
Lowell Music Teacher Cut

Callie Morris <callie.rose67@gmail.com>

Thu, Jun 6, 2024 at 2:01 PM

To: "publiccomment@mcpsmt.org" <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

Hello!

I'm writing because I don't agree with the choice made to cut the music teacher position at Lowell school and hope that there is an emphasis on hiring a music teacher at a fair and liveable wage for Missoula.

As one of the many people that feels music saved their life during a tumultuous childhood I have a personal passion and belief that music saves lives. Additionally, being pregnant currently, it worries me for the future of my daughter that so many of these life-saving positions are being cut. My hope is to have her thrive in public schools, but it's decisions like this that have lead so many people to homeschool or pull their children out of school and it is certainly part of the conversation with my husband when discussing the future schooling of our daughter.

Please consider my comment when moving forward with your decisions that effect the arts in Missoula.

Take good care of you and your community,

Callie Morris (She/Her/Hers)

Mental Health Therapist, SWLC

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Lowell Music Concern

Randy Zschaechner <rjzschaechner@mcpst.org>
To: publiccomment@mcpst.org

Mon, Jun 10, 2024 at 10:54 AM

I'm writing to you to check in on a concerning switch at Lowell elementary for the upcoming year, the elimination of the music position and addition of an art position. From an equity perspective this concerns me as ALL other elementary schools will have music, this puts a lower socio-economic student base at a disadvantage when joining their peers at the middle school level. Lowell is already slated to have art for the 2024-25 school year so this move is solely removing music from the equation and not adding anything the students weren't already getting. Does this mean the Lowell students will be getting double Art opportunities?

I've heard that there were no applicants for the position, however I know this to be false. The music education community is a small group and we're frequently in touch with each other to develop best practices for teaching and mentoring as needed. One music education member has mentioned that they did indeed send in an application but received a response that the "needs of the district have changed and the position is no longer available." This person was highly qualified, and if hired, would have allowed the opportunity for the Lowell students to receive equitable education with those from other schools. This is concerning, especially given that with the removal of the Arts Education Director, program cuts are seemingly more up to the values of each individual principal and not necessarily equitable across the district. I believe we as a staff and community had been told that no programs would be lost with the elimination of the Arts Education Director.

My intent for writing to you is not to try to remove art from Lowell but to reevaluate the decision so student's futures are not negatively impacted through the removal of music. Re-opening the music position would allow both art and music to be part of the student's day and set them up for equitable opportunities for success that other MCPS students will be receiving.

Randy Zschaechner

- - Director of Bands, Meadow Hill Middle School
 - - MEF Teacher of the Year 2015
 - - Director's who Make Difference for School Band and Orchestra, 2018 Montana Representative
 - - Missoula Arts Star Award Recipient 2020
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Access to Music Education at Lowell Elementary

Jesse Dochnahl <jessedochnahl@gmail.com>
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Mon, Jun 10, 2024 at 12:14 PM

Dear Principal Rae Cooper and the MCPS Board of Trustees,

It was brought to my attention on June 5 that Lowell Elementary is planning to terminate music education programs for all students next year. I hope and expect that the collective leadership team at Lowell and MCPS will reconsider this frightening and destructive decision.

Superintendent Micah Hill stated in a letter to all Missoula families in early February, 2024, when addressing the district's sprawling cuts, "We will make every effort to uphold programs and opportunities valued by the MCPS community." At the ensuing board of trustees meeting on February 13, 2024, the administration clearly laid out to a packed room of board members, students, and community members that the Arts Education Director position was being eliminated in order to preserve all existing music, art, and theater programs for all MCPS students. It was clearly implied from both the Feb 13 meeting and the superintendent's letter that the district's priority was to preserve the curricula and opportunities currently offered amidst the budget shortfall.

Therefore, the recent decision to stamp out access to music education at Lowell demonstrates to all families that the administration's view of a quality education is misaligned with Missoula's Board and Superintendent(s). In addition, the termination is in direct conflict with the US federal requirements for an effective education: music is a core academic subject in the United States, as designated by the Every Child Achieves Act (S. 1177), a bipartisan revision of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) that passed the Senate in July 2015. The arts and music provide unparalleled opportunities for inclusion and equity within our school system--the essential values for which that MCPS strives. How can we lose sight of this?

Ms. Cooper, I thank you for your time and support of Lowell's children and families. Can you please explain why Lowell Elementary is considering the drastic, inequitable, and saddening decision to eradicate general music classes from their school? What is driving the decision? Is Lowell struggling to find a music teacher applicant? If so, what resources have you used to seek out the best applicants? What can the community do to help Lowell sustain the exceptional music programs accessible to every student in our district? (Put us to work for you and your students, please! There are robust networks available for everyone.) What led the Lowell and MCPS leadership to believe that Missoula does not value music education, as the optics of this scenario imply? Is this a strategic reallocation of FTE that best serves each and every student for years to come? Have you assessed the long-term consequences of terminating music education? And is this insight available to the Missoula community?

