



Testimonials for Appropriations Sub-Committee Budget Hearing – February 10, 2016

Dan Gurvich, Executive Director

Good evening. I'm Dan Gurvich, Executive Director of Neighborhood Music School, one of the 10 largest community arts schools in the U.S, serving more than 3,000 students from 80 towns, and employing over 150 teaching artists. The ability to sustain an institution of this scope right here in Connecticut is a great point of pride, and we wouldn't be where we are today without the generous support of the state. Given our large size and the limited donor base of a smaller city, state funding is enormously important to us, and we have been able to leverage these grants to bring in additional funds and make a huge impact on our community.

From its origins in 1911 as a Settlement House serving new immigrants, NMS is built on the belief that the arts transform lives and strengthen communities. Over 500 students each year rely on our free and tuition-reduced programs in music, drama and dance. We are a hub where people of all ages, races, nationalities, and economic means come together around shared learning and shared expression, helping to unify our community.

Our City Initiative program, a partnership between NMS, New Haven Public Schools and Yale University's Music in Schools Initiative, now in its eighth year, offers free music lessons, ensemble participation and mentoring opportunities for more than 60 middle and high school students. City Initiative promotes academic success and leadership skills, and sets students on track for college. Over the last two years, all fourteen graduating seniors went on to attend college – nearly all were the first generation in their families to do so.

In the words of the mother of one of our students whose tuition is underwritten by state funding: "Thank you for causing my son to strive for his very best, and to dream, and for having such an impact on him, because now, the other 'little ones' are following their older brother's footsteps." And in the words of one of our alumni: "NMS has had everything to do with my chosen path and success in life. My teacher was my most important mentor. I learned not just how to be a better cellist, but how to be a better human being."

Programming at Neighborhood Music School does not just create artists, it changes lives! I would like to introduce two of our City Initiative students to speak first-hand about their experiences:

Tyler Jenkins, City Initiative/financial aid student, takes drum lessons and is a member of the NMS Premier Jazz Ensemble

My name is Tyler Jenkins and I am a sophomore at Wilbur Cross High School in New Haven. Neighborhood Music School is more than a school. It exists as a community, a platform for artistic development, and a place that I am proud to call my home. One of the great aspects of Neighborhood Music School is the opportunity it gives me to study and play with like-minded musicians who challenge me. I am fortunate to be a beneficiary of the scholarships that are given to students like me. Diminishing funding would be a disservice to all of us who rely on this financial support. I hope you will continue supporting all of us who need this wonderful place in our lives. Thank you.

Stephanie Persiani, City Initiative/financial aid student, takes trumpet lessons and is a member of the NMS Concert Band

My name is Stephanie Persiani and I am in the City Initiative program at NMS. I play trumpet in the Concert Band and take individual lessons. All of this is offered to me because of the financial aid I receive. Neighborhood is one of my favorite places to go – it's my home away from home. I even have a bench in the lobby I like to call my own! Through NMS, I've been able to not only improve on trumpet, but I've been in the rock ensemble, learned to accompany dancers, made amazing new friends, and had so many wonderful experiences. I am so grateful for everything NMS has given me. Please keep supporting my favorite place!
