

**From:** [Vanyah \[REDACTED\]](#)  
**To:** [Deb Whitten](#); [Official Trustee](#)  
**Subject:** Music Funding Programs.  
**Date:** Monday, March 9, 2026 10:42:47 PM

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Dear Official Trustee Bell and Superintendent Whitten

I am a former student at [REDACTED] middle school and would like to express my support for maintaining funding for music programs within the Greater Victoria School district as the district begins its annual budget process.

for me, I can express that choir has helped me a lot mentally and physically and i have learned a lot and learned how to express myself and not feel awkward or weird but that I actually fit in because that's how I met a lot of good people in my life and good life skills, I have talked to others and they have also felt this way, and I can also imagine that it has also helped people in great ways even if they haven't expressed it. Music has helped me mentally and has provided a safe space for me and actually feel like I fit, I also believe that choir , the musical and the play has helped me with life skills such as learning to commit and be engaged in life , and for a lot of people choir and such other music programs gives them a sense of comfort, and belonging, freedom even things that they might not feel on a daily basis it has helped me mentally and taught me the importance of day to day life skills I haven't been great at since I joined choir. It has helped me with my attendance, awareness, mental health, confidence, and has made me feel a sense of belonging and I am sure other choir students and music students feel the same way.

Music isn't just notes it's a way to connect with people in ways that we don't see and I strongly think that removing it due to budget does not help because at the end of the day music is something that helps us mentally, physically even and we create a healthy and happy community with the choir program and such other things as Jazz band, the musical, the play, and such other activities that are planning on getting removed due to budget and we all connect with each other over it at the end of the day.

Removing or continually threatening music programs does not result in savings without consequences. Instead, it creates gaps that frequently reappear in the system through increased disengagement, behavioural changes, and greater demand for student support services. Stable, well funded music programs are a proactive and I believe absolutely necessary investment in healthy school communities.

I am writing to urge the district to keep funding for middle school music and Elementary Strings programs intact as budget decisions are made. Protecting these programs supports not only student learning, but also the social and and emotional well being of our children and the strength of our school communities .

I give permission to make my letter available for the district to include my letter in the next available Board meeting packup.

Thank you for your time, leadership and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Vanyah [REDACTED]

Student



**From:** [UJAM Young All Stars Admin](#)  
**To:** [Deb Whitten](#); [Official Trustee](#); [Katrina Stride](#)  
**Subject:** Please Protect Middle School Music Programs in SD61  
**Date:** Wednesday, March 25, 2026 9:17:50 PM

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Dear Superintendent Whitten, Official Trustee Sherri Bell, and Secretary Treasurer Katrina Stride,

I am writing to express my deep concern regarding the proposed cuts to middle school music programs in the Greater Victoria School District.

I understand that SD61 is facing a budget deficit of approximately \$1.6 million, and that one proposed reduction would cut \$250,871 from middle school music programming. While it has been stated that middle schools will continue to offer Concert Band 6, 7, 8 and Strings 6, 7, 8, this wording leaves out middle school choirs, jazz bands, musical theatre programs, and other valuable ensembles that are essential to students and school communities.

These programs are not extras. They are important educational opportunities that help students develop confidence, creativity, discipline, teamwork, belonging, and connection to school. For many students, these ensembles are where they find community, purpose, self esteem, and success.

These proposed cuts would affect hundreds of families across our district. SD61 serves about 20,000 students across 10 middle schools, and reductions to middle school music would be felt widely across every single one of our school communities.

Jazz band is a unique and valuable offering. It is a specialized ensemble experience that many students do not have access to outside of school. For students interested in improvisation, collaboration, and contemporary ensemble playing, school jazz band may be their only opportunity to develop those skills in a meaningful and supported way.

The UJAM Young All Stars is a local non-profit jazz education program that mentors middle school and high school students in the methods of improvisation and musicianship. We have been able to help young people shape their talents in a way that can be life defining. Many students who have been mentored through our program have gone on to study at top music schools in Canada, the United States and abroad, and are having successful music careers.

