

For distribution March 31

Washington Middle School Parents and Students Mobilize to Save Legacy Music Program

Central District school faces deep cut to its music program for 2023-24 school year

Community plans to attend April 4 school board meeting to urge Seattle Public Schools to restore award-winning program

Students are leading a march in protest of proposed cuts at 3:45 pm April 7 outside Washington Middle School

SEATTLE (March 31, 2023) --- A group of parents, faculty, community leaders, alumni, musicians and students is rallying to save Washington Middle School's award-winning, legacy music program, which school leaders have proposed to cut by half next school year. Seattle Public Schools [faces](#) a \$131 million budget shortfall.

The cuts displace the band teacher, which means the consolidation of the entire music program -- including choir, band, and orchestra -- into a single teaching position, and the loss of jazz instruction during the school day.

The coalition plans to protest the proposed cuts at the April 4 meeting of the Seattle Public Schools Board of Directors. A group of students is organizing an April 7 march from Washington Middle School after school, and is collecting signatures [here](#) to restore the full program, which serves more than 150 students in bands, 28 choir students and more than 50 students in orchestra.

Washington Middle School fronts Jackson Street, where the Jackson Street Jazz Walk celebrates the deep legacy of jazz in the community every year. Washington Middle School Junior Husky Jazz Band is the primary feeder program for Garfield High School's internationally recognized jazz band. The Garfield Jazz Band has won every major competition on the West Coast and is a frequent participant in the Essentially Ellington National Jazz Band Competition and Festival at Lincoln Center. The Junior Husky Jazz Band placed in the top three bands at the Bellevue Jazz Festival last month, and last year, [placed first](#).

Washington Middle School is one of the most diverse middle schools in the city, [with](#) 80 percent BIPOC students and 62% of the student population qualifying for free and reduced lunch. The music program at Washington has grown increasingly diverse in recent years, thanks in part to a renewed focus by educators on ensuring the program is accessible.

"Coming back after the quarantine, I didn't expect to like music at all. But in the 6th grade, I started band and it has made me feel included," said Owen Heffter, 12, a 6th grader who plays

the drums and the saxophone. “Taking band this year has made me excited about school. It invokes teamwork with my friends, and it’s now my favorite class of the day.”

“Band brings an unmatched feeling of energy and belonging that motivates me and many others to get out of bed each day. It has boosted my self confidence and happiness more than anything else in my life,” said 6th grade drummer Jo Chick. “It has given me new connections to people I wouldn’t talk to otherwise, that have been instrumental in my life ever since. Washington Middle School’s music program is truly life changing and something we absolutely need to continue.”

“I’m saddened for the students and the prospects of instrumental music education in the Central District, where educators were laying the groundwork for a neighborhood-based music program that was accessible and could be much more demographically representative of the school population,” said Jared Sessink, the director for bands and jazz at Garfield High School. “Music classrooms are a beautiful space at school where students find a sense of belonging, safety, joy, passion, and learn how to collaborate and cooperate in large group settings. Seeing these spaces be reduced to bare bones is devastating.”

About Washington Middle School’s Music Department:

WMS Music serves a diverse and dynamic student body through daily music ensembles: concert band, orchestra, choirs, jazz band, and one percussion ensemble. Students from every educational program and background are afforded the ability to participate, and more than half of the school’s population is enrolled in a music ensemble. Complemented by after-school music offerings, this program is truly groundbreaking. For more information, visit <https://washingtonms.seattleschools.org/academics/music-department/>.