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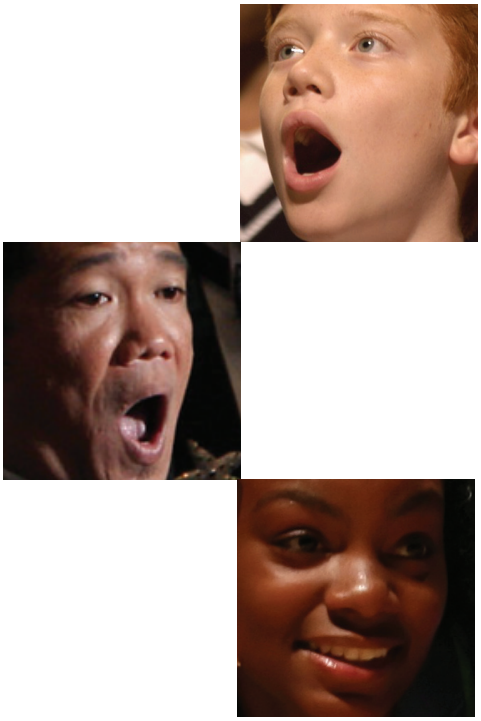

How Children, Adults, and Communities Benefit from Choruses

The Chorus Impact Study

With funding support from

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Foreword

Chorus America's work is dedicated to understanding choral organizations and meeting their needs. As the hub of information for independent choruses and through our service to the whole choral field, we have come to know a lot about choruses—from the broad strategic issues facing their leaders to the smallest operational detail of running a successful organization. We have long been committed to collecting and analyzing data about the choral field and, most recently, have extended our research beyond chorus organizations to choral singers themselves. While choral music is much more than the sum of its parts, from time to time it is valuable to stop and do the math.

The 2009 Chorus Impact Study accomplishes several goals. First, it tracks trends since Chorus America's 2003 Chorus Impact Study that confirmed choral singing as the most popular form of participation in the performing arts, and it sheds more light on the many attributes of those who sing in choruses. Next, it explores the value of singing for children in ways that no previous research has done before. And finally, it reveals an area of concern related to the diminishing number of choral singing opportunities for children, even though singing in a chorus provides overwhelming value for the youth who sing in them. While this research does not prove that choruses *cause* singers to gain attributes that are characteristic of success, the data—especially from parents and teachers surveyed—make the connections overwhelmingly strong. Simply put, if you're searching for a group of talented, engaged, and generous community members, you would do well to start with a chorus.

The choral field includes a great deal of diversity in terms of organizations, missions, repertoire, performance venues, and participants. One of the most surprising things about choruses, however, may be that even though their effects are all around us—with an impressive number of beautiful concerts being sung by an enormous number of talented singers—their many positive attributes are often overlooked. In a society that seeks civic engagement and student achievement, the data in this report suggests that it would be a mistake not to leverage the benefits that choruses bring to children, adults, and the communities they serve.

We trust that this study will further Chorus America's mission to build a dynamic and inclusive choral community so that more people are transformed by the beauty and power of choral singing.

Todd Estabrook
Chairman

Ann Meier Baker
President & CEO

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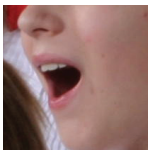
Executive Summary

In 2009 Chorus America commissioned a new study of choruses in American life with two primary goals: first to update baseline research that Chorus America commissioned in 2003, which sought to remedy the absence of information about choral singers, choruses, and their impact; and, to gather new data to shed light on the role of choral music experience in childhood education and development, as viewed from the perspective of both educators and parents.

The study was conducted by Grunwald Associates LLC (Bethesda, MD), who examined the attitudes, opinions, and activities of more than 2,000 singers in choruses of all kinds, 500 members of the general public, 500 parents, and 300 K-12 educators from throughout the United States using online surveys. Additionally, to estimate the number of choruses and choral singers, the research team used reliable sources such as Trimedia and others (see Methodology for details).



The picture that emerges from this data is striking. Across a wide variety of qualities found in successful people, there are strong associations between these characteristics and chorus participation. This powerful connection applies to both adults and children.

In virtually every case, parents of children in choruses were significantly more likely to ascribe to their children nearly every positive quality tested than parents whose children have never been part of one, and adult singers are significantly more likely to ascribe these qualities to themselves than are average Americans. Moreover, adult singers consistently credit their chorus participation for these positive attributes, parents credit chorus participation for these qualities in their children, and overwhelming majorities of educators believe choral participation has a wide variety of positive effects beyond even those identified by choral singers and choir parents. And yet, in spite of its apparent and myriad potential benefits, an alarming number of educators and parents say there is no choral program in their schools.

KEY FINDINGS

FINDING 1 | Choral singing continues to be the most popular form of participation in the performing arts.

- **Chorus participation remains strong in America.** Overall, 18.1% of households report one or more adults currently participate in a chorus, an even higher rate of participation than found in Chorus America's 2003 research. When children are added to the equation, participation jumps to 22.9% of households.
- When the total number of choral singers per household are tallied, **there are an estimated 32.5 million adults regularly singing in choruses today and 42.6 million Americans overall** (including children), both numbers up substantially from 2003, although some of this increase could be due to changes in methodology (see Research Notes).
- **There are nearly 270,000 choruses nationwide.** This total includes about **12,000 professional and community choruses** (which includes the independent choruses that comprise a majority of Chorus America's membership), **at least 41,000 K-12 school choruses**, and **216,000 religious choirs**. These estimates are believed to be conservative, based on the methodology used to calculate these figures (see Methodology).

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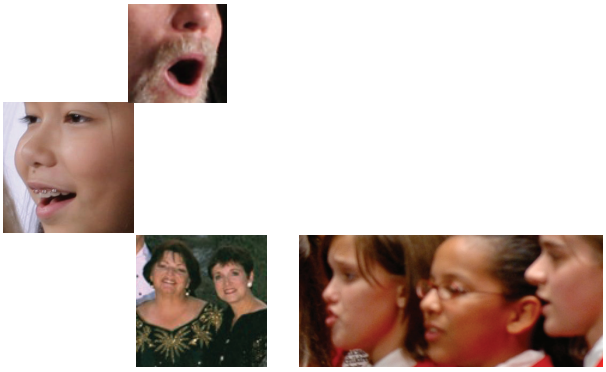

FINDING 2 | Adults who sing in choruses are remarkably good citizens.

- **Chorus members are avid patrons of the arts**, attending theater, opera, choral events, orchestra concerts, museums, and art galleries significantly more frequently than members of the general public.
- **Chorus members also volunteer significantly more frequently than the general public**. They're significantly more likely to say they volunteer frequently, fairly often, and/or at least sometimes, significantly less likely to say they almost never do so. They're also significantly more likely to regularly attend a church, mosque, or synagogue than general public members.
- **Chorus members are substantial financial contributors to their choruses**, and are contributing significantly more dollars now than in 2003. As was the case in the earlier research, choral singers **also contribute much more financially to philanthropic organizations than the average American**, and do so at rates that appear even slightly higher than before.
- More generally, **chorus members exhibit greater civic leadership** than their fellow Americans—they are significantly more likely to report voting regularly, reading books and newspapers regularly, contributing money to political parties or candidates, serving as officers of civic organizations, and working for political parties. And by most of these measures, chorus members have become significantly more civically engaged than they were in 2003.
- **Chorus participation appears to make members better team players** in other activities in their lives (outside chorus). Choristers are significantly more likely than others to self-report being reliable, willing to accept criticism, regularly accept assignments outside their area of expertise, and significantly less likely to say they don't get enough credit for what they do or get viewed by others as resources instead of allies. A large majority of choral singers credit chorus experience as key to their team participation or team leadership abilities and with helping them to socialize better in other areas of their lives.

FINDING 3 | Children who sing in choruses have academic success and valuable life skills.

- **Children who sing in choruses get significantly better grades** in school than kids who have never been part of a choir, according to their parents, and substantial majorities of parents with children in choirs say their child's ability or performance in English/language arts, mathematics, and academics overall improved after their child joined a choir.
- **Parents** whose children sing in choirs **are significantly more likely to report that their child has many other qualities conducive to learning and development** than parents of children who don't sing, including, among others, good memory, good practice and homework habits, and high levels of creativity. Sizable majorities of member's parents credit joining a choir for achievement in these areas and more.
- Parents of children in choirs are significantly and consistently more likely to report that their children are **better team players** and have **more advanced social skills** than parents of children who've never participated. An overwhelming majority of these parents date improvements in these areas to when their child joined a choir, and also say their child's ability to manage his/her emotions and/or read the emotions of others improved after they became choral singers.
- **Educators**—drawn widely across disciplines in our sample—**are even more emphatic about the positive role that choirs play** in childhood education and development. Large majorities of educators, often 80 percent or more, agree that choir participation can help make students better participants in groups, help develop stronger social skills, lead to better emotional expression and management, improve overall academic performance, help instill self-discipline and punctuality, and more.

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- **More than three-quarters of educators surveyed say they can tell which students in their classes participate in choirs**, with more than half of these saying they can "always" or "often" tell. And **more than half of all educators say they've recommended chorus participation to students or to their parents**.
- In addition, **vast majorities of educators believe choirs help schools and communities in a variety of other ways**, for example, that **choirs can keep some students engaged in school who might otherwise be lost**, help make students more active participants in school and more likely to attend classes in general, help get students more involved in their communities, and add to the overall sense of community in schools.
- While the arts and sports are often pitted as rivals for scarce school resources, **parents** say their **young choristers** are significantly **more likely to participate in sports** and **other extracurricular activities** than other children.

FINDING 4 | The decline in choral singing opportunities for children and youth is a key area for concern.

- In spite of its apparent and myriad potential benefits, **more than one in four educators say there is no choir program in their schools and one in five parents say there are no choir opportunities for their children in their communities** (the same proportion who say they would be "extremely" or "very" interested if a new choir for children started in their area).
- **Many parents whose children have stopped singing in a choir say they did not do so voluntarily**—one in five say they only stopped because the choir their child was involved in closed down, and one in eight said they left only because their child was no longer eligible (e.g. due to voice changes) and there were apparently no other appropriate choirs available for them to join.