Without a solid start in middle school, we are setting our students back by years and disadvantaging them for the competitive college admissions process but also limiting their development. Middle schoolers are much less embarrassed to try new things, once they hit high school, they become much less likely to pick up something new like a musical instrument. Middle school Jazz band is a CRUCIAL STEP, please do not allow these programs to be cut.

Choir, is one of the most accessible and equitable music classes students can participate in. Unlike some other music programs, choir does not require families to rent or purchase an instrument, pay for private lessons, or secure resources outside of school in order for students to be fully involved. It provides a low-barrier, inclusive entry point into music education for a wide range of learners. Cutting choir would remove one of the most accessible opportunities for students to belong, contribute, and thrive in school.

Research also supports the importance of singing and choir participation. A 2021 systematic review found that group singing may support young people's well-being through social connectedness and confidence (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32762613/>). Another large review found that choir singing is associated with increased positive emotions, reduced anxiety, and stronger social bonding (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29982515/>). Research on children and adolescents has also found that choir singing can have positive psychological and biological effects, including improved mood and reduced stress (<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8764148/>).

These cuts would narrow access to diverse learning experiences and reduce the pathways through which students can participate in school life. Not every student connects with the same kind of music program, and choir, jazz band, and other ensembles help ensure that more students can find a place where they belong.

School connectedness is one of the strongest predictors of adolescent health and academic success. When programs like choir and jazz band are cut, we are removing the very things that make students want to come to school. For many, these ensembles are the primary reason they feel a sense of purpose and attachment to their school community. As the above research makes clear, the 'social bonding' and 'connectedness' found in group singing are not just byproducts of attending music classes, they are essential developmental benefits that support long-term student well-being.

I urge you to reconsider any reductions to middle school music programming and to protect the full range of music opportunities currently available to students, including choir, jazz band, and other ensembles. Supporting public education means not just teaching academics to our children but providing the programs that keep students engaged, inspired, and connected to their schools.

***Personal message / experience:***

*Please share your own experience here. For example:*

*Do you have personal experience with choir, jazz or other ensembles on a professional level? Would this decision impact your own children or students that you know? Why do these programs matter in our school communities? What would be lost if choir, jazz band, or other ensembles were cut?*

Thank you for taking the time to consider the importance of these programs and the lasting value they bring to students, families, schools, and the broader community.

I give permission for this letter to be included in the correspondence of the next scheduled agenda for the Greater Victoria School District.

Sincerely,

Louis Rudner  
Universal Jazz Advocates and Mentorship Society

Young All Stars Program Director

[www.u-jam.ca](http://www.u-jam.ca)

Dear Blake,

Thank you for your thoughtful and well-researched email. We appreciate the depth of your analysis, including your review of the district's publicly posted audited financial statements and your questions regarding historical budgeting patterns, projected versus actual deficits, and fund balances. Your engagement reflects the strong community commitment to public education in Greater Victoria. We also appreciate your continued advocacy for adequate funding.

You asked that the Board reconsider proposed reductions to middle school music, inclusion supports, and mental health programs in the 2026-2027 budget.

Across the province, school districts are managing structural, not one-time, budget pressures. The Greater Victoria School District is entering the 2026–2027 budget cycle with an estimated structural deficit of \$5.2 million, partially offset by prior-year surpluses, leaving \$1.6 million to address. These prior-year surpluses include \$2.3 million from 2024-2025, representing .89% of the district's total actual operating expense, and \$1.3 million projected from 2025-2026, representing approximately .49% of the district's total budgeted operating expense. Although these surpluses help reduce the structural deficit, they are relatively small in proportion to the overall budget and therefore insufficient on their own to eliminate the underlying funding gap.

