
Regarding cuts to the 2025-2026 school budget

1 message

Marcia Jones <jonesm@newhtfd.org>

Mon, Mar 10, 2025 at 3:30 PM

To: Meagan Albert <albertm@newhtfd.org>, Tom Buzzi <buzzit@newhtfd.org>, Timothy Klepps <kleppst@newhtfd.org>, Penny Miller <millerp@newhtfd.org>, Erik Perotti <perottie@newhtfd.org>, Frank Rodenberg <rodenbergf@newhtfd.org>, Timothy Russell <russellt@newhtfd.org>, Deirdre Tindall <tindalld@newhtfd.org>, Kristin Young <youngk@newhtfd.org>

Cc: Jeffrey Sousa <sousaj@newhtfd.org>, Amy Kennedy <kennedy@newhtfd.org>, Andrew Zaorski <zaorskia@newhtfd.org>, Kelly Cravanzola <cravanzolak@newhtfd.org>

To the Board of Education members who presently sit on the Board of Education of this school year, 2024-2025

My name is Marcia Jones. I live at 298 Ramstein Road, and have lived in New Hartford for 40 years. I have seven grown children who all attended New Hartford schools and Northwestern Regional 7, and I am currently raising a granddaughter who is 9 years old, in 4th grade at Antolini School and part of the Special Education program. I am also the Instructional Assistant at Bakerville School and New Hartford Elementary School, and have held this position for 14 years.

I am writing this letter to express my deep regret, disappointment, frustration and anger at the latest news of cuts being demanded and considered for the upcoming school budget process. While I certainly understand the need for fiscal responsibility and applaud your efforts, I also certainly understand the need for educational responsibility, providing the very best education for the children of New Hartford. Their needs are enormous and varied, and our teachers and staff are constantly striving to provide guidance and support for their students.

My position in the schools as the Instructional Assistant is a para position that directly supports the teachers by providing all their curriculum needs so they can move seamlessly from lesson to lesson without the worry of whether they have all the materials required. I work tirelessly producing massive quantities of work for all of my teachers, thereby keeping them out of the workroom and in the classroom where they truly belong. I work closely with Heather Mathes, our curriculum director, making sure all materials are prepped in a timely manner, and with the constant evolution of our math and ELA curriculums, it is a monumental task to keep my teachers up-to-date and supported. My strengths lie in multi-tasking, organization and time-management, specific requirements for the job I do, as I can produce unlimited amounts of materials and support in my allotted time. I know without hesitation that I am a valued asset to the teachers, administrators and students in the two schools in which I work. The teachers depend on this position to support their teaching and allow them the time they need to support their classrooms and their students. I am personally aware that many school districts hold New Hartford in very high esteem for continuing to fund this position, as it directly supports and affects teachers and students in a supremely positive way.

Throughout the course of a day I am also always willing and available to cover any necessary duties, and am called on often to do so. I am also one of only two substitutes for the Administrative Assistants at the primary schools and am readily available to them whenever they need me, whether it's monitoring the offices when they are called away from their desks, filling in so they can leave for an appointment, or

covering full days for any reason. I am well-versed in Power School, phones and security, and am fully capable of managing it all.

I ask you, as a Board, to consider very carefully how much needs to be cut, and where those cuts will come from. As a long-time resident, taxpayer and voter, I will not support cuts that I feel will negatively affect the education and well-being of our students and teachers or take anything away from our ability as a district to address the educational and emotional needs of any of our students. My position is invaluable to the teachers in keeping them running smoothly and therefore able to concentrate on their teaching and mentoring. Eliminating it would put enormous pressure on the teachers and negatively affect their time and energy, resulting in a negative effect on the students of New Hartford.

Respectfully,

Marcia Jones

Marcia Jones

298 Ramstein Road

New Hartford Connecticut

Tuesday, March 11, 2025

Dear Members of the Board of Education,

As members of the New Hartford Education Association, we recognize that budget season brings difficult choices, requiring careful deliberation to balance financial constraints with the needs of our students. We are writing to share our concerns about potential cuts to teaching positions and the impact such reductions could have on our schools. These decisions could disrupt our ability to provide quality education and hinder the long-term success of our students and community. We urge you to explore alternative solutions that allow us to retain our current educators and sustain the high standards of education in our district.

Currently, several grade levels in our district are structured in a way that ensures manageable class sizes, allowing teachers to provide individualized attention, differentiate instruction, and address the unique needs of all learners. If a grade that presently has four sections were to consolidate into three, class sizes would increase significantly, making it more difficult for educators to meet the diverse needs of their students. This is especially concerning in grades where students require additional support, whether due to academic challenges, behavioral needs, or social-emotional development. Class sizes impact engagement, classroom management, and the quality of instruction that each student receives. Historically, classes that have been impacted by consolidation have had significant challenges in the subsequent years.

The demands placed on our district continue to increase; many students require additional academic support, mental health resources, and individualized learning strategies. Reducing our teaching and support staff would only diminish our capacity to meet these growing needs, ultimately impacting the quality of education that our district strives to provide.

Additionally, we encourage the Board to continue prioritizing special education staffing. Our special education teachers, support staff, and related service providers are essential to ensuring that students with diverse learning needs receive the instruction and accommodations required for their success. Any reductions in special education staffing could place an undue burden on the remaining staff and impact our ability to provide the level of support required by state and federal guidelines, as well as the students themselves.

We also hope that any staffing decisions take into account the significant investment the district has already made in training our educators in current curriculum and instructional methods. Our teachers have developed expertise in district-approved programs, built strong relationships with students, and collaborated with colleagues to ensure consistency and effectiveness in instruction. Reducing teaching positions would not only disrupt learning continuity but also require additional time and resources should the need for those positions arise again in the future. Preserving our experienced educators ensures stability and supports student achievement.

We appreciate your dedication to making the best possible decisions for our students and our schools. We respectfully ask that these considerations be an integral part of the decision-making process, and we welcome the opportunity to discuss how we can work together to maintain a high-quality education for all students.

Thank you for your time and commitment to our school community.

Sincerely,
The New Hartford Education Association

Dear Members of the Board of Education,

There is no doubt you have a big decision ahead of you, and not an easy one. Superintendent Sousa has the most difficult task, one that I would not want. You asked him to come back with 4 scenarios ranging from 4% to 5 1/2%, which includes reduction in positions.

It would be helpful for taxpayers to fully understand the impact of budgetary increases in relation to their tax bill. Does the Board of Finance and BOE know what it would look like for the taxpayers of New Hartford if we had an 8% increase in Education? Approximately how much would everyone's taxes go up in a year? A couple Board members mentioned families having a hard time already paying electric bills. I can understand those concerns and I can appreciate that you are taking that into consideration. All I ask is that you also take into consideration how much harder it will be for the New Hartford taxpayer/employees that are losing their jobs.

For some Board members, this will be the first time facing the Board of Finance. I ask that you encourage them to fight for what is best for our students, staff, and community and not to be told "this is what happened last year". Don't sound defeated before you even try. You will more than likely be right, but you should get the word out. Encourage our families to attend the Board of Finance meeting and voice their concerns over eliminating positions.

I am writing, as the Union President on behalf of the Secretaries Union, expressing our concern regarding the proposed reduction in the Clerical Aide position at Antolini School. This role is essential for maintaining the confidentiality, safety, and smooth operation of our school's daily activities, and its reduction would undoubtedly impact these areas in a significant way.

The Clerical Aide position plays a vital role in ensuring the security of sensitive information within the office. This role helps maintain confidentiality and ensures that important administrative tasks are handled efficiently and securely. Without this position, we risk compromising these critical functions.

In addition to confidentiality, the Clerical Aide is key to school safety. They assist in managing various administrative functions that directly affect student and staff safety, including keeping accurate records and helping manage communications during emergencies. The absence of this role would place an increased burden on the remaining staff, which could jeopardize the safety and well-being of the school community.

This position also serves as one of the primary substitutes for the Administrative Assistants. As it stands, the Administrative Assistants already face challenges in managing their schedules, often rearranging appointments around the availability of substitutes. Without a Clerical Aide to step in during absences, it is unclear how we will be able to maintain the smooth running of the office when one of the Administrative Assistants is unavailable. This could lead to significant disruptions in daily operations, with the potential for increased stress and workload on other staff members.

We are all committed to providing a high-quality education for our students and ensuring the best possible experience for families and staff. I urge you to reconsider the reduction of this crucial position, as its continued presence is integral to the confidentiality, safety, and overall effectiveness of the office at Antolini School.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We look forward to your response and hope that we can work together to find a solution that supports the needs of our school community.

