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**From:** Nora Flack <[ciaobellanora@gmail.com](mailto:ciaobellanora@gmail.com)>  
**Sent:** Monday, January 27, 2025 10:19 AM  
**To:** [boe@hcpss.org](mailto:boe@hcpss.org); CouncilMail; [bill\\_barnes@hcpss.org](mailto:bill_barnes@hcpss.org); Ball, Calvin  
**Subject:** Re: Budget FY25

**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
**Flag Status:** Flagged

[Note: This email originated from outside of the organization. Please only click on links or attachments if you know the sender.]

Dear Superintendent Barnes, Members of the Howard County Board of Education, Dr. Ball, and Members of the Howard County Council,

I am following up regarding my letter and public testimony. I would like to thank you all for keeping both GT programming and the 3rd grade strings program intact for the 2024-2025 school year! Many students at Dayton Oaks Elementary are benefitting from GT and Music programs. As a parent volunteer for the orchestras I am so proud to see the progress they have made. There are eighty third grade students participating in the beginning orchestra. My fourth grader continued orchestra this year, loves science ceu, and being challenged in GT math. I hope these programs will continue to be a staple for our community and not be considered for budget cuts in the immediate future. Thank you and have a great day!

Sincerely,  
Nora Flack

On Thu, Jan 25, 2024 at 3:29 PM Nora Flack <[ciaobellanora@gmail.com](mailto:ciaobellanora@gmail.com)> wrote:

Dear Acting-Superintendent Barnes, Members of the Howard County Board of Education, Dr. Ball, and Members of the Howard County Council,

I am a proud parent of two music-loving students. I currently have a 3rd and 5th grader in orchestra at Dayton Oaks Elementary School. I am writing to express my sincere concern regarding the potential program and staffing cuts in the Howard County Public School System (HCPSS), specifically the third grade strings program.

I attended Fairfax County Public Schools in Virginia and started playing the violin in 3rd grade over 35 years ago. I continued playing in the orchestra through 12th grade. It had a profound impact on me and I benefitted in so many ways from the fine arts music education that I received in public school. I am so grateful that I had the opportunity to experience musical fine arts in public school. I am so happy that both my children had the same opportunity as I did. They both are currently thriving in their school orchestras. I, however, think about all the rising 3rd graders that will not get the opportunity or chance to learn a string instrument next year if the strings program is cut. I am advocating on behalf of over 2,500 future 3rd grade string students that will not receive the chance. HCPSS should be providing more opportunities, not taking them away.

Music education plays a pivotal role in shaping well-rounded individuals, fostering creativity, discipline, and teamwork. My child's involvement in music in Howard County schools has not only enriched their academic experience but has also contributed to their overall personal development. Research consistently highlights

the positive impact of music education on academic performance. Students engaged in music often show improved cognitive skills, better concentration, and enhanced problem-solving abilities. These benefits extend beyond the music room and positively influence their academic achievements.

Furthermore, our Gold Standard music programs contribute to building a sense of community within our schools. The collaborative nature of musical ensembles teaches students the value of teamwork, discipline, and perseverance. These qualities are essential not only in their academic journey but also in their future careers.

I understand the budgetary challenges that HCPSS faces, but I urge you to consider the invaluable contribution that music programs make to our students' lives. By investing more in HCPSS overall as a county, we are investing in the future leaders, artists, and innovators of our community.

I kindly request that you work together to solve any proposed cuts to music funding and continue to support all programs that are considered well-managed and essential in our county.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Nora Flack

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Nora S. Flack, BA, RDH  
Cell (202) 207-6299

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Nora Sayasithsena Flack, BA, RDH  
(202) 207-6299

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**From:** Kay Sisson <kirsten.sisson@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Friday, April 11, 2025 2:55 PM  
**To:** Budget Testimony; Ball, Calvin; CouncilMail  
**Subject:** Testimony for the County Executive's FY26 Operating Budget

**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
**Flag Status:** Flagged

[Note: This email originated from outside of the organization. Please only click on links or attachments if you know the sender.]

Dear Howard County decision makers,

My name is Kirsten Sisson, and I am a parent of 3 hcpss children from Rockburn Elementary, Elkridge Landing Middle School, and Long Reach High School. I am writing to urge full funding for the Howard County Public School System's (HCPSS) FY26 budget request. Our schools need these resources to support students, educators, and vital programs. At my kid's schools, programs like music, art, special education, and theater have made a real difference, but we still face challenges such as class size, gym equipment, and funding for field trips.

The proposed budget prioritizes staff retention, special education, and student safety—areas critical to student success. Key priorities are needed [specific needs, e.g., athletic trainers, special education support, sufficient staffing]. Without these investments, our students will not receive the education and support they deserve.

I appreciate your leadership and commitment to education. I urge you to fully fund this budget and advocate for the resources necessary to support all HCPSS students.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Kirsten M. Sisson

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**From:** Aparna <ms.aparna@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, April 22, 2025 4:10 PM  
**To:** CouncilMail; boe@hcpss.org  
**Subject:** HCPSS budget

**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
**Flag Status:** Flagged

[Note: This email originated from outside of the organization. Please only click on links or attachments if you know the sender.]

Please provide full funding for the HCPSS operating budget. I am a parent of 3 hcpss public school students and believe so much in the value of our public education system. Please ensure that our children have all the academic rigor and excellent Music instruction to keep them mentally nourished, challenged, and to prepare them for the future and to take on our Nation's great challenges as future leaders. There is nothing more important.

Please reach out if you have any questions or if I can be of any assistance.

Thank you,  
Aparna Sri

Sent from my mobile.

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**From:** Jmorgan G Mail <jmorgan.lehrer@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, April 22, 2025 10:23 PM  
**To:** CouncilMail  
**Subject:** Fund the Hcpss budget!!

**Follow Up Flag:** Flag for follow up  
**Flag Status:** Flagged

[Note: This email originated from outside of the organization. Please only click on links or attachments if you know the sender.]

To Whom it May Concern:

I am a very concerned parent and educator. I am a primary talent development coach in Montgomery County Public Schools and all the research shows how important it is to expose ALL students to the gifted and talented curriculum. The main reason we moved our family to Howard County was for the public schools. They have a wonderful reputation and there is no doubt in my mind that this kind of seclusion would tarnish HCPSS's reputation. ALL children should be able to have access to the curriculum and the academic standards that they need. The level of rigor should remain up to the individual student, not the area in which they live. Being an educator, I see a direct correlation between class sizes and student achievement. Our students need small group time with the teacher as well as individual time to build on their strengths and to succeed academically. If the class sizes are too large, the teacher will not be able to meet the individual needs of the students. This multiplies the stress put on teachers. We certainly don't want to lose our qualified educators in Howard County! As much as academics are an important part of education, so are the arts! My children thrive when music is involved and they have been waiting patiently to learn an instrument in school, please don't take this opportunity away from them.

I am appalled by the discriminatory nature of this action and am worried for my own children's future education. Please consider revamping this initiative to include all of our children.

Jesse Lehrer Kaplan

Sent from my iPhone

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**From:** Karen B. Estrada <karen.b.estrada@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Sunday, April 27, 2025 7:04 PM  
**To:** Rigby, Christiana; CouncilMail  
**Subject:** Fully Fund the HCPSS Budget

[Note: This email originated from outside of the organization. Please only click on links or attachments if you know the sender.]

Dear Ms. Rigby and County Council representatives:

I was disappointed to see such drastic cuts to the funding of the HCPSS budget. As you know, our schools are already suffering from considerable deferred maintenance, lack of adequate staffing (particularly when it comes to special education and support staff), and increased class sizes (often with insufficient classroom space to house these numbers of students). We face a budget crisis every year in trying to keep services that not only provide students with a foundational education, but provide them with meaningful and enriching access to arts, music, theater--the type of programming that helps make Howard County a desirable school district in which to raise one's child.

As a parent whose children both find music programs (band, chorus) and theater as core to their happiness and sense of self, I would hate to see these valuable programs on the chopping block again due to inadequate funding from the county.

Please fully fund the HCPSS requested operating budget and keep valuable programs in our schools!

Sincerely,

Karen B. Estrada

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**From:** Jacobs, Noah <njacobs@smcm.edu>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, April 29, 2025 11:49 PM  
**To:** CouncilMail; Rigby, Christiana  
**Subject:** In support of 3rd Grade Strings in HCPSS

[Note: This email originated from outside of the organization. Please only click on links or attachments if you know the sender.]

Dear Howard County Council members:

I write to you again today to urge you to support GT teachers and 3rd grade strings and restore funding for HCPSS's operating budget. I am the proud parent of an HCPSS second grader who has been counting down the days since he was in kindergarten until he is able to join orchestra next year. It is disheartening to learn that this is once again in doubt due to looming budget cuts. While my son is one of the most open-minded and understanding 8-year olds I have ever interacted with, I still do not have a clue how to adequately explain to him that his excitement for being able to join orchestra may need to be put on hold, yet again.

