

September 7, 2023

Neah-Kah-Nie School District
504 N. Third Ave
PO Box 28
Rockaway Beach, OR, 97136

Dear Board of Directors and Superintendent Reed,

I am writing you today on behalf of my family and my son who attends Neah-Kah-Nie Middle School regarding the school board and administration's decision to cut music education in the form of band and choir from the 6th grade curriculum. This letter is intended to show our support and desire as a district family to have this decision reconsidered.

Music has played an important role in my family's culture for several generations.

My great-grandfather played the fiddle as he called square dances in Eastern Oregon in the early 1900's. My mother sang her first solo in her church on Christmas Eve when she was 5 years old. She learned to play the flute and continued to do so all throughout her schooling, even participating in marching band throughout high school. She sang in school choirs and traveled throughout the state to perform in various competitions. She went on to continue singing into her adult years, having been a part of Portland's Jazz scene through the 80's and 90's. I grew up attending Sunday afternoon jazz jam sessions throughout Portland, watching my mother perform with many of the great Portland jazz musicians of late. Leroy Vinegar, Eddie Weid, Gordon Lee, Mel Brown, just to name a few. I learned at a very young age that there is no excuse for talking during the bass solo.

When my brother was around 12, he decided he wanted to learn to play the guitar. He continued with his music education through high school at Jefferson High School in Portland, participating in jazz band taught by another Portland great, Matt Schiff. He played in several bands until his graduation and went on to study recording arts, moving to Los Angeles to work in the music industry. He played in a band LA for some time, and they even had a song on the radio at one point. He eventually made his way out of music, taking a path toward education. He is currently a math teacher at San Pedro High School, in San Pedro, California in the South Bay area of Los Angeles. Three years ago, his high school principal wanted to incorporate music into the school curriculum. He asked my brother to assist. A school garage band was formed, and my brother has since

supported several students at his school, not only in their math education but in their music education as well. He would tell you that he's seen the difference music education has made in his student's overall academics.

Having watched my mother sing and my brother play guitar, I chose to first join more than just elementary school music class in the 5th grade when the offer was there for a violin class. I spent 5th grade learning to read music, playing the violin and the cello. When it came time to register for middle school, it was assumed I would join band. I of course was willing to do so as that's what we do in our family. As I ended up not inheriting any natural talent on the violin or cello from my great-grandfather's skill, I decided to follow in my mom's footsteps and chose the flute. I played every day from the first day of 6th grade until the last day of 8th grade. Often to the dismay of our middle school band teacher, my friend's and I would often trade instruments over the weekend. While we were supposed to be continuing to learn and practice our parts, we'd often end up learning each other's parts as well. Over those three years, I ended up playing the flute, piccolo, clarinet, and oboe. At the time, we were not able to afford an instrument of my own, so I had always rented one from the school. While my music career ended after middle school because of this, music has continued to play an important role in our family.

Since my son began preschool in Mrs. Douma's class seven years ago, Mr. Simpson has been a staple in his education. He has learned the concentration and dedication to the music that is needed to support a great performance. He has learned how to be a performer on stage, as well as how to be a respectful audience member, often having to show the families in attendance of the winter and spring performances how to also be a respectful audience member. He has had Mr. Simpson's steadfast support in learning to be the best he can be. He looks up to Mr. Simpson as a dedicated educator. I asked him what he would say to someone if he were asked what two main things Mr. Simpson has taught him. He said, "how to read music and the importance of music history." He still talks about Mr. Simpson's upset to learn 6th grade choir was being cut and was upset to learn 6th grade band was also cut.

Upon learning of the choir cut last spring, we remained hopeful knowing that band was an option. The first night we came to middle school preview in the spring, he was the first name on the list for band sign up. Finding out that music has been cut altogether, was nothing less than disappointing. My hope is that this board and the school administration will reconsider this decision and find a way to make this accessible to students again. We were told that there could be an option for a zero period before school to hold band, but there would be no transportation offered. Parents would have to get our students to school ourselves. While this may work for some, will it work for

all? Possibly not. How is this providing an equal and equitable opportunity to our students? If there is an after-school activity bus for sports, why can there not be a similar bus in the mornings to support a band zero period each day?

At the 6th grade orientation night, parents were told the decision to cut band from the daily schedule was due to the high number of below-grade-level reading scores amongst the students. A quick Google search on the benefits of music education will find you many articles on this topic, most of which will discuss the link between music education and improved literacy. After receiving an email from my son's ELA teacher that included a document detailing the learning modules they will be covering with a list of books to read at home, I responded to ask how many of those books on the read at home list were required. I wanted to ensure to have them for my son to be able to do the required reading. The response I received was to say that they are not in fact required and there is no expectation for students to do any reading at home, on top of the reading they will do at school. I found this to be ironic. Music is being cut to improve reading scores, but there is no requirement for at home reading to support this improvement as well?

I would hope that this topic of the importance of music education has been thoroughly researched by this board and the administration before having made this decision to cut music education. It does not appear as though this board and administration values a well-rounded education that would only be further enriched with music education, and I truly hope that is not the case. Please reconsider the decision to cut music education and allow us all to work together to come up with an equitable solution to continue to provide these opportunities to our students.

Thank you for your time,



Skye Warnholtz, parent
Henry McCann, student