Sincerely,

Secretary Union President

Kate Humphrey & Jon Puz
Troutwood Drive
New Hartford, CT 06057
katesfamily2000@gmail.com

March 17th, 2025

New Hartford Board of Education
P.O. Box 315
New Hartford, CT 06057

Sent via email with copies to First Selectman Jerram and Superintendent Sousa

Dear Chairman Klepps and Members of the New Hartford Board of Education,

New Hartford is known for having outstanding schools and we need to advocate for the current children of our town to continue to have the opportunity to receive such an outstanding educational experience. With that in mind, we write to you to express our concerns regarding the anticipated changes proposed in the school budget as currently written and approved by the Board of Education on March 11, 2025. We ask for a secondary review of the 7.6% budget increase as requested by Superintendent Sousa as well as a discussion with the Town about a) why that budget is the necessary budget and b) why that budget is the budget that upholds the fiduciary responsibilities of both the school system and the Town and best aligns with the mission of the New Hartford Public Schools.

The mission of the NHPS is to "...inspire and prepare all children to become independent and enthusiastic learners who achieve excellence by providing a challenging and exemplary education program that is differentiated, inclusive, and dynamic." We are concerned that the proposed budget reductions will result in significant decreases in support to our educators, limited access to experiences for our children to achieve their full potential, and, ultimately, fewer general resources to promote their growth and development -- therefore the budget reductions will result in all of us failing to meet the stated mission of the NHPS.

Specifically, budget items that raise our concern include but are not limited to:

- **Instructional Assistant FTE:** the elimination of Instructional Assistant who acts as a mission-critical support to the teachers in preparing necessary materials, thus allowing them to focus their attention on the learning and development of the children in the classroom -- please see the Letters to the BOE for details, especially the letter from the Teachers at the elementary schools.
- **Clerical Aide FTE:** further support to teachers and the staff of the school system to allow it to function normally -- please see the Letters to the BOE for details for how this reduction will disrupt the schools.
- **General Music FTE & White Memorial:** loss of programs that promote independence and growth, and are accessible to all children such as the band program and the annual trip to Nature's Classroom are essential. One may argue that fundraising and after

school programs can bridge the gap, but the PTO fundraising more than \$60K is unrealistic and ignores the reality that not all families have the resources to ensure their children can participate in after-school programs. Moreover, our neighboring schools offer these programs at the 5th and 6th grades, which will put our children behind when they reach 7th grade. Taken together, these cuts go against the stated mission.

- **Budget for the Talented & Gifted and Math Olympiad Programs:** These programs are only \$5000 annually including the associated Teacher time. The State requires that talented and gifted children be identified by schools, and cutting this budget inhibits the growth and development of these children who have the potential to excel academically.

The proposed loss of FTEs and programs does a disservice to our children by not allowing for the development of a well rounded class of students, and these reductions go against the mission of having a differentiated, inclusive, and dynamic education program for all students. The combined cost of these aforementioned FTEs and programs is only \$129,150 as compared to an overall budget of approximately \$10,300,000. At the same time, there are other opportunities for cost savings and we appreciate the Board reviewing where cuts are needed in coordination with the educators.

In summary, these proposed budget reductions eliminate important positions and programs that are core to the educational mission of the New Hartford Public School System. While we are in full support of ensuring financial responsibility by the Board of Education, and ultimately by the Town, we propose the Board of Education to reconsider Superintendent Sousa's budget.

We also encourage the Board of Education to discuss with the Board of Finance and the broader Town of New Hartford the cost drivers in today's schools and the tax rates that are needed to fulfill the mission of our schools. The dramatic increase in state-mandated educational programs (more than 15% this year and, based on reviewing past budgets, averaging 10% over the past seven budget cycles) and in other required costs that outpace inflation (e.g., insurance and other benefits) necessitate increases in overall educational spending. Falling short of what's needed for our schools does a disservice not just to our children, but to the economic livelihood of the town. Families are important to New Hartford's continued and future economic growth and without strong schools, families will move away and property values will decrease.

Thank you for your commitment to ensuring the mission of the New Hartford Public Schools is fulfilled. We appreciate your time and for considering our recommendations regarding the proposed budget. We look forward to working with you in the years to come to ensure that our school system is one in which our children can gain the education and confidence that they need to succeed.

Respectfully,

Kate Humphrey and Jon Puz

Residents & Taxpayers, Parents of a Student, and Active PTO & School Volunteers

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **christine barberet** <chrisbarberet@gmail.com>

Date: Tue, Mar 11, 2025 at 7:58 PM

Subject: Office Security

To: sousaj@newhtfd.org <sousaj@newhtfd.org>, kleppst@newhtfd.org <kleppst@newhtfd.org>

I attended the BOE meeting of March 11 concerning the budget to be presented to the Board of Finance. I appreciate the dedication and thoughtfulness which you all displayed during your discussion. However, I feel the need to point out one critical area. The position of clerical aide in the Antolini office was omitted without discussion.

Perhaps it is misleading as the title does not adequately describe the position. I am a retired Administrative Assistant at both Bakerville and Antolini Schools. When I was moved to the position from Bakerville to Antolini I was asked to perform the office duties and those required by the Principal without assistance. I did so for several months. Upon review I was asked if this was "doable." My answer was an emphatic no. My biggest concern was the impact on security.

In all three schools the office staff is responsible for watching cameras and allowing entrance to the building while answering phones, addressing staff and student concerns, reviewing daily attendance and a host of other office requirements. It is impossible to safely do so with one person in the office. While I applaud the attention paid to security, i.e. windows, doors, the people in the office are the first line of defense. I humbly ask that you again review the eliminations you have so painfully made and consider not eliminating the position of clerical aide which supports the office during the busy morning through lunch/recess time.

Thank you for your consideration and again thank you for your dedication and thoughtfulness.

Dhirs Barberet
19 Deer Run
New Hartford, CT

To: The New Hartford Board of Education

Dear Board Members,

I can only imagine how challenging it must be for Mr. Sousa and the board to be making these decisions regarding the budget, given the increases that we are seeing. However, I am deeply concerned about the impact these staff cuts will have on the daily operations of our schools, particularly the proposed elimination of the Clerical Aide position at Ann Antolini School. This role is essential to maintaining not only the efficiency of the office but also the safety and confidentiality of the school. At a time when so much money and effort have been invested into our schools to improve safety, removing this position would be a step in the wrong direction.

I believe explaining the importance of the Clerical Aide position at Ann Antolini School is where I can contribute most effectively, given my knowledge and experience in the role and as someone who now relies heavily on the support of having another person in the office to help maintain building safety, while also supporting the needs of parents, students and staff.

I started with New Hartford originally assuming the role of Clerical Aide in 2022. In 2023, the Administrative Assistant at the time, had an emergency with her family, which required me to assume her position until I was formally hired in the winter. I worked for months without the support of the clerical aide, until one was hired in January. During this time, I rarely got a break during the day, despite the building principal's best attempts to provide me with one. I was working an 8.25-hour day because I was covering the hours for both positions and found myself often feeling overwhelmed. It was also concerning for me, being the only person responsible for watching the cameras and front door, especially during the times of day when there was heavy traffic coming through the office. There are often unfamiliar faces that come to the door, especially because, in addition to Ann Antolini's parents and visitors, we are also having parents and staff show up for Oak Hill, which is a specialized school that rents space within our building. Part of our job is that when a visitor arrives, we need to confirm that they are authorized to be there. Even if it seems safe, we need to confirm their identity and purpose which also can mean having to confirm with other staff in the building. A second person provides support to handle these situations effectively.

In listening to the meeting last night, there seemed to be numerous times that a concern was made over losing certain things, like annual trips and extracurricular programs (which with proper staff and parent support we can help fundraise to bring back), the additional school counselor position, and the Instructional Aide. I was watching from home and was shocked that no one ever even mentioned the Clerical Aide position. The only thing that I can assume from this, is that the board is unaware of what this position actually is. In short, the Clerical Aide at Ann Antolini has a broad range of student and staff services that it supports, in addition to all of the tasks incorporated within the position of the Instructional Aide.

