



February 26, 2024

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Dear County Executive Ball, members of the County Council, members of the Board of Education and Acting Superintendent Barnes:

Thank you for your hard work and transparency crafting this year's county and school system budget. I am a proud Howard County graduate, new parent considering moving back to Howard County, former educator, and current Executive Director of Arts Education in Maryland Schools (AEMS). I am writing to implore you to fully fund the Howard County Public School System budget, and for the school system budget to include the continuation of the popular third grade strings program.

As you have already heard from numerous residents including students, both in this budget cycle and many prior budget cycles, music education is a critical component of our children's development. Music education, especially early on in a child's schooling, provides myriad benefits including strengthened critical thinking skills, social and emotional development, and sense of belonging. Instrumental music education boosts neuroplasticity, synchronizes the brain's cerebral hemispheres, and strengthens neural pathways; all of which produce long-lasting impacts on the brain ("Music for Every Child," San Francisco Conservatory of Music- see link below).

As a long-time champion of students' right to a robust arts education, I often point to Howard County as the gold standard for opportunities that all children should have access to in their public schools. It is a mark of pride for Howard County residents, current and former, that our schools offer a third grade strings program. Parents and community members continually stand up for this program that is clearly desired and appreciated.

Maintaining Howard County's standard of excellence and opportunity requires not just the support of the community, but also your active and continued support and protection of the programs that make our school system exceptional. The evidence is clear. The arts are incredibly important for student engagement and development. Taking away this significant part of the Howard County school experience is unwanted and detrimental to our students and community.



Participating in instrumental music from a young age in Howard County Public Schools had an outsized positive impact on my own development, and it has the potential to continue positively impacting children for decades to come. I implore you to continue setting a high bar of opportunity so children can continue to learn and develop with strong instrumental music programs.

Thank you for your service.

With Gratitude,

Rachel McGrain

Reference link:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1_QRi1mp_eerEXx2SwS1GQN_PBqdZwXdc/view?usp=sharing