There are many factors contributing to the structural deficit, including:

- declining enrolment reducing per-pupil funding
- reduced investment income due to interest-rate changes
- rising inflationary pressures on essential software and service contracts
- increasing unfunded costs such as benefits, salary increments, and replacement costs
- programs that are unfunded or only partially funded by the Ministry and must be supported locally

As you observed, year-end results often differ from initial projections. This occurs because budgets must be prepared months before the end of the fiscal year, while audited actuals reflect finalized revenues, unforeseen staffing vacancies, one-time savings, and other late-year adjustments. At times, this difference can also result from intentional spending restraint, where the district underspends in specific areas to increase the year-end operating surplus to help offset structural deficits in future years. This has been a strategy employed by the District in recent years as a way to minimize deeper budget cuts. The district does incorporate historical variance trends where prudent. The \$1.3 million projected surplus from 2025-2026 that is being used to partially offset the structural deficit in 2026-2027 reflects a conservative estimate based on anticipated year-end conditions. However, relying more heavily on projected surpluses, beyond what is reasonably certain, would create significant financial risk, as it cannot be assumed that the specific one-time circumstances that generate these surpluses will recur.

We understand and genuinely value the community's strong support for music education. In your email, you highlighted several important examples including the national recognition earned by a middle school music teacher and students, the testimonials from former students who credit these programs with shaping their lives, and the well-established research linking music participation to student engagement, belonging and well-being. These impacts are meaningful and underscore why music will continue to receive additional funding and why reductions are being considered with great care.

At the same time, the Board must balance these priorities with the following :

- the legal requirement to present a balanced budget
- the reality of ongoing structural deficits
- the financial risk associated with relying on year-end variances that cannot be guaranteed
- the legal and accounting restrictions on the use of restricted funds
- the need to ensure long-term financial sustainability rather than one-year deferrals

You also asked whether restricted fund balances could be used to temporarily stabilize programs. The district's audited financial statements clearly separate restricted funds (externally restricted grants, targeted Indigenous Education funding, professional development funds protected by collective agreements, school special projects and reserves, department initiatives, one-time capital purchases, etc.) from unrestricted operating funds (operating contingency). Under the *School Act* and the provincial *Accumulated Operating Surplus Policy*, these restricted funds must be used only for their designated purposes and cannot be redirected to ongoing operating expenses such as staffing.

Regarding unrestricted operating funds, Ministry and Board policy require the district to maintain a contingency of 2-4% of the prior year operating expenses. Based on the district's audited financial statements, the minimum operating contingency is approximately \$5 million. The current operating contingency is \$1.3 million, or .48%, well below the required minimum. Maintaining and building this contingency is essential for financial stability and cannot sustainably fund recurring staffing costs.

While year-end results may sometimes improve due to unforeseen savings, the Board cannot base staffing decisions on projected variances that may or may not recur. Any future budget decisions would depend on the circumstances at that time and a full assessment of the district's overall financial position.

Your questions reflect the thoughtful inquiry the Board hopes to encourage from the community, and your perspective is genuinely valued as we navigate these challenging decisions.

Thank you again for writing and for your advocacy on behalf of students.

Sherri Bell  
Official Trustee, Greater Victoria School District

**From:** [Blake Crouch](#)  
**To:** [Official Trustee](#); [Deb Whitten](#)  
**Cc:** [Community Engagement](#)  
**Subject:** Re: Concern Regarding Proposed Cuts to Middle School Music  
**Date:** Wednesday, March 18, 2026 6:25:24 AM  
**Attachments:** [image002.png](#)  
[image004.png](#)  
[image003.png](#)  
[image001.png](#)

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I would like to follow up with the additional letter below please

Official Trustee Sherri Bell  
[officialtrustee@sd61.bc.ca](mailto:officialtrustee@sd61.bc.ca)

Superintendent Deb Whitten  
[dwhitten@sd61.bc.ca](mailto:dwhitten@sd61.bc.ca)

Dear Trustee Bell and Superintendent Whitten,

I am writing as a resident of Esquimalt and a member of the SD61 community to ask you to preserve middle school music programs in the 2026/27 budget.

I want to acknowledge upfront that I understand the district faces real structural pressures — inadequate provincial funding, rising costs, and depleted reserves. Those pressures are real, and I share the frustration that the province has not increased per-student grants to keep pace with inflation. That failure at the provincial level is something I am also raising directly with Minister Beare and MLA Rotchford.

But I have a sincere question about the math at the district level — and I raise it respectfully, not as an accusation.