It's difficult to fully grasp the responsibilities of a position and its impact on the environment until you've actually worked in it. Based on my experience having worked as the clerical aide position, and now being in a position that is supported by the clerical aide, my primary concerns are security and confidentiality. There are numerous times during the day when I've had to leave the office to assist with an emergency or complete a task elsewhere. In fact, this happened this morning when both our principal was in a meeting and our teacher in charge was teaching a class. Without another person in the office, these circumstances, that happen quite often, leave the office vulnerable. I encourage you to join us at Antolini between the hours of 8:15 and 11:15 on a busy day. The clerical aide may only be in the office part-time, but their presence allows the Administrative Assistant the early hours of the day to manage tasks that require someone to be in the office, ensuring it doesn't go unattended.

When I worked in the clerical aide position, I would often sub at NHES, as well as Bakerville. The Clerical Aide is trained in powerschool and trained how to run the office efficiently in the absence of not only Ann Antolini's Administrative Assistant, but also that of the two primary schools. We work behind the computer, but also deal hands on with the student's in the building. There is a high level of confidentiality that is expected when working with students. We handle extremely sensitive information, making it inadvisable to have an unfamiliar person fill in as a sub at the times that it is needed, and going without a sub and leaving the office unattended is simply an unrealistic option. In addition to confidentiality, I have seen the difference in the size of the schools, and appreciate the importance of a secondary presence at Antolini based on the number of students. To remove that position would create an inequality, as Antolini supports 238 students, in addition to the larger amount of building staff and Oak Hill. Due to these numbers, we also do not have the option of having the nurse cover, as she is kept very busy seeing around 20+ students per day.

On a personal note that stresses how important the Clerical Aide's presence is, my father, whom I resided with for 3 years, passed away at the end of the 2024 school year. Only because of the experience and knowledge of the clerical aide, was I able to take the time off that I needed, to be present for my family. The same was true for Chris Baberbert in 2022, when she was able to rely on me for coverage when needed. We can not predict when someone may need this coverage, and having someone trained, ready and familiar is so pertinent to maintaining the flow of the school.

I know that there were student activities and extracurriculars on the list of cuts as well. We have been fortunate to be able to fundraise within the office and save parents a large amount of money, particularly on the 6 grade field trips. The class trip to NYC for example, was estimated this year to cost \$133.00 per child. We were able to take this number down to \$97 per child with the help of PTO funds, and then got it down even further to \$68 per child with the help of in-school fundraising. If we can keep the Clerical Aide position in the school, we will be able to continue to grow these fundraisers and help with the costs of these other activities that unfortunately may be cut. Without the extra office support, this will no longer be possible and parents will end up paying more for these experiences that their children look forward to.

I don't know the perfect solution for making the necessary cuts while keeping the positions vital to the building, but I do understand the difficult position Mr. Sousa has been in, having to make these decisions to present to the board. However, I ask you to please consider the immeasurable impact that cutting the Clerical Aide position would have on safety, efficiency, and confidentiality and ask yourselves whether the savings is worth going backwards in a time when we are putting so much money and effort in to making sure our school buildings are safe and secure.

I truly hope that the board will take these concerns into consideration as decisions are being made.

Thank you for your dedication to our students and our community.

Julie Cyr

Ann Antolini School
(860) 489-4169

To: The New Hartford Board of Education

Dear Board Members,

In lieu of recent proposed budget cuts, I find myself in the position to communicate with you the need for a second person in the Antolini office and how the clerical aide benefits the school as a whole. While the person in this position is responsible for a variety of daily tasks to help keep the school running, there are other underlying factors that you may not be aware of that make this position a necessity at Antolini. I ask that you consider all that I do and most importantly the fact that families and students rely on me for daily communication and support regarding all aspects of the school day.

First, without a clerical aide there would be no one to cover the administrative assistant in all three schools when she is absent. This coverage not only requires an extensive knowledge of how the building is run but an expertise in Powerschool, and the security of knowing all matters concerning students is kept confidential as required by law. The required confidentiality in these matters would not be guaranteed with outside substitute sources. We work together as a team to ensure a smooth transition if someone needs to cover in the district for an hour, a day, or an extended time. One of us in the Antolini office is often called upon to help with a student when others are unavailable and this happens more than you would think, impossible to do with one person in the office. Also important, clerical aides are also trained to cover not only day to day essential tasks but appropriate responses to an emergency.

Importantly, as recent times have dictated, we find ourselves playing an important role in the safety and security of children. Both the administrative assistant and myself are responsible for screening visitors via the cameras and securing the safety of our students. This includes the vetting of frequent guests visiting our Oak Hill School who are required for safety reasons to enter through our main office. Additionally, I am responsible for ensuring all those present in the building are accounted for should an emergency happen and action needs to be taken, something I have trained for under the administrative assistant. Also, a second person for at least part of the day allows the other to walk away from the office to complete tasks within the building knowing someone is there to safeguard the office. The clerical aide position allows for all this to happen. Aside from the tasks involving students and parents we both endeavor to meet the daily needs requested by the building principal.

Recently, we have also been able to organize fundraising to aid with the cost of field trips through raising funds to add to our school activity fund. With the rising price of field trips, even with the generous funds from the PTO, costs are exorbitant. With a clerical

aide available to help, the administrative assistant has had the time to organize, run and be totally responsible for this fundraising. This would be impossible without someone to help cover the office. This extensive fundraiser has procured between 3 and 4 thousand dollars this year alone. A testament to cooperation and teamwork in the office this year. As a team we have been able to reduce the price of field trips for parents. This would be impossible with one person fulfilling all the needs of the office.

The clerical aide is also responsible for reserving room usage throughout the building, from staff, after school care, the New Hartford Recreation Department, and the community at large. This task includes the assurance of required insurance coverage. Additionally the position along with the administrative assistant is responsible for leave time accounting within our building. As I mentioned above the clerical aide is responsible for a variety of office duties. On a daily basis some are fielding phone calls, recording absences, producing passes, as well as fulfilling requests from staff, students, and the administration. Duties have also included procuring estimates for field trip buses, as well as being responsible for accepting payments for field trips, and organizing deposits to send to the central office for deposit. Additionally, I support teachers with preparation of curriculum materials when possible. Most importantly, students seek me out when they need to communicate with their parents or rely on me to support them when they need a break or emotional support when a mental health provider is unavailable. Contact with students and families is a considerable portion of my role throughout the day.

To be honest, I could go on. I only ask that you consider the amount of work, security and integrity I bring to the system and more importantly the vital role the clerical aide plays in the school office, and weigh it against what it actually costs the board to keep this position. Personally, I bring over 30 years of service with the board and loyalty to the school. My years of experience have definitely been an asset to an ever changing education community here in New Hartford. I implore you to keep the position of clerical aide here at Antolini in next year's budget and in future years.

With gratitude,
Shelly McCoy
Clerical Aide
Antolini School

Instructional Assistant Position

1 message

Kelly Cravanzola <cravanzolak@newhtfd.org>

Wed, Mar 12, 2025 at 9:12 PM

To: Board of Education Members <boe@newhtfd.org>

Cc: Jeffrey Sousa <sousaj@newhtfd.org>, Andrew Zaorski <zaorskia@newhtfd.org>

Dear Members of the New Hartford Board of Education,

We are writing to you to express our concerns regarding last night's decision to cut the Instructional Assistant in the New Hartford Public Schools District. As members of this community, we understand the challenges faced in balancing a budget and meeting the needs of all students. However, we believe that eliminating the Instructional Assistant position will have a lasting negative impact on both the students and the overall culture in our district.

The Instructional Assistant is an essential part of the educational team, providing invaluable assistance to our staff. This position has many responsibilities, perhaps one of the most important is to ensure that teachers have their curriculum needs met, allowing them to focus on what really matters: their students. After adopting a new math and ELA curriculum, this role has been crucial to the success of classroom teachers. Without this position, it will affect the overall classroom environment, as teachers will be stretched thinner, unable to devote as much time to the diverse needs of each student.

We urge the Board to reconsider the impact of this cut on our students and explore an alternative way to balance the budget without sacrificing a position that directly contributes to the educational experience.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We trust that the Board will continue to prioritize the best interests of our students and community as you navigate these difficult decisions.

Respectfully,

Kelly Cravanzola

Andrew Zaorski

Paraeducator Union Co-Presidents

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Steve Boratko** <sboratko@gmail.com>

Date: Thu, Mar 13, 2025 at 10:25 PM

Subject: music funding

To: <boe@newhdfd.org>, <sousaj@newhdfd.org>

Dear New Hartford School Board Members,

As someone who benefitted from Ann Antolini's 5th and 6th grade music program, I strongly encourage you to continue funding it. Though I was far from gifted, the music education that started at Antolini and continued at Regional 7 remains the part of primary school that I look back on most fondly. At the ripe old age of 38, some of my closest friends are people I bonded with in sectional rehearsals.