In sum, *The Chorus Impact Study* confirms that introducing children to choral music opportunities when they are young develops future performers, audience members, and consumers of arts and culture well into adult years. Choral singing is an activity that fosters personal fulfillment and an appreciation of beauty for a lifetime. Moreover, singing with a chorus has life-long collateral benefits including fostering behaviors that lead to good citizenship. This is good news—and information that is important for policymakers, funders, educators, and chorus leaders to understand and leverage in their work on behalf of their communities.

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Chorus Impact Study Report

FINDING 1 | Choral singing continues to be the most popular form of participation in the performing arts.

Data from the U.S. general population sample in the research show that:

- 18.1% of households have one or more adults currently participating in a chorus, up from 15.6% in 2003.[1]
- When children are included, 22.9% of households have one or more current choral singers, up from 18% in 2003.[2]
- Based on the individuals/households identified as including choral singers by our respondents, there are an estimated 32.5 million adults regularly singing in choruses today, up from 23.5 million estimated in 2003.
- With children included, this number jumps to 42.6 million Americans overall regularly singing in choruses, up from 28.5 million in 2003.[3]

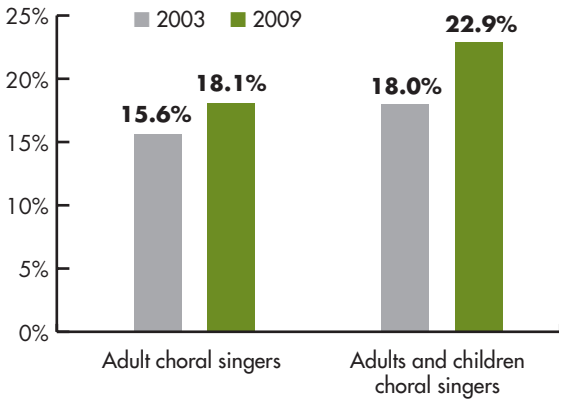
FINDING 2 | Adults who sing in choruses are remarkably good citizens.

Data gathered via a survey of 2,000 choral singers from across the U.S. who sing in choruses of all kinds validate Chorus America's 2003 research that benchmarked the remarkable breadth and depth of choral singing activity by people of all ages; in fact, choral singers today are even more engaged in their art form than ever.[4]

Other observed changes may be at least partially the result of obtaining a more representative sample in 2009 than in Chorus America's 2003 research, including:

- 38% of choristers say they rehearse more than once a week now, significantly more than the 34% who said the same in 2003.[5]
- 36% of chorus members say they perform more than once a month now, up significantly from 28% in 2003, and overall average numbers of performances/year[6] have increased significantly, too, from 9.9/year in 2003 to 11.3/year today.[7]

Chart 1: Proportion of U.S. Households with Choral Singers



SOURCE: 2003 AND 2009 GENERAL U.S. POPULATION SURVEYS

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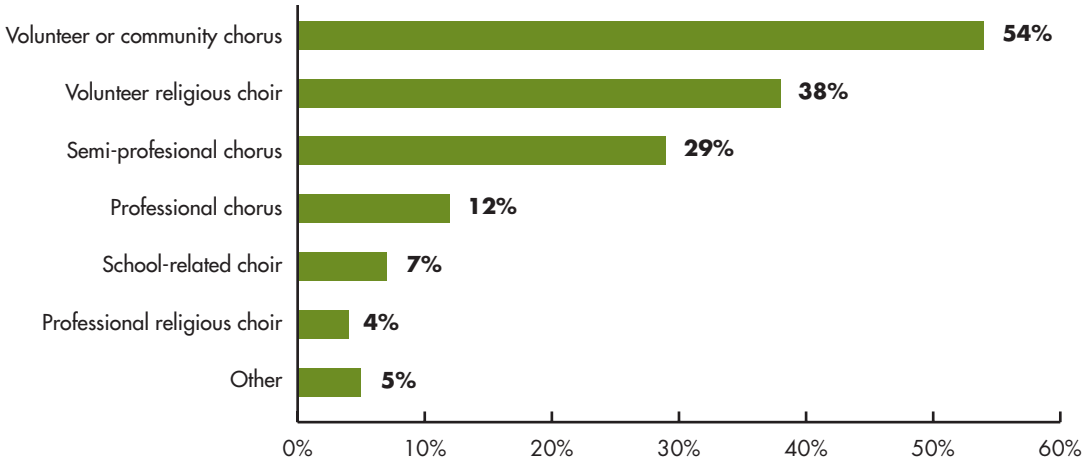
As shown in Chart 2, more than half of those surveyed participate in one or more volunteer or community choruses, with substantial proportions also taking part in one or more volunteer religious choirs and/or semi-professional choruses.[8]

Choral singers predominantly got their first choral experience in either elementary or middle school, though the overall centrality of the school experience seems to be waning since the 2003 research. Overall, 65% of choristers say their first choral experience was in elementary or middle school, down from 69% in 2003.[9] The drop in the proportion who say they got their first choral exposure in high school—from 14% in 2003 to only 9% today—is significant.

Just over half of choral singers (53%) say others in their households sang in choruses while they were growing up, down from 56% in 2003.[10] What is significant is the drop in the proportion of choral singers who say their parents or siblings went to choral performances while they were growing up—65% of choristers say this is true, down from 73% in 2003. Neither of these results can be accounted for by changes in the ethnic make-up of the survey sample.[11]

Chart 2: Types of Choruses Choral Singers Belong To



SOURCE: 2009 CHORUS MEMBER SURVEY

Chorus Members and Civic Engagement

When compared to members of the general public, choral singers report being significantly more philanthropic, civic-minded, and supportive of the arts. To start with, the average chorus member gives $267 per year to philanthropic organizations like the Red Cross and the United Way; a typical American gives an average of $104/year.[12]

Beyond this, chorus members are also bigger contributors to their communities in other ways:

- 19% of choristers say they "frequently" volunteer their time in their communities (in addition to the time they spend in their choruses); 12% of the general public can say the same.
- An additional 19% say they volunteer "fairly often," vs. 12% of average Americans.
- And 78% say they volunteer "at least sometimes," while only 50% of the general public can say the same.

In addition, 67% of chorus members say they regularly attend a church, synagogue, or mosque. This far outpaces average Americans; only 38% of the general public cites a similar rate of attendance.[13]

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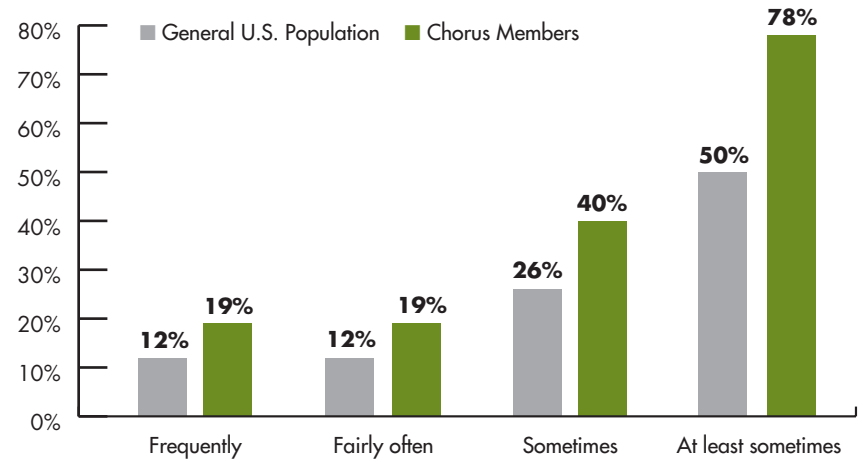
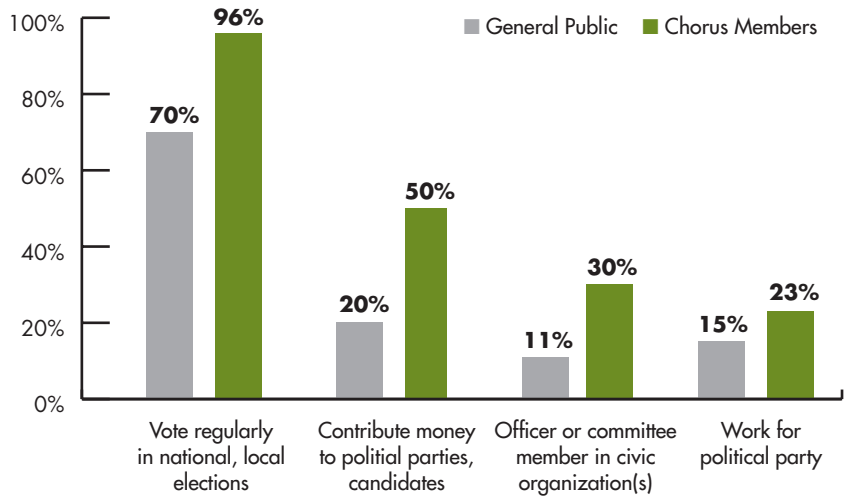
Chart 3: Frequency of Volunteer Activity*, Chorus Members vs. General Public



*In addition to time singers spend volunteering for their choruses

SOURCE: 2009 GENERAL U.S. POPULATION AND CHORUS MEMBER SURVEYS

Chart 4: Civic Engagement, Chorus Members vs. General Public



SOURCE: 2009 CHORUS MEMBER SURVEY

More generally, choral singers exhibit civic engagement in a variety of ways, all representing differences with the general public that are statistically significant:

- 96% of chorus members say they vote regularly in national and local elections; only 70% of the general public cites the same level of civic commitment.[14]
- 87% of chorus members have read a book in the last month; 59% of the general public says the same.
- 61% of chorus members read newspapers daily; 48% of the general public does.
- Half (50%) of all chorus members have contributed money to political parties or candidates; only 20% of the general public has done the same.
- 30% of chorus members serve as officers or committee members of civic organizations such as their local Rotary Club or PTA; this compares to 11% of the general public.
- 23% of chorus members have worked for a political party—while 15% of average Americans have done so.

Furthermore, as can be seen from Chart 4 above, choral singers have become more civic-minded in a variety of ways over the last five years, in most cases in a statistically significant way.

