

# Results of MMTA Member Survey, December 2022

by Susan Sophocleus

The MMTA Board continually evaluates all educational programs. Overall membership and registrations for Piano and Theory Exams decreased substantially in recent years. In response to this trend, a survey was created to gather member feedback and input. Members were notified of the survey and given an opportunity to respond in December, 2022. We thank everyone who completed the survey for their input.

The survey was conducted through Google Forms. The response rate was very good among teachers who have been members for ten or more years. There were 122 respondents. 102 respondents have had a student or students participate in a theory or piano exam. For context, 145 teachers participated in piano exams last year. Many teachers provided detailed open-ended responses. Participation among new members was not as strong.

## Key Findings

- Lower participation in exams is partly related to a decrease in members but also related to a student body that is not as interested in preparing for exams. Secondly, some teachers feel that preparing students is too time consuming. Teachers need support in demonstrating the value of the exams to students and ideas for teaching the curriculum efficiently.
- Teachers feel the theory requirements are aligned well for piano exam levels 1-3 and State Contest. 30% rate the theory requirements as too difficult for Piano Exam levels 4-7.
- Providing online and in person options for exams is important to the membership. Teachers see important benefits to both formats.

## Overall Participation in Piano and Theory Exams

- 70% of teachers participate in piano exams and 84% participate in theory exams. These results were consistent across teachers who have been members 5-10 years 10-15 years and over 15 years.

## Responses and Feedback from Members Who Use Exams

- A majority of teachers (about 60%) have at most 25% of their students participating in piano and theory exams. **The main reason teachers give for not having more students participate is “Some students are not interested.” The second most common reason was “Preparation is too time consuming.”**
- The reasons for not having more students in piano and theory exams were similar. Time consuming preparation was cited slightly more often for piano exams than theory exams.
- There were many insightful comments about the piano and theory exams. For example, a newer teacher described the challenges of getting started. Suggestions were made for improving theory workbooks. Overall, there were many positive comments about the curriculum of the piano and theory exams.

## Why don't more students participate in piano exams?

(Check all that apply)

Some students are not interested	71%
Preparation for a piano exam is too time consuming	46%
Scheduling is difficult	17%
Not enough in person dates	13%
Cost of the exam is prohibitive	9%
The theory exam requirements do not work with piano exam	9%
I prefer to test my own students	6%
I utilize a different program	5%
Not enough online testing	5%

## Why don't more students participate in theory exams?

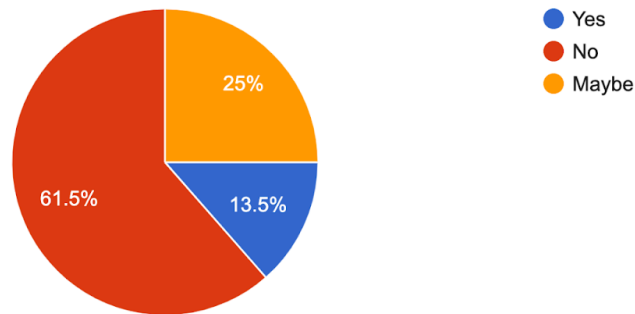
(Check all that apply)

Some students are not interested	70%
Preparation for a theory exam is too time consuming	32%
Scheduling is difficult	13%
Layout of material is confusing	12%
Not enough in person testing	7%
Not enough online testing	7%
Material is too difficult	6%
Cost of exam is prohibitive	3%

## Alignment of Theory Requirements with Piano Exams and Contest

- Respondents generally rate the theory requirements as “just right” for Piano Exam Levels 1-3. They rate theory requirements for Contest and Young Artist as “just right” or “too easy.”
- For Piano Exam Levels 4-7, 70% of respondents rate the theory requirements as “just right” and 30% rate them as “too difficult.”
- For Young Artist, 58% rate the theory requirements as “just right” and 42% rate them as “too difficult.”

Would you like to see a theory level for every level of the Piano Exam? This would mean a more gradual curriculum; teachers would need new materials and students would need to take more exams.  
96 responses



### **In-Person Exams vs. Online Exams**

- Most teachers have used both testing formats since COVID restrictions were lifted.
- For theory and piano exams, slightly over half of teachers want both formats to be available.
- Teachers have a stronger preference for In-Person testing (47%) for piano exams compared to theory (36%) exams.
- Teachers estimate their students having a slightly stronger preference for online testing - especially for theory.
- Some respondents prefer online testing because of convenience, ease of scheduling, elimination of travel for outstate families, and less stress while taking exam.
- Other respondents prefer in person for piano exam performances because of the social and personal nature of playing in person; better sound quality for judging.
- Both formats offer important benefits to teachers and students.

### **Next Steps**

In response to the survey results, MMTA has taken the following steps:

- The Piano and Theory Curriculum committees are working together to better align the keyboard skills required for piano and theory exams. Currently, the requirements for scales and cadences, for example, are different and that requires more preparation for teachers and students.
- Rebekah Richards, Chair of the Theory Development Committee, created teaching guidelines for Theory Exam levels 1, 2 and 3. This teaching guide gives step-by-step assignments for teachers and checklists for students. Teachers can use this guide to prepare students for a theory exam in 13 weeks. These teaching guidelines will be presented at the MMTA Conference and will be available to all members.

- The Piano Curriculum Committee will develop similar teaching guidelines for piano keyboard skills and sightplaying exams.
- Members are encouraged to teach 40 to 45-minute lessons with students to allow time to teach the valuable MMTA piano and theory curriculums.
- MMTA will continue to offer online exam opportunities as members feel these are important.

## **Shorter Summary for Weekly Update:**

### **MMTA Member Survey Results**

Thank you to all members who participated in the member survey in December, 2022. You may read about the results here (insert link). Members provided helpful insights into what is needed to increase participation in piano and theory exams.

In response to the survey results, MMTA has taken the following steps:

- The Piano and Theory Curriculum committees are working together to better align the keyboard skills required for piano and theory exams. This should result in fewer keyboard skills to prepare.
- Rebekah Richards, Chair of the Theory Development Committee, created teaching guidelines for Theory Exam levels 1, 2 and 3. This teaching guide gives step-by-step assignments for teachers and checklists for students. Teachers can use this guide to prepare students for a theory exam in 13 weeks. These teaching guidelines will be presented at the MMTA Conference and will be available to all members.
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