There are countless studies about the benefits of a music education on the developing brain, or how playing an instrument makes you more attractive to colleges. That is certainly true, but surely you know that already. What you should consider is where getting exposed to music at a young age can take you. Off of my head I can think of a Broadway performer, music educator, and professional trumpet player that got started playing in the multi-purpose room. A percussionist I know went on to play in UConn's pep band as confetti fell on one of their national championships. Sure, most of us don't hit those highs, but music still has a positive influence on our development. For me I can say the involvement in music that started at Antolini taught me a sense of pride in my craft and appreciation for complex systems that has led me to great success in my professional life.

When Miss Huber, the long-time band teacher retired, a former student a few years older than me put out the call. She was hoping to get a few former students together to play at the retirement party. She was able to field a full ensemble, though some of us had not played in a few years. We showed up because to celebrate the love of music she shared with us, and the community the program created made a difference in our lives. I would hate to think that future generations do not get the same opportunity.

Steve Boratko

Dear Mr. Sousa and members of the Board of Education,

I am writing to express my concern about the proposed budget cuts that threaten to alter the entire music program and eliminate the elementary band program at Antolini. I believe that both the general music classes and the band program is a vital part of the school community and it creates students who are well-rounded, confident, and creative individuals.

The Band Program and Lesson Schedule

The proposal made at the Board of Education meeting stated that the band program would take place after school and that only 40 students would be affected. It is important to realize that this plan eliminates ALL small group lessons and only a full band rehearsal would occur after school one day a week. Without instrumental lessons, students cannot learn to play an instrument. Students need to learn HOW to play instruments before they can play in a band. Instrumental lessons at the elementary level are essential to create a band. Important skills such as understanding new rhythms, note reading, and fingerings specific to each of the nine different instruments would be impossible to teach in a full band setting. The 40 students, who represent 64% of the current 5th grade class, will be in the 6th grade next year. They would be the only students participating in a single after school band without any second year lessons. Without small group lessons, next year's 5th grade class will have no way of beginning a new instrument, which would mean the end of the band program. Simply put: without instrumental lessons there can be no band.

The Band and Our Community

Band is an important part of our school community at Antolini and to the town of New Hartford. The 5th and 6th grade bands provide three performances per year for all of the students at Antolini, allowing the students in the band program and in the general Antolini community to experience art, music, and emotion. The solo and ensemble concert during school in June promotes independence, leadership, and cooperation among the students. Band musicians provide music during various patriotic ceremonies throughout the year. In the town of New Hartford, students perform Taps for the Veterans Day and Memorial Day ceremonies at Chapin Park and Hoppen Road while the middle and high school bands are marching in the parades. These events bring immense pride to our children who are performing and are loved by the townspeople and veterans in attendance.

Affects at Northwestern Regional 7

The band's elimination does not just affect New Hartford. The elementary band is the foundation of the band program for Northwest Regional 7. Lesson groups and full band rehearsals are where the students learn fundamental skills such as rhythm, note reading, and musicianship that will be carried on to the middle and high school programs at Region 7. Without instrumental instruction at Antolini, they would not be able to play at Region 7. Currently, New Hartford provides the largest number of students to the band program and without our presence, their band program will be decimated. There will be no concerts, no pep bands, no parades, no Northern Region Music Festival, and no All State Music Festival for the students of New Hartford. The overall quality of the bands will suffer and New Hartford students

will not be able to compete with their peers from the other towns, since most towns start their students in 4th grade.

Hands-on Learning

It is also important to understand that band is not only about performance opportunities. Academic, social, and emotional learning occurs within the band setting. It was mentioned at the meeting on March 11th that learning by doing or hands-on learning was best. Band is the epitome of hands-on learning. Students learn physical coordination through posture, fingering, embouchure placement, and tonguing. These skills must line up with reading the notes and performing them accurately, and coordinating with other musicians. In addition, students are using their knowledge of science to play in tune and math skills to read and execute rhythms accurately.

Mental Health and Music

Mental health was widely discussed at the March 11th meeting. A "Long Term Benefits of Music Study" from Wheaton College found that "study in the arts developed character traits such as discipline, perseverance, teamwork, patience, self-control, problem solving, and empathy." Likewise, Tony Wagner's 21st Century Skills stated that, "music challenges students to imagine unforeseen solutions and borderless outcomes. From abstract, to concrete to abstract, over-and-over again, music challenges and invigorates the mind, body, and spirit." In addition, the band program provides a space for students to have different experiences from the classroom or other special areas. Many of the students flourish in band - it is their haven. Eliminating the band program would eliminate another avenue to help the mental health of our students.

Given the impact that music and band has on our students, I urge you to reconsider the reconfiguration of the music department and the elimination of the band program. Please consider the long-term benefits of keeping the music and band program intact, not only for the current students, but also for the generations that will follow.

Sincerely,

Allison Melillo
(3-6 General Music, 5-6 Instrumental Music, Band)

Dear Members of the Board of Education,

I am writing to express my deep concern regarding the proposed elimination of the school counseling position for the upcoming academic year. As the school counselor for both Bakerville and Antolini Schools, I serve the entire student body across both buildings, ensuring that students receive the academic, emotional, and social support they need to succeed. The loss of this position would be a significant disservice to our students, staff, and the overall well-being of our school communities.

The impact of COVID-19 on students' mental health has been profound, and the ongoing mental health crisis is far from over. Now is not the time to reduce support services that directly address these challenges. I provide intervention groups for students identified through the BESS, our social-emotional screener, ensuring that struggling students receive the targeted support they need. Additionally, I work with students receiving counseling through their IEPs and 504 plans, as well as those identified through MTSS – many of whom are general education students who might otherwise go unnoticed.

The role of a school counselor is essential in maintaining a balanced workload for our school social worker and psychologist. While they primarily focus on students receiving special education services, a school counselor is able to handle the day-to-day emotional and social concerns of the general student population. This division of responsibilities allows all students to receive appropriate care without overwhelming any single support provider. Prior to my arrival, my colleagues described an immense workload that left them struggling to meet students' needs. While they managed to get by, scraping together resources and efforts is not the same as providing adequate, sustainable support. On any given day, I am running two to four intervention groups, meeting with students individually, responding to unexpected situations, and delivering classroom lessons – all of which contribute to a positive and supportive school environment. If the school counseling position is cut, these responsibilities will fall onto an already stretched-thin staff, ultimately reducing the quality of care students receive. This is not just an issue of workload distribution – it is an issue of student safety, well-being, and academic success.

I recall a particularly critical moment during my first year in this role when I was the only mental health professional present in the district for the day. That afternoon, a student expressed suicidal ideation, and I was responsible for conducting a suicide risk assessment. The thought of such situations arising without a dedicated counselor on site is alarming and unacceptable.

Eliminating the school counseling position would be a short-sighted decision with long-term consequences. I urge you to consider the invaluable impact that this role has on our students, staff, and overall school climate. Our children deserve a learning environment where their emotional and mental health needs are met, ensuring their ability to thrive academically and personally. I implore you to reconsider this decision and continue to prioritize student well-being by maintaining the school counselor position.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Shayla Vu
School Counselor

March 14, 2025

Dear Members of the Board of Education,

I am writing to express my deep concern regarding the recent budget cuts that have been approved, particularly the elimination of vital positions and programs that directly impact the educational experience and development of our students. It is evident that these decisions do not fully reflect the needs and desires of the families and educators who work with these students daily, nor do they consider the long-term consequences for our community.

The removal of the .6 general music FTE, Talented and Gifted Program, and Math Olympiad Program, in particular, will have a profound effect on student growth. These programs and positions are not luxuries; they are essential to fostering a well-rounded, inclusive, and effective learning environment. Without these resources, many students will struggle to reach their full potential.

Furthermore, studies show that music education improves memory, attention, and problem-solving skills. It strengthens neural pathways related to math, reading, and spatial reasoning. In addition, music fosters collaboration, teamwork, and discipline. Students learn patience, perseverance, and how to work towards a collective goal. Participation in school bands, orchestras, and choirs creates a community where students feel supported and connected to their peers, as well.

I am currently the facilitator for the TAG program and served as the facilitator for the Math Olympiad Team for the past two years. These programs are the only opportunity for our gifted students to shine and excel. They encourage higher-level thinking, problem-solving, and creativity, preparing students for advanced studies and careers. Without TAG programs, gifted students may become disengaged, unmotivated, or under-stimulated in a standard classroom setting. Gifted students often require differentiated instruction that goes beyond the standard curriculum. Finally, when students are challenged appropriately, they become more engaged in their learning and develop a stronger sense of self-efficacy.