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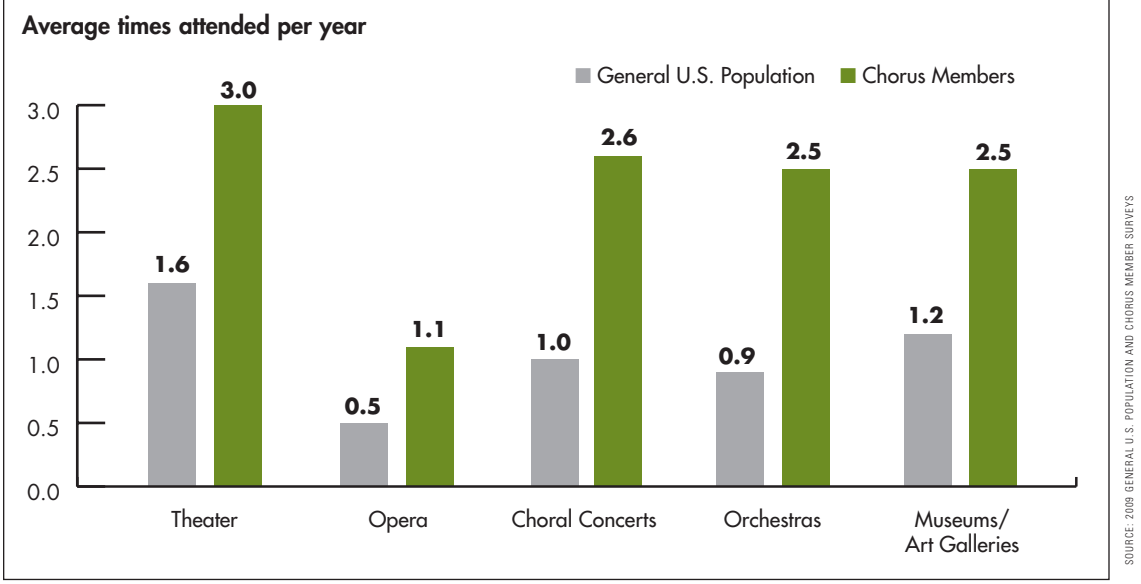
Choral singers are also more likely to exercise regularly than the general public, too (70% vs. 58%).

Finally, and not surprisingly, choristers' generally high level of civic engagement extends to a number of specific areas as well, particularly when it comes to patronage of the arts. For example:

- Chorus members attend an average of three theater performances/year; the general public less than two (1.6/year).
- Choristers go to the opera more than once a year (1.1/year); the general public less than once (0.5 times/year).
- In addition to their own performances, chorus members attend between two and three other choral performances/year (2.6/year); average Americans go an average of only once.
- Chorus members also go to orchestra events an average of two or three times a year (2.5/year), while the general public attends less than once (0.9/year).
- Choristers go to museums or art galleries two or three times a year, too (2.5/year); average Americans a little more than once (1.2/year).[15]

Chart 5: Patrons of the Arts, Chorus Members vs. General Public



SOURCE: 2009 GENERAL U.S. POPULATION AND CHORUS MEMBER SURVEYS

Choral Singing, Social Skills, and Emotional Intelligence

By any number of measures, chorus members appear to be better team players and team members in a variety of other contexts. For example:

- 95% of chorus members say reliability is one of their strong suits; only 78% of average Americans say the same.
- 61% of chorus members are willing to accept most criticism they receive as "fair and legitimate"; 43% of the general public feels this way.
- 47% of chorus members say they regularly accept assignments at work outside their areas of expertise; just 41% of average Americans agree.

What's more, chorus members are significantly *less* likely to say that others in their work environment view them more as resources than allies (only 29% of chorus members say this, vs. 39% of average Americans) or that they don't get appropriate credit for their ideas (22% say they come up with more of the best ideas in their organization than they get credit for, vs. 29% of the public at large). Since these qualities and feelings are often signs an individual lacks a fully realized team approach, the fact that chorus members are less likely than the general public to exhibit them indicates even more strongly how team-oriented the average choral singer is.

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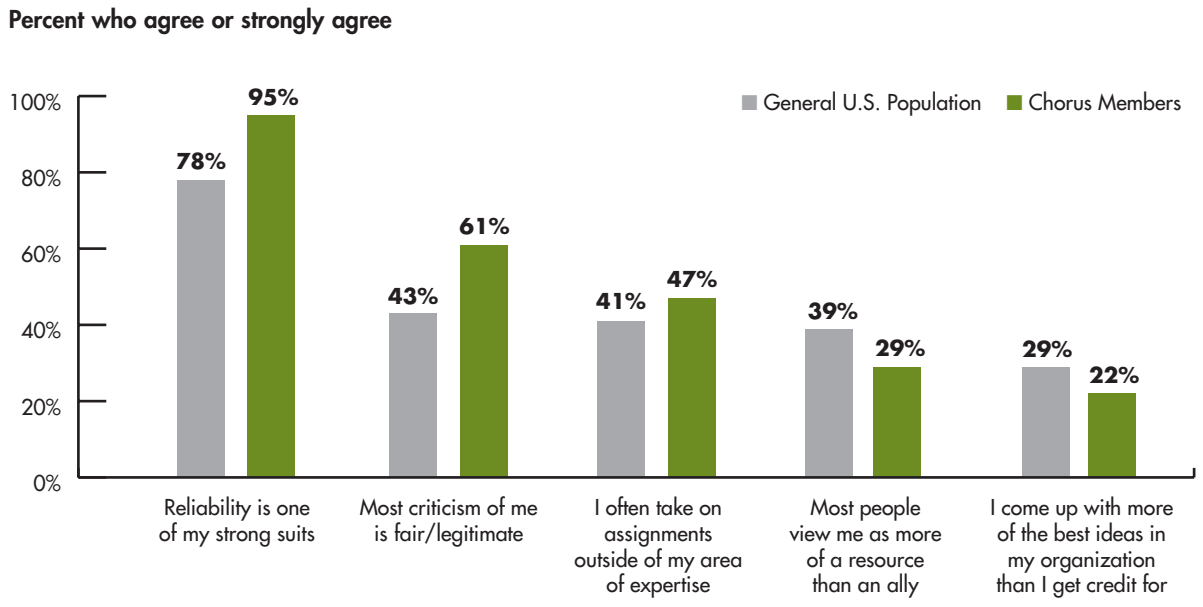
Chart 6: Choral Participation and Team Skills, Choral Singers vs. General Public



SOURCE: 2009 GENERAL U.S. POPULATION AND CHORUS MEMBER SURVEYS

It can be argued whether choruses are responsible for helping develop these skills or whether they simply attract and aggregate the types of people who already have them, but to choristers themselves, the answer to that question is clear: *74% agree or strongly agree that singing in a chorus has helped them become better team leaders or team participants in other areas of their lives.*

As with team and listening skills, a substantial majority of choristers are quick to credit their chorus participation for at least some of their prowess in social skills: *nearly two thirds (66%) agree or strongly agree that being in a chorus has helped them socialize better in other areas of their lives.*

FINDING 3 | Children who sing in choruses have academic success and valuable life skills.

If chorus participation can have as profound an effect on adult singers as the singers themselves say it does and a battery of related correlations suggest it does as well, it's natural to ask what impact choruses can have on the developing child. To ascertain this, online survey interviews were conducted with (1) 500 parents—some with children currently in choirs, some with children who used to be choristers, and some whose children have never participated (each parent was asked to choose one child about whom most of the questions of them would be asked); and (2) 300 K-12 educators. Both surveys were drawn from an existing, well-respected online panel.

It's important to note at the outset that choir participation is *not* a proxy for income or ethnicity, at least not in this sample. Children currently in choirs were no more statistically likely to come from high income families than they were to come from families of lesser means, and they were no more likely statistically to be white than African-American or vice versa.[16]

Similarly, the responses received from educators cannot be interpreted as the product of arts teachers protecting their turf. There were more language teachers, more math/science teachers, and more social studies/social science teachers surveyed than arts teachers and in nearly every

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case, there were no significant differences in the ways educators from different disciplines responded.

This is particularly notable given the current environment. With the increasing variety of social and other burdens on schools, competition for resources among different discipline groups has become, in many cases, a zero sum game. For this reason, educators outside the arts—and even arts instructors who don't teach choral music—have little or no self-interest in agreeing with favorable statements about the value of choruses. If anything, the reverse is true.

But whether asked about teambuilding or social skills, academics or the more general skills required to excel, school/community participation or choral singing's impact on school or community, *educators were, in many cases, virtually unanimous across disciplines about the positive impact chorus participation can and does have on children and their environments.*

For their own part, parents of children in choirs ascribed to their children virtually every positive quality tested at significantly higher rates than parents of children who have never joined a choral group. In fact, in many cases, parents whose children only formerly sang in choirs were more likely to ascribe these qualities to their children, too. Moreover, large majorities, in nearly every case, consistently date their child's progress to when he or she joined choir.

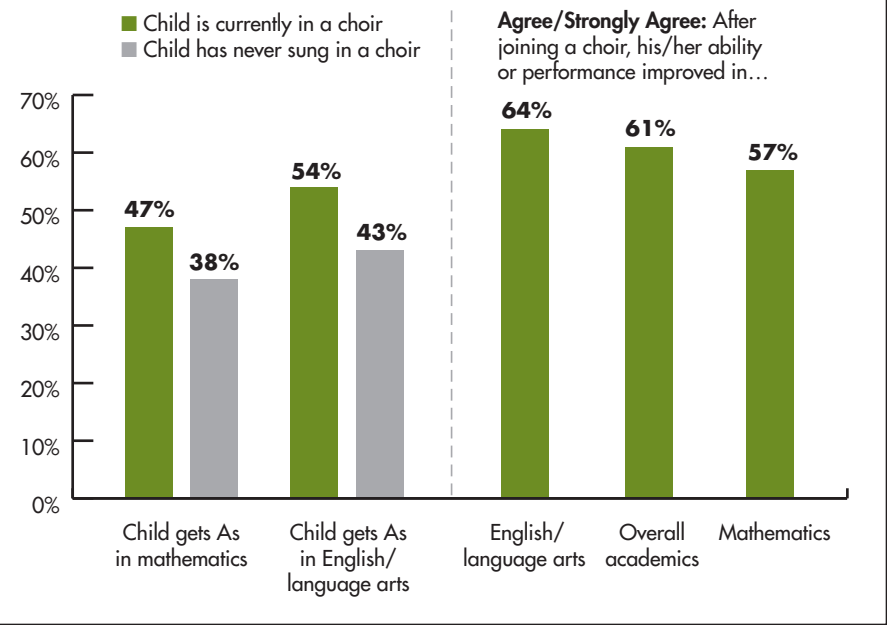
Academics and Other Success Skills

Parents with children currently singing in choruses report their children get significantly better grades than children who've never been a part of one—54% of parents with children in choruses say their child gets "all or mostly As" in language arts, vs. 43% of parents whose children have never sung; 47% of parents of choristers say their child gets "all or mostly As" in mathematics, vs. 37% of children who don't sing; and parents with children in choruses report significantly better grades overall as well.[17]

What's more:

- 64% of parents whose children are currently sing in choruses say their child's ability or performance in English/language arts improved since joining a chorus.
- 57% say their child's ability or performance in math improved.
- 61% say their child's academic performance overall improved after he or she became a member of a choir.

