to classical concerts (see Figure 8). Seventy-two students said that their parents did not partake in other musical activities, such as listening to music or watching music programs with them at home (see Figure 10). Hong Kong parents are often very busy with work and other commitments and have been criticized for not spending quality time with their children. According to a survey of 1,553 families

conducted by the Boys' and Girls' Clubs Association of Hong Kong, about 40% of parents are too busy working overtime to have the time or energy to care for their families and enjoy themselves with their children (*China Economic Net*, May 13, 2007). Honk Kong parents also tend to reduce their contribution to their children's music as the children move from primary to senior secondary schools. Parental support should not be limited to the provision of financial assistance, but should include an active involvement in listening to music and going to concerts with their children as well as offering support for their instrumental learning and other musical activities. Such support has significant effects on children's attitudes towards musical participation (Davidson et al., 1996; Denny, 2007; Howe & Sloboda, 1991; Sichivitsa, 2007), instrumental learning (Borthwick & Davidson, 2002; Creech & Hallam, 2003; Macmilian, 2004; Zdzinski, 1996), and musical study (Eccles, 1983).

Third, many students perceived that their parents would not strongly support their entering the music profession, despite the fact that more than half of the students in this study claimed that their parents' valued academic and musical instrument achievements equally. This study reported those students who thought that their parents offered them the most support were those who intended to pursue a musical career. Despite parental encouragement of and support for students taking extra music lessons outside class (Choi et al., 2005), students may stop doing so due to heavy academic workloads that are more obviously oriented towards future career development. The findings of this study may

echo most parents' belief that their children should concentrate on those academic subjects that can directly benefit their future career, in particular traditional basics such as English, Chinese, mathematics, computer competency, and science (Hau & Salili, 1996; Shek & Chan, 1999; Chan & Chan, 2003; Phillipson & Phillipson, 2007). Family involvement is a major contributor to students' academic success (Ho et al., 2003; Ho, 2003, 2006).

This study has shown a significant dependence ( $0.365, p < 0.005$ ) between students' intent to have a career in music and their enjoyment of music practice. It has also revealed that there is no significant correlation between students' interest in learning an instrument and their parents' willingness to attend their performances. There was also no significant correlation between students' intention to learn musical instruments and whether or not their parents were instrumental learners. Many students in this study identified their interest in music as their main reason for taking instrumental classes (see Table 2). The value that students placed on music could be a strong motivational factor for their continuing to learn music (Davidson & Borthwick, 2002; Hallam, 2002; Sichivitsa, 2004).

Maintaining a more positive attitude toward instrumental learning and toward school music across all ages should be a concern for music educators. Most children do not grow up to be professional musicians. Nonetheless, children's positive experiences with music could increase their motivation and long-term commitment to playing an

instrument (Borthwick & Davidson, 2002; Davidson & Borthwick, 2002). It is necessary that students develop an independent interest in music based on their own needs and aspirations (Denny, 2007). As noted by Marjoribanks and Mboya (2004), understanding students' interest in music is a challenge for music educators that lies at the core of the school curriculum. This study has shown that 64 students believed their private instrumental tutors to be both their most importance source of musical knowledge and the greatest supporters of their instrumental learning. Encouragement from music teachers could also help students persist in learning music (Sichivitsa, 2007). School music teachers can help children become more committed to a positive musical learning experience. The unique music curricula, materials, and educational methods that have been developed to suit the varied learning styles of children in their developmental years demonstrate the potential influence of school music teachers. Children who participate in after-school programs are more likely to perform better academically, to be more engaged in and have a better attitude towards learning, to make a valuable contribution to school life, and to enjoy an increased sense of accomplishment and competence. While parents' involvement in education is extremely important, so too is their support for extra-curricular activities.

Music educators should consider how best to make music education accessible to the community. This includes including helping parents to understand the benefits of musical participation and showing how music education contributes to broader

educational goals (Ho, 2009; Law & Ho, 2009). Many Hong Kong parents would love to have their children learn an instrument and take ABRSM and other public examinations (Cheung, 2004; Hiebert, 1993). Instrumental music learning is educationally beneficial, as it fosters qualities of mind, equips students with a range of transferable skills, and positively affects personal well-being. Musical participation, both in and out of school, has been linked to increased academic achievement among children and adolescents (Southgate & Roscigno, 2009). Thus, an important goal for music educators is to interest students in and excite students about performing music and participating in group music activities. Interactions between parents and music educators, which may lie outside the domain of traditional parent-teacher communication, may contribute to rich musical experiences for young students.