I am also deeply concerned that the decision to cut clerical staff and eliminate the purchase of student workbooks will place an even greater burden on teachers who are already stretched to their limits. Expecting educators to manually copy four 150-page language arts workbooks and eight 150-page math workbooks per student each year is extremely time consuming. Not to mention, Antolini has one copy machine for the entire building, which is out of service and needs maintenance regularly. This added workload will inevitably require sacrificing our personal time, further exacerbating the challenges we face. With the instructional day already packed with essential teaching responsibilities, adding yet another task will only detract from the time and energy needed to effectively support our students' learning.

Our students deserve better. The families in our district deserve better. The choices made by this board should reflect the voices of the community it serves. I urge you to reconsider these budget cuts and seek alternative solutions that prioritize student success over financial reductions that will only hinder their development. These cuts directly contradict our mission to provide a high-quality education that meets the diverse needs of all learners.

I appreciate your time and consideration and wish you the best as you make these difficult decisions.

Sincerely,

Melissa Preece

Grade 3 teacher

Ann Antolini

March 13, 2025

Dear Members of the Board of Education,

We are writing to express our deep concern and disappointment regarding your vote to make cuts to Superintendent Sousa's initial budget proposal. We understand the immense responsibility you carry in proposing a sound and balanced budget that meets the needs of the district. However, the impact of these decisions should not be felt so significantly by the children of New Hartford. While many of the cuts will have a considerable impact on our schools and the community, as educators, we are most concerned about the reduction of mental health positions and the significant downsizing of the music program in our schools. This not only undermines the well-being of our students, but also jeopardizes their academic and personal growth. Their education, well-being, and opportunities should remain a priority, and we must ensure that essential services are not sacrificed in the process.

Need for Mental Health Support

The need for mental health support in schools has never been greater. Students today face immense stress, anxiety, and other mental health challenges. Reducing access to counselors and mental health professionals will only exacerbate these issues. A lack of proper mental health resources can lead to increased behavioral problems, lower academic performance, and an additional identification of needs without the appropriate resources to address them before they escalate. Schools should be places that provide students with the emotional support they need to succeed academically, ensuring that they are able to fully engage in their education and reach their potential.

Impact of Eliminations

Eliminating our school counselor and contract with CJR will be devastating. These programs provide invaluable services that directly support students' emotional and academic success. These professionals run small social skills groups, offer counseling services, and lead classroom lessons that align with our RULER program, helping students develop emotional intelligence and self-regulation skills. They also provide on-demand crisis processing, ensuring that children who experience trauma or distress receive immediate support. These services are not luxuries—they are essential interventions that help students navigate the challenges of school and life. Cutting these positions will severely limit students' access to these crucial supports and place an even greater strain on the remaining staff. These programs have been instrumental in allowing our school psychologists and social workers to provide their professional services efficiently. With these cuts, they will be overburdened, making it more difficult to complete essential tasks such as student evaluations, special education testing, counseling sessions, and required meetings. When these professionals are stretched too thin, critical services are delayed, negatively impacting students who rely on timely interventions and support. This will not only create additional strain on staff but also hinder the ability to meet students' growing needs in a timely and effective manner.

Value of Music Programs

Equally concerning is the cut to our music program. The New Hartford music program has been a cornerstone of our district for many decades, earning recognition and fostering a love for music in countless students. It has served as the foundation for many who have gone on to become successful musicians and music educators. Our program does more than teach students how to play an instrument and sing—it instills discipline, teamwork, and a passion for the arts. Music education enhances cognitive abilities and improves emotional expression, supporting classroom learning. Cutting music programs deprives students of these benefits and takes away opportunities for artistic expression, teamwork, and personal development. Furthermore, for many students, music is not just an extracurricular activity but a passion and an essential outlet for self-discovery.

Community Impact of Elimination

The elementary music program builds the essential skills that the Northwest Regional #7 middle school band and choral directors continue, setting students up for success in high school. Without students matriculating into band and chorus from New Hartford, those programs will suffer, weakening an important tradition of excellence in our regional district. It should be clear that without the part-time music educator here in New Hartford, our remaining music teacher will not have time in her day to provide instrumental lessons, lead chorus, or direct band rehearsals. The New Hartford band and choral programs will cease to exist, and the impact will be felt by many within New Hartford and throughout the surrounding towns.

New Hartford vs. Neighboring Towns

Meanwhile, neighboring towns continue to enhance and invest in their music programs, recognizing the lifelong benefits that music education provides. While other districts are expanding opportunities for their students, we should not be moving in the opposite direction. Cutting our music program puts our students at a disadvantage compared to their peers in surrounding communities and sends the message that the arts are not a priority in our district. Instead of diminishing these programs, we should be striving to provide the same high-quality opportunities that other districts are offering.

Budget constraints are always a challenge, but the solution should not come at the expense of the mental health and music education of children in New Hartford. We strongly urge the Board of Education to reconsider cutting services that are vital to ensuring that all students receive the quality education and support they need to succeed. Instead, we encourage the Board to stand firm in advocating for a responsible and comprehensive budget—one that reflects the thoughtful and strategic plan Superintendent Sousa presented weeks ago. Now is the time to prioritize our students by fighting for the resources they deserve, rather than compromising their education due to financial constraints.

Respectfully,

The New Hartford Education Association

3/14/25

Dear New Hartford Board of Education Members,

I am reaching out in regards to the proposal to remove the Instructional Assistant position from the primary schools.

This position is crucial for the preparation of essential materials in grades Pre-K through 2. Ms. Jones does so much more than just make copies.

While implementing our new curriculum, we have found that there are a lot more materials to prepare than we had initially expected. Ms. Jones has been a critical part of our success in implementing this program. Packets, paper books, picture and word sorts, word sliders, sight word practice rings...the list goes on. All of these items are a necessary part of the program and student learning, and all of these items take significant time to prepare.

Of course, she is responsible for preparing the “fun stuff” too. Any special craft a child came home with in preschool, kindergarten, first, or second grade was likely prepared by Ms. Jones. These activities would not be possible without her help, as teachers do not have the magnitude of extra time it would take to prepare many of these crafts and special projects. It might seem like crafts are not all that important, but these activities tie into our learning, keep children engaged, and bring joy to our students. It would be so sad for incoming students to miss out on special activities simply because there is no one to prepare them.

On a personal note, when I had to unexpectedly begin my maternity leave early last year, Ms. Jones was an essential part of supporting the planning for my classroom. She knew where to locate many of my materials, and she would collaborate with the entire kindergarten team to gather and prepare whatever was necessary for my sub. She also knew exactly what materials to prepare for August, and she did so

before school ended in June. I didn't have to stress about preparing parent packets, bus tags, beginning of the year projects, etc. while I was home caring for my premature son. When I returned at the beginning of the school year, I was so relieved to find that Ms. Jones had set me up for success.

In addition to all of that, Ms. Jones is able to be a substitute in the office at both schools. This is a role other staff members are not trained to do, and there are no subs for this position otherwise. If a secretary needs to be out for an extended period of time, she is able to cover all office duties with ease. It is essential to have someone trained to cover the office, not only for things running smoothly during a typical school day, but also for emergency situations such as a lockdown.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. I am hopeful that this demonstrates just how important and dynamic the role of Instructional Assistant is to the success of the primary schools.

Respectfully,
Colleen Sabo
Kindergarten, NHES



Janet G.M. Terenzi <terenzij@newhtfd.org>

Fwd: 2025-2026 New Hartford School Budget

1 message

Jeffrey Sousa <sousaj@newhtfd.org>

Mon, Mar 17, 2025 at 11:54 AM

To: "Janet G.M. Terenzi" <terenzij@newhtfd.org>

Please print for BOE meeting 3/18.

Thank you.

Jeffrey F. Sousa

Superintendent

New Hartford Public Schools

860.379.8546

Sousaj@newhtfd.org

On Sun, Mar 16, 2025 at 11:20 PM Mary Wallace <mary.j.orefice@gmail.com> wrote:

Dear Members of the New Hartford Board of Education,

As a parent of three children, two of school age currently attending Ann Antolini School, I am writing to express my concerns regarding the proposed budget cuts for the 2025-2026 school year. I believe the current proposed budget cuts do not address the needs of all of our students and will have a devastating impact on our community.