Looking at the district's own audited financial statements from 2022 to the present, there is a consistent and significant pattern: every year, the projected deficit has been substantially larger than the actual deficit. The average annual discrepancy between projected and actual results over the last four years is approximately 17 times larger than the proposed \$250,871 cut to music programs. That same discrepancy is approximately 9 times larger than the combined proposed cuts to music, inclusion, family and mental health supports — totalling roughly \$700,000.

In other words, the programs proposed for elimination represent only about 16% of the average annual gap between what the district projected it would lose and what it actually lost.

I am not suggesting the district is acting in bad faith. Budgeting is genuinely complex, and projection gaps can reflect prudent conservatism. But I am asking: has this pattern been factored into the decision to cut music? And if actuals have consistently come in better than projections, is there a case for protecting these programs while the full-year picture becomes clearer?

I also note that restricted fund balances have grown year over year while the unrestricted contingency sits at 2–4% of budget per policy. I would welcome transparency about whether any of those restricted funds could temporarily bridge the gap for programs of this demonstrated community value.

The music programs in this district are extraordinary. A Victoria middle school teacher won a national competition with her students just this past December. Former students — many of them now prominent in fields well beyond music — have testified repeatedly to the lasting impact of these programs. For students who struggle to find belonging elsewhere, music is often the place where they find it. The research on music and brain development, on social connection, on mental health outcomes, is unambiguous.

The proposed cut of \$250,871 is real. So is the human cost of losing what took decades to build.

I respectfully ask that you:

1. Reconsider the proposed cuts to middle school music, inclusion supports, and family and mental health programs in the 2026/27 budget
2. Provide a public explanation of the consistent gap between projected and actual deficits, and whether that pattern informs this year's decisions
3. Clarify the status and intended use of restricted fund balances that have grown while operating programs are cut

Thank you for your continued service to this community under genuinely difficult circumstances. I give my consent for this letter to be included in the district's public agenda package.

Sincerely,

Blake Crouch

**From:** [Adam Jonathan Con](#)  
**To:** [Official Trustee](#)  
**Subject:** RE: Protecting Comprehensive Middle School Music Programs in SD61  
**Date:** Thursday, March 12, 2026 10:49:07 AM  
**Attachments:** [Outlook-A red circ.png](#)  
[Outlook-Chinese Na.png](#)

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Dear Official Trustee Bell,

**Subject: Protecting Comprehensive Middle School Music Programs in SD61**

I am writing to express my concern regarding the proposed reductions to middle school music programs in the Greater Victoria School District (SD61).

I understand that the district is currently addressing a budget shortfall of approximately **\$1.6 million**, and that one proposed measure would reduce approximately **\$250,871 from middle school music programming**. While it has been indicated that Concert Band and Strings programs may remain available at the Grade 6–8 level, the description of the proposal appears to omit programs such as **choir, jazz band, musical theatre, and other ensemble-based learning opportunities** that currently play an important role in middle school education.

I am also well aware that when school districts are faced with difficult financial decisions, the arts are often among the first programs considered for reduction or elimination. This tendency frequently reflects an assumption that arts programs are primarily recreational—valuable perhaps for enjoyment, but ultimately non-essential. However, research in music education and the learning sciences demonstrates that this assumption is **fundamentally inaccurate**. Far from being peripheral, music education is strongly associated with a range of educational, developmental, and social benefits that contribute directly to student learning and well-being.

A substantial body of research in music education, psychology, and neuroscience demonstrates that sustained engagement in school music programs supports **cognitive development, social-emotional learning, and school engagement**. Participation in ensemble music-making has been associated with the development of discipline, collaboration, empathy, creative problem-solving, and persistence—capacities that are widely recognized as core competencies for contemporary education.

Choral programs are particularly significant in this regard. Choir represents one of the **most equitable and accessible forms of school music participation**. Unlike some instrumental programs, choral participation typically does not require families to purchase or

rent instruments or to arrange for private instruction outside of school. As a result, choir provides an inclusive entry point into music education for students from a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds. Reducing or eliminating these opportunities would therefore disproportionately limit access for students who may not otherwise be able to participate in music education.