Chart 7: Choir Participation and Academic Performance



SOURCE: 2009 PARENTS SURVEY

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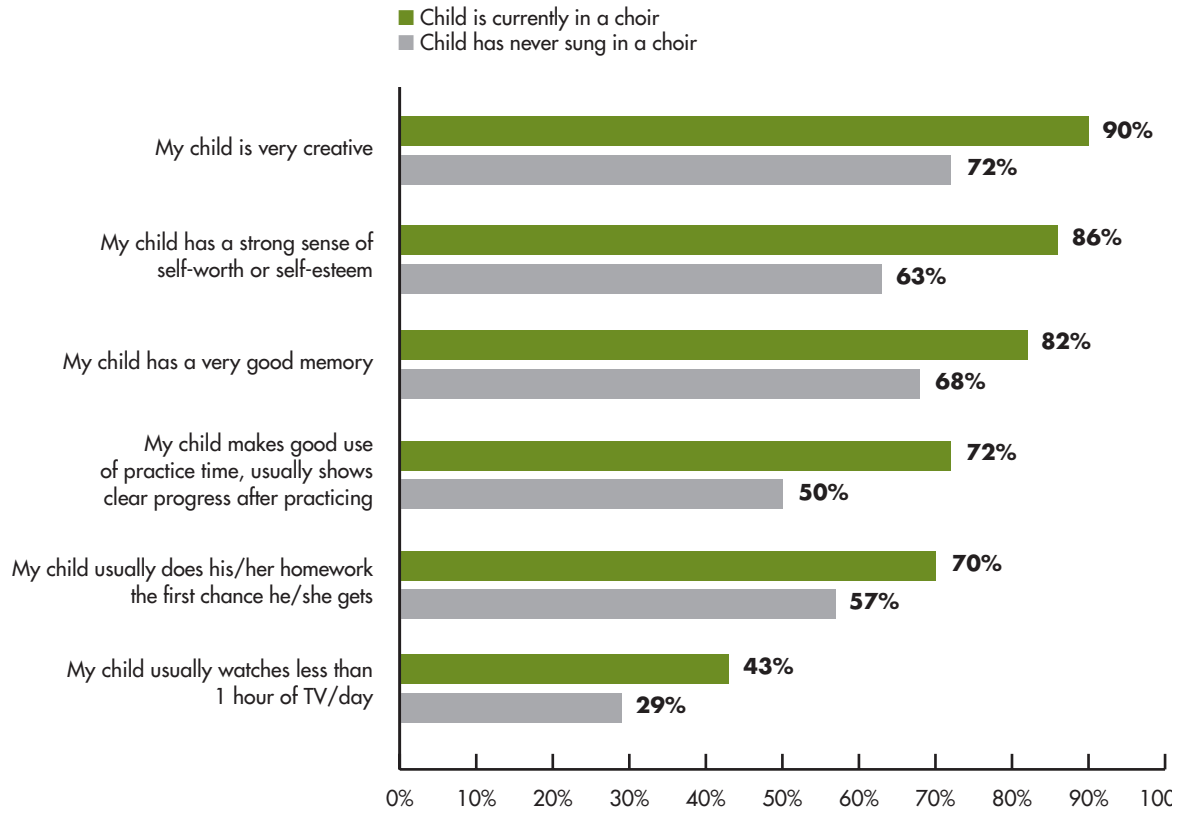
Even among parents whose children are no longer singing in choruses, twice as many said their child's overall academic performance improved after joining a chorus than disagreed, and nearly three times as many agreed their child's performance in language arts improved as well.

The apparent impact parents are seeing on their child's academic performance may be the result of a wide variety of influences that choral singing appears to have on other skills and qualities important for academic and life success. Again, there are a number of significant differences between children singing in choruses and those not participating. For example:

- 90% of parents whose children are in choir say their children are "very creative"; 72% of parents of children who don't sing in choruses say the same about their kids.
- 86% of choir parents say their child has a "strong sense of self-worth and self-esteem," vs. 63% of kids who are not in choir, according to their parents
- 82% of parents whose children are in choir say their kids have "very good" memories, vs. 68% of parents whose children have never been.
- 74% of choir parents say their child "usually practices the activities he/she is involved in without being told," vs. 54% of non-choir children, according to their parents.
- 43% of children in choirs "usually watch 1 hour or less of television a day," while 29% of non-choir children watch that little television.

Chart 8: Choir Participation and Children's Success Skills

Percent of parents who agree or strongly agree



SOURCE: 2009 PARENTS SURVEY

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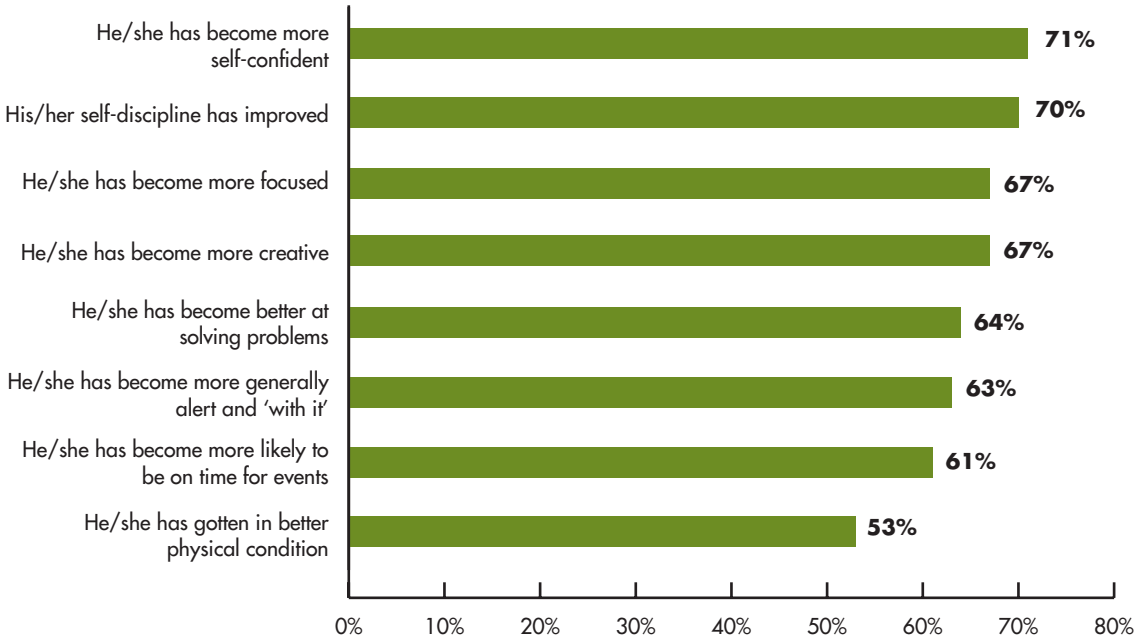
As with social skills, large majorities of parents correlate improvements in many of these qualities and behaviors to when their children became choristers. For example:

- 71% of parents of children in choruses say their child has become more self-confident since joining a choir.
- 71% say their child has become better at practicing for other activities since joining a chorus.
- 70% say their child's self-discipline has improved.
- 69% say their child's memory has improved.
- 67% say their child has become more focused.
- 67% say their child has become more creative.
- 64% say their child has become better at problem solving.
- 63% say their child completes chores and assignments more promptly and completely.
- 61% say their child has become more punctual (likely to be on time for events).

Chart 9: More on Choir Participation and Children's Success Skills

Percent of parents who agree or strongly agree: Since my child has joined a choir…



SOURCE: 2009 PARENTS SURVEY

All of these qualities and behaviors are integral to or involved in choir practice and performance, but the extent to which parents identify carry-over into other aspects of their children's lives is nevertheless remarkable. Even parents whose children are no longer in choirs testify in substantial numbers to choral participation correlations even though, for whatever reason, they could not or did not choose to keep their child in a chorus.[18]

Educators, in general, agree emphatically with parents' assessment of the choir participation's potential impact on children. For example:

- 94% of teachers believe that singing in a choir can enhance a child's self-confidence.
- 93% of teachers say choir participation can enhance a child's memory skills.

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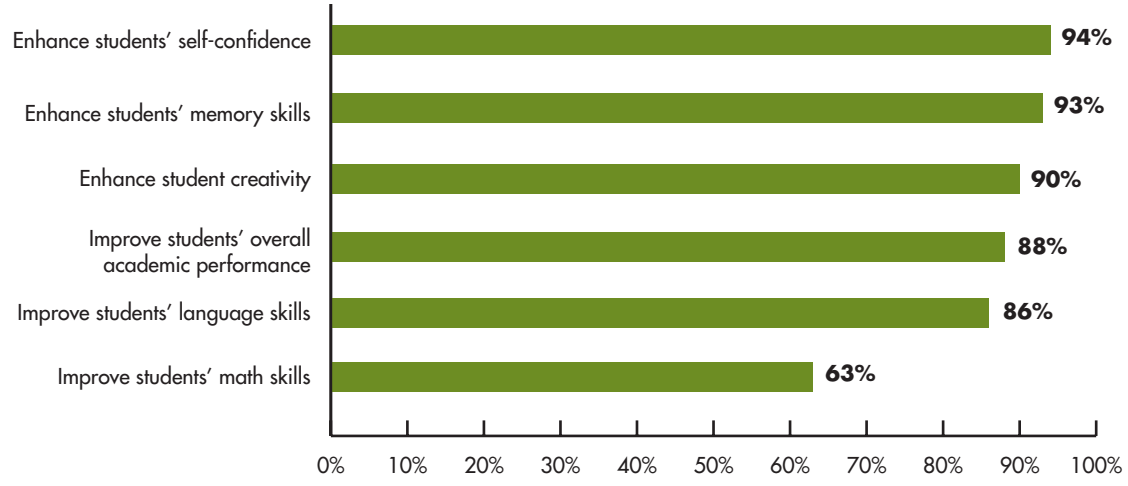
Chart 10: Educators on Choir Participation and Student Success Skills

Percent of educators who agree or strongly agree: Choir participation can…



SOURCE: 2009 EDUCATORS SURVEY

- 90% say choral singing can enhance student creativity.
- 90% say that singing in a choir can instill efficient and effective practice habits.
- 81% believe choruses can help students make better connections between disciplines.[19]
- 88% say singing in a choir can improve a child's overall academic performance.
- 86% say choral singing can improve a child's language skills.
- 63% say singing in a choir can improve a child's abilities in math.