I am most concerned about the proposed cuts to the Talented And Gifted program, Math Olympiads and the music program. My eldest daughter, Kaydence, is an active participant in all three of these programs, and will be disappointed to learn they will be discontinued next year. Last year she placed in the top half of Math Olympiads of all participating countries as a 4th grader. If you attended last year's TAG Cultural Fair, you may remember her New Zealand presentation or tasted the Pavlova treat she made, both of which she was so proud to present. If you have met Kaydence, you know she puts 110% into everything she does. If the only two programs offered that are intended to support and enrich students demonstrating high ability/aptitude are eliminated, what, if any, advanced educational experiences will be provided as a replacement to meet the needs of these children?

In regards to the music program, I feel music plays a unique and important role in education. Music appreciation is an important part of all of our lives, with benefits far surpassing the cost of the proposed program budget cut. Music has proven time and again to provide students, especially young children, with unique abilities to express themselves, improve mental health, benefit brain development and improve cognitive skills. Some studies show it can improve academic performance in other subjects such as math and reading as well. New Hartford has historically had a very strong music program, one I remember from when I was a student, and one that I find to be an important part of any child's education. I encourage you to think about what a day without music would look like in your own lives, when you decide to remove such an important program from our children's.

I urge the Board to reconsider the proposed budget, prioritizing a more equitable approach to resource allocation, to ensure that it adequately supports the needs of all of our students.

I appreciate your commitment to our community, your time, and your consideration on these important matters.

Sincerely,

Dr. Mary Orefice Wallace
6 Woodland Road
New Hartford, CT 06057

3/17/2025

Dear Members of the Board of Education,

I am writing to express my concern regarding the proposed cuts to the school counselor position and the band program in New Hartford Public Schools. As an employee for New Hartford Public Schools for the past nine years and as someone who has worked across all three elementary schools, I have seen firsthand how essential the school counselor position is to the well being of the children in New Hartford. As Superintendent Jeffrey Sousa emphasized in the most recent Board meeting, in which I attended, the cuts you are recommending are a step backwards for the district. We would not have hired a school counselor if things were status quo. From 2015-2020 I served as the sole mental health provider between New Hartford Elementary School and Bakerville Consolidated School, **often** having to race between schools to support students in crisis, such as when students were expressing suicidal ideation. During this time, the school psychologist at Antolini, with a caseload of 60+ students, had little time to provide direct services to those who needed them the most. It was only after the growing need for mental health services that the district wisely hired a district social worker in 2020. However, as I continued to work across schools, I still found myself in racing between buildings when students were in crisis. This was not sustainable.

Yes, it is true that “we went through years and years and years and years without this position” as one board member stated, but hopefully it is now clear that the status quo was not working, which is why the district created the school counselor position. We now have a professional providing support to students in ALL three buildings. This year alone, the mental health team has conducted over 10 risk assessments for students expressing suicidal thoughts. This position is essential to the safety and well-being of our students. At Antolini alone, the school counselor has worked directly with 39 students this year, not to mention the support provided during crises, consultations with staff, and mediation for children. It is essential that we have a mental health provider in all three buildings five days a week to meet the growing and urgent needs of our students. Removing this position is a **dangerous** step backward. Mental health is not solely the responsibility of parents, as one board member stated. The reality is that many parents in New Hartford face significant challenges of their own and are unable to provide the necessary mental health support for their children. Our schools are often the only place where students can receive the help they need.

Finally, the decision to move the band program to before or after school will create an inequity that cannot be overlooked. Many students will no longer have the opportunity to participate in band because their parents work and cannot provide transportation or support outside of regular school hours. In working at Ann Antolini the past few years, I have seen how beneficial the program is to so many students, many of whom struggle academically. It brings joy to their lives during difficult days, and it fosters confidence and a sense of accomplishment.

I urge you to reconsider the cuts to the school counselor position and the band program. These decisions have far-reaching consequences, not only for students' academic success but for their emotional and social development. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Alexandra Plourd

School Psychologist

Ann Antolini Elementary School



Janet G.M. Terenzi <terenzij@newhtfd.org>

[NHPS-BOE] Music Program

1 message

Elaine Boratko <eaboratko@gmail.com>

Mon, Mar 17, 2025 at 11:24 AM

To: "sousaj@newhtfd.org" <sousaj@newhtfd.org>, boe@newhtfd.org

Dear New Hartford Board of Education:

As a longtime resident of New Hartford for more than 40 years, I was distressed to hear that the music program for 5th and 6th grade is under consideration to be eliminated. My three grown children were students at New Hartford Elementary School and Ann Antolini. Their experience in the schools was extremely positive and I can't stress enough what a huge role the music program played in their achievements.

All three of my children are highly successful and credit the music program with helping them develop important life skills including discipline, focus, critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and time management. It also built confidence which is priceless. In my opinion, music is not an option, it is essential to a well-balanced and complete education.

As a parent, if I was looking to buy or build a house for my family, the first thing I would check is the curriculum at the schools. If it did not have music, I would look to another town. Also, Northwestern Regional #7 has a long history of having an exceptional music program. Much of that success starts in the elementary schools with New Harford having the biggest influence on the programs.

New Hartford needs to continue being a first-rate town. Please do not cut the music program.

Sincerely,

Elaine A. Boratko

P.O. Box 233

New Hartford, CT 06057

Board of Education, New Hartford

Dear Members of the Board of Education,

We are writing to express our deep concern regarding the proposed removal of the 5th and 6th grade band program and the corresponding 0.6 FTE music education position from the school day in the 2025-2026 school year budget. As parents in the district and music educators and band directors in neighboring districts, we have witnessed firsthand the profound impact that music education has on students' lives.

Instrumental music is a highly unique and beneficial enrichment that is not mirrored anywhere else in the public-school experience. It provides students with a creative outlet, fosters a sense of discipline, and encourages teamwork. The skills learned in music classes are transferable to many other areas of life and education. Here are several reasons why maintaining the entire band and instrumental music instruction program is crucial:

1. **Development of Life Skills:** Music education helps students develop essential life skills such as discipline, patience, and perseverance. Learning to play an instrument requires consistent practice and dedication, which teaches students the value of hard work and commitment.
2. **Social Development:** Being part of a band fosters a sense of community and belonging. Students learn to work together towards a common goal, developing teamwork and collaboration skills. These social interactions are vital for their overall development and well-being.
3. **Cultural Connections:** Music education provides students with an understanding and appreciation of different cultures. Through music, students can explore and connect with diverse cultural traditions, fostering a sense of global awareness and empathy.
4. **Academic Performance:** Numerous studies have shown that music education enhances student performance in other academic areas. Students who participate in music programs often have higher test scores, improved reading and math skills, and better overall academic achievement.
5. **Accessibility and Burden on Families:** Moving the 5th and 6th grade band program outside of the school day will make it less accessible to students. It places an added burden on families to arrange for transportation and scheduling, which will be in direct competition with pre-existing extracurricular activities like sports, clubs, and other enrichment programs. Additionally, students may not be able to engage at their full potential after a full day of school at this developmental age. Attrition rates will likely increase as students and families face the additional challenges of making it to after-school sessions.
6. **Critical Role of Small Group Instruction:** Beginner band programs are implemented through the delivery of small group instrumental instruction. These small group lessons are the most critical element for beginners, where they learn everything in the first stages—from how to open the instrument case and properly assemble the instrument, to how to make their first sound and begin to interpret written music notation specific to their individual instrument. They also learn how to practice and develop as beginner musicians, and how to

prepare for a band rehearsal, including basic band etiquette and expectations. Beginner band programs focus on small group instruction and often don't meet for full band rehearsals until students have received enough small group instruction to develop the necessary skills for an ensemble rehearsal. Can you imagine a group of 40 students showing up to an after-school band rehearsal with all different instruments and zero prior instruction? That would be a very poor use of time, putting enthusiastic students and a music educator in a position set up for failure.

7. **Long-term Impact on Music Programs:** Diminishing the beginner band program will have a rippling effect upward, impacting the middle and high school music programs. Without a strong foundation in the early years, students are less likely to continue with music education, which could result in the loss of marching band, pep band, and other public outreach programs. These programs are vital for community engagement and school spirit. Denying New Hartford students' the opportunity to engage in a comprehensive band and music program is putting our children at a disadvantage as they enter upper middle school and high school.