Research literature further highlights the distinctive social and psychological benefits of group singing. Systematic reviews of choral participation among children and adolescents indicate that group singing contributes to **increased social connectedness, improved mood, reduced anxiety, and enhanced emotional well-being**. Studies also suggest that ensemble singing fosters a sense of **collective identity and belonging**, both of which are strongly associated with student engagement and persistence in school communities.

In addition, it is important to situate this discussion within the broader context facing young people today. We are currently witnessing **significant concerns regarding youth mental health across Canada**, including rising levels of anxiety, isolation, and disengagement among adolescents. At precisely such a moment, schools should be strengthening—not reducing—programs that foster connection, creativity, and emotional expression.

Music education offers a powerful counterbalance to these challenges. Ensemble music-making provides opportunities for **collective participation, emotional expression, and meaningful human connection**—experiences that are increasingly scarce in the digitally mediated environments that dominate much of young people’s daily lives. At a time when educators and parents are seeking ways to help young people move beyond the isolating and often numbing effects of constant smartphone use, music education offers a profoundly human alternative: students breathing together, listening to one another, and creating something meaningful through shared effort.

Jazz band and other specialized ensembles similarly provide unique educational opportunities. These programs cultivate **creative agency, improvisation, collaborative listening, and musical leadership**, competencies that are difficult to replicate in other curricular contexts. For many students, school-based jazz programs represent their only opportunity to engage in this form of collaborative and exploratory music-making.

SD61 serves approximately **20,000 students across ten middle schools**, meaning that reductions to middle school music programs would affect a significant portion of the district’s student population. A diverse range of music ensembles ensures that students with different interests, abilities, and learning styles are able to find meaningful points of connection within the school environment. When these opportunities are narrowed, the pathways through which students can experience belonging and engagement within school communities are also diminished.

Educational research consistently identifies **school connectedness** as one of the strongest predictors of both academic success and adolescent well-being. Ensemble music programs—particularly choir and collaborative instrumental groups—are among the most effective contexts in which students develop these connections. When such programs are reduced, the educational system risks losing important mechanisms that support student motivation, identity formation, and community engagement.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the district to reconsider reductions to middle school music programming and to preserve the **full spectrum of ensemble opportunities currently available**, including choir, jazz band, and other collaborative music programs. Supporting public education involves not only providing academic instruction, but also ensuring that students have access to the artistic and communal experiences that foster engagement, well-being, and a sense of belonging within their schools.

Thank you for your consideration and for your continued commitment to the students and families of Greater Victoria.

Sincerely,  
Dr. Adam Jonathan Con

I give permission for this letter to be included in the correspondence of the next scheduled agenda for the Greater Victoria School District.



**Adam Jonathan Con, Ph.D.** (he/him) 簡仁翰

Professor of Music, Music Education, Choral Conducting  
[University of Victoria](#)

*We acknowledge and respect the Ləkʷəŋən (Songhees and Xʷsepsem/Esquimalt) Peoples on whose territory the university stands, and the Ləkʷəŋən and W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.*

March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2026

Re: Proposed cuts to middle school music programs

Dear Official Trustee Bell and Superintendent Whitten,

I am a parent of two SD61 students, one in middle school and the other in elementary school. I believe by now you have received many letters from families, community members, perhaps students themselves, and prominent organizations such as the Victoria Symphony, the Victoria Conservatory of Music, and BC Music Educators' Association-- among others--about the proposed cuts to middle school music programs in next year's SD61 budget. The myriads of science-proven benefits of music programs, including and particularly at the middle school level, and the detrimental implications of these proposed cuts have no doubt appeared in these letters, so I will not reiterate them here. Instead, I would like to draw your attention to and advocate for one particular group that would be impacted significantly by the proposed cuts but may not have been well represented in these conversations: SD 61 middle school music teachers.

Profoundly influenced by my high school band teacher, I began my undergraduate studies in the Music Education program at the University of Victoria. I was inspired by my peers and professors and motivated to challenge myself to learn, grow, and prepare for a career as a school music teacher. However, I dropped out of the program after only two terms, not because I did not like it or because I was getting poor grades. I dropped out because I quickly realized that school music teachers are an exceptional group of educators and I, unfortunately, didn't quite have what it takes!

