

# Music Is Instrumental To Learning

*Area Teachers Aim to Help Every Student*

BY PATRICK O'GRADY

Valley News Correspondent

It is not hard to find stories about school districts forced to reduce music education in schools because of budget constraints, a greater focus on core subject such as math, science and reading, or both.

The most recent revision of the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act includes music as a core subject, but lawmakers have not agreed on a final version and its future is not certain.

So, while Washington stumbles around and plays politics, those who understand and appreciate the benefits of music education — academically, socially, for young people and the community — are doing what they can to give students an opportunity to play an instrument.

Maybe Carlos and Linda Galvan can't reverse the nationwide trend of declining music education, but they, like Melissa Richmond in Claremont, are

doing what they can in their corner of northern New England to keep music education alive in schools.

A cellist and cello teacher with the chamber music group Camerata New England, Linda Galvan does outreach in Upper Valley schools, including Lebanon. "We provide instruments and lessons after school that they don't provide in school," she said. "We feel very strongly there should be a string presence in the schools."

The Galvans pay for the program, backed by several donors, and do not charge the students for anything. "We have some wonderful donors that allow us to do this," she said.

The program is for all students beginning in third grade. For those who stick with it, they can participate through high school.

Galvan said she understands that the Lebanon School District does not have the money for a string program.

"We know they can't afford it so we try to make a difference," she said.

The Galvans also have a presence in Colebrook, N.H., with what Galvan said was a "strong association" but added they are not directly in the schools but are hoping to make that connection. They are in discussions with another school district but that possibility is not far enough along to name the district, Galvan said.

The National Association for Music Education reacted with glee in April when the Senate version of a draft revision of No Child Left Behind included music as a core subject, a first in education history.

"This is game-changing news," Chris Woodside, the association's assistant executive director, said on

its website.

Woodside said designating music as a core subject will ensure that all students, regardless of their socioeconomic status and other demographics, will have access to music programs in schools.

The website, musicempowersfoundation.org, cites many studies demonstrating the correlation between music education and higher test scores. In one example, the U.S. Department of Education found that students who participate in band or orchestra while in middle and high school showed a higher level of proficiency in math by grade 12.

"Those who took instrumental music were more than twice as likely to perform at the highest levels in math as their peers who were not involved in music," according to a 2002 study cited by the website.

Other studies showed similar achievements in reading skills by students who played an instrument compared with those who didn't.

But listing music as a core subject is one thing; giving it the funding and time it needs is entirely different.

Like Galvan, Richmond understands the benefits of music education and lends her talents as a classically trained flutist in Claremont's elementary schools.

"I think between budgets and scheduling, music does not get the focus it should," said Richmond, executive director of the West Claremont

Center for Music and the Arts. "There is so much stressing on testing and other subjects, they just can't give the time."

Richmond helps out with flute lessons for all levels of ability at Maple Avenue Elementary School. Some students, she said, give up recess in order to play an instrument.

In addition to flute lessons, Richmond offers group lessons and other instruction. She is able to provide these opportunities through the many grants that she applies for.

"We try to get instruments for kids who can't afford one and also have tuition aid help" for lessons outside of school, Richmond said.

Both Galvan and Richmond point to numerous studies that demonstrate music education can improve a student's academic performance in other subjects.

"There is so much research that shows music education improves students behaviorally, emotionally and academically," said Galvan. "The higher test scores are pretty significant. It is nice to be able to play an instrument, and it has such an impact on how kids do in school. That is why we have such a strong commitment to music education."

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