It seems that the ramifications of the decision to eliminate this music position have not been fully identified, and that the dollars saved will never be a fair rationale for taking away invaluable learning opportunities for all students, families, and the community at large. Music plays a major role in our everyday lives; we engage with music when we travel in a car, are in the store, eat at a restaurant, at social gatherings, attend sports events, watch TV, movies, or social media, etc. Music is something that brings people together, defining culture and values. Music is a true universal language, and taking opportunities for our children to engage in it is simply unacceptable.

We urge you to reconsider the proposed budget cuts and recognize the invaluable benefits that music education brings to our students and community. By preserving the 5th and 6th grade band program and the corresponding music education position, you are investing in the holistic development of our students and ensuring the continued success of our district's music programs.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Marc Riccio & Kellan Mahford
655 W Hill Rd. New Hartford, Connecticut 06057



Janet G.M. Terenzi <terenzij@newhtfd.org>

Fwd: Proposed Cuts to the Music Program at Antolini

1 message

Jeffrey Sousa <sousaj@newhtfd.org>

Tue, Mar 18, 2025

To: "Janet G.M. Terenzi" <terenzij@newhtfd.org>

Please print for 3/18.

Jeffrey F. Sousa
 Superintendent
 New Hartford Public Schools
 860.379.8546
Sousaj@newhtfd.org

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Charlotte D'Aleo** <cdaleo@nwr7.org>

Date: Mon, Mar 17, 2025 at 2:32 PM

Subject: Proposed Cuts to the Music Program at Antolini

To: <sousaj@newhtfd.org>, <kleppst@newhtfd.org>, <buzzit@newhtfd.org>, <albertm@newhtfd.org>, <millerp@newhtfd.org>, <perottie@newhtfd.org>, <rodenbergf@newhtfd.org>, <russellt@newhtfd.org>, <tindalld@newhtfd.org>, <youngk@newhtfd.org>

Superintendent Sousa
 Board of Education
 Board of Finance
 New Hartford School District

Dear Superintendent Sousa, Members of the Board of Education, and Members of the Board of Finance,

I am writing to express my concern regarding the proposed reductions to the Antolini elementary school music program, specifically the potential elimination of the band and orchestra programs. As Music Supervisor for Northwestern Region 7, I have observed firsthand the significant impact a comprehensive and equitable music education provides to students, benefiting their academic, social, and emotional development. Cutting this program would have serious and far-reaching consequences, not only for our youngest learners but also for the middle and high school music programs, and by extension, the entire greater school community.

Elementary music education is a cornerstone of high-quality schooling, fostering critical skills such as creativity, collaboration, discipline, and cognitive development. Extensive research demonstrates that students actively engaged in music instruction perform better academically across all subjects, exhibit enhanced social-emotional abilities, and develop greater confidence and self-esteem. Restricting access to structured, inclusive music instruction during regular school hours disproportionately impacts students who cannot participate in extracurricular ensembles due to transportation barriers, thereby undermining educational equity.

Instrumental music instruction at the elementary level necessitates structured, homogeneous instructional groups during the school day to ensure effective learning. Transitioning music programs solely to before or after-school hours would severely limit participation, particularly among families facing logistical challenges. This will also lead to the weaker foundation of the middle and high school programs.

Currently, 46% of students enrolled in our grade 7-12 music programs originate from New Hartford, indicating the critical role your elementary program plays in sustaining our middle and high school ensembles. Reductions at the foundational level would inevitably diminish student participation over time, eroding the quality of award-winning ensemble programs and negatively impacting the broader educational community.

Beyond academics, music is a pillar of our community. Our school concerts, performances, and community events unite students, families, and residents. For many students, participation in music ensembles are essential sources of identity, belonging, and personal achievement. Curtailing these foundational programs would not only affect student development but also the cultural fabric of our community.

I respectfully urge you to reconsider the proposed cuts and prioritize the maintenance of a comprehensive, equitable, and accessible music education program. Investing in music instruction directly supports students' academic and personal growth, enhances our community's culture, and ensures continued excellence in our district's music education.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss this further and explore alternative solutions to ensure that music remains an integral part of our schools.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Charlotte D'Aleo

Charlotte D'Aleo

3/18/25, 8:44 AM

New Hartford Public Schools Mail - Fwd: Proposed Cuts to the Music Program at Antolini

High School Band Director
Music Department Chair
Northwestern High School
[100 Battistoni Drive](#)
[Winsted, CT 06098](#)

The information contained in this e-mail is confidential and/or proprietary to Charlotte D'Aleo and/or Northwest Regional School District No. information transmitted herewith is intended only for use by the individual or entity to which it is addressed. If the reader of this message is not the intended recipient, you are hereby notified that any review, retransmission, dissemination, distribution, copying or other use of, or taking of action in reliance upon this information is strictly prohibited. If you have received this communication in error, please contact the sender and delete it from your computer.



Janet G.M. Terenzi <terenzij@newhtfd.org>

Fwd: BOE Public Comment

1 message

Jeffrey Sousa <sousaj@newhtfd.org>
To: "Janet G.M. Terenzi" <terenzij@newhtfd.org>

Tue, Mar 18, 2025 at 8:29 AM

Please print for BOE meeting.

Jeffrey F. Sousa
Superintendent
New Hartford Public Schools
860.379.8546
Sousaj@newhtfd.org

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Melissa Wilczak** <mellie8381@gmail.com>
Date: Mon, Mar 17, 2025 at 6:31 PM
Subject: BOE Public Comment
To: <kleppst@newhtfd.org>, Jeffrey Sousa <sousaj@newhtfd.org>

Good evening,

Below is a public comment from my son, Lukas Wilczak I would like to enter in support of the 5th/6th grade band. He lives at 15 Spencer Brook Road.

The band program is important because it helps kids prepare for the upcoming choices they can make at North Western MS and I think it's a good idea to keep it around because it helped me meet people I probably would not have gotten to meet otherwise. The band community is a different community of people from other school activities, and I made a lot of friends in band at Antolini. It was also cool, because I really enjoy music and it was great to help with my creativity and gave me another way to express myself in school. Joining band in middle school would have been almost impossible to start because you are expected to know a lot of material starting the school year and the first concert is early in the school year. Having taken band in 5th grade and 6th grade gave me the opportunity to also join jazz band in middle school since I have a solid background in music. Keeping the music/band program is so important as it serves all students in New Hartford. Thank you.

- Lukas Wilczak

Jason and Kate Smith
191 Niles Rd
New Hartford, CT 06057
katepesce@gmail.com; jasontsmith@live.com
(860) 922-1432; (413) 329-782

March 17th, 2025

New Hartford Board of Education
PO Box 315
New Hartford, CT 06057

Dear Chairman Klepps and Members of the New Hartford Board of Education,

As concerned parents of students attending New Hartford Public Schools and taxpayers, we are writing to you today to express our strong support for the full budget increase request of 7.6% as submitted by Superintendent Sousa. We respectfully urge you to submit the full proposed budget to the Board of Finance with no cuts, in order to maintain the high standard of education our children have come to rely on and that our town is known for.

The proposed budget takes into consideration the necessary resources to support the academic, emotional, and social well-being of our students. Reductions to the budget would only serve to undermine these efforts, leaving our schools with fewer resources, less support, and ultimately, fewer opportunities for the success of our children.

Our town is proud of its very low per-pupil expenditure in comparison to surrounding districts. However, this can only be a source of pride if we can also say we provide an excellent education for that dollar value. As parents, we understand the importance of fiscal responsibility. However, we also recognize that investing in our children's education is an investment in our community's future. Cutting the budget now will have long-term consequences, affecting not just the academic success of our students, but also the overall vitality of New Hartford and its ability to attract new families and new businesses. We cannot afford to compromise on the quality of education our children receive.

We implore you to prioritize the needs of our students and the future of our community by submitting the full budget as requested. The Board of Finance should know what our community requires to best serve our students, and the town needs to prioritize our children. This is a matter of our children's future, and we trust you will make the decision that is in their best interest, and the best interest of the community of New Hartford.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We are confident that, together, we can ensure New Hartford Public Schools remain a place where students thrive and excel.

Sincerely,

Jason and Kate Smith
Parents of Ella, Maya and Jack Smith
New Hartford, CT

March 17, 2025

Dear Board of Education Members:

I couldn't believe that cutting the band from your school budget would be a consideration. Band is the one place where **everyone** can participate. Studies have shown that children who learn an instrument have better memory skills, reading skills, math skills and IQ scores.