I urge you to prioritize support for 3rd grade strings and GT teachers, which provide so many immeasurable benefits to students across HCPSS. As the spouse of an elementary strings teacher, I have seen firsthand both the amazing results that my wife is able to get with students who had never picked up a musical instrument prior to this year, as well as the very real negative impacts that even the discussion of cutting funding for the strings program has on her, her colleagues, and her students.

While the musical results themselves are nothing short of amazing (I urge you to attend an upcoming spring concert to see for yourself), even more powerful are the impacts that students' participation in music have on the rest of their academics and their lives more broadly. My wife has shared with me countless instances in which she has seen students who may struggle in their other classes thrive in orchestra and develop a renewed sense of self-confidence that they take with them and use to turn their struggles into success in their other classes. I have seen the messages of gratitude and thanks her students share with her at the end of each year expressing how grateful they are for the opportunity to learn an instrument, for her believing in them, and to feel like the hard work they put in was more than worth the effort for the experience they gained.

I looked back over similar messages I have written over the last several years to the County Council and Board of Education and have been saddened by the frequency with which I have felt compelled to write similar messages, not because I do not think this is worth speaking out for, but for the realization that enough people with control over our budget decisions apparently do not. I urge you to support GT teachers and 3rd grade strings and restore funding for the HCPSS operating budget. Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Noah Jacobs

Howard County Resident, Spouse of an HCPSS Teacher, and Father of a HCPSS Second Grader



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**From:** Joshua White <joshandsteph@msn.com>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, April 30, 2025 3:27 PM  
**To:** CouncilMail  
**Subject:** HCPSS Music

[Note: This email originated from outside of the organization. Please only click on links or attachments if you know the sender.]

Dear Sirs,

Much like I did last year, I am once again writing to advocate for ALL music programs in ALL HCPSS schools. Music education provides skills and camaraderie that students don't get through any other avenue. Our music programs open up a different world to students, some of whom normally wouldn't have a like opportunity anywhere else. It creates a place where students can belong, be creative, and thrive. Cutting the music program in our county would be a disservice to our students, and a detriment to the morale and health of our schools.

Sincerely,

Stephie White

WLHS, WLMS, and RBES Orchestra and Band Parent Sent from my iPhone

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**From:** Monica Lim <mcalim79@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, May 6, 2025 4:49 PM  
**To:** CouncilMail  
**Subject:** Please do not cut funds into the music program for 3rd graders

**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
**Flag Status:** Flagged

[Note: This email originated from outside of the organization. Please only click on links or attachments if you know the sender.]

Hello,

My name is Monica Lim. I'm a mother of 4 kids in Howard county MD.

I'm writing here to ask you not to cut fund for the music program for our 3rd graders.

My kids really enjoy being part of the school orchestra and county GT orchestra.

Starting the orchestra at 3rd grade has really impacted on my kids music skill level, discipline, team work, creativity and emotional intelligence.

My kids feel inspired and they feel great being part of the orchestra.

I'm sure that keeping this program will contribute to make more talent kids in the future.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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**From:** Brittany Jacobs <brittanyplaysviola@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, May 6, 2025 11:13 PM  
**To:** CouncilMail; Budget Testimony  
**Subject:** Keep 3rd Gr Strings

[Note: This email originated from outside of the organization. Please only click on links or attachments if you know the sender.]

Dear County Council members,

I write to you as a concerned parent of an elementary student. Cutting programs that benefit students, such as 3rd Grade Strings, should not be an option as you prepare to make your budget decisions. Our 3rd Grade Strings program is a champion of equity, diversity, and community; allowing students who could otherwise not afford private music lessons to learn and perform together in school. Please consider what you want your legacy to be. Do not take away this program and these opportunities from our children. Please fully fund the HCPSS budget.

Respectfully,

Brittany Jacobs

Sent from my iPhone

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**From:** Gina Rothbaum <gina\_rothbaum@yahoo.com>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, May 7, 2025 1:43 PM  
**To:** CouncilMail; boe@hcpss.org; Budget Testimony  
**Subject:** School Budget Cuts

**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
**Flag Status:** Flagged

[Note: This email originated from outside of the organization. Please only click on links or attachments if you know the sender.]

I have a rising 3rd grader who is so excited to start 3rd grade strings next year, and she would also be eligible for the GT CEUs. Please do not cut these offerings from next year's budget as they benefit so many kids in the county.

Gina Rothbaum  
Hammond Elementary parent

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**From:** Brittany Jacobs <brittanyplaysviola@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, May 7, 2025 10:38 PM  
**To:** CouncilMail; Budget Testimony  
**Subject:** Keep 3rd Gr Strings

**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
**Flag Status:** Flagged

[Note: This email originated from outside of the organization. Please only click on links or attachments if you know the sender.]

Dear County Council members,

I write to you as a concerned parent of an elementary student. Cutting programs that benefit students, such as 3rd Grade Strings, should not be an option as you prepare to make your budget decisions. Our 3rd Grade Strings program is a champion of equity, diversity, and community; allowing students who could otherwise not afford private music lessons to learn and perform together in school. Please consider what you want your legacy to be. Do not take away this program and these opportunities from our children. Please fully fund the HCPSS budget.

Respectfully,

Brittany Jacobs

Sent from my iPhone

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**From:** Brittany Jacobs <brittanyplaysviola@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Friday, May 9, 2025 10:58 PM  
**To:** CouncilMail; Budget Testimony  
**Subject:** Keep 3rd Gr Strings

**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
**Flag Status:** Flagged

[Note: This email originated from outside of the organization. Please only click on links or attachments if you know the sender.]

Dear County Council members,

I write to you as a concerned parent of an elementary student. Cutting programs that benefit students, such as 3rd Grade Strings, should not be an option as you prepare to make your budget decisions. Our 3rd Grade Strings program is a champion of equity, diversity, and community; allowing students who could otherwise not afford private music lessons to learn and perform together in school. Please consider what you want your legacy to be. Do not take away this program and these opportunities from our children. Please fully fund the HCPSS budget.

Respectfully,

Brittany Jacobs

Sent from my iPhone

**From:** snap@howardcountymd.gov  
**Sent:** Friday, May 9, 2025 4:42 PM  
**To:** Smith, Brenda; Anderson, Isaiah; Gelwicks, Colette; Respass, Charity  
**Subject:** Case: CS0067920 – opened and unassigned

**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
**Flag Status:** Flagged



## Case

**Short Description:** Contact Howard County Council

**Case Number:** CS0067920

**Case Opened:** 05-09-2025

**Constituent:**

[VIEW CASE](#)

### Summary:

Who would you like to contact?	District 3
Subject	Canceling 3rd Grade Orchestra Objection
Message	<p>Please do not cancel 3rd grade orchestra. Here are a few reasons why: Firstly, many 3rd graders look forward to signing up for the orchestra. If it gets cancelled, the third graders will have to wait another year to sign up. Next, if it gets cancelled, people won't be able to get one extra year in the orchestra. They would not be able to learn the basics, and they would learn that in fourth grade, which is a delay in learning. Lastly, if it gets cancelled, then schools that charge money for orchestra lessons would lose one year worth of funding. Without this money, teachers could not buy new instruments if school ones broke, and teachers may not get as much money as they used to. Please consider not cancelling 3rd grade orchestra based on all these reasons. Thank You!</p>
First name	Rhea

Last name	Shah
Email	rshah9854@inst.hcpss.org
State	Maryland

**Details:**

howardcountymd.gov



Ref:MSG6126269



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**From:** Doris Reinhardt <dorisreinhardt22@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Saturday, May 10, 2025 6:36 PM  
**To:** Budget Testimony; CouncilMail; Ball, Calvin  
**Subject:** Fully Fund HCPSS

**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
**Flag Status:** Flagged

[Note: This email originated from outside of the organization. Please only click on links or attachments if you know the sender.]

Good evening,

I am writing to ask you to please fully fund the HCPSS budget. The greatest draw for people to live here is the outstanding school system. People can pay less in neighboring counties, but the outstanding school programs, especially music and particularly STRINGS make the difference from other areas. If you defund schools and these programs are cut, we might as well live somewhere else. All 3 of my children have been/are involved in string programs and I am telling you it matters more than you think. Without your funding, we certainly believe this will be cut and we are not okay with it.

Thank you for reading this and for putting money where it matters, public schools.

Sincerely, Doris Reinhardt

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**From:** Brittany Jacobs <brittanyplaysviola@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Saturday, May 10, 2025 11:12 PM  
**To:** CouncilMail; Budget Testimony  
**Subject:** Keep 3rd Gr Strings

**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
**Flag Status:** Flagged

[Note: This email originated from outside of the organization. Please only click on links or attachments if you know the sender.]

