

Dear Board of Finance Members,

My name is George Beratis, a proud product of SPS, and a proud former employee as the Stamford High School Band Director for nine years. During my time as an educator in Stamford, I had the honor of being nominated for Teacher of the Year and being the first runner up and being a SPEF Educator of the Year nominee in 2016. I am writing to express my strong opposition to the proposed elimination to instrumental music programs in our elementary schools. Instrumental music is a vital part of a well-rounded education, and eliminating it at the elementary level would have a significant negative impact on our students, our schools, and our community.

Early exposure to music is crucial for development. Studies have shown that learning a musical instrument at a young age enhances cognitive function, improves motor skills, and fosters creativity and discipline. These are essential skills that benefit students in all areas of their academic life. By cutting instrumental music programs in elementary schools, we are denying our youngest learners the opportunity to reap these important benefits.

Recruitment and retention in band programs from 5th to 6th grade across the country always decreases drastically. There are many reasons why, but the most significant is because students begin to find who they are as pre-teens and gravitate towards what they have been introduced to and doing for years leading up to their middle school tenure. It is a huge risk to assume that students will take up an instrument in 6th grade and stick with it. Playing an instrument is difficult in all the best ways, but becomes more challenging to stick with as students get older because of the discipline needed for growth. Moreover, our students will in most cases be two to three years behind the rest of the state of Connecticut.

Equitable access to instrumental music is vital. Instrumental music programs provide a unique opportunity for students from all backgrounds to experience the joy of music making and gain the life skills that were mentioned above. For many students, these programs are the only chance they will have to learn an instrument. Cutting these programs would disproportionately impact students who cannot afford private lessons, creating an educational disparity. It will boil down to those who can not afford versus those who can. Diversity, Equity and Inclusion is something that has been at the forefront of development as teachers, and the elimination of elementary school instrumental music would be exactly opposite of what DEI teaches us.

A strong elementary school foundation creates success for all grade levels. Instrumental music programs in elementary schools are the foundation for thriving middle and high school music programs. Eliminating these programs at the elementary level will leave a significant gap in the vertical alignment of the music program. In short order you will see the end of bands at parades, football games, school concerts, spring musicals, holiday performances, representation at western region and all-state festivals and much more.

Lastly, instrumental music should not be a bargaining chip. The morale of both faculty and students takes a hit when fine arts programs are seen as expendable. These programs are an essential part of a vibrant school environment and should be valued for the positive impact they have on our children.

I urge you to reconsider this proposal. Instrumental music programs are an investment in the future of our students and our community. Please find a way to preserve these programs for the benefit of all.

Sincerely,

George Beratis