



To the members of the Chelmsford School Committee,

The value of a strong music education program is a topic that is often the subject of heated debate, especially in recent years. Although the evidence in support of keeping music in our schools is overwhelming and often well recognized by school administrations, these programs are typically the first to suffer cuts in times of declining budgets and rising costs. The Chelmsford Public Schools have a long history of providing excellent music education to their students, and the Chelmsford Friends of Music sincerely hope that the children of Chelmsford will continue to benefit from these programs for a long time to come.

We acknowledge the severity of the current budget issues, and the agonizing choices the administration must make. On one hand it is difficult to argue to save funding for music programs when faced with rising elementary class sizes, the lack of teacher aides, implementation of extra fees, potential cuts to “core” curriculum subjects in the upper grades, etc., etc. But there are certain economical and far-reaching benefits that can only be provided by a strong music program which we hope you will consider in your planning.

The value of a strong musical education has been well documented for years – a fact of which you are undoubtedly well aware – but which bears repeating. Kids who study music learn self-discipline and build self-esteem, while learning to work with others in a group environment. They are better at abstract reasoning, perform higher on standardized tests (which is so important today), and even are less likely to become involved with drugs or alcohol. The research is conclusive and the list goes on and on. We have been told by one music teacher in the district that he has often been thanked by parents because attending his class was the only reason their students came to school, and without it they would have dropped out.

When the middle school arts block was eliminated a few years ago, it was done under the presumption that more time was necessary on “core” subjects. There is not one other subject that is as far reaching as music in its integration and reinforcement of these “core” subjects. Kids who study music are learning science (acoustics, intonation), math (spatial and abstract concepts), language arts (symbol recognition and reading) and history. One could even argue that the dexterity and exercise involved in playing an instrument or singing rivals the skills learned in gym class!

There are certain economies and conveniences that can be enjoyed by having music in the schools. The student to teacher ratio is typically much higher in a band, orchestra or chorus than in a general classroom setting, so more kids can be engaged in a worthwhile activity for less cost. In addition, music classes keep kids learning during the planning periods that the “core” teachers require. You can’t keep kids (especially elementary and middle school students) sitting in classrooms all day, so providing them with an activity that boosts their imagination and develops their social skills while furthering their cognitive development is a win-win situation!

In recent years, the Chelmsford music program has lost its elementary band program, elementary string program (which has been re-instated in a lesser form), the much-heralded arts block in the middle schools, the position of full time Fine Arts Curriculum Coordinator and has suffered the cut back from 5 to 2 days of performance music for 7th and 8th graders. The program has already absorbed more than its share of budget cuts. We have an excellent, dedicated faculty which has been stretched to the limit, some travelling between several schools. When you look at the number of students serviced by the music teachers, we doubt you will find a better bargain anywhere. For these reasons, and many others, additional cuts would be absolutely devastating to the music program – it is providing an incredibly valuable service as economically as possible – there is simply no more room for savings without devastating the program.

We hope that you will carefully consider these factors when making the difficult decisions that lie ahead, and trust that you will do your best to ensure the overall development of well-rounded students in Chelmsford’s public schools by maintaining a strong music program for the future good of Chelmsford students.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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