Dear County Council members,

I write to you as a concerned parent of an elementary student. Cutting programs that benefit students, such as 3rd Grade Strings, should not be an option as you prepare to make your budget decisions. Our 3rd Grade Strings program is a champion of equity, diversity, and community; allowing students who could otherwise not afford private music lessons to learn and perform together in school. Please consider what you want your legacy to be. Do not take away this program and these opportunities from our children. Please fully fund the HCPSS budget.

Respectfully,

Brittany Jacobs

Sent from my iPhone

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**From:** Brittany Jacobs <brittanyplaysviola@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Sunday, May 11, 2025 10:09 PM  
**To:** CouncilMail; Budget Testimony  
**Subject:** Keep 3rd Gr Strings

**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
**Flag Status:** Flagged

[Note: This email originated from outside of the organization. Please only click on links or attachments if you know the sender.]

Dear County Council members,

I write to you as a concerned parent of an elementary student. Cutting programs that benefit students, such as 3rd Grade Strings, should not be an option as you prepare to make your budget decisions. Our 3rd Grade Strings program is a champion of equity, diversity, and community; allowing students who could otherwise not afford private music lessons to learn, grow, and perform together in school. Please consider what you want your legacy to be. Do not take away this program and these opportunities from our children. Please fully fund the HCPSS budget.

Respectfully,

Brittany Jacobs

Sent from my iPhone

**From:** snap@howardcountymd.gov  
**Sent:** Monday, May 12, 2025 3:04 PM  
**To:** Smith, Brenda; Anderson, Isaiah; Gelwicks, Colette; Respass, Charity  
**Subject:** Case: CS0068136 – opened and unassigned

**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
**Flag Status:** Flagged



## Case

**Short Description:** Contact Howard County Council

**Case Number:** CS0068136

**Case Opened:** 05-12-2025

**Constituent:**

[VIEW CASE](#)

### Summary:

Who would you like to contact?	District 3
Subject	Orchestra
Message	Please do not cancel 3rd grade orchestra. I want people to have the opportunity to get do do music at a young age.
First name	Elizabeth
Last name	Stafford
Email	estaff@inst.hcpss.me

### Details:

howardcountymd.gov



Ref:MSG6134134

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**From:** Jacobs, Noah <nhjacobs@smcm.edu>  
**Sent:** Monday, May 12, 2025 1:59 PM  
**To:** CouncilMail; Budget Testimony; Ball, Calvin  
**Subject:** In support of 3rd Grade Strings

**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
**Flag Status:** Flagged

[Note: This email originated from outside of the organization. Please only click on links or attachments if you know the sender.]

Dear Dr. Ball and Board of Education Members:

I'm writing today to implore you to fully fund the HCPSS budget including 3rd Grade Strings.

My son Oliver will be in 3rd grade next year and he has been counting down eagerly until he can start learning violin or viola and be in orchestra. Oliver has been taking piano lessons for the last two years and he loves music and my wife and I want him to have the same opportunity that we had to play in orchestra starting in 3rd grade.

In addition to being the parent of an HCPSS student, I am also the proud spouse of an HCPSS elementary strings teacher. I have seen firsthand how my wife has built up the strings program since she has been at her school, how she persevered through the impossible task of teaching remotely during the height of the pandemic, and has come out the other side with a program that is thriving in every way. When Oliver and I came to see her winter concert, we were amazed to see how the chairs set up for her students filled up most of the available space on the gym floor. In addition to that, so many parents and family members were in attendance that it was standing room only. I wish you could have heard those students perform, and to hear the thunderous applause that filled the space when they finished in recognition of their hard work.

I respectfully urge you to find ways to fully fund the budget that do not involve cutting programs or student services as have been suggested. My son and so many of his friends in 2nd grade have been looking forward to playing in the 3rd grade orchestra since they first started at their school. Please do not take this opportunity away from them.

Sincerely,

Noah Jacobs,  
Howard County Resident, Spouse of an HCPSS Teacher, and Father of a HCPSS Second Grader

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**From:** John Park <jypark01@terpmail.umd.edu>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, May 13, 2025 10:36 PM  
**To:** boe@hcpss.org; bill\_barnes@hcpss.org; CouncilMail  
**Subject:** HCPSS Budget for 3rd Grade Strings

**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
**Flag Status:** Flagged

[Note: This email originated from outside of the organization. Please only click on links or attachments if you know the sender.]

Dear HCPSS Board of Education,

My name is John Park, a resident of Howard County and Electrical Engineering and Violin Performance dual degree holder.

Around this time last year, I wrote you all a similar letter imploring you to preserve the 3rd grade strings program. This year, the creativity of HCPSS students and the livelihoods of hundreds of educators are once again at risk.

Last year, I made the following argument in my letter to you: "You cannot have professionals without amateurs." Just as we must nurture amateur scientists, mathematicians, and writers if we are to live in a scholarly society, we must also nurture amateur artists if we are to live in a culturally rich society.

I again make this request to you: please preserve the HCPSS 3rd grade strings program. You have the unique opportunity to send a message of positivity to all Howard County residents: that we will always protect the artistic development of our children and give them every good opportunity to express themselves, even in the face of uncertainty and difficult times.

Thank you for your consideration; I trust that you will act for our students' best interests.

John Park

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**From:** Sears, Julia M CIV USARMY MEDCOM KACC (USA) <julia.m.sears2.civ@health.mil>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, May 13, 2025 10:12 AM  
**To:** Ball, Calvin  
**Subject:** Reservoir High School Theater Department testimony

**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
**Flag Status:** Flagged

[Note: This email originated from outside of the organization. Please only click on links or attachments if you know the sender.]

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to express how much the Theater Program at Reservoir High School has meant to my child. My daughter, 11<sup>th</sup> grade, has always loved music. She has been singing since she learned to speak and has always been a bright spark, dancing to the beat of her own drum, full of life, and always entertaining. In elementary school, at Fulton Elementary, she played the cello, and showed considerable talent. I would know: my husband and I were both professional musicians with 4 degrees in music between the 2 of us. In 4<sup>th</sup> grade, my daughter developed Obsessive Compulsive Disorder and had to give up the cello. Her OCD was contamination-based and her cello was one of her biggest triggers. She could not touch her beloved instrument without going into a full-blown OCD anxiety attack. After much counselling and exposure therapy, she gave it up for good in 5<sup>th</sup> grade. She ended up joining the Chorus in middle school, at Lime Kiln Middle, and seemed to enjoy singing with a group. COVID hit in 6<sup>th</sup> grade and all performing arts took a very strong hit, that we are just now seeming to recover from.

Once she entered high school, my daughter decided to try out for the school musical. She loved singing and felt like a fun thing to explore. After auditioning, she was placed in the ensemble for the show Mama Mia. Rehearsals were tough, tech week was brutal, but she loved every minute of it! She was blown away by how welcoming and NICE everyone was in the theater department and she made some deep friendships. She was again in the ensemble her Sophomore year, this time in Chicago, and enjoyed the entire process even more since she knew what to expect. This year, her Junior year, she took a chance and tried out for the Fall play. She had never done a play before, but she was given a named role in the Reservoir production of Romeo and Juliet. She really enjoyed being on the stage, not just singing this time, and received a lot of positive feedback and encouragement for her performance. This Spring, she was one of the lead ensemble members in the musical Legally Blonde, and had even more stage time, and solos, than she has ever had before. Her bright personality, sense of humor, and musical talent shone on the stage. Despite the long hours, constantly changing rehearsal schedule, and juggling 3 AP classes, I have never seen my daughter happier. It feels like she comes to life when she is up on stage. She is enrolled in the GT theater class at Reservoir High School next Fall and is very excited to take an actual theater class and develop her natural skills.

The educators, Mrs. Binder and Mr. Knauf, have built a truly wonderful program at Reservoir High School. The productions put on by the Theater Program are very high caliber for a high school. I have spoken to many people in the audience who are not there to see their child, a friend's child, or even a child from their neighborhood. They are community members, with no school affiliation, who come just for the show, knowing that RHS will not disappoint. And they have been coming for years. Mrs. Binder and Mr. Knauf are not only skilled educators in the arts, but have created a nurturing, supportive environment for all students who participate in their productions: singers/actors, tech crew, mangers, set designers... Everyone is important and valued.



In addition to the musical experience of being in the theater program, my daughter has made close friendships and learned so many valuable lessons and life skills: confidence from being on stage and performing for a large audience; cognitive skills and memorization from having to memorize many lines and MANY songs and choreography; flexibility needed for last minute scene and choreography changes; physical and emotional stamina and strength needed for demanding rehearsals and performances; social skills and emotional awareness needed to work with a large group of peers, from many different backgrounds and life experiences; how to be a team player and support those around you, in order to create something truly special, no matter how small you may think your contribution is; and so much confidence. Confidence in her talent, her choices, her strength, her relationships, who she is as a performer and a person.