### **Conclusions and Further Research**

Parents can initiate, facilitate, constrain, and shape children's development of interests and their participation in instrumental learning and other music activities in numerous ways. The statistical analyses of this study reveal the overall impact of parental involvement as well as specific components of parental involvement. Most parents may have higher expectations of their children's academic performance and spend more time helping them with school homework. Parental involvement in their children's instrumental learning often involves the growth of complex relationships between parents

and their children's academic achievement and career development. Music educators should consider how best to encourage students' commitment to instrumental learning. It is important that school music teachers, instrumental teachers, and parents be aware that parental involvement supports students' instrumental learning, behavior, and attitudes.

The sample of the present study was limited and more work on this topic is warranted. One recommendation would be to repeat the present investigation using a larger and more diverse student population, including those children who have chosen to stop learning their music instruments. Parental involvement could take many forms including good parenting in the home, the provision of a stable and peaceful environment for music practice, and musical stimulation. Parental involvement could also include high aspirations relating to their children's personal fulfillment, music participation with their children, and contact with instrumental tutors to share information and to recognize the music progress of their children. Future research could include a wider spectrum of parents, which might be necessary to understand more clearly what motivates parents' decisions involving their children's music training. It would be worthwhile to clarify how mothers and fathers support their children's instrumental training, and whether that support is gender based. Further investigations with a larger sample size and broader characteristics will also allow for a greater breadth of understanding to compare parents' support for their children's instrumental learning in Western and non-Western societies.

This study suggests that attitude and interest are important factors in students'

instrumental learning and can be developed through the combined influences of parents, teachers, self-perception, and self-determination. Qualitative research can also supplement the findings of this study by addressing how the relationship between parents, instrumental tutors, and school music teachers impacts students' instrumental learning. Researchers might examine at which age students are mostly like to end their instrumental learning and how parents, instrumental tutors, and music teachers could help them continue.

### **Acknowledgement**

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> The Music Office provided data for this research project, and defined the two instrument categories of strings, and percussion and wind.

<sup>2</sup> The Music Office provided these figures. Involvement in the symphonic band and symphony orchestra contests in these five years peaked in 2007, with 51 bands and 13 orchestras.

<sup>3</sup> The standard of performance is equivalent to the first year performance component for a full-time undergraduate course at a conservatoire or other higher education establishment (Trinity Guildhall, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> These two public examinations are scheduled to be cancelled and replaced by the Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education in 2012. Students who entered Grade seven in September 2006 will sit for the first Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination in 2012, after completing their six-year secondary education. The new curriculum reform intends to widen the knowledge base to allow students to cultivate in-depth learning in some subjects, and to promote whole-person development.

## Appendix

### Questionnaire Survey on Hong Kong Young Students

Unless stated otherwise, please use a tick “√” to indicate your choice in the boxes provided.

#### Section A: Personal information

1. Gender:     Male             Female
2. Age:     9     10  11     12     13     14     15     16     17 and above
3. Grade:
 

<input type="checkbox"/> Grade 4	<input type="checkbox"/> Grade 5	<input type="checkbox"/> Grade 6
<input type="checkbox"/> Grade 7	<input type="checkbox"/> Grade 8	<input type="checkbox"/> Grade 9
<input type="checkbox"/> Grade 10	<input type="checkbox"/> Grade 11	<input type="checkbox"/> Grade 12 <input type="checkbox"/> Grade 13
4. Which of the following people are the main source of your acquisition of musical knowledge? Please tick your most important choice.
 

<input type="checkbox"/> School music teachers	<input type="checkbox"/> Conductor of your school/community orchestra
<input type="checkbox"/> Private instrumental coach	<input type="checkbox"/> Orchestral members
<input type="checkbox"/> Siblings	<input type="checkbox"/> Parents
<input type="checkbox"/> Friends	<input type="checkbox"/> Others (please specify) : _____

#### Section B: Your family and your instrumental learning

1. Does/Did your father study any musical instrument(s)?
 

<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes. Please name the instrument(s): _____
-----------------------------	--
2. Does/Did your mother study any musical instrument?
 

<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes. Please name the instrument(s): _____
-----------------------------	--
3. Does/Did any of your brother(s) or sister(s) play any musical instrument(s)?
 