In light of all these benefits, it's perhaps not surprising to learn that more than half of all educators (54%) across disciplines have recommended singing in a choir, at least at some point in time, either to individual students, their classes as a whole, or recommended to parents that they sign up their child to join. Only 23% agree with the premise that chorus participation detracts from other academic activities.

Teambuilding, Social Skills, and Choruses

By any number of measures, parents report that children who sing in choruses are significantly better group contributors and team players than those who are not. For example:

- 87% of chorister parents say their child helps around the house, vs. 64% of children who have never been in a choir.
- 83% say their child participates a lot in class discussions; only 57% of parents of children who don't sing in choruses say the same about their child.
- 84% say their child is a strong contributor to group activities, vs. only 52% of children who don't sing.
- 77% say their child is happiest in groups, vs. only 49% of children who don't sing in choruses.

In most cases, these significant differences also exist between children who *used* to be in choir and those who have never been as well. Furthermore, large majorities of parents attribute or connect these characteristics to their child's choir participation in some way. Specifically, *77% of parents whose children are in a chorus say that since their child joined, he/she works better in groups and/or is a better "team player."* Even parents whose children no longer sing in a chorus are 40-plus times more likely to agree than disagree with this view of choir's effect on their children.

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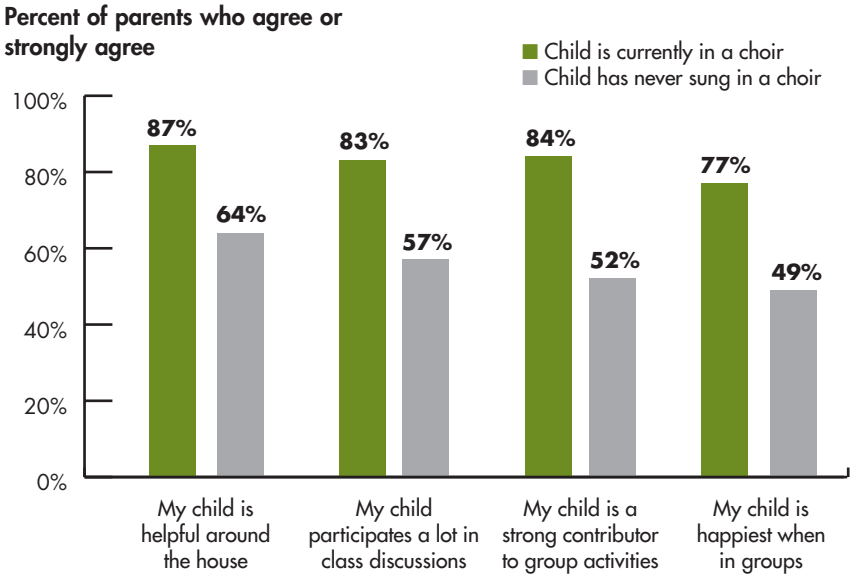
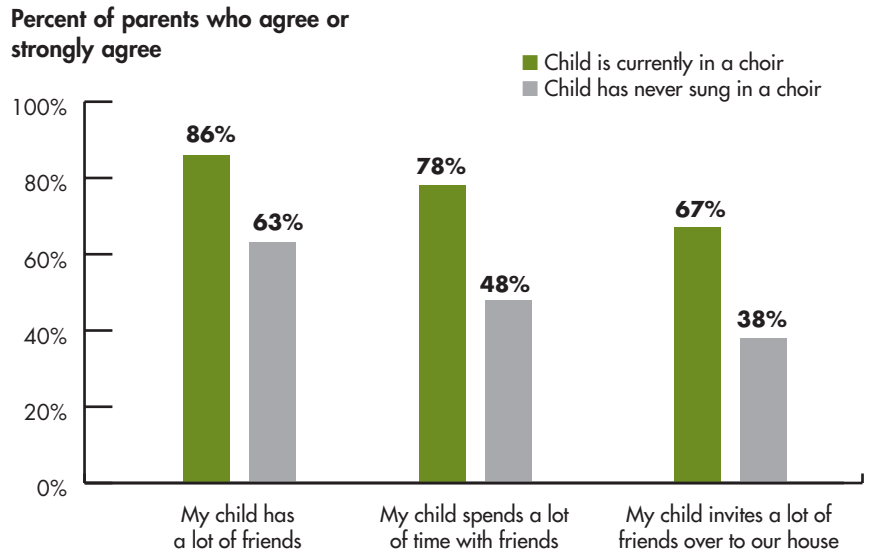
Chart 11: Choir Participation and Teambuilding Among Children



SOURCE: 2009 PARENTS SURVEY

Chart 12: Choir Participation and Children's Social Skills



SOURCE: 2009 PARENTS SURVEY

What's more, educators agree with parents about the teambuilding impact: *93% of educators agree that participation in choruses can make students better participants in other groups, and 89% agree that choral singing can get students more involved in their communities*—findings that are independent of the educators' disciplines.

In addition to teambuilding, parents of children that sing in choirs are significantly more likely to report strongly developed social skills in their children than parents whose children don't participate. For example:

- 86% of parents whose children sing in a choir say their child has a lot of friends, vs. 63% of parents of children whose child has never participated.
- 78% of choir parents say their child spends a lot of time with friends; only 48% of children who don't sing in a chorus do the same, according to their parents.
- 67% of choral singers' parents say their child invites a lot of friends over to their house; only 38% of children who don't sing do so.

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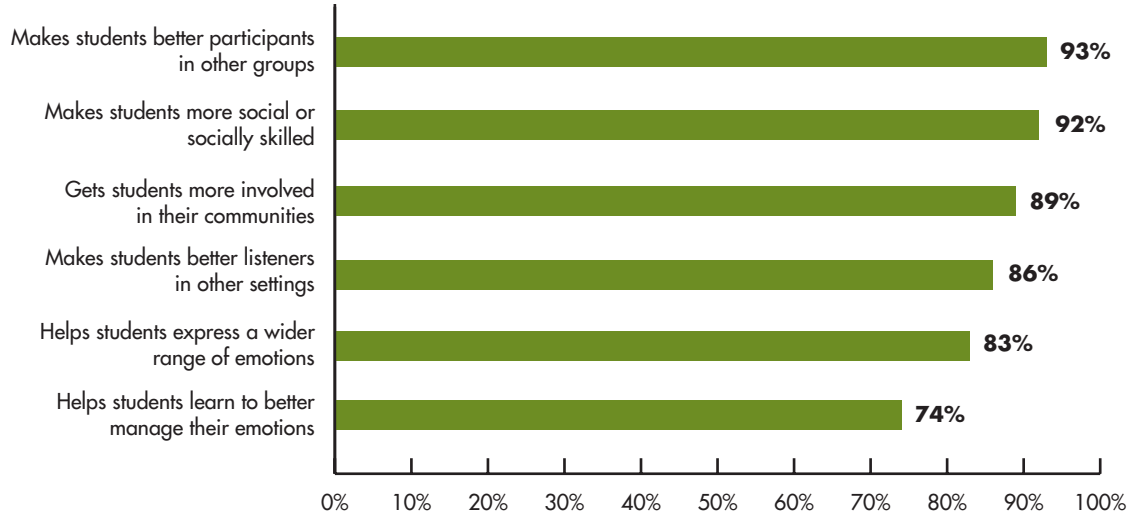
Chart 13: Educators on Student Choir Participation and Social Skills

Percent of educators who agree or strongly agree: Student choir participation…



SOURCE: 2009 EDUCATORS SURVEY

In all cases, parents of children who used to be in a chorus report similar significant differences. Again, a substantial majority of parents attribute at least some of their child's social proclivities to choral singing—*77% say their child has become more social with other children and made more friends since joining a choir.* Even parents whose children are no longer singing in a chorus agree by nearly a three-to-one margin that their child's social skills improved after joining a choir.

What's more, *60% of parents whose children sing in choirs today say their child's ability to read others' emotions or manage their own has improved since their child joined a choir*—only 8% disagree. And even when parents whose children are no longer singing are added to the mix, nearly five times as many parents date positive changes in their child's sociability to when they started singing in a chorus than disagree.

Educators agree strongly with these parent observations. *Independent of the subjects they teach:*

- 92% of teachers say participation in choirs can make students more social or socially skilled.
- 83% of teachers agree participation in choirs can lead to students expressing a wider range of emotions.
- 74% of teachers agree participation in choir can help students learn to better manage their emotions.

The research shows that children who sing in a chorus are also significantly more likely to be better listeners than children who don't participate. For example:

- 79% of choir parents say their child's teachers consider them to be good listeners, vs. 60% of other children.
- 76% of choir parents find their children to be good listeners; only 54% of parents of other children agree about their own children.

And again, large majorities of parents attribute at least some of their child's listening skills to the choirs they belong to: *70% of parents with children in choirs say their kids have become better listeners since joining a choir.* Even when parents whose children used to be in choirs are added to the mix, more than five times as many parents of children in choruses—past or present—say their children became better listeners after joining than disagree with this assessment.

At the same time, children in choruses are significantly more likely than non-participants to dominate interactions with their peers (55% vs. 38%)—though that could be as much a result of leadership qualities as an unwillingness to listen. A smaller number of children in choruses are more likely to have difficulties focusing (44% vs. 33%) or letting their parents "get a word in edgewise" (34% vs. 23%).[20]

Nearly nine out of ten (86%) teachers believe participation in choruses can make students better listeners in other settings, a result that is independent of teacher discipline.