In college, my creative, talented, extroverted daughter plans on studying Astronomy/Astrophysics. See, she's not only creatively gifted, but she is pretty darned smart as well. She is extremely organized, a bit of a perfectionist, pretty levelheaded for a 17 year old, and one of the most emotionally intelligent people I know. The Theater program at Reservoir High School has been such a supportive, nurturing environment for my daughter. It has given her a creative outlet and shaped her and supported her as she continues to grow into an amazing young woman and lifted her up throughout the process. The relationships she has formed in the Reservoir High School Theater program will, no doubt, last long beyond high school, and the experience of being part of such an amazing community has given her the confidence to truly believe in herself.

Respectfully,  
Julia M. Sears  
Mother of Cora Sears, 11<sup>th</sup> grade at Reservoir High School

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**From:** Brittany Jacobs <brittanyplaysviola@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, May 14, 2025 11:09 PM  
**To:** CouncilMail; Budget Testimony  
**Subject:** Keep 3rd Gr Strings

[Note: This email originated from outside of the organization. Please only click on links or attachments if you know the sender.]

Dear County Council members,

I write to you as a concerned parent of an elementary student. Cutting programs that benefit students, such as 3rd Grade Strings, should not be an option as you prepare to make your budget decisions. Our 3rd Grade Strings program is a champion of equity, diversity, and community; allowing students who could otherwise not afford private music lessons to learn, grow, and perform together in school. Please consider what you want your legacy to be. Do not take away this program and these opportunities from our children. Please fully fund the HCPSS budget.

Respectfully,

Brittany Jacobs

Sent from my iPhone

---

**From:** Yoshiaki Horiguchi <basshoriguchi@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Monday, May 19, 2025 11:29 PM  
**To:** CouncilMail  
**Subject:** Fully fund HCPSS Budget- don't cut music

**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
**Flag Status:** Flagged

[Note: This email originated from outside of the organization. Please only click on links or attachments if you know the sender.]

Dear Howard County executive board member,

My name is Yoshiaki Horiguchi. I am a music professor at the Peabody Conservatory and Towson University.

More importantly, I am the private teacher of a graduating senior (Glenelg HS) who will attend Juilliard (in NYC) in the fall on scholarship. I started teaching him in 3rd grade. He would not have been able to be globally competitive enough to garner the attention of one of the best music conservatories had it not been for HCPSS starting strings in 3rd grade.

Reducing the music program will take Howard County off of the map for arts and culture for future generations to come as fewer and fewer students will become competitive enough to attend such a competitive school.

Please do not cut this world-class HCPSS music program.

--

Yoshiaki Horiguchi (he/him)  
Double Bassist  
Faculty: Towson University  
Faculty: Peabody Conservatory at the Johns Hopkins University  
Faculty: Bass Works  
Bassist for National Chamber Winds  
443-529-3118  
[basshoriguchi@gmail.com](mailto:basshoriguchi@gmail.com)  
[www.basshoriguchi.com](http://www.basshoriguchi.com)

---

**From:** Evelyn Teng <shirw9@icloud.com>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, May 20, 2025 1:13 AM  
**To:** CouncilMail; Ball, Calvin; boe@hcpss.org; superintendent@hcpss.org  
**Subject:** Fund the HCPSS Operating Budget

[Note: This email originated from outside of the organization. Please only click on links or attachments if you know the sender.]

Hello,

As a parent and a strong supporter of music education, I'm writing to ask the county to fully fund the HCPSS operating budget and protect the 3rd grade strings program.

Growing up, it was my dream to learn a musical instrument. Unfortunately, my school didn't offer an instrumental music program, and my mother couldn't afford private lessons. That's why I find it so meaningful that HCPSS offers a strings program starting in 3rd grade. It's something many other counties do not offer, which makes this school system truly special.

Because I never had the opportunity to learn an instrument, I made sure my daughter could. Music has profoundly shaped her life. Even now, as a college graduate, she continues to play violin. It is one of her biggest hobbies and a way for her to decompress after a stressful day. Throughout her schooling years, she had a hard time both academically and socially, but orchestra was always her favorite class. Orchestra class was where she felt happiest, most confident, and like she truly belonged.

There are so many students out there just like my daughter, students who may not thrive in a traditional classroom, but who find their voice and their community through music. Please don't take that opportunity away from them. Education is not one-size-fits-all.

Music education is NOT a luxury as some may ignorantly believe, it is a NEED. For many students like my daughter, it serves as a lifeline in today's fast-paced and stressful world. It not only motivates, but also provides a powerful outlet for self-expression. The world would completely lose its joy and color if everyone only focused on math and reading. Mental health everywhere would plummet without music and the arts. It would be hypocritical to say that music is unimportant, yet still indulge in music, concerts, movies, and other art forms. Music is a universal language that connects everyone in a way that math and reading simply cannot.

I respectfully ask that the county fully fund the HCPSS operating budget to preserve this essential program for all students.

Thank you.

Sincerely,  
Evelyn Teng

---

**From:** Daniel Tee <danny9728.main@hotmail.com>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, May 20, 2025 12:06 AM  
**To:** CouncilMail; Ball, Calvin; boe@hcpss.org; superintendent@hcpss.org  
**Subject:** Please Protect and Fund the Music Program – A Vital Investment in Our Children’s Future

[Note: This email originated from outside of the organization. Please only click on links or attachments if you know the sender.]

Dear Members of the Board of Education, County Council, and Superintendent,

I am writing to express my strong support for the Music Program and to urge continued and increased funding for the Howard County Public School System to ensure its survival.

As a product of music education myself, I can personally attest to its profound and far-reaching impact. Music gave me a voice when I had none. As a shy and timid boy, it became my outlet for self-expression, helping me communicate when words felt out of reach. It instilled in me a quiet confidence through opportunities to perform—moments that built not just my self-esteem, but also my courage to stand before others.

Beyond the personal, music gave me connection. It sparked conversations and created common ground with peers I may never have spoken to otherwise. It taught me the value of collaboration, the importance of listening, and the discipline of practice. Through music, I developed an appreciation for beauty—not only in melody and harmony, but in life itself.

Cutting the Music Program would not just be the loss of a class. It would be the loss of opportunity, confidence, connection, and creativity for thousands of students. At a time when our children need more avenues for expression and resilience, not fewer, I strongly urge you to preserve and fund this invaluable program.

Please continue investing in what shapes not just better students, but better human beings.

Thank you for your time and dedication to our community’s children.

Sincerely,  
Tee Tean Ming Daniel

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**From:** Guo Wei Jiang <gjiang258@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, May 21, 2025 7:47 AM  
**To:** CouncilMail; Ball, Calvin; boe@hcpss.org; superintendent@hcpss.org  
**Subject:** HCPSS Budget

[Note: This email originated from outside of the organization. Please only click on links or attachments if you know the sender.]

Dear County Council Members,

I am writing to urge the county to fully fund HCPSS. Education should be the top priority anywhere as it is the backbone and foundation of a thriving society. The fact that this is even up for debate is absolutely baffling and concerning. Providing strong, well-funded education is not only common sense, but essential for progressing as a society. Cutting from education is a step backwards. It is already evident that **the U.S. education system is absolutely failing these students**. We should be pouring in MORE money to fix the problem, NOT TAKE AWAY money.

Without the funding, HCPSS is planning to cut programs like 3rd Grade Strings. It's extremely frustrating to see how much people overlook the arts. I should emphasize that **having a well-rounded education is so important**. It promotes creativity, encourages joy in learning, supports mental health/well-being, and prepares students for the real world. Take the pandemic for example. When we had to go on lockdown and mental health was declining, **people turned to music**. People turned to music to connect with others, express themselves, and find comfort.

To the people who don't support the arts, I say to them: don't listen to music on your way to work, don't sing in the shower, don't listen to music while you work out, don't listen to music to help you destress, don't sing "Happy Birthday" at the next party you go to, don't attend a live concert, don't enjoy music at gatherings or celebrations, don't cheer at sports events with team anthems, etc. People who overlook the arts need to realize that the arts surround us everyday, whether we realize it or not. You cannot enjoy the product, but not the work that it takes to get there. You cannot take these nice things for granted. There would be no professionals without amateurs. Everybody needs to start somewhere, and starting music young is the best way.

Cutting programs like 3rd Grade Strings would be a huge mistake and throwing away the county's biggest asset. It is crucial for students to have the option to learn an instrument at a young age. My own daughter started learning strings at a young age and it taught her the importance of discipline, perseverance, focus, patience, responsibility, time management, how to channel her emotions in a healthy way, and so much more. While math and reading may teach you academic skills, music teaches you transferable life skills that benefit students way beyond the music room.

Please fully fund our school system so that we can keep these programs. It would be incredibly disheartening to lose them and it would be such a disservice to the community.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.

