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## Huge Support, Tough Choices for Many Lamorinda Musicians

By Jean Follmer



Liz Brummel directs the Lafayette Elementary and Springhill Elementary 5th Grade Bands at the recent 26th Annual Lafayette School District Band Festival Photo Jean Follmer

When school districts are faced with budget crunches, music programs (and the arts in general) are often quickly cited as "expendable." Not so in Lamorinda.

Lamorinda districts and their partner organizations continue to recognize the arts as an integral part of overall community growth. Along with parents, school districts and the greater communities, the Educational Foundation of Orinda, the Lafayette Arts and Science Foundation, and the Moraga Education Foundation continue to demonstrate their strong belief in the value of music in our communities.

At the 26th Annual Lafayette School District Band Festival last week, Stanley Middle School Band Director Bob Athayde said, "LASF is the most positive, and to my knowledge, the most effective of any organization helping with public school music."

The audience in the packed gymnasium erupted in applause.

Yet even with the strong community support for music in Lamorinda, there can be challenges. While many students have the opportunity to join the band, the orchestra or the choir in elementary school, when Lafayette and Moraga students enter sixth grade, they're only allowed one elective and they have to make a choice.

Lafayette mother Patricia Kuan, whose fifth grade twins will head to Stanley Middle School next year is torn with the decision. "My kids are very creative and they really want to try an elective called FACETS," she said. While her son plays the violin and her daughter plays the flute, Kuan and her husband decided to let

the kids take sixth grade off from music and return to it in seventh grade when they can choose two electives.

Kuan said it's still hard to give up music, even for a year.

By contrast, Orinda Intermediate School sixth graders have two elective choices. OIS Band Director Greg Mazmanian is grateful. "We're pretty fortunate in Orinda," he said.

Joaquin Moraga Band Director Adam Noel has felt the effects of the single elective choice in sixth grade. He encourages kids to stick with music if they can. Noel said the rate at which society is moving often makes music a more difficult commitment.

"I find it increasingly difficult as everything is speeding up and there are more choices," he said. "You can't do music quickly. Music takes time. You have to be willing to spend the small amount of free time you have on music.

Mazmanian agrees that music becomes an increasingly bigger commitment as the years go on. "As (students) get older, they notice they have to practice every day," he said. "There is a discipline involved so, of course, there's going to be some fallout. If you want to attain excellence, it requires discipline."

And music is challenging.

Mazmanian likened performing on stage to publicly taking a math test.

Generally tests are taken privately so there is great pressure to perform well when "tested" on stage. Mazmanian continued by saying, "It's (music) not just for the brain but for the soul as well. Music is very emotional."

For those weighing what to choose, Noel said, "As parents we really need to remember that we're the ones with the cognitive ability to have foresight. We need to make sure that our kids are making the decisions that will result in them (growing) into the kind of adults they want to be. They should enjoy their childhood but not ignore that larger part of life that is adulthood. Music is a long-term investment that will pay off in the end.

I've never met anyone that says, 'I'm really glad I can't play an instrument now,'" finished Noel.

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