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Choral Singers in the School and Community

The arts and sports are often pitted as rivals for scarce school resources, but the fact is that children who sing in choruses are significantly more likely to be sports participants as well: 64% of kids currently in choirs regularly participate in one or more sports either in or out of school—only 45% of children who have never been in a chorus engage in sports, according to their parents. The same is true of other activities: 55% of current children choristers also participate in one or more other activities; only 33% of children who don't sing are doing the same.

Clearly choruses are not the only extracurricular activity most of these children are participating in, yet parents definitively date their child's improvements in a variety of areas to their joining a choral group. That, and the breadth of benefits described by both parents and educators, argues for a unique "chorus effect," one that isn't simply replicated by participation in other extracurriculars.

And in fact, educators support the existence of this effect in large numbers: 76% of teachers say they can tell which children in their class participate in a choir, the majority of these educators reporting that they can "always" or "often" tell which of their students are choristers. This effect is particularly pronounced in schools where large percentages of children are in choirs.[21] In these schools, 95% of educators say they can tell which students sing in chorus and which do not.

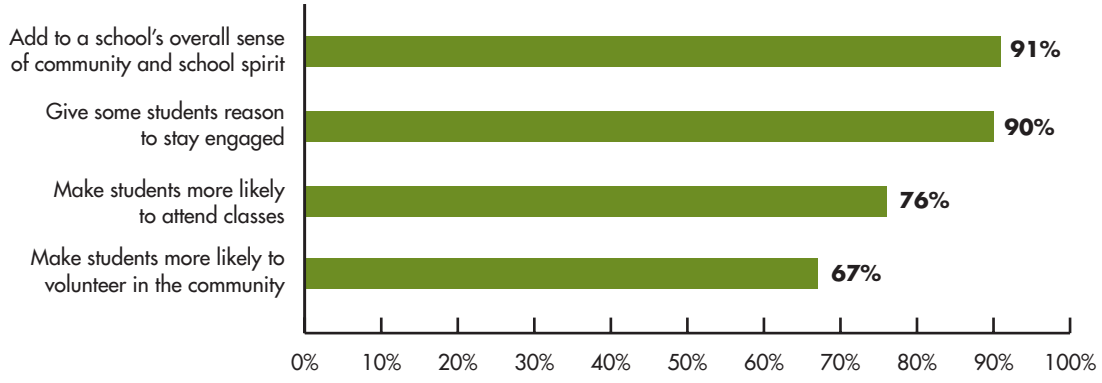
But chorus membership is also part of a broader phenomenon pointed to by educators in particular—the impact of choruses on students' school and community participation. For example:

- 90% of educators believe choral singing can keep some students engaged in school who might otherwise be lost—this is particularly true of educators (94%) who describe the ethnicity of their schools as diverse.
- 78% of educators believe that choral singers are more active participants in their schools in general, and educators from schools where choral participation is high are particularly likely to agree with this assessment (89%).
- 76% of teachers believe singing in a choir can make students more likely to attend other classes and, again, educators who come from schools where substantial numbers of students sing in choirs are particularly likely (88%) to say this.
- 67% of teachers believe choral participation can make students more likely to volunteer in their communities; 82% of teachers in schools with high chorus participation say they know it to be so.

As a result of all these perceived effects, it's probably no surprise that 91% of educators believe choruses add to a school's overall sense of community, with as many as 95% of the teachers whose schools have choral programs and 95% of those who teach in schools where chorus participation is high agreeing with this assessment. At a time in our nation's history when it has become critically important to solve the daunting challenges that face our schools and our society, it may be the impact of choral singing on overall school and community participation that proves the most important benefit of all.

Chart 14: Choir Participation and School, Community Participation

Percent of educators who agree or strongly agree: Choir participation can…



SOURCE: 2009 EDUCATORS SURVEY

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Finding 4 | The decline in choral singing opportunities for children and youth is a key area for concern.

Despite their myriad benefits, children's choirs have become an increasingly scarce resource. Consider the fact that:

- Nearly one in five (19%) parents say there are no choir opportunities for their children in their locale, at least none they are aware of.
- The same proportion of parents (19%) of children who have never sung in a choir say they would be "extremely" or "very" interested in signing up their child for a choir if a new one started up in their community.
- More than one in four educators (28%) say there is no choir program in their school.

Schools have been a primary source of free opportunities to sing in choruses—as many parents say the reason their child is not in a choir is because their school has no program (20%) as say there are no choral opportunities for their child at all. Of the educators who said that their school has no choir program today, nearly a third (31%) said their school used to have such a program.

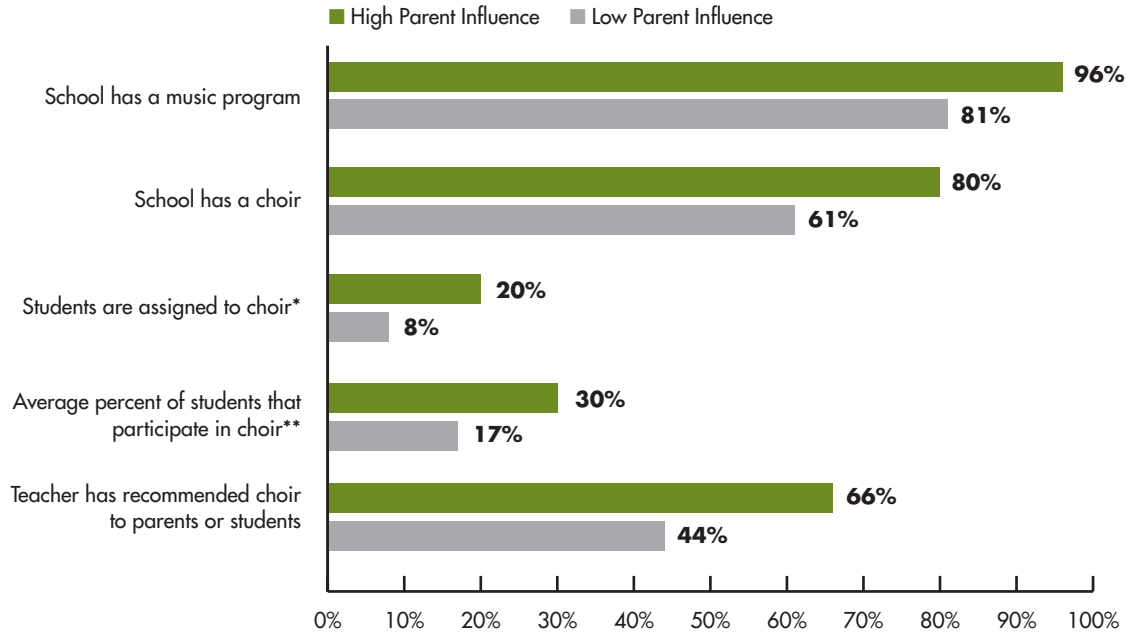
There are similar issues regarding independent children's choirs as well. One in five (20%) parents whose children were no longer in choirs said they left because their choir closed down and one in nine parents (12%) told us their child left only because he or she was no longer eligible (e.g. voice change, age limit) and there apparently wasn't an appropriate choir for them to join.

We also investigated the role parental involvement may have to play with respect to choral music programs.

Educators report that schools where parental involvement is high[22] are:

- Significantly more likely to have music programs than schools where parental influence is low (96% vs. 81%).
- Significantly more likely to have choir programs than low parental influence schools (80% vs. 60%).
- Significantly more likely to assign students to choirs, rather than just let them elect to join (20% vs. 8%).
- Have significantly higher proportions of students involved in choirs (30% vs. 17%).[23]
- Significantly more likely to have teachers who recommend to parents that their children join a choir, or recommend it directly to children themselves (66% vs. 44%).
- Significantly more likely to agree with every positive assessment of choir's benefits for children.

Chart 15: Choir Parents and Parental Involvement in Schools



*If a school has a choir program **If choirs are present in school or community

SOURCE: 2009 PARENTS SURVEY

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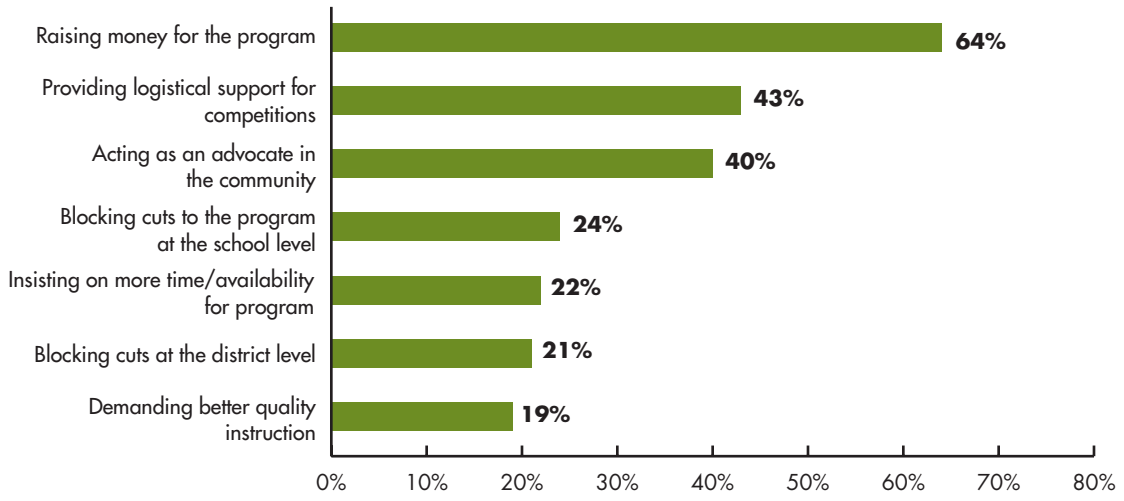
To some extent, parental influence in the categories tested may be a demographic proxy high parental influence schools are disproportionately likely to be described by their educators as "mostly white" and more likely to be described by educators as "wealthy" than "poor", though in both cases, most "high influence" and "low influence" schools are middle class, not rich or poor.[24] But in general, the differences between high parental influence and low parental influence schools are more extreme, in many cases much more extreme, with respect to every choir-related measure than any such demographic contrasts.[25] Overall, then, it seems clear that parental influence in general, and specifically with regard to choir programs, is both an independent force and an important tool for chorus advocates today.