-Gee

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**From:** Janice Teng <jant3731@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, May 21, 2025 12:07 AM  
**To:** CouncilMail; Ball, Calvin; boe@hcpss.org; superintendent@hcpss.org  
**Subject:** Fully Fund HCPSS, Protect 3rd Grade Strings

[Note: This email originated from outside of the organization. Please only click on links or attachments if you know the sender.]

Good morning,

Please fully fund the Howard County Public School System. Without proper funding, we will lose valuable teachers, staff, and programs like the 3rd grade strings program, which is essential to a well-rounded education.

Funding education must be our top priority. Without it, the quality of learning will deteriorate significantly and put the futures of our students at serious risk. Please protect our valuable 3rd grade strings program. It is what sets our county apart from the rest and upholds our reputation for excellence.

I trust that the county will make the right decision and prioritize what's best for our students and their future.

Sincerely,  
Janice Teng



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**From:** Teng Shir Fun <shanice\_teng@yahoo.com>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, May 21, 2025 1:53 AM  
**To:** CouncilMail; Ball, Calvin; boe@hcpss.org; superintendent@hcpss.org  
**Subject:** Fully Fund HCPSS, Protect 3rd Grade Strings

[Note: This email originated from outside of the organization. Please only click on links or attachments if you know the sender.]

Hello,

Please fully fund the Howard County Public School System. Without proper funding, we will lose valuable teachers, staff, and programs like the 3rd grade strings program, which is essential to a well-rounded education.

Funding education must be our top priority. Without it, the quality of learning will deteriorate significantly and put the futures of our students at serious risk. Please protect our valuable 3rd grade strings program. It is what sets our county apart from the rest and upholds our reputation for excellence.

I trust that the county will make the right decision and prioritize what's best for our students and their future.

Sincerely,  
Shanice Teng

---

**From:** snap@howardcountymd.gov  
**Sent:** Thursday, May 29, 2025 9:58 AM  
**To:** Smith, Brenda; Anderson, Isaiah; Gelwicks, Colette; Respass, Charity  
**Subject:** Case: CS0068922 – opened and unassigned

**Follow Up Flag:** Follow up  
**Flag Status:** Flagged



## Case

**Short Description:** Support for HCPSS Operating Budget

**Case Number:** CS0068922

**Case Opened:** 05-29-2025

**Constituent:**

[VIEW CASE](#)

**Details:**

**05-29-2025 09:57:32 AM EDT - Christiana Rigby** Additional comments

From: Janice Teng <jant3731@gmail.com>  
Sent: Wednesday, May 21, 2025 12:07 AM  
To: CouncilMail <CouncilMail@howardcountymd.gov>; Ball, Calvin  
<cball@howardcountymd.gov>; boe@hcpss.org;  
superintendent@hcpss.org  
Subject: Fully Fund HCPSS, Protect 3rd Grade Strings

[Note: This email originated from outside of the organization. Please only click on links or attachments if you know the sender.]

Good morning,

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Funding education must be our top priority. Without it, the quality of learning will deteriorate significantly and put the futures of our students at serious risk. Please protect our valuable 3rd grade strings program. It is what sets our county apart from the rest and upholds our reputation for excellence.

I trust that the county will make the right decision and prioritize what's best for our students and their future.

Sincerely,

Janice Teng

[howardcountymd.gov](http://howardcountymd.gov)



Ref:MSG6206852

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**From:** Annette Love <annettelove1978@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, May 27, 2025 6:28 PM  
**To:** CouncilMail; Ball, Calvin  
**Subject:** Please fully fund the HCPSS budget

[Note: This email originated from outside of the organization. Please only click on links or attachments if you know the sender.]

Hello! I realize money is tight these days. It's a terrible time in politics. However, we need to fund the HCPSS budget. In particular I'm concerned about the cut to strings teachers and media specialists. The school system is a critical part of our county and helps us invest in the future of our county and society. Please find a way to fund the budget.

---

**From:** Jacobs, Noah <nhjacobs@smcm.edu>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, May 27, 2025 8:48 AM  
**To:** CouncilMail; Budget Testimony; Ball, Calvin  
**Subject:** Importance of 3rd Grade Strings in HCPSS

[Note: This email originated from outside of the organization. Please only click on links or attachments if you know the sender.]

Dear Dr. Ball and Board of Education Members:

I am writing to implore you to increase funding for the HCPSS budget so there are no cuts to vital student services and programs, including 3rd Grade Strings.

In addition to being the parent of an HCPSS 2nd grader, I am also the proud spouse of an HCPSS elementary strings teacher. I have seen with my own eyes the work that she has poured into making her strings program the success that it is, both in sheer numbers but also in equally important areas of student enthusiasm and engagement, parental involvement and feedback, and outright joy and pride which anyone of the attendees at their recent standing-room only concert would be able to attest.

My son, Oliver, attended a birthday party for one of his classmates on Monday. I sat chatting with the other parents as the kids ran in and out of the bounce house set up in their backyard. One of the parents asked what I did for a living, and in the ensuing discussion I alluded to Brittany, my wife, and how we live slightly farther from the school but that Oliver is able to attend due to her teaching there. The other parent's face lit up when she realized- "your wife is Mrs. Jacobs?! We just went to the concert and it was amazing!" She proceeded to tell me how meaningful her daughter's experience had been playing in strings starting in 3rd grade, and now continuing into middle school. She went on to say how the concert had been incredibly impressive to see, that the students sounded fantastic, and that it was moving to see how much work, energy, and passion both Brittany and all her students clearly had put into this. I could only smile and indicate that I agreed. She asked that I pass this along to Brittany, and I feel that it is appropriate that I share this with you as well.

Students who are in grades as young as Kindergarten are aware of the music programs at school- I have been in the building to volunteer and seen kids in Kindergarten through Second Grade, whom my wife does not yet teach, high-fiving her in the hallway and saying with unchecked enthusiasm "Good morning, Mrs. Jacobs!" because they have older siblings who are or have been in orchestra, because they have attended their concerts, and because they are so excited about being able to play an instrument themselves.

Only days ago it was announced that Howard County has been recognized as a "Best Community for Music Education" by the National Association of Music Merchants (NAMM) Foundation for the 10th year in a row (<https://news.hcpss.org/news-posts/2025/05/hcpss-recognized-as-best-community-for-music-education-for-tenth-consecutive-year/>). While this designation comes as no surprise to any of the students, parents, and teachers who support music in HCPSS, it is difficult to reconcile with the reality that funding for music in the county is in jeopardy yet again. I urge you to increase funding necessary to the levels needed to not take away student programs including 3rd Grade Strings. I cannot overstate the

importance of these programs across the county and urge you to do what is necessary to support music and keep these programs in place for all students.

An unseen consequence of the continuing cycle of the threat of cuts to the music program is the toll taken on music teachers. I have watched my wife and her colleagues have to advocate for their programs on a regular basis since she began teaching in Howard County. The psychological, emotional, mental and even physical tolls that the repeated cycle of threats of cuts to music have had on her and her colleagues is significant and cannot be ignored. There are days and weeks where the energy that she has to devote to advocating for her program (including contacting county leaders, attending and viewing board meetings, and staying up to date on the latest developments) rivals the energy that goes into actually teaching and working with her students. It is at times as if she has two jobs, and the two cannot be separated. It is not an overstatement to say that this dynamic is traumatic, and cannot be sustained. This is the effect that the perpetual cycle of existential threats to music has on our teachers, who only want to be able to do what they do so well- teach.

My wife is phenomenal at her job- she instills in her students a passion for playing music, and with that the pride and satisfaction that comes from working tirelessly at something that may have initially seemed unattainable but over time has come to fruition. Despite this, too often she has been in tears at the end of her day because she is made to feel that no matter how well her students play, no matter how much she has grown her program, no matter how many parents take the time to email her to share how much being in orchestra has meant to their child, it does not seem to matter.

It is mind-boggling that the constant threat of cuts hangs over teachers who are among the most dedicated and passionate about what they do. We owe it to them to remove this ever-present threat, to state unequivocally that music education is as vital as any other academic area, and to support our music teachers and allow them to teach and no longer require them to be lobbyists for their own programs.

I respectfully urge you to find ways to fully fund the budget that do not involve cutting programs or student services as have been suggested. Oliver and so many of his friends in 2nd grade have been looking forward to playing in the 3rd grade orchestra since they first started at their school. Please do not take this opportunity away from them.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Noah Jacobs,  
Howard County Resident, Spouse of an HCPSS Teacher, and Father of a HCPSS Second Grader

---

**From:** Bethann Ritter Snyder  
**Sent:** Monday, June 2, 2025 5:03 PM  
**To:** BoE Email  
**Cc:** CouncilMail; Ball, Calvin; CouncilDistrict1@howardcountymd.gov  
**Subject:** HCPSS BOE Letter - Keep GT & Music 2025-06-02  
**Attachments:** HCPSS BOE Letter - Keep GT & Music 2025-06-02.docx

[Note: This email originated from outside of the organization. Please only click on links or attachments if you know the sender.]

