

**How Children, Adults, and Communities
Benefit from Choruses**

The Chorus Impact Study

Executive Summary and Key Findings

With funding support from

- The Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation
- The James Irvine Foundation
- The McKnight Foundation
- The National Endowment for the Arts

© 2009 by Chorus America

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

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.

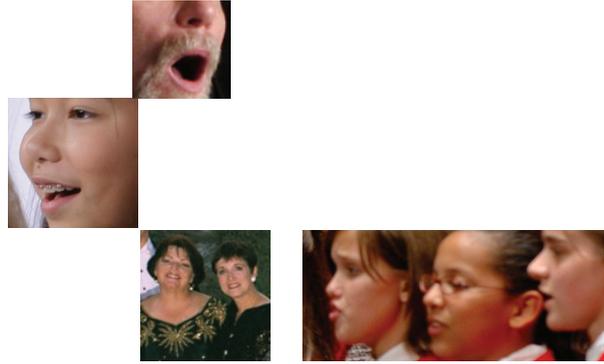
In virtually every case, parents of children in choruses were significantly more likely to ascribe to their children nearly every positive quality tested than parents whose children have never been part of one, and adult singers are significantly more likely to ascribe these qualities to themselves than 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).



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.

- **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.

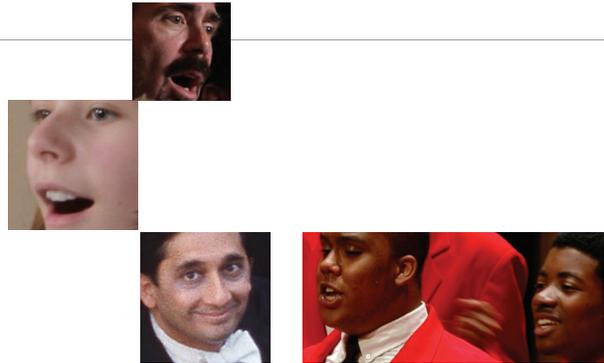
A copy of the full report, including the Acknowledgments, Methodology, and Research Notes is available from Chorus America at www.chorusamerica.org.



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.

Chorus America

1156 15th Street, NW, Suite 310

Washington, DC 20005

202.331.7577

Fax 202.331.7599

www.chorusamerica.org