According to educators, in less than a third (30%) of schools do parents actually have a high degree of influence specifically over choir programs. However, in schools where parents are influential in this area, their reach is positive and widespread, as seen in the chart below.

In fact, schools where *general* parental influence (as well as specific influence over the choir program) is high are even more likely to insist on more time and/or availability for the program (33%), block cuts at the district level (26%), demand better quality instruction (26%), and help recruit other singers (19%). But general parental involvement can, in a relatively small number of cases, be a double-edged sword, pointing up the need for choir advocates to nurture these relationships and not take them for granted. Specifically, parents in schools where general parental involvement is high are also significantly more likely to have demanded that their choral program be eliminated (10% vs. 3%) and/or reduced (11% vs. 1%).

On any given day, choruses across the country in towns both large and small present hundreds of beautiful concerts—audiences and choral singers alike have long understood the intrinsic value of choral music. The data in this report confirms that choral singing is a thriving and growing form of artistic expression, and in addition to providing great musical performances, choruses advance many of the positive qualities associated with success in life both for children and adults. These benefits are particularly relevant in addressing the challenges in society today.

Chart 16: What Parents Are Doing In Schools Where They Have Influence Over Choir Programs



SOURCE: 2009 EDUCATORS SURVEY

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Recommendations

HOW TO USE THIS REPORT

Chorus America's 2009 *Chorus Impact Study* clearly shows the power of choruses to enrich the cultural and civic life of our communities, as well of the lives of those who sing in them. The study's findings are a rich resource for articulating the positive characteristics and accomplishments of choruses and the singers that comprise them. The study should be used to inform planning and decisionmaking, to make the case for partnerships between communities and choruses, and to develop financial support that ensures the sustainable future of the art form.

Here are some ways to use these results to inspire new and creative connections between choruses and their communities.

Chorus Leaders

1. Discuss with elected officials, community leaders, and other policymakers the many ways your chorus benefits your community. Use Chorus America's *Chorus Impact Study Tools* (available at *www.chorusamerica.org*) to illustrate how choral singers are an influential and civic-minded constituency.
2. Use data from the study in your grant proposals and development opportunities. Illustrate the positive impacts of choral singing on youth, adults, entire towns, regions, and beyond.
3. Throughout multiple media channels—programs, emails, websites, newsletters, subscription letters, donor receptions, and pre-concert lectures—use information from the study to help establish an awareness of the personal and communal benefits of choral singing.
4. Leverage Chorus America's tool kit to develop a media strategy for your chorus. Promote the enormous impact of the art form in addition to your own concerts and programming.
5. Invite civic leaders and elected officials to your concert. Recognize each performance as an advocacy opportunity.

Parents and Educators

1. Use Chorus America's *Parent Guide: Advocating for the Choral Arts in Your Child's School* to encourage school boards and administrators to begin, revive, or expand arts programs. Highlight the findings that show exposing children to choral singing promotes heightened academic performance, civic involvement, and socialization skills.
2. Share Chorus America's *Top 10 Reasons to Sing* with your children to encourage their participation in a chorus.
3. Involve children in the arts by taking them to concerts, singing with them at home, and exposing them to other art forms.
4. Admission to higher education institutions is increasingly competitive. A balance of academics, arts participation, civic involvement, and athletics is typically expected. Choral singing is an excellent channel to fulfill the artistic component of a child's development and education.
5. As an educator, recommend chorus participation to all your students, especially to children who exhibit lower self-confidence or a reluctance to join activities inside and outside of the classroom. The study indicates choral singing has strong connections with the development of key social skills and self-esteem.

Community Leaders and Policymakers

1. There are more than 42.6 million American adults and children singing in choruses today and this number is growing. Get to know these people. Who are they? Where and when do they perform?

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2. Choral singers are a large and influential group of people who exhibit high levels of volunteerism, civic involvement, and patronage of other art forms. Consider the power of this constituency and think about how you can partner with singers and choruses to mobilize positive change in your local communities.
3. Look for additional ways to involve choruses in community gathering and events.
4. The study reveals that children who sing develop heightened social skills and achieve a higher level of academic success than children who don't sing. Ensure that every child has access to performing arts programs in their schools and communities.
5. Do your part in making certain that your town, region, and state benefit from a healthy arts sector. Give consideration to policies that encourage the development and sustainability of choruses and other arts organizations.

Funding Community

1. Consider how your grant appropriation allows for the sustainability of these valuable organizations.
2. Involve representatives of the choral community in your convenings, research, policy, and planning dialogues.
3. Choral singers have a greater impact on their communities beyond their artistic contributions. Understand the leadership roles they play as volunteers, civic leaders, and as contributors to charitable causes. Consider how these leadership qualities can contribute to your efforts to identify and support worthy community initiatives.

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Acknowledgments

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Many thanks to Peter Grunwald and Tom de Boor of Grunwald Associates LLC (Bethesda, MD), and Drew Richardson, of Lucidity Research, who consistently went above and beyond the borders of their contract to lead this research project on behalf of Chorus America.

KSA-Plus Communications (Arlington, VA) contributed valuable communications support via expert guidance from Senior Project Director Bonnie Jacob and from President and CEO Adam Kernan-Schloss. Additional pro bono communications support was provided by Kathy Bonk and Phil Sparks at the Communications Consortium Media Center (Washington, DC). Chorus America Board Member Tad Czyzewski played an important role in helping develop tools for Chorus America members to use to put this data into action for their own choruses and communities. Danielle Lees of DLG Design provided impeccable design in a very short timeframe.

This project was guided by the Chorus America Board's Impact Study Task Force whose members include Anton Armstrong, Paul Caldwell, Corty Fengler, Joyce Garrett, Jim Grigsby, Elfrieda Heinrichs, Susan Knight, Gayle Ober, Alice Parker, Debbie Patel, Dianne Peterson, Susan Reardon, and Frank Stubbs. The Task Force has been led by Chorus America's Chairman, Todd Estabrook, whose unfailing support for this research and belief in its value to the field helped move this project from the idea stage to the final report.

Chorus America's staff operates much like a chorus dedicated, skilled staff members work together as one. But two staff members deserve special mention for their efforts with this project: Catherine Davies who, among other things, played a key role in helping to hone the survey instruments and reviewed the data with the finest of fine-tooth combs; and Robin L. Perry, who is the most skilled communications director an organization could ever wish for. —*Ann Meier Baker*

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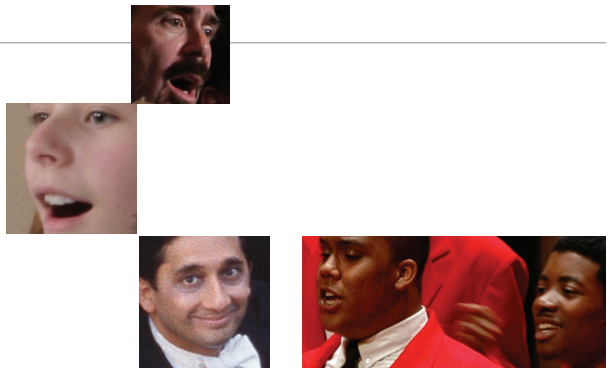
About Chorus America



Chorus America strengthens choral organizations and provides their leaders with information, research, leadership development, professional training, and advocacy to help them deliver the best possible contributions to their communities and to the choral art.

Chorus America provides invaluable news, resources, and expertise delivered in myriad accessible ways. Chorus America's programs bring professionals and volunteers together to learn and collaborate in a friendly, supportive environment that promotes networking, information exchange, and shared goals. Chorus America speaks with a strong and unified voice to increase recognition of choral singing as an essential part of society.

Chorus America's work is funded by membership dues and registration fees, and by generous gifts from individuals, private foundations, businesses, and government support. Members include choruses of every kind, individuals associated with choruses, and businesses that work with choruses. Chorus America is headquartered in Washington, DC and is governed by a board of trustees from across North America.

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Methodology

Choral Singer Survey

2,053 choral singers participated in an online survey; recruitment was done from Chorus America's own lists and the lists of associated or collaborating choruses, choirs, or choral organizations. Per standard research best practices, the results were weighted by ethnicity and region, specifically African-Americans were oversampled and weighted up; regional oversamples that were conducted for project funders were weighted down in the overall report.

General Public Survey

500 members of the general public were interviewed by means of an online survey; recruitment was done via a high quality, nationally representative panel. These results were weighted and balanced by age, gender, educational attainment, race/ethnicity, and region. There was also a minimum requirement for African-American and Hispanic participation, which was met in both cases.

Parent Survey

500 parents of children ages 6-17 were interviewed by means of an online survey; recruitment was done via a high quality, nationally representative panel. (An established and respected approach, a research panel is a group of people who volunteer to be surveyed periodically and are demographically representative of the U.S. population per the Census.) These results were weighted and balanced by age of target child, age of parent, and household income; there was also a minimum for African-American and Hispanic participation applied, which was met in both cases.

Educator Survey

300 K-12 educators were interviewed by means of an online survey; recruitment was done via a high quality, nationally representative panel. Because there is no Census-based standard demographic profile for K-12 teachers, no weighting or balancing was applied. The population was drawn from a wide range of academic disciplines.

Why Online?

For a variety of reasons, online surveys are, at this point, superior to traditional RDD instruments. With large percentages of Americans now online, it is relatively easy to draw demographically representative samples, while phone surveys are experiencing increasing difficulties reaching key segments such as those Americans who use only cell phones or those who use caller ID to screen out survey houses and other forms of solicitation. Online surveys can also be more accurate in terms of transcribing respondents' answers and intent than telephone surveys, in that respondents may be more honest in their answers in an online survey, and that such surveys can allow for more detailed and in-depth responses.