Please see attached

June 2, 2025

Dear Howard County Board of Education, Council & County Executive Ball:

I am a community member and parent in Elkridge, with two young children in Howard County Public elementary schools. I am writing to you today to ask you to ensure that no teaching positions are cut in the budget deliberations to address the HCPSS budget gap caused by County Executive Ball and the Howard County Council's failure to fund the full FY2026 HCPSS budget request. Fund our schools to give our children a better future.

The BOE's original FY26 request was grounded in essential services with rock solid justification for every dollar. It was not aspirational nor is it extravagant. It is what the community needs to grow and thrive and what HCPSS – our CHILDREN – deserve. Now, thanks to the County's unwillingness to meet the needs of the children in Howard County, the BOE is faced with a set of nasty choices.

Howard County wants to be seen as a place where everyone is welcome and valued. We like to talk about valuing equity and ensuring our youth have opportunities. However, the cuts the BOE is facing will mean painful reductions and an inability to meet those goals of welcoming and valuing our students and HCPSS staff. The cuts the BOE is proposing means HCPSS will be unable to maintain current class sizes and retain opportunities for students to develop executive function skills, logical & critical thinking, public speaking, group work, and so much more. This would be hugely detrimental to our children, as studies have shown that students engaged in the arts often show improved cognitive skills, better concentration, and enhanced problem-solving abilities (see [nfhs.org/articles/how-music-primers-the-brain-for-learning/](https://nfhs.org/articles/how-music-primers-the-brain-for-learning/)).

Participation in the arts positively influence children's academic achievements. I've seen that with my oldest child, as learning to read music and play the viola unlocked their ability to read books, a skill they had struggled with for years. Thanks to learning the viola in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade (the same 3<sup>rd</sup> grade strings program the BOE is looking to cut), my child went from struggling to read picture books and simple graphic novels to now joyously reading Harry Potter or Narnia books as a 4<sup>th</sup> grader. We should ensure that all of our students – our children – have access to these types of programs that unlock the joy of learning like it has for my child, which even the shelves of books in our home couldn't do. However, due to the County's lack of funding for HCPSS, my youngest, who shares their older sibling's reading challenges, is going to be denied the same opportunities as their sibling because of the proposed budget cuts. If the BOE's proposed cuts to 3<sup>rd</sup> grade strings goes through, my youngest is likely going to continue



their reading struggles even when they reach 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. This is scary to me as a parent, given that Maryland is instituting reading requirements that will hold back students who struggle to read at the end of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. While this is a laudable goal, HCPSS is going to struggle to help it's students meet that requirement if the BOE makes cuts to the arts and special education tools that are key to helping children, like mine, who learn differently and struggle with reading in particular.

Helping children who learn differently isn't just the domain of special education, but of the Gifted and Talented program at the elementary level as well. While, like the arts, GT seems like a "nice to have," it has also been a vital program for my oldest child, who is twice exceptional (they have both diagnosed learning challenges and have received high marks on CoGAT and other standardized tests). My child's ability to participate in the Curriculum Extension Units (CEUs) for social studies and science this year put them in smaller classes that gave both the CEU students and their classmates in the regular lessons smaller class sizes and greater ability to interact with their teachers and the lessons more deeply. This also holds true for GT math, which has provided my child with the challenges they need to grow and thrive.

I and many others in the community believe there is enough room in the budget. Howard County has the funding for the school system. Possible sources above tax revenue include the larger- than-budgeted earnings from investment funds, which are currently outpacing both the FY25 budgeted amount and FY26 projections. Further, Howard County Council and County Executive have the ability to impose fees on developers who are looking to place more stress on our school system with the developments they have planned. Increase their fees so we can maintain quality schools. Members of our community have also noticed that the SAAC estimates of additional revenue are extremely conservative and have created wide gaps in actual earned revenue, which turns into Pay Go money and does not prioritize the school system.

I frequently see complaints in community groups on social media about youth having nothing to do after school; the Mall in Columbia has even imposed restrictions on youth in the mall. But the programs the BOE is looking to cut due to the lack of funding for their FY26 budget request are just the sort of programs to engage kids in productive activities. We should be expanding these opportunities – programs like theater and debate, MESA, and Model UN that are provided through the schools - because that is the one place kids can definitely get to every day.

Last year, HCPSS experienced staff reductions and program cuts. Class sizes got bigger, and teachers had to do more with less – limits were even placed on how much paper teachers could use and subscriptions for electronic resources (ebooks for classroom use and other electronic learning tools) were cut. We need leaders who are willing to step up and care for our children in these uncertain times; leaders who will do what is necessary to maintain excellence and prevent class size increases and staff reductions from happening again this year. We ask that you show us your commitment to our public schools by fully funding the HCPSS FY26 operating budget and not cutting any instructional positions or increasing class sizes.

Sincerely,

Bethann Snyder  
Elkridge Resident and HCPSS Parent

---

**From:** Jade Chang  
**Sent:** Tuesday, June 3, 2025 1:18 PM  
**To:** BoE Email  
**Cc:** CouncilMail; Ball, Calvin; Jade Chang  
**Subject:** FY26 operating budget-Keep GT and 3rd grade Strings  
**Attachments:** 2025-06-03 FY26 email to BOE+CC+CE PTACHC.docx

**Follow Up Flag:** Flag for follow up  
**Flag Status:** Flagged

[Note: This email originated from outside of the organization. Please only click on links or attachments if you know the sender.]

Dear Members of the Howard County Board of Education,

As a concerned member of the Howard County community, I am writing to share my input on the remaining \$9 million in budget reductions for the upcoming fiscal year.

I urge you to preserve essential programs and services that directly impact students: elementary school **Gifted and Talented program** and elementary school **3rd grade Strings**.

To achieve fiscal responsibility, I suggest considering reductions in the following areas: administration, non-essential travel, contracted services.

Thank you for your continued commitment to transparency and student-centered decisions.

Sincerely,

Jade Chang  
Ellicott City, District 1  
(202) 919-8888

June 3, 2025

To: [boe@hcpss.org](mailto:boe@hcpss.org), [councilmail@howardcountymd.gov](mailto:councilmail@howardcountymd.gov), [cball@howardcountymd.gov](mailto:cball@howardcountymd.gov)

Subject: FY26 operating budget-**Keep “GT and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade Strings”**

Dear Members of the Howard County Board of Education,

As a concerned member of the Howard County community, I am writing to share my input on the remaining \$9 million in budget reductions for the upcoming fiscal year.

I urge you to preserve essential programs and services that directly impact students: elementary school **Gifted and Talented program** and elementary school **3<sup>rd</sup> grade Strings**.

To achieve fiscal responsibility, I suggest considering reductions in the following areas: administration, non-essential travel, contracted services.

Thank you for your continued commitment to transparency and student-centered decisions.

---

**From:** Jade Chang  
**Sent:** Tuesday, June 3, 2025 2:26 PM  
**To:** BoE Email; CouncilMail; Ball, Calvin  
**Cc:** Jade Chang  
**Subject:** FY26 operating budget-Keep GT and 3rd grade Strings  
**Attachments:** 2025-06-03 FY26 email to BOE+CC+CE EC version.docx

**Follow Up Flag:** Flag for follow up  
**Flag Status:** Flagged

[Note: This email originated from outside of the organization. Please only click on links or attachments if you know the sender.]

Dear Board Members, Council Members, and County Executive Ball,

County Executive Ball assured BOE, in a 5/20 letter, that his adjusted allocation of money for HCPSS would be enough for the same services of FY25 for FY26, which was outlined by Superintendent Barnes. The County Council voted down the 4.2 million amendments. At the 5/27 BOE work session, Superintendent Barnes explained that the fund balances proposed by County Executive Ball were NOT available for FY26. This account of fund balances was in line with estimates provided by BOE at the County Council's 5/16 session.

Cutting elementary school **GT program** and **3rd grade strings** due to the \$9M gap in fund balance "differences in opinion" is unacceptable. Either the money was, is and always has been available or it was never enough to begin with. Why is the County Executive saying one thing and the Board of Education another?

Howard County leaders, BOE, and HCPSS should hold a town hall solely around education and finally agree on one set of numbers and respond with a plan and not with charts and graphics that don't tell the whole story.

BOE should assume more risk in any fund balances and keep the same level of services for **GT program and 3rd grade Strings**. HCPSS' reputation for educational excellence is literally on the line, at a tipping point, and close to falling off a cliff.

BOE should hold a new public hearing on the FY26 operating budget, since the budget is not the same one the public testified to earlier this year.

Thank you for your services and leadership.

Sincerely,

Jade Chang

Ellicott City, District 1

June 3, 2025

To: [boe@hcpss.org](mailto:boe@hcpss.org), [councilmail@howardcountymd.gov](mailto:councilmail@howardcountymd.gov), [cball@howardcountymd.gov](mailto:cball@howardcountymd.gov)

Subject: FY26 operating budget-**Keep “GT and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade Strings”**

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BOE should hold a new public hearing on the FY26 operating budget, since the budget is not the same one the public testified to earlier this year.