Music is an important part of our everyday lives. Music inspires everyone in so many ways. Just as parents prepare their child for school by teaching colors, numbers and the alphabet, the band program opens children's minds to the world of music. They also learn that by mastering their instrument and by working together, the end product is nothing short of amazing! The education that a child receives by learning an instrument is truly a gift that will last them a life time.

I've lived in New Hartford for over 25 years and teach piano out of my home. I know firsthand how much effort and discipline go into learning an instrument. I also know firsthand what a child feels when they have accomplished learning a song. Pride isn't a strong enough word. Before you know it, one accomplishment leads to another and another and their self-confidence builds.

Band is **all inclusive**. It is not geared toward children who already possess special skills. If a child is unable to obtain private lessons, where else will they have the opportunity to learn an instrument? If you do not make **that** part of the music world available to them when they are young, you will more than likely not have their interest in middle school. If you cut the band program at the grammar school level, no child will have the necessary skills to participate in the band or orchestra once they get to middle school. And if they are not prepared, then only those children who have taken private lessons, those children who already possess the skills, will be the only ones allowed to participate.

We are not a backwoods community....let's not act like one. Every child should have the same rights whether they are gifted or not. Give them **ALL** the ability to learn how to play an instrument. Look to your mission statement....

" to inspire and **prepare all children** to become independent and enthusiastic learners who achieve excellence by providing a **challenging and exemplary education program** that is differentiated, **inclusive**, and dynamic."

This is a crucial part of their education; please do not fail them by cutting the band program.

Most sincerely,

Donna LeBlanc
24 Buttercup Lane

Dear Superintendent Sousa and Board of Education members,

I am writing to express my deep concern regarding the cuts to the ensemble programs slated for next year.

I know you are in a difficult position with challenging decisions to make. I am writing as an arts advocate and music professional to help inform those decisions.

Here are what I feel to be the effects of cuts to the music program at New Hartford Public Schools:

1. The choral program gets eliminated

I hold the .6 FTE general music position slated to be cut next year. I teach all grades PK-2 general music classes, as well as sections of grades 3 and 4. But I also direct our choral ensemble, a fact which was absent from the meeting on March 11. Cutting the .6 FTE position means the choral program would be eliminated.

This is a crucial point to understand. An entire ensemble, currently affecting grades 5 and 6 but potentially grade 4 (as grade 4 has participated in the past), is being eliminated under the proposed budget. The chorus, like the band, gives concerts during the year for the school and community, and has been invited to participate in town events such as Veterans Day. And as the program continues to grow, I am confident that our singers would be welcome additions to various celebrations and gatherings in New Hartford- similar to how our school band is vital to town functions like Memorial Day. Having no chorus will lead to a dearth of music in our schools and in our community.

2. School culture and climate

Removing the opportunity for students to participate in chorus doesn't just affect rising 6th graders who sing in chorus this year. It affects all students in New Hartford by taking away an opportunity to grow musically, socially, and personally. It affects siblings who see their older brothers and sisters and think they, too, want to be in chorus one day. It affects families who take pride in their children learning and sharing a beautiful art.

Thinking beyond students' time at Antolini, lack of an elementary chorus deprives them of the chance to excel in chorus at the middle and high school levels. Elementary school is where students' passions often begin. If there is no choral program to ignite a love of singing, fewer singers will come into Northwestern Regional. Chances for New Hartford students to earn honors, like participation in the Northern Regional Music Festival or All State Festival, and scholarships for excellence in the arts will be severely diminished.

A strong musical culture plays a vital role in fostering a thriving school community. Choral performances bring people together, from peers and teachers to families and friends, and that strengthens the bonds within our school. It is essential for New Hartford students to see their classmates succeeding in all areas, whether in athletics, academics, or the arts. Each success contributes to our collective pride. In our close-

knit community, every achievement, no matter how small, is a shared victory. All New Hartford students deserve not just the opportunity to sing, but the chance to be part of something greater.

3. Social emotional learning and mental health

At the March 11 meeting, mental health and social emotional learning were addressed many times. I know all of us want our young people to be able to manage their emotions, open up to others, and participate in activities that contribute to good mental and physical health. Chorus is an activity that checks all those boxes.

Additionally, through our diverse repertoire, students get the chance to sing in other languages from different parts of the world. They explore how emotions can be expressed through poignant lyrics, driving rhythms, or with just their own unaccompanied voices. Students also have the opportunity to build empathy, focus on team-building skills, and see their goals come to fruition.

It is also worth noting that music is sometimes the bright spot in a student's day. It's the place where they feel most excited or motivated, or perhaps where they discover they have a talent that brings them joy and raises their self-esteem. Music programs also attract all types of learners, from high-achieving students to neurodivergent students to those with special needs. Ensembles provide kids a chance to really lean into a learning mode that matches their learning styles.

4. An after or before school band program is untenable and poor practice

Lastly, I echo everything Allison Melillo said in her letter regarding the band program. Framing it as a restructuring was misleading. An after or before school band program would ultimately dwindle and disappear. Specifically:

1. It privileges those who can secure transportation while potentially juggling other extracurricular activities.

2. There is no time in an extracurricular band program to teach homogeneous lesson groups, as is best practice. How can students participate in band when they don't know how to play their instruments? Only students with prior knowledge- i.e. students who take private lessons- would be able to participate. This places an undue financial burden on families that is out of touch with the reality many families face today.

3. Every other school that feeds into Region 7 has a band program. While there will ultimately be differences in resources among us, this should not be one of them. An elementary school without ensemble programs is virtually unheard of in Connecticut.

I am aware that I have a vested interest in remaining employed at New Hartford Public Schools. That said, I am writing this letter in earnest. I implore you to reconsider your reconstruction of the music program. Ensembles are the epitome of what New Hartford Public Schools hope to provide in their mission statement: an education program that is "differentiated, inclusive, and dynamic."

Sincerely,
Sarah Mauro

March 11, 2025

Dear New Hartford Board Members,

I am writing on behalf of the teachers at New Hartford Elementary and Bakerville Schools to express our concerns regarding the potential elimination of Marcia Jones' position. We would like to ensure you are fully aware of the significant impact this decision would have on both our students and staff. We are firmly in support of maintaining the Instructional Assistant position, which has been an integral part of our schools for over two decades, and has been held by Marcia Jones for the past 14 years. Without her dedicated help and support, the successful implementation of our most recent curriculum would not be as effective, nor would it reach its full potential.

The work Ms. Jones has done has greatly enhanced the quality of education our students receive in New Hartford. She has been instrumental in supporting classroom teachers to create a well-organized, high-functioning classroom environment, allowing students to fully engage with the instructional programs and resource materials available to them.

Over the past four years, we've adopted several new programs, including EL modules, Skills Block, IM Math, RULER and Mystery Science. These programs require extensive preparation and the creation of resources to support student learning. One of the most noticeable aspects of the new EL program has been the sheer amount of preparation needed—things like game boards, word cards, vocabulary cards, puzzle pieces, booklets, charts, and many other

curricular items. When we first transitioned to the EL program, the volume of work required to implement it was overwhelming... but we had Marcia!

To effectively carry out the mandated curriculum with the required rigor, the support of the instructional assistant is essential. Below are just a few examples of the many ways Ms. Jones has supported both students and teachers in New Hartford.

- Collaborates with teachers to help plan modified materials.
- Creates modified materials for IEP students for example, enlarging text, creating modified templates, modified paper, etc.
- Creates materials for our EL block such as making copies of books, flash cards, word sorts, sentence builders, etc.
- Creates math activities for our centers by sorting manipulatives, making game boards, creating pieces to the games
- Prepares materials for ALL curriculum so teachers can spend time learning, implementing and carrying out what we need to teach.
- Creates materials for climate committee initiatives
- Supports collaboration between two schools by transporting materials and creating shared materials for classroom use

Teachers consistently go above and beyond, arriving early, staying late, and working from home during the week and on weekends to meet the diverse needs of our students. We dedicate ourselves to learning new curriculums and preparing each night for the lessons ahead. Marcia plays a vital role in allowing us to focus on what truly matters—such as reading, planning, addressing the individualized needs of our students,

and analyzing data. The materials she prepares are essential in helping us implement the curriculum as intended. Marcia's contributions are invaluable to our staff, and losing her would have a profound impact on our students and our school community.

Thank you for considering our input in your decision regarding Marcia's position. Marcia plays a crucial role in creating the materials that enable students to engage in the hands-on experiences at the heart of our curriculum. Her contributions are integral to the success of our educational goals.

Respectfully submitted,

The Teachers of New Hartford Elementary and Bakerville Schools