I have not met a school music teacher whom I have not liked, respected, or admired – and I have met many of them. Every single one of them fosters creativity, inspires excellence, demonstrates discipline and hard work, instills confidence, teaches teamwork, and provides a safe place where students feel they belong. During a time when adolescents begin to separate from their parents to find themselves, music teachers are their role models and cheerleaders -- trusted adults who encourage and support them not only in their musical pursuits but in character building and emotional/social development.

Our music teachers' impact on the students, families, schools, community, and even the world is profound and should be recognized, honoured, and celebrated. Filled with strength of character and generosity of spirit, they are raising future generations of not only music educators and professional musicians but also doctors and nurses, philosophers, first responders, mathematicians, writers, engineers, world leaders, etc. Their expertise and dedication should not be undermined: they deserve job security and satisfaction, and they should not have to worry about being displaced as a result of these cuts.

Cutting any school music program would erode inclusion and equity, disrupt the stability of teaching staff, and take away opportunities for meaningful connections among students

and teachers. I urge you to consider other ways of balancing the budget without imposing cuts to student programs and supports. Our music teachers have always been there for us; it is now our turn to have their backs.

I give permission for this letter to be included in the next scheduled agenda and available pack-up for the Greater Victoria School District.

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Shu-min Huang". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Shu-min Huang  
SD61 Parent





## **Subject: Please Protect Middle School Music Programs in SD61**

Dear Superintendent Whitten, Official Trustee Sherri Bell, and Secretary Treasurer Katrina Stride,

I am writing to express my deep concern regarding the proposed cuts to middle school music programs in the Greater Victoria School District.

I understand that SD61 is facing a budget deficit of approximately \$1.6 million, and that one proposed reduction would cut \$250,871 from middle school music programming. While it has been stated that middle schools will continue to offer Concert Band 6, 7, 8 and Strings 6, 7, 8, this wording leaves out middle school choirs, jazz bands, musical theatre programs, and other valuable ensembles that are essential to students and school communities.

These programs are not extras. They are important educational opportunities that help students develop confidence, creativity, discipline, teamwork, belonging, and connection to school. For many students, these ensembles are where they find community, purpose, self-esteem, and success.

Choir is one of the most accessible and equitable music classes students can participate in. Unlike some other music programs, choir does not require families to rent or purchase an instrument, pay for private lessons, or secure resources outside of school for students to be fully involved. It provides a low-barrier, inclusive entry point into music education for a wide range of learners. Cutting choir would remove one of the most accessible opportunities for students to belong, contribute, and thrive in school.

Research also supports the importance of singing and choir participation. A 2021 systematic review found that group singing may support young people's well-being through social connectedness and confidence (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32762613/>).

Another large review found that choir singing is associated with increased positive emotions, reduced anxiety, and stronger social bonding (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29982515/>). Research on children and adolescents has also found that choir singing can have positive psychological and biological effects, including improved mood and reduced stress (<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8764148/>).

Jazz band is also a unique and valuable offering. It is a specialized ensemble experience that many students do not have access to outside of school. For students interested in



improvisation, collaboration, and contemporary ensemble playing, school jazz band may be their only opportunity to develop those skills in a meaningful and supported way.

These proposed cuts would affect hundreds of families across our district. SD61 serves about 20,000 students across 10 middle schools, and reductions to middle school music would be felt widely across every single one of our school communities.

These cuts would narrow access to diverse learning experiences and reduce the pathways through which students can participate in school life. Not every student connects with the same kind of music program, and choir, jazz band, and other ensembles help ensure that more students can find a place where they belong.

School connectedness is one of the strongest predictors of adolescent health and academic success. When programs like choir and jazz band are cut, we are removing the very things that make students want to come to school. For many, these ensembles are the primary reason they feel a sense of purpose and attachment to their school community. As the above research makes clear, the 'social bonding' and 'connectedness' found in group singing are not just byproducts of attending music classes, they are essential developmental benefits that support long-term student well-being.