Thank you for your services and leadership.

Sincerely,

Jade Chang

Ellicott City, District 1

---

**From:** Jacobs, Noah  
**Sent:** Tuesday, June 3, 2025 1:23 PM  
**To:** Councilmail@howardcountymd.gov  
**Subject:** Fully fund 3rd Grade Strings

**Follow Up Flag:** Flag for follow up  
**Flag Status:** Flagged

[Note: This email originated from outside of the organization. Please only click on links or attachments if you know the sender.]

Good afternoon,

I'm writing today to ask you to please fully fund music programs in Howard County, particularly for 3rd Grade Strings.

Success in music starts early, and a year taken away from that means the middle school and high school programs will eventually suffer as a direct result. It is unrealistic to think that eliminating 3rd Grade Strings will not have any effect. If we want our students to be involved in music and to thrive going forward, we have to give them every opportunity for success, which means allowing them to begin playing as soon as possible.

My son has been excitedly counting down the years until he'll be in 3rd grade next year so that he can join the orchestra. Please do not take this away from him and every other 2nd grader who has been doing the same.

Sincerely,  
Noah Jacobs

---

**From:** Anthony DeBella  
**Sent:** Wednesday, June 4, 2025 8:12 AM  
**To:** boe@hcpss.org; Bill Barnes; Ahmad, Yousuf; councilmail@howardcountymd.gov; cball@howardcountymd.gov  
**Subject:** Re: Maintain Funding 3rd Grade Strings

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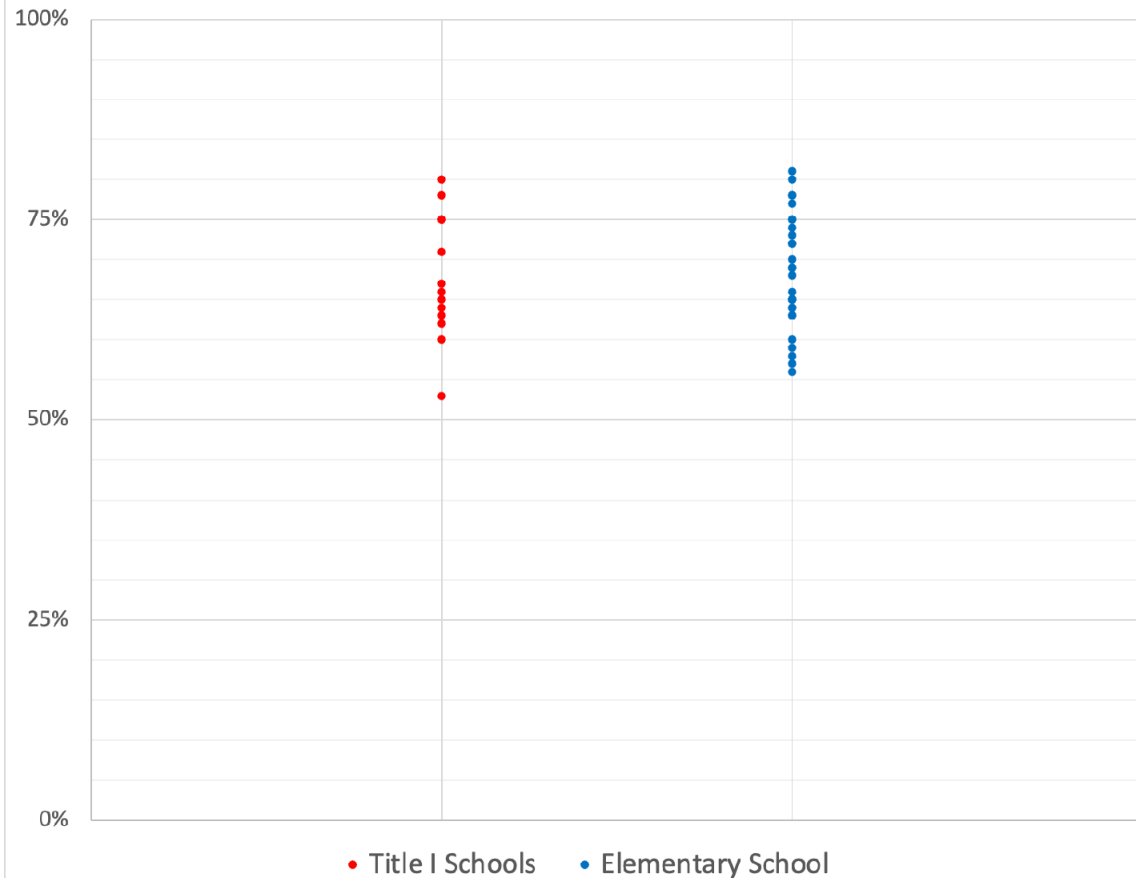
Please pardon the previous incomplete email, repeating here and continuing.

The needs of the students are many, and the resources don't seem to meet them, but some of the scenarios under consideration don't reflect the needs and values of the community. First and foremost, maximizing use of fund balances to limit the budget damage to the curriculum is necessary. The Board of Education has received repeated assurances from the County Executive that the Health and Dental Fund will be made whole during FY26 if the fund balance is committed to operating expenses. Fears of one time revenue disappearing from Howard County budget are not likely to materialize. The Spending Affordability Advisory Commission stated clearly in the report that despite the uncertainty in other funding, property tax revenue is projected to remain steady and increase by over \$30M in FY27. The County money will be there. In addition, how will reductions to academics look when county money becomes available during the coming fiscal year?

3rd Grade Music is the foundation of HCPSS' music program. 68% of students (over 2,000) participate, and the participation rate is not statistically different between Title I schools and the rest of the HCPSS. Each ES is represented by a dot on the chart below.



### HCPSS 3rd Grade Strings Enrollment Percentages 2023-2024



- Given the high participation rates, 3rd grade class size is effectively reduced by 10-15% when strings students are pulled out. Same holds for when GT math and science classes are taught. The combination of times when classroom teachers have fewer students to focus on is a secondary
- Studies show that the cognitive benefits accruing to instrumental music participation by young children result in brain growth that is only possible as children grow. Starting instrumental music almost immediately after learning to read independently in 2nd grade is the way to take advantage of this.
- Parents of instrumental music students commit their own resources to the program by renting and buying instruments. The concept of cost sharing isn't new to music parents.
- HCPSS representation in all-state orchestra groups is not only higher in number than any other county, but also widely distributed across nearly all HCPSS' high schools. Students all across HCPSS achieve at a high level.
- HCPSS provides high quality instruction at a modest annual cost of \$500 per enrolled student. Parents typically pay that in two months of lessons, and many Title I students just couldn't even access that kind of instruction.
- HCPSS students with special needs are accommodated in an individual manner during instrumental music. Instruction is delivered by expert practitioners who incorporate strategies for helping all students learn an instrument. This doesn't get listed explicitly under special education, but it is very much a part of the education for many students whose ability to read and do math was fostered by participation in instrumental music.

In closing, HCPSS' music program was diligently built by parents and teachers over the course of decades. Preserving it is very much worth using the fund balance until it can be replenished during the upcoming year.

Anthony DeBella  
Mayfield Woods MS Band Parent

On Wed, Jun 4, 2025 at 7:29 AM Anthony DeBella <[jhu1996@gmail.com](mailto:jhu1996@gmail.com)> wrote:

The needs of the students are many, and the resources don't seem to meet them, but some of the scenarios under consideration don't seem to reflect the needs of the community. First and foremost, maximizing use of fund balances to limit the budget damage to the curriculum is necessary. The Board of Education has received repeated assurances from the County Executive that the Health and Dental Fund will be made whole during FY26. Fears of one time revenue disappearing from Howard County budget are not likely to materialize. The Spending affordability Advisory Commission stated clearly in the report that despite the uncertainty in other funding, property tax revenue is projected to remain steady and increase by over \$30 in FY27. The County Money will be there. In addition, how will reductions to academics look when county money becomes available during the coming fiscal year?

3rd Grade Music is the foundation of HCPSS' music program. 68% of students (over 2,000) participate, and the participation rate is not statistically different between Title I schools and the rest of the HCPSS

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**From:** Bethann Ritter Snyder  
**Sent:** Wednesday, June 4, 2025 2:17 PM  
**To:** boardoffice@hcpss.org; boe@hcpss.org  
**Cc:** Ball, Calvin; CouncilMail; CouncilDistrict1@howardcountymd.gov  
**Subject:** Keep 3rd Grade Strings at HCPSS  
**Attachments:** HCPSS BOE Letter - Keep 3rd Grade Strings 2025.docx

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Please see attached.

