

To the Members of the Joint Committee Meeting—

My wife Andrea and I have resided in Stamford for 49 years. We are proud of our public schools, which educated our adult daughter and son and are now educating two of our grandsons, with a third scheduled to arrive following preschool. Andrea served a social worker in the Stamford Public Schools for 29 years. We support paying higher property taxes in the interest of preserving the quality of our schools which, we are convinced, is more important than any other aspect of government in enhancing the quality of our community at large. We write about a narrow issue among the topics under discussion by you this evening.

There is a broad consensus in Stamford in support of retaining the music program in the public schools intact, and we are worried that a funding shortfall will expose that program to elimination in the elementary schools. We have observed time and again over the years the extraordinary benefits that music education confers on our students. There is no question that the preparation students receive in the elementary schools is critical to the viability of the music programs in the middle and high schools. Our students are still recovering from the disruptions caused by the pandemic in their musical training and performance (and other school disciplines) that could not be helped. A self-imposed elimination of music education in the elementary grades will make that handicap permanent. All of us know students whose high school success is deeply connected to their experience with the arts, music foremost among them, and our role as adults is to expand and not diminish their opportunities and their progress.

We do not believe that support for music programming is controversial at all in Stamford and that, at heart, there is a broad consensus that music training aids the academic and emotional development of all students who participate. Put another way, your constituents are not divided on this question. Under the circumstances, we urge you to find a way to work collaboratively with the Board of Education in the forthcoming budget to fund the public schools in the coming year, despite the challenges, at a level that will sustain music programming for our kids.

Thank you for considering this issue among the many confronting you at this time of year.

Sincerely, David Cohen