Estimating the Total Number of Choruses

Total (Conservative) Estimate: 270,000
(rounding from 269,000)

K-12 School Choruses
According to Market Data Retrieval, a leading provider of educational data, about 33,800 teachers (as of December 2008) identify themselves as choral directors in public and private schools at all levels. In addition, a national association of music educators estimates that 15 to 20% of school chorus directors lead more than one chorus, and many direct more than two choruses. Multiplying 33,800 by a factor of 1.15 comes to nearly 39,000 K-12 school choirs. But MDR only covers 95% of K-12 educators; if we assume the same proportion of the remaining 5% as the first 95% are chorus directors, and apply the same multiplier for choruses/director, the total number of K-12 school choruses is estimated to be nearly 41,000.

Church Choirs
Fort Worth-based Trimedia, a leading provider of church data, has contact information for 168,000 church music directors. If we assume, conservatively, that only 83% of these music directors lead church choirs, this drops the number of church choir directors to 140,000. But many churches with choirs have multiple choirs, including youth and children's choirs. A conservative multiple factor of 1.2 would put the total of choirs for these churches

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back up to 168,000, and a more reasonable factor of 1.33 would bring the number up to 186,000 choirs. But Trimedia's list is incomplete: it includes only 301,000 churches, whereas the number of churches in the United States is variously estimated at between 300,000-400,000 (see e.g. ABC News). If we assume that the true number is at the midpoint of these estimates, at 350,000, assume the same proportion of these additional 49,000 churches have music directors as the first 301,000, assume the same proportion of music directors are choir directors, and apply the same 1.33 multiplier for choirs/director, there are about 30,000 church choirs not covered by Trimedia, for a total of 216,000 church choirs. Even this number is very conservative because there are undoubtedly many churches with choirs for which Trimedia does not have music director contact information and even churches with choirs with no official music director at all. As a result, our estimate assumes that only 56% of churches have music at all (i.e. the percentage of Trimedia's churches for which Trimedia has music director contact information), which will seem extremely low, we believe, to anyone familiar with churches.

Independent Professional and Community Choruses

Arriving at a figure for independent professional and community choruses is more difficult, but the total could easily be 12,000. As of 2003, the American Choral Directors Association alone included in its membership directors of 1,000 professional choruses and 5,000 community choruses.[26] If no more than half of the directors of all professional and community choruses in the nation are members that would add another 12,000 choruses to the total. Additionally, Chorus America counts as dues paying members just over 700 choruses (professional, volunteer, symphony/opera, and children/youth). Projections from state choral directories online indicate that 12,000 may actually be a fairly conservative number, particularly if college choirs (not included in any of our other categories) are added to the mix.[27]

Data Sources

Market Data Retrieval:
http://www.schooldata.com/mdrteachernames.asp

Trimedia:
http://www.trimediaonline.com/dcards/TC002.htm

ABC News:
http://abcnews.go.com/US/Story?id=93111&page=1

Wisconsin Choral Directory:
http://my.execpc.com/~regent/choi.htm

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Research Notes

[1] This apparent increase does not rise to the level of statistical significance, because we have only 78% confidence that there is an upward difference between the 2003 and 2009 results. Chorus participation in 2003 was ascertained by means of a single question in 2003 (asking whether any adults participate), while in 2009 we used two questions (asking about the respondent him/herself [12.5% of respondents self-identified as choristers], then a checklist of others in the household [from which we extracted respondents who indicated they do not participate but that others in the household do, and added these respondents to those who reported themselves as chorus participants to arrive at 18.1% of respondents].

[2] This difference is statistically significant. It's important to note that our definition of choral singers is more inclusive than others, who often do not include children and whose methodology often excludes singers in religious choirs (e.g. by limiting definitions to participation in "public performance") that represent a substantial proportion of all choristers.

[3] These figures were derived by compiling "adult singers/household" and "total singers/household" values from our general population respondents, then multiplying by the U.S. Census' projected number of households in 2008, i.e. 112,363,000.

[4] Differences in methodology may account, in part, for these apparent increases in total choral singer numbers—in general the 2009 methodology was designed to measure the number of singers more comprehensively than the 2003 instrument. In 2009 we provided respondents with a checklist of individuals living with them who might be choral singers, whereas in 2003, a telephone survey (conducted by a different independent survey firm than 2009), respondents were simply asked how many people in their household sing in choruses. Providing a checklist combined with the more leisurely pace at which respondents can choose to complete online surveys (vs. phone-based instruments) may have aided recall beyond that of the 2003 survey.

[5] In our tables of results, this finding is expressed as 38.5%, which ordinarily would be rounded up to 39%, but 38.5% represents only a rounding of the result to the nearest 10th; the actual result was 38.48%, which dictates that we round down to 38%. There are several similar instances of this in other numbers cited in this report—in all cases if the number cited as (and rounded to) XX.5% in our tables was actually less than XX.5% when expressed to the nearest 1/100th (e.g. XX.49%), we rounded it down in the report.

[6] In both 2003 and 2009, singers were asked whether they perform publicly "more than once a month," "once a month," "once a quarter," "several times a year," or "once a year." For purposes of calculating means, "more than once a month," was treated as 24 times/year, "once a month" was treated as 12 times/year, "once a quarter" was treated as 4 times/year, "several times a year" was treated as 3 times/year, and "once a year" was treated as 1 time/year.

[7] Volunteer and professional church choirs, to which African-American singers in our sample disproportionately belong, perform more often than typical community choruses (and, as a result, our non-white respondents indicate significantly higher performance frequencies than white choristers). With a much higher—and more representative—number of African-Americans in the 2009 survey, it's therefore not surprising to see performance numbers go up, and as a result, we consider these numbers to be more accurate, rather than representing an actual change in real frequencies.

[8] The 2009 survey methodology included extra effort to determine the full extent of the types of choirs choristers belong to, soliciting the type for each choir they sing in rather than just asking (as in 2003) for a general statement about the typical choir they participate in. As a result, we can't comfortably compare 2003 and 2009 results with respect to chorus type, though it appears participation in voluntary religious, semi-professional, and school-related choirs is up, while volunteer/community and professional chorus participation is down, subject to the limitations of not just how the question was asked but also the significant change in 2009 sample demographics. Specifically, the fact our 2009 sample had substantially more African-American and other non-white participants, could account for many of these apparent changes, since, for example, non-whites were significantly more likely to say they participate in school-related or professional religious choirs and significantly less likely to say they participate in volunteer/community choruses. The change in sample composition doesn't account for the apparent increases in semi-professional chorus participation, however, since non-whites are actually significantly also less likely to participate in choruses of this type.

[9] We are only 93% confident that this difference did not occur by chance, versus the 95% confidence level we require to claim significance.

[10] This difference is not formally statistically significant. We have only 93% confidence that a real difference/change exists.

[11] There were no significant differences in the way whites and non-whites answered these questions.

[12] Respondents were asked if they contributed "nothing," "up to $100," "$100-$250," or "more than $250." For the purpose of calculating means, responses were valued at the midpoint of ranges, e.g. "up to $100" was valued at $50; "more than $250" was valued at $500. Giving to philanthropic organizations such as those listed is unlikely to represent the full extent of philanthropy—some researchers have found the average American gives as much as $1,000-$2,000 a year when other types of philanthropy (such as tithing) are included; the key here is therefore not the amounts, but the differences between choristers and the general public.

[13] Our general public results are in line with those of many others, including Gallup, the National Opinion Research Center, Harris, and the Barna Research Group.

[14] It's statistically well-established that Americans exaggerate the extent to which they vote in elections; the key here is not the absolute percentages of choristers and other Americans who say they vote, but the differences between these percentages.

[15] In each event case, in both 2003 and 2009, respondents were asked if they attend the event "none," "one," "two," "three," "four," "five," "six to ten," or "eleven or more times"; for the purpose of calculating means, a response of "six to ten" was treated as eight times, "eleven or more" was treated as 15 times.

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[16] They *are* statistically more likely to be "tweens" than older or younger children, but children in all age groups undergo significant growth and development. Therefore, with a couple of minor exceptions we call out later in the report, it seems unlikely an overrepresentation of "tweens" among our choir children could be responsible for any of our findings.

[17] There is undoubtedly some self-reported grade inflation in these numbers; again, the key is the difference between choir children and non-participants.

[18] For example, more than five times as many parents of former choristers agree their child became more self-confident after joining a choir than disagree with this assessment (39% vs. 7%); more than five times as many also agree their child became better at practicing for other activities after they joined (39% vs. 7%); five times as many said their child became more focused (35% vs. 7%), and so on.

[19] Learning a new piece often involves an amalgamation of language, art, history, geography, math, and more.

[20] In our sample, parents of 6-8 year-olds and parents of 9-12 year-olds were both significantly more likely to ascribe these issues to their children than parents of teens, and do so at about the same rate as parents of choir children.

[21] 26% or more of the school's students are in choir, as estimated by the educators.

[22] I.e. high parental involvement (4 or 5 on a 5-point scale), according to educators, in budget or budget allocation decisions OR programmatic (which subjects to offer) decisions OR determining curricula for specific subjects OR setting homework levels OR determining technology use.

[23] Among schools that have choirs.

[24] But against stereotypes, the "high parental influence" schools in the research sample were also disproportionately urban, not suburban, and several previous studies conducted by Grunwald Associates LLC (with more accurate socioeconomic status [SES] assessments) have found a number of types of parental influence that are clearly SES independent. For example, GA has done several studies that found parental influence is SES-independent at the district level and with respect to influence over technology decision-making (see e.g. *Children, Families and the Internet*, Grunwald Associates, 2003; *The Digital Leadership Divide*, Grunwald Associates, 2004). The SES assessments in this research were either taken directly from the U.S. Department of Education or were made by district-level decision-makers with better information than individual educators in schools. It's also important to understand that "parental influence" does not necessarily mean that the average parent is more involved in schools; it means only that whatever proportion of parents who are *activist* are more involved in the school or district.

[25] For example, while 66% of educators in high parental influence schools have recommended choir to students, only 50% of educators in "mostly white" schools and only 57% in "high/middle income" schools have done so.

[26] ACDA's database is currently undergoing an overhaul and only directors whose *first/primary* affiliation is with a community or professional choir are currently extractable; the 2003 numbers included all member directors who ran one or more community or professional choirs, irrespective of whether these were the choirs they listed as their primary affiliation; until the database overhaul is complete, current secondary affiliation data is unavailable to us.

[27] For example, informally projecting out from the number of independent and college choirs (290-300) listed in just one Wisconsin choral directory (itself undoubtedly incomplete) yields a national estimate of nearly 17,000.

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