June 4, 2025

Dear Board of Education & Superintendent Barnes;

Last night, Elkridge Elementary School had it's spring orchestra concert at Guilford Park High School. Why was the ELEMENTARY concert at the new high school? Because Elkridge Elementary has so many string players – particularly in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade – that it was not physically possible to hold the concert at the Elkridge Elementary school cafeteria, where it has traditionally been held.

Elkridge Elementary School has over 800 students, 135 of them in the current 3<sup>rd</sup> grade class. Of these 135 students, 87 of them are in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade orchestra this year (55 violins, 20 violas, and 12 cellos). This is a 64.4% participation rate by students in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade strings at an elementary school that is 45% FARMS and only 28% white. In our heavily diverse school with a huge mix of incomes and cultural backgrounds, 3<sup>rd</sup> grade strings is extremely valued. So valued that the concert had to be held at the high school and not the elementary cafeteria because the students could not fit on the stage there to perform for their families and still have room for an audience.



Photo: EES 3<sup>rd</sup> grade orchestra, June 3, 2025

Our 4<sup>th</sup> grade orchestra is a bit smaller, but not by much. Out of a class of 136 4<sup>th</sup> grade students, 51 students, or 37.5%, are participating in orchestra this year. Last year, this class

also had a participation rate of over 60%, though some have now gone on to band and/or chorus instead of orchestra.



Photo: EES 4<sup>th</sup> grade orchestra, June 3, 2025

Elkridge Elementary has 132 students in 5<sup>th</sup> grade. The 5<sup>th</sup> grade orchestra is similar in size to 4<sup>th</sup> grade, with 44 students participating (again, they also have classmates learning band instruments and/or in chorus).



Photo: EES 5<sup>th</sup> grade orchestra, June 3, 2025

Why do I share all this with you? I want you to SEE the impact of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade strings – INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC – in our schools and for our students. Because Elkridge is not an island. HCPSS has 42 elementary schools, all with stories like Elkridge Elementary's. Per data shared with me by HCPSS music teachers last year, the average number of students involved

in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade strings was 68%, EVEN at the 13 Title 1 elementary schools in the county, with over 2,800 3<sup>rd</sup> graders participating in the strings program in 2023-2024 (the last year for which I have data). Given the size of EES' orchestra this year, I'm guessing the numbers are similar for the 2024-2025 school year. MUSIC matters, regardless of income, regardless of racial or ethnic background, it matters. It's important. It gives students a way to belong, to express themselves, to learn responsibility, to think outside the box, to be part of a team. Music, especially 3<sup>rd</sup> grade strings, is not an "extra." Music is vital to the learning environment of our schools. If you had attended Elkridge Elementary School's concert at Guilford Park High on Tuesday night, you would know that because you would have heard the thunderous applause not only for these students, but for their beloved teacher, Ms. Taschenberger.

I get that the County Executive and the County Council have put all of you, our HCPSS Board and Superintendent, in a rotten position after a very thorough and well-considered budget that you proposed this spring. And I get that you have to make cuts that you do not want to make and that are going to have an adverse effect on our schools. I do not want larger class sizes, or cuts to elementary Gifted & Talented, or reduction in paraeducators or media center staff. These should all be retained as part of the Maintenance of Effort to continue HCPSS at the level it's at now. I just want you to SEE what you are proposing to cut and I don't want you to continue to buy into the fallacy that 3<sup>rd</sup> grade strings aren't important and are a luxury we cannot afford. My 45% FARMS school begs to differ.

Sincerely,

Bethann Snyder, parent

Elkridge Elementary School

Cc: Calvin Ball

Howard County Council

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**From:** Bonnie Zeitler  
**Sent:** Tuesday, June 3, 2025 9:46 PM  
**To:** boe@hcpss.org; bill\_barnes@hcpss.org; cball@howardcountymd.gov;  
councilmail@howardcountymd.gov  
**Subject:** Save the String Program

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Good evening! I'm writing to ask you to use the funds available to continue instrumental music programs, and accept the support of the county executive that has been promised.

Over 2,000 third grade students (68%) participate in instrumental music, and it forms the foundation of the success of the middle and high school programs that achieve so much in the performances they provide the community and the high ratings they earn for our district.

Students achieve, work as a team, and find belonging as well as being engaged in this program that studies show correlates with higher reading and math scores. Please think of all you heard from stakeholders last year and do not take this from the children.

Thank you for your time and consideration,  
Bonnie Zeitler

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**From:** Charles Zeitler  
**Sent:** Tuesday, June 3, 2025 9:55 PM  
**To:** councilmail@howardcountymd.gov  
**Subject:** Save 3rd Grade Strings

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Dear County Council,

I want to implore you to save the third grade string orchestra program in Howard County. It might seem like a small sacrifice in the grand scheme but it is not. The ramifications are considerable and compounding over time. There are few places in the United States as special as Howard County when it comes to education. One of the things that sets us apart and draws individuals to move here, an attraction that will go away if not taken care of, is our strong program. I implore you to extend every effort to save the 3rd grade string orchestra program.

Thank you,  
Dr. Zeitler



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**From:** Evelyn Teng  
**Sent:** Wednesday, June 4, 2025 11:07 AM  
**To:** CouncilMail; Ball, Calvin; boe@hcpss.org; superintendent@hcpss.org  
**Subject:** Fully Fund HCPSS, Protect 3rd Grade Strings

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Dear all,

Please find more sustainable ways to fund our schools!!! We DO NOT want to lose valuable educators and programs, such as 3rd grade strings. Howard County is the BEST county for music education and sacrificing these educators and programs would be throwing away a gem.

We need to find a better solution to close the budget gap. I know we can do it.

Sincerely,  
Evelyn Teng

## HCPSS Named a Best Community for Music

For the 10th consecutive year, HCPSS has been identified as a Best Community for Music Education by the National Association of Music Merchants (NAMM) Foundation. The award recognizes districts and schools that demonstrate an exceptionally high commitment and access to music education.

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**From:** Joey Yeoh  
**Sent:** Wednesday, June 4, 2025 6:00 AM  
**To:** BoE Email  
**Cc:** cball@howardcountymd.gov; councilmail@howardcountymd.gov; Superintendent  
**Subject:** Fund 3rd Grade Strings

**Follow Up Flag:** Flag for follow up  
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[Note: This email originated from outside of the organization. Please only click on links or attachments if you know the sender.]

Dear Members of the Board of Education,

I'm writing to respectfully urge you to reconsider the proposed elimination of the 3rd grade strings program and GT teacher positions. These are the very programs that set Howard County apart and contribute significantly to its reputation for educational excellence.

As someone who did not grow up in Howard County, I was drawn to work here because of its strong commitment to a well-rounded, high-quality education. Programs like 3rd grade strings and GT are part of what makes this county exceptional. Without them, our schools will become indistinguishable from those in other districts.

The orchestra program, in particular, is clearly valued by our community as reflected in our growing enrollment numbers. This year, 173 students enrolled in orchestra, which is a **15% increase** from last year. Of those, **74 are 3rd graders**, representing approximately **56% of the entire 3rd grade** at our school. The continued growth and high participation rate demonstrate strong student interest and family support. If orchestra weren't meaningful to our community, we would not see such sustained and rising enrollment year after year.

Some may argue that families who want their children to learn an orchestra instrument should pursue private lessons outside of school. However, our goal as educators is to **remove barriers** and **make music education accessible to all students**, not just those with the means to afford it. In our current program, **only 4 out of 173 students** take private lessons, highlighting the critical role school orchestra plays in providing equitable access.

Compare this to sports, where affordable equipment is widely available, unlike instruments and private instruction. By offering orchestra within the school day, we **level the playing field** and give all students the opportunity to learn an instrument at a young age. Eliminating the 3rd grade strings program would **deny access to those who depend on school-based music instruction**, reinforcing inequities rather than reducing them. Funding this program is not just about music; it's about **equity, access, and opportunity**, which is a goal that Howard County is committed to.

Last week, we hosted a school-wide music assembly. Afterward, many 2nd graders excitedly told me they couldn't wait to join orchestra next year. It's upsetting to think I may have to tell them that the

opportunity they've been looking forward to for years may no longer exist. These students are full of excitement, hope, and curiosity, and we should do our best to keep that spark alive.

Please understand the serious and long-term impact of eliminating 3rd grade strings. This program provides students with a critical head start, laying the foundation for strong middle and high school music programs. It's no coincidence that Howard County's music programs are among the strongest in the state and this early investment is the reason why.

**Removing 3rd grade strings is like cutting the roots of a tree: it weakens everything that grows from it.** Over time, the strength and distinctiveness of Howard County's music programs will erode, and so will the excellence that we take pride in.

If we want to preserve Howard County's reputation for exceptional education, we must invest in the programs that make it so. Don't take this opportunity away from our students. Support what sets us apart.

Please reconsider the proposed eliminations. We urge you to listen to the voices of educators, families, and communities when we say that this truly matters to all of us.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Joey Yeoh