



Address:

556 Boleskine Road, Victoria, B.C.
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Dear School District 61:

Jordan Watters; Board Chair

Diane McNally, Nicole Duncan, Tom Ferris, Angie Hentze, Elaine Leonard, Ryan Painter, Rob Paynter,
and Ann Whiteaker; Trustees

We are the University of Victoria Student Music Education Association, and we are writing to express our concerns regarding the proposed School District 61 budget. We are student music educators and through our daily work and study we are learning why music is a central part of education. We believe that an alternative course of action needs to be taken to keep robust music programs in the School District for the sake of future growth, to protect the district's mission statement, and for the immense, proven benefits music education has for students.

UVSMEA recognizes that SD61 is facing a difficult financial situation compounded, in part, by the collapse of revenue from international students. Recovery will ultimately be determined how successfully the district is able to create a comprehensive, enriching, world-class learning community that draws in students from home and from abroad. Arts and music programs are key to burnishing a district's reputation as a place where students flourish and come into their own.

Whatever cuts SD61 makes to music education will negatively affect the quality of all its music programs. Lack of supported programs will drive our quality educators to seek work in other districts or in the private sector, and this loss of talent will lead to further decline in the quality of arts education. This may lead to even lower domestic enrollment as families switch to private schools or other districts that offer students the kind of well-rounded education they have come to expect, and fewer international students down the road as overseas arts programs become more competitive. SD61 needs a long-term growth strategy that establishes it as the world-class learning community it claims to be. This includes rich and thriving music programs, and does not allow for cuts.

The proposed budget cuts contradict the values of the SD 61 mission statement, particularly with regards to equity and Indigenous values. Cuts to Strongstart, the number of EAs, and music programs stand in stark contrast to the district's stated commitment to equity, which is to "give every student the opportunity to fulfill their potential". By decreasing public and accessible middle school music programs, only those who can afford out-of-school programs can participate. School is the place where all kids can access music, where the systemic barriers such as those for private lessons or youth orchestras are not present.

The cuts also contradict a goal outlined in the district's Strategic Plan to "Create a culturally responsive learning environment that will support Indigenous learners' personal and academic success." The Government of Canada's page on First Nations Music in Canada states that "although there is great diversity among First Nations people, music acts as a unifying force." In a curriculum that places so much emphasis on Indigenous education and reconciliation, cutting music programs is a step in the wrong

direction. Music holds a place of vital importance in Indigenous cultures across the province. As an educational tool it is a powerfully immersive way to share Indigenous knowledge with students. When we cut music programs, we foreclose on the idea that there is a place for indigenous music in public elementary education. In the words of Kwagiulth/Salish artist Carey Newman, “Music is literacy, and putting cuts onto [our district] is disingenuous, and is the exact opposite of reconciliation” (Newman, 2021)

Finally, we are concerned with how devastating these cuts would be to children’s development, not only musically but also socially, emotionally, and cognitively. Research shows that music education has a positive impact on both students’ academic success as well as social and mental wellbeing. Roege Bayle synthesizes these findings well in the article, “Why We Need Arts Education.” It states how the “experiences facilitated by arts education produce mentally, socially, physically, and academically fit citizens” (Roege, 126). The concern of mental health among students, especially in middle school, is increasingly being brought forward. Cutting programs with proven psychological benefits will further exacerbate the issue by removing outlets for expression and emotional structure for many of our students.

It may be argued that while some music programs are being eliminated, others are being kept, and therefore that students will still benefit. However, Sabahat Burak’s study, “Motivation for Instrument Education,” found that the flow of motivation decreases with age (Burak, 127). This means that starting musical programs in grade 8 is too late for most students, and that they are less likely to learn a new instrument and participate in programs. This means that fewer students will gain the benefits of music education.

For all the reasons stated above, the University of Victoria Student Music Educators Association is calling on trustees of School District 61 to categorically refuse all cuts currently being proposed. Difficult decisions will need to be made to address the district’s financial situation, but they should be made with full information and after an appropriate period of deliberation. Instead of haphazardly rushing towards draconian cuts that will cause direct and ongoing harm to generations of students, we call on SD61 to apply to run a deficit, or take funds from reserves to balance the budget for this year. This would buy the district time to conduct a comprehensive examination of expenses next year, without making hasty and uninformed decisions.

Signed:

Tessa Bell, Gillian Ramage, Meghan Parker, Scott Gordon, Breanna Morrisette, Eva-Kate Smith, Charlie Mason, Sarah Higginson, Heidi Goetz, Gabriel Cayer, Kyle Lancaster

Sources:

<https://www.sd61.bc.ca/our-district/about-us/mission-statement/#:~:text=We%20nurture%20each%20student's%20learning,responsive%2C%20and%20inclusive%20learning%20community.>

https://www.sd61.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/sites/91/2020/06/GVSD61_StrategicPlan2020-2025.pdf

<https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1303136115424/1534962405726>

<https://twitter.com/blueravenart/status/1392181970566750210?s=21>

Roege, Gayle B., and Kyung H. Kim. "Why we Need Arts Education." *Empirical Studies of the Arts*, vol. 31, no. 2, 2013, pp. 121-130.

Burak, Sabahat. "Motivation for Instrument Education: A Study from the Perspective of Expectancy-Value and Flow Theories." *Eurasian journal of educational research* 55 (2014): 123-136.