

April 10, 2014

**Attention: Vancouver School Board**

**An open letter from Access to Music Foundation President and CEO to the Vancouver School Board**

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In 2007, Access to Music Foundation received an urgent plea from a music teacher in Vancouver's West End. Sixty Grade 6 and 7 students wanted to learn how to play an instrument so they could take part in their school band. However, the school had just a handful of instruments - most that were old and broken - to share among all the students that wanted to participate. The bigger challenge was that the VSB had defunded music programs.

Before long, we raised \$40,000 through an anonymous donor just in time to prepare for a holiday school concert. Thanks to these efforts 60 students succeeded in learning to play new instruments and had discovered the real benefits of playing in a band. And that, we thought, was the end of our work. But in fact, our work was just beginning.

Over the next few years we received dozens of urgent requests for assistance from other Vancouver schools. From dedicated music specialists who could no longer teach effectively on broken instruments; from parents who could not afford instrument rental fees and more from enthusiastic new teachers who wanted to start a band and string program that the VSB board could not or would not fund. And so, Access to Music became the **"first responders"** to music education. We responded to the most critical needs by contributing **\$85,000 to the most needy elementary and secondary schools in your district.** We recognized that was a simple triage approach, but it meant a world of hope and opportunity to students and their parents and brought sense of pride to their schools. Your schools.

**Seven years later**, your budget proposal to cut elementary school band and strings is, again, extinguishing every hope and putting at risk these opportunities for young people. This single act will have **disastrous effects on the overall learning experience** for thousands of elementary students now and for generations to come.

I am extremely dismayed to learn of these proposed cuts. I now find it hard to believe that the VSB is not as committed to supporting music programs; a critical part of whole and holistic learning, as are our individual and corporate donors. Our donors are not parents of children in your schools. They are not people of extreme wealth nor are they elite musicians. They are regular people who understand that for elementary school children, playing in a band or orchestra is key to building literacy and math skills, developing self-esteem, and yes, playing in a band is fun!

### Why is Music Education important?

1. **Why band and strings? More than any other learning methods,** Music education is proven to open neuro-pathways that develop critical and analytical skills, build determination, physical endurance and good judgement. When children learn to play in a band or orchestra at an early age, they are learning essential collaborative skills that will shape the way they communicate with others, work as a team, solve problems and make positive life choices throughout adulthood.
2. **Invest now or pay the price later** Extensive research and experience has shown that children who participate in public school music programs are less inclined to participate in gang related crime, less likely to turn to substance abuse and are less likely to suffer from depression and related mental health conditions in adulthood.
3. **Increases to parent fees create more financial hardship.** Included in the proposed budget is a substantial increase in fees for music and other activities from \$25 to \$250 annually. With the majority of successful music programs in schools in East Vancouver, the West End, and downtown, this increase will mean parents making the choice between food on the table or a child's academic wellbeing. And although Access to Music Foundation provides subsidies to parents who cannot afford these fees, the reality is that students are dropping out of music programs at alarming rates so as **not to "shame" their parents into admitting they cannot afford the costs.**

Access to Music Foundation is **urging the Vancouver School Board** to:

1. **restore** all existing elementary band and string programs and encourage the development of new programs for all elementary schools;
2. **support** the overall development of every child now rather than contribute to the cost burden for Vancouver's citizens and taxpayers later; and
3. **remove** the economic barriers to music participation for all its students and relieve the economic and emotional burden for parents.

**It's not just about music.** It is about providing a creative and innovative way to make the overall learning experience for every child a meaningful and lasting one.

Access to Music Foundation is **calling on all VSB parents of music students:**

1. **join** our Twitter campaign using **#InvestInVanKids** to show your support of music education;
2. **write** a letter to Premier Christy Clark asking for improvements to school funding (an example is at [www.accesstomusic.ca](http://www.accesstomusic.ca)); and
3. **attend** the public budget meeting on Tuesday, April 15th at Mt. Pleasant Elementary School at 7pm.

Access to Music Foundation works collaboratively with school districts, music educators, funders, and music education stakeholders to provide the best possible music education for BC's youth. Since 2007 we have placed instruments into the hands of close to 6,000 students from Haida Gwaii to Delta. We now support 30 school music programs across the province, with a focus on school districts in the Lower Mainland. We also provide mentorship and clinic opportunities for public school music students and teachers, creative workshops for vulnerable and marginalized youth and scholarships and study bursaries for talented youth who demonstrate need. Access to Music Foundation is governed by a Board of Directors who are leaders in the music industry, business and education.

I hope the Vancouver School Board will invest as enthusiastically in the future of Vancouver's children as do our foundation, our board, the corporate and private donors who support our efforts and our partners in education.

Sincerely,

**Elka S. Yarlowe, M. Mus.**  
President and CEO  
Access to Music Foundation