<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes. Please name the instrument(s): _____
-----------------------------	--
4. Please name your primary learned instrument(s) and year(s) of study:
 

Name of instrument: \_\_\_\_\_; Year(s) of study: \_\_\_\_\_
5. Where do/did you learn the musical instrument(s) with which you are most experienced? (Please tick only one)
 

<input type="checkbox"/> Music Office instrumental classes	<input type="checkbox"/> Private tutor(s)
<input type="checkbox"/> School music lessons	<input type="checkbox"/> Extra-curricular activities
<input type="checkbox"/> Others (Please specify: _____)	
6. My home environment always allows me to practise my instrument efficiently.
 

Highly disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Highly agree
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- 
7. On average, how many hours do you spend on instrumental practice each week?
- less than 1 hour     1 -3 hours     4-6 hours     7-9 hours     10-12 hours  
 13-15 hours     16-18 hours     19-21 hours     more than 21 hours
8. What is the most recent instrumental examination you have taken for your primary musical instrument?
- The Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM) Practical Examination in Grade \_\_\_\_\_ in the year \_\_\_\_\_.
- The Central Conservatory of Music Practical Examination in Grade \_\_\_\_\_ in the year \_\_\_\_\_.
- Other(s) (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- No examinations yet taken
9. Have you participated in the annual Music Festival for your musical instrument?
- Yes. I have participated in the Festival \_\_\_\_\_ times during my school education.
- No
10. What is the main reason for you taking instrumental classes?
- Compulsory in school to learn at least one instrument
- Interest in music
- For relaxation
- My school music teacher's encouragement
- My instrumental teacher's encouragement
- I find that I have musical capability
- Parental encouragement
- To learn with schoolmates/friends
- To play my favourite music
- To pursue a professional career in music
- To fill up time
- Influenced by the mass media
- Playing an instrument is common to every student
- Others (Please specify: \_\_\_\_\_)
11. Overall, I have a great interest in learning my primary instrument.
- |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Highly disagree          | Disagree                 | Undecided                | Agree                    | Highly agree             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
12. Overall, I enjoy practicing my music.
- |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Highly disagree          | Disagree                 | Undecided                | Agree                    | Highly agree             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
13. I will stop learning my primary instrument when I enter a higher grade in school.
- |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Highly disagree          | Disagree                 | Undecided                | Agree                    | Highly agree             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

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14. I will pursue music or my instrumental playing as a professional career.

Highly disagree      Disagree      Undecided      Agree      Highly agree  
                                                                                       

**Section C: Parental influence on your instrumental learning**

1. Which of the following people most strongly support your instrumental studies?

Please tick your most important choice.

- School music teacher(s)                       Conductor of your school/community orchestra
- Private instrumental teacher                       Orchestral member(s)
- Sibling(s)     Parent(s)
- Friend(s)
- Others (please specify) : \_\_\_\_\_

2. My parent(s) generally support my pursuit of music activities inside and outside of school.

Never              Seldom              Sometimes              Often              Always  
                                                                                       

3. My parent(s) encourage me to perform in community hall, school hall and other performing venues.

Never              Seldom              Sometimes              Often              Always  
                                                                                       

4. When I have my music performances, my parent(s) attend the concerts.

Never              Seldom              Sometimes              Often              Always  
                                                                                       

5. My parent(s) accompany me to classical concerts to perfect my instrumental playing.

Never              Seldom              Sometimes              Often              Always  
                                                                                       

6. My parent(s) give me their oral comments on my music practice at home.

Never              Seldom              Sometimes              Often              Always  
                                                                                       

7. My parents enjoy watching or listening to music programmes with me at home.

Never              Seldom              Sometimes              Often              Always  
                                                                                       

8. My parent(s) are willing to provide the monthly tuition fees required for learning my musical instrument(s) and other musical activities.

Never              Seldom              Sometimes              Often              Always

---

9. My parent(s) are willing to buy me an instrument or pay for my instrument rental.

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

10. My parent(s) support me buying music CDs or other audio-visual means to perfect my instrumental playing.

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

11. My parent(s) believe my musical results/achievements are equally as important as my academic results/achievements.

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

12. My parent(s) will support me if I choose to pursue music or instrumental playing as my future career.

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

13. On the whole, parental involvement is helpful to my instrumental learning.

Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**END**

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