I urge you to reconsider any reductions to middle school music programming and to protect the full range of music opportunities currently available to students, including choir, jazz band, and other ensembles. Supporting public education means not just teaching academics to our children but providing the programs that keep students engaged, inspired, and connected to their schools.

Thank you for taking the time to consider the importance of these programs and the lasting value they bring to students, families, schools, and the broader community.

I give permission for this letter to be included in the correspondence of the next scheduled agenda for the Greater Victoria School District.

Kind regards,

*Steven J. Capaldo*

Dr. Steven J. Capaldo  
Acting Director, School of Music  
Graduate Advisor  
Head of Music Education  
Associate Professor of Music Education and Conducting

**From:** [Kym Thrift](#)  
**To:** [Official Trustee](#); [Deb Whitten](#); [Community Engagement](#)  
**Subject:** Feedback on Budget 2026-27  
**Date:** Saturday, March 28, 2026 7:47:41 AM

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**Dear Superintendent Whitten, Official Trustee Sherri Bell, and Secretary-Treasurer Katrina Stride,**

I am writing as a concerned parent about the proposed budget cuts to middle school music programs in the Greater Victoria School District.

There are several key issues I urge you to consider:

1. **The proposed reductions would cause long-term harm to established and highly successful choir and jazz band programs**, affecting both current students and future cohorts.
2. **The most recent school board election delivered a strong mandate to protect and nurture music education.** Implementing cuts of this magnitude—particularly under an official trustee—would undermine the clear priorities expressed by the electorate.
3. **There are viable alternatives for addressing the district’s deficit that do not impact student-facing programs.** Operational efficiencies within administration and maintenance have not been fully explored and could provide meaningful savings without compromising core educational services.

I understand that SD61 is facing a budget shortfall of approximately \$1.6 million, and that one proposed measure would remove \$250,871 from middle school music programming. While it has been stated that Concert Band will remain, this reduction would significantly affect middle school choirs, jazz bands, musical theatre, and other valuable programs. These offerings are not extras—they are essential educational experiences that build confidence, creativity, discipline, teamwork, belonging, and connection to school. For many students, these ensembles are where they find community, purpose, self-esteem, and success.

**Choir, in particular, is one of the most accessible and equitable music programs available.** Unlike other music pathways, choir does not require families to rent or purchase instruments, pay for private lessons, or secure additional resources outside of school. It provides a low-barrier, inclusive entry point into music education for a wide range of learners. Eliminating choir would remove one of the few universally accessible opportunities for students to belong, contribute, and thrive.

**Jazz band also plays a unique role in engaging students through contemporary music and fostering strong peer connections.** Programs that bridge classroom learning with popular culture consistently demonstrate high levels of student dedication and enthusiasm.

As a [REDACTED] parent, I have seen firsthand the remarkable participation and engagement in

the school's music programs. These are thriving, high-impact programs with clear educational and social benefits.

The research strongly supports the importance of group singing and ensemble participation.

- A 2021 systematic review found that group singing supports young people's well-being through social connectedness and confidence (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32762613/>).
- Another large review linked choir participation to increased positive emotions, reduced anxiety, and stronger social bonding (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29982515/>).
- Additional research on children and adolescents shows positive psychological and biological effects, including improved mood and reduced stress (<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8764148/>).

We also know that **school connectedness is one of the strongest predictors of adolescent health and academic success**. When programs like choir and jazz band are cut, we remove the very experiences that make students want to come to school. For many, these ensembles are the primary source of belonging and attachment to their school community. The “social bonding” and “connectedness” identified in the research are not incidental—they are essential developmental benefits that support long-term well-being.

For these reasons, I strongly urge you to reconsider any reductions to middle school music programming and to protect the full range of opportunities currently available, including choir, jazz band, and other ensembles. Supporting public education means not only delivering strong academics but also sustaining the programs that keep students engaged, inspired, and connected to their schools.

Thank you for your time on this important issue.

Kind Regards,

Kym Thrift

Parent of Elementary and Middle School Students in SD61

Note: Please include this letter in the official package of information for the public school board meeting regarding the budget.