

FROM BRETT HOLT, POSTED TO FACEBOOK ON MAY 4, 2024

I don't fight to just save music for my kids. I fight to save music for the kids who haven't experienced yet what my kids have been able to experience through music in Edmonds School District.

My kids are barely staying ahead of the music cuts. My son is a junior in Jazz 1 at Mountlake Terrace High School. It's a sweet spot for musicians and he will graduate high school with no impacts. My daughter will be a freshman at Mountlake Terrace High School next year. While the music class she will be placed in isn't ideal as it's not specific to only Jazz 2, at least she will have a music class with some jazz available unlike those at Madrona or some other middle schools. They will have no jazz, some no band, next year. If she was born one year later, she would have no music next year. We would purposely leave the school if music wasn't offered.

When my son entered kindergarten in 2012, our introduction to Edmonds School District, I wasn't aware of the music classes offered in intermediate, middle and high schools. I didn't know that his future high school had a nationally recognized jazz program, that those kids had already gone to New York multiple times to compete against top jazz programs in the nation. I wasn't aware of Mr. Faul, Mr. Matt Edwards, or Ms. Nelson, music teachers that would have a profound effect on both my kids in both developing their musical passion as well as learning to grow up, set priorities, and establish independence.

I started playing drums in 1988, my freshman year of high school. I didn't take any music classes in school. I had lessons at the local music shop with Dave Gary (RIP). What Edmonds School District has today didn't exist to this extent in my school district when growing up. I jammed with friends in my bedroom. I horribly emulated Tommy Lee, Tommy Aldridge, Rick Allen, and other rock drummers. This passion eventually led to an underground punk band I played in from 1996-2000 that experienced recording albums of original songs, touring across the country, creating our own merchandise, performing almost 300 shows, building a fan base, and experiencing life in a unique way that instilled in me a Do-It-Yourself (DIY) ethic.

When my son entered 4th grade, it was our first experience with a performance music group in the schools. I didn't know this was the beginning of the feeder system into high school music. It wasn't part of my experience growing up. He started to play in the orchestra at Madrona under Ms. Nelson. We started lessons with Paul Gabrielson, a phenomenal bass player and, more important, mentor for my son since 2016. As my son advanced from elementary orchestra to middle school orchestra, middle school jazz band to high school band, it became apparent to me how phenomenal the music opportunities are for him in Edmonds School District. It not only developed musical skills, but brought him into a community to feel safe and create friendships. This continues with my daughter who started playing drums in 2019, being taught from Matt Edwards, learning drums from David Dunkley.

Watching both of them go from trembling playing in front of people to improvising music with confidence and a smile in front of hundreds amazes me. I couldn't do that until my mid-20s. Watching my kids work with other kids to form student-led music groups with little to no adult guidance is fantastic. Their ability to read another language, a universal language, has taken them to wonderful places so far, and I hope will take them around the world.

Despite my own music experience, I had to learn about these opportunities in Edmonds School District as my kids experienced them. Trust me when I say it's pretty damn awesome! But, I don't believe our current school board and superintendent understand this. I don't believe they understand how a music feeder system works from intermediate to middle to high schools that allows for these wonderful opportunities that are open to all students - that it's made better if the kids are connected with music at a very early age.

I don't believe the current school board and superintendent understand this for many reasons.

1. Parents and teachers that advocated in spring 2023 to save music classes from being cut were compared to the January 6 rioters by one of the current school board directors.
2. Despite the overwhelming support for music in public comments at school board meetings in spring 2023 and in the recent three school board meetings where over 50% of the public comments favoring to keep music classes, the school board and superintendent have not publicly stated their support for the

Edmonds School District music model, why it works, and the importance of keeping our music programs intact.

3. The school board and superintendent have stated in public meetings that class cuts are the result of student choice. This is also on the Edmonds School District website. This is not true as there are music classes with high enrollment that are being cut. The board and superintendent are not owning the choices they are making.

4. When the superintendent was asked what her vision was for the Edmonds School District nationally recognized music program, she did not have one. She has yet to share any vision for music.

5. One school board representative stated that their son would've started band in 6th grade if band wasn't offered in 5th grade - providing a reason that it's ok to cut 5th grade. That school board doesn't understand how feeder systems work and that to have a competitive high school band or orchestra program, you need to develop musicians in 4th and 5th grade.

6. When you ask the superintendent and school board to support saving music classes - put funding to them or at least don't take it away, they have said that they can't do anything, that it's either a state issue or a building level issue (principal choice). They choose to not be accountable.

7. They have stated multiple times that music is an elective - hence it's not a priority.

As a result of this lack of support, I have little faith that when the state system is "fixed" and additional funding is shared with the school district, that the school board and superintendent will prioritize building back a great music program. By the way, state legislatures have yet to commit any support - verbal or in writing - in the past year to fix the school funding system in early 2025 despite many parents and school administrators advocating for change.

I have little faith in our school board and superintendent that when enrollment is higher, they will shift money to bringing back music classes to ensure strong music classes in intermediate, middle, and high schools.

In the meantime, we may lose great music teachers just starting their career in Edmonds School District. We will have kids not provided the opportunity to find or continue their passion in music.

Knowing what I know now, and if my kids were starting in Edmonds School District, I would look around for a school district with a strong music program and, more important, leadership that supports a strong music program. There are school districts not impacted by cuts.

If you know me, you know my passion for music. I support my kids' programs, but other schools as well. I believe in not a few schools thriving, but all schools thriving in music opportunities. I've served on the Mountlake Terrace High School Music Boosters for three years where I book our jazz combos and string ensembles (40 gigs a year), volunteer for events, chaperone on music field trips, capture and share photos/videos with all, maintain the MTHS Music Boosters website, manage social media, and so much more. I do much the same at Madrona helping with field trips, promoting performances, capturing photos/videos of performances, and supporting their jazz combo. My wife calls it a second job. I couldn't see not doing it. I want to grow music programs. I want to expand opportunities for student musicians.

This is why I will direct my advocacy towards the school board and superintendent.

This is why I want to save the music.