Missoula's board of trustees has consistently and publicly advocated for music and arts education through the decade amidst four superintendents, \$158 million bond projects, a global pandemic, and a recent budget shortfall that inspired the passing of two elementary levees in May, 2024. Missoula's families have heard repeatedly that their trustees value music and art education through their public comments, written responses in social media, and actions. Consequently, the quantifiable scenario unfolding at Lowell is the specific attack for which the community and school board expressed immense concern on February 13; that eliminations like these are just the first of many more Draconian cuts to come. I'm shocked by how the Lowell administration, in addition to our district leadership, are rapidly failing the community as the stewards of public trust and advocates for a well-rounded education for all.

Thank you for taking the time to answer these questions for Missoula, and thank you for reconsidering your plan. Your positive, supportive, transparent, and high-standard style of leadership will be greatly appreciated.

Jesse Dochnahl
Director of Bands
Hellgate High School
2024 MEF High School Teacher of the Year

Urgent Appeal to Preserve the Music Teacher Position at Lowell Elementary

2 messages

Ryan Davis <rsdavis30@gmail.com>

Mon, Jun 10, 2024 at 4:22 PM

To: javgeris@mcpsmt.org, awake@mcpsmt.org, chayes@mcpsmt.org, kmercerc@mcpsmt.org, woldperson@mcpsmt.org, jvogel@mcpsmt.org, awalker-andrews@mcpsmt.org, jwalsh@mcpsmt.org, mwhicher@mcpsmt.org, kwitt@mcpsmt.org, rwoelich@mcpsmt.org, publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Cc: Rae Cooper <rcooper@mcpsmt.org>

Please see the attached letter and thank you for considering my concerns.

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Ryan Davis
Director of Orchestras
Hellgate High School
Sentinel High School
Missoula Youth Symphony



Urgent Appeal to Preserve the Music Teacher Position at Lowell Elementary.pdf

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Dear Members of the School Board,

I am writing to you today with a matter that deeply concerns our entire community—the proposed elimination of the music teacher position at Lowell Elementary. As a devoted educator, I have spent years witnessing firsthand the profound impact that music education has on our students. It is essential that we maintain this role, not just for the sake of our school, but for the vitality of our community as a whole.

Music education is a cornerstone of a well-rounded academic experience, offering much more than just musical skills. It enhances cognitive development, sparks creativity, and builds the emotional resilience of our students. Access to music education should not be a privilege reserved for those who can afford it; it is a fundamental right that enriches every student's learning journey and life. The decision to cut this position disproportionately affects students from lower-income families who might not have to engage with music through private lessons or other private programs. This is not just unfortunate; it is fundamentally unjust.

In recent months, our community has demonstrated significant support for the elementary levies in Missoula, signaling a strong commitment to sustaining our arts and music programs. Many of us believed that voting for the elementary levies would ensure the continued support and funding of these vital programs. Music teachers were informed that the elimination of our fine arts supervisor was a necessary sacrifice to protect music positions and the integrity of our programs. However, it now appears that additional cuts are being made beyond the fine arts supervisor, impacting the arts disproportionately. This decision will send a troubling message about the value placed on the arts within our district. If we continue to diminish arts education, we risk losing talented, dedicated music teachers who might seek opportunities elsewhere. The implications are far-reaching: it will become increasingly difficult to attract skilled educators if they perceive that we do not value the arts.

Moreover, our music programs play a crucial role in attracting students from diverse educational backgrounds, thereby boosting our enrollment and enhancing our funding. I know of many families, previously homeschooling or attending private schools, that have chosen our schools specifically for its vibrant music offerings. Reducing access to these programs not only diminishes our district's appeal but also risks a decrease in our district's funding, as these families may opt to continue with private or homeschool education if our schools do not have quality music programs.

Missoula prides itself on its distinctive, artistic culture—the motto "Keep Missoula Weird" is a testament to this identity. Cutting music and arts education threatens this very ethos. You, as our elected representatives, have a responsibility to ensure that our schools mirror the values that our community holds dear. The arts are not a luxury; they are indispensable to fostering a dynamic and inclusive community.

Therefore, I urge you to reconsider this decision to cut the music teacher position at Lowell Elementary. Reflect on the profound and far-reaching benefits that music education offers to our

students and the community at large. Let us continue to give every student the opportunity to discover and develop through the transformative power of music.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Ryan Davis

Director of Orchestras

Hellgate and Sentinel High School

Missoula Youth Symphony

President, Montana String Teachers Association