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Meet the School Board Candidate Music in MBUSD Issue Sheet

As part of the Town Hall, the Manhattan Beach Music Coalition asked each candidate a set of questions that were specific to the issues facing the Music Program. It was agreed in advance that the publication of each issue sheet would happen once the candidate had submitted responses (issue sheets would not be held up waiting for others to respond). Our thanks goes to the candidates for their willingness to share their views on the crucial topic of music education for all.

Candidate: Cathey Graves

Website: <https://www.catheygraves4mbschoolboard.com>

Cathey is a 35 year resident of the South Bay and proud parent of 4 children who have played music in and attended school in Manhattan Beach, including her youngest who is now a senior at Mira Costa High School. Professionally, Cathey worked as a CPA and an attorney for 18 years and has served our schools for 17 years, most recently as VP of Health & Wellness at Costa and founder and member of the District Social Emotional Learning, Green and Communications committees.



What is your personal relationship with the arts (music, theatre, dance, visual arts and/or media arts)? Did you have arts in your school? What meaningful arts experiences did you have growing up and how did they impact you?

I studied piano privately from kindergarten until 5th grade and played the saxophone beginning in 4th grade, when that option became available at school, through high school. In elementary school, every teacher incorporated the arts into their curriculum but there was no formal art or music program in place except for band. In high school I took a studio arts elective and played in the marching and concert bands. During college, I worked for several years as a DJ on the college radio station.

These experiences gave me an appreciation for the arts, and I have continued through community art lessons and a 35-year membership in LACMA and the Ahmanson Theatre. My involvement also motivated me to get my own children involved in the arts. All 4 started with strings in 4th grade and then moved into band in 5th grade, with 2 staying in the music program through high school.

What is your philosophy about music education? Do you believe it is a critical and essential cornerstone in our schools? What role do you believe the music program plays in our district?

Music allows students to connect with each other and express themselves. It allows students to grow emotionally and mentally while also creating a support system for students. Music additionally teaches life skills including self-discipline, patience, responsibility, and teamwork. I believe the music program plays a vital role and is a cornerstone of MBUSD. Our kids benefit from the program beginning in kindergarten with VAPA programs funded by PTAs. In 3rd grade, children study the recorder or orchestra and beginning in 4th grade and continuing through high school have options in band, orchestra and choir. There are additionally courses in Music Theory and AP Music Theory. The MBUSD music program is a source of pride for our district and our community.

ESSA (the Every Student Succeeds Act), which was signed by President Obama in 2015, establishes that music and the arts are core curriculum in grades K-12. What is your perception of the extent to which MBUSD has adopted that policy? What factors need to be implemented to meet Visual and Performing Arts policies and standards established by ESSA and by the California State Board of Education?

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) includes the arts and music in the definition of a well-rounded education guaranteed to all students. In compliance with ESSA, California has specifically adopted standards for visual and performing arts in the areas of dance, music, theatre, media arts, and visual arts. Those standards are incorporated into the curriculum at MBUSD at each grade level. Due to financial constraints the District unfortunately had to cut some funding for arts education for 2020-2021. Teachers, community artists, and parents have filled the gaps, with the essential help of the schools' PTA's, the Manhattan Beach Education Foundation and Booster Clubs. I would advocate using District funding for programming in the future if it becomes available. Additionally, I would search for grant funding and look at corporate sponsorships to support programming.

The Declaration of the Rights of All Students to Equity in Arts Learning states that all students have the right to participate in high-quality, sequential standards-based arts learning. Do you believe all students in MBUSD are currently able to exercise that right? If not, in your view, what barriers currently exist? If elected, how will you support these

rights for all students?

I do believe that the curriculum exists in MBUSD for high-quality sequential standards-based arts learning. Students in MBUSD have many classes available to them and may not be able to participate in the arts due to schedule conflicts and limitations imposed by a 7-period day. I support Zero period and limiting APs to 4. Both of these measures create additional time in schedules and provide an opportunity for students to explore the arts.

The California State Board of Education adopted the California Arts Education Framework for Public Schools (TK-12) on July 8, 2020, which supports the California Arts Standards (adopted in January of 2019) which establishes curricular standards for arts education in California. How will you ensure that these Visual and Performing Arts curricular standards are implemented in the district, and once implemented, how would you work to ensure compliance?

As a Trustee, I would work closely with the Superintendent and his Cabinet to ensure that the Framework is incorporated in MBUSD curriculum K-12. If curriculum pieces are new or different and will be delivered by classroom teachers, I would institute professional development to ensure that all teachers are qualified and comfortable in teaching the standards. I would have Principals and site leaders monitor compliance and report to the Superintendent and his Cabinet with follow up by the Board.

As you may be aware, the district does not currently have a finalized curriculum for the K-12 Music Program. As a board member, would you support finalizing the K-12 curriculum for the Music Program, and what steps would you take to achieve this?

I would support finalizing curriculum for the K-12 Music Program. I would direct the Superintendent and his Cabinet to accomplish this goal, set a goal date, and follow up to ensure that the K-12 Music Program curriculum is finalized as soon as possible.

Would you classify music a core curricular academic subject, co-curricular, or extracurricular? Why, in your view, does it fall in that category?

Music is a core curricular subject in MBUSD. Students receive credit and a grade for all classes. I would continue to support this policy.

Do you support having a Visual and Performing Arts Coordinator at the District level?

I support having a Visual and Performing Arts Coordinator at the District level.

What, if any, do you see as the primary academic and social benefits of offering music in elementary, middle and high school?

The benefits of offering students a music education are significant. Studying music has been shown to help with language development and reasoning, math skills, eye-hand coordination, and fine motor skills. Studies show that it helps with learning to memorize. Socially, music education can help develop teamwork, self-confidence, and risk taking. In many cases, being part of a music group often provides students with a friend group. Emotionally, music education often results in higher self-esteem, empathy toward other cultures, and reduced stress and anxiety.

The structure of the music program does not currently conform to best practices and current research, especially at the elementary level. To restructure the elementary program in order to align it with best practices and current research, the Full Time Equivalent (# of teacher hours) dedicated to the music program would need to be increased. What is your position on this?

It appears that best practices suggest that students should meet twice a week for 30 minutes each at the elementary level. If resources are available and the time is available from a teacher perspective, I would support this initiative.

Currently, large numbers of middle school and high school students do not have realistic access points into the MBUSD Music Program because they did not attend elementary school in the District. In addition to serving new enrollees from other districts, introductory level classes would also offer an option for students to switch instruments within the same group (from cello to the bass in orchestra, for example), or switch groups (from choir to band). Do you support increasing FTE in order to create those access points by offering additional introductory level classes at both the middle school and high school levels?

I support providing opportunities for all children to study music. We are fortunate our children have those opportunities beginning in elementary school. I do support intro level groups for new enrollees or for children who want to switch instruments and have been very excited to see that happen personally in our cadet band at MBMS and concert band at MCHS.

Music is not currently being offered in kindergarten, first or second grades. Do you believe robust music education should be offered from Kindergarten through twelfth grade? If so, what would you do to bring music education to our youngest students?

I do believe that music should be offered from Kindergarten through 12th grade. In

order to make this happen in the past, we created robust VAPA programs at the elementary schools