

The strings program has been very valuable to my son. It has built up his confidence, and the musical performances have really shown him how his hard work pays off. Strings are an asset to his education that benefits him beyond the musical arena.

Why are we spending time on pennies, when there are much larger issues at play?

Curriculum

Lack of any sort of strategic & tactical planning (Rainwater's comment about the potential need for new schools and a 2005 referendum.... - might be so, but how does this fit into any sort of a long-term educational plan and the overall costs for that plan)?

c) How are we going to pay for our plans? I think the property tax has largely run its course? Low income achievement.....positive opportunity.

My son is in the 4th grade strings program. Last year he had no interest in playing an instrument at all. After his teacher gave the demonstration class, he came home and handed me the sign up sheet and said "I want to play the cello, fill this out". He has really enjoyed playing this year, he has learned a lot about music and I think it has helped with his self esteem. He is a sports kid and I never thought he would take up an instrument, let alone a string instrument. I was amazed to see what the strings program has done when I attended the Strings Festival and saw the West High Gym filled with 600 kids from all the schools. I saw so many children that I would never have thought would be interested in playing an instrument, looking so proud of themselves. It would be a terrible waste and a great shame to cut money from a program that is reaching so many children who have so little to look forward to.

I don't have anything profound to say, but something that happened in our house recently is a testimonial to the strings program.

Our 11 year old son, who started strings in 4th grade recently asked his piano teacher if he could play a viola solo at his piano recital. She said yes, and as a result, he not only prepared his piano pieces, he also learned Vivaldi's "Spring" on viola. For a boy who can't seem to accomplish getting his dirty socks in the hamper, initiating and completing this goal is a big deal:-)

The 4th and 5th grade strings programs have meant a great deal to our son and to our family. I believe exposure to this wonderful musical opportunity helps to define our schools as excellent vs. just mediocre. It is especially important to provide this opportunity to the many children that could not possibly find the funds or means for private lessons. I believe musical education can open doors for children, broaden their horizons, touch and spark creativity that can lead to other successes. Musical education has documented positive impact on math skills as well. Trends in education caused by wrongheaded government management along with funding constraints are pushing schools toward rote learning for improved standardized test scores. This can only diminish the overall learning experience for our children and society as a whole. I strongly encourage the board to find a solution that will preserve the elementary strings program.

Two thoughts leap to mind. First, I want Madison to have excellent public schools, not schools which provide only the barest basics. Music instruction at all levels is part of the excellence Madison should offer. A district without an elementary instrumental program is saying it is not an excellent school system. If Madison wants to declare loud and clear that excellence is not a priority, the schools will quickly get much worse, a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Second, for my own kids I could live without school strings, because my children get private music instruction from a young age. But for many children, especially for children of poverty whom the district claims it wants to serve, the chance to study a string instrument in school opens the door to a whole cultural world which may otherwise be shut to these children forever, and to a challenge which they can meet individually and learn about their own abilities. That is what school is supposed to be for.

I expect the girls will want to add some thought. I told them about this issue on the way to school and their responses were on the order of, "That makes me so mad! That is just *idiotic*!" We may have to tone down the language a little. :)