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President
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Although virtual was the way to go in 2020, our teachers and students realized the value of in-person contact once restrictions lifted. Virtual offered students a chance to continue with music, but the drawback was clear: virtual lessons didn't allow teachers to play with students, which is critical to translating skills and forming musical ideas. All of our group lessons are now in store and in person. There's energy transferred between humans when they relate to each other, and for musicians, this energy manifests itself in locking into another's rhythm.



Noel Wentworth

Wentworth Music
VP Education/Media
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We are still doing hybrid lessons, but the majority of teachers are teaching in person now. When the pandemic hit, we got educated quite quickly on how to use Zoom and the possibilities it had, including using the annotate feature for sheet music, but the latency of audio took getting used to. I recently discovered the Musicology app, where latency is low enough to play duets.

We really needed to get students back in person for the sake of our store and lesson culture, so we're charging \$5 more a lesson for students who request to take lessons online. For parents who question the increased cost, we explain our costs have risen due to upgrading our Wi-Fi and equipment.



**Frank Pampenella
& Robyn Rogers**

President & Office Manager
PM Music Center
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How is the hybrid lesson model working for your lessons program?

We've looked at the hybrid lesson model as an opportunity to continue to expand upon our lessons program. It was something we thought of prior to the pandemic, but never looked at seriously.

We started offering virtual lessons at sign-up nights. This is something we typically don't do because of the distance between the school and our facility, but we look at virtual lessons as an extension of our stores' lessons program far out-reaching the typical distance a parent or student is willing to travel. Virtual lessons also offer us the opportunity to have virtual recitals, once again expanding the outreach of our lesson program. We think we might be able to grow our lessons program by 25 percent just by marketing it to people that are too far away and getting them to take virtual

lessons with us.

Even though we're still doing virtual lessons, about half of the teachers are back in the store teaching students one-on-one. We still have teachers reluctant to come back. But we did everything we could to incentivize them to do so. We took a number of safety precautions in the store prior to teachers returning, such as making sure air purifiers with UV lights were in every teaching room, stepping up our disinfecting protocol, installing clear curtains between the student and teacher, expanding the size of some of our rooms, and, besides our retail staff cleaning the rooms, we supply the teachers with all the disinfecting supplies they would need between students.

Also, we helped out our teachers by offering room rent at half the regular rate from January through April.

If they were back teaching in the store by May 1, the whole month of May would be free of charge. We are doing everything we can to incentivize the teachers to come back in. For instance, today we just had a pizza party to mark the milestone of opening up further and having more people taking lessons.

I think in September we're going to see a big increase since people just can't wait to get out of their bubble and get back into the real world. That will be great, because overall, our numbers are down 61 percent lesson-wise since before the pandemic. We've seen an increase in our in-store rentals, when we've done recruiting at schools, and I think its going to be the same with lessons as we have found that virtual recruiting has been not as good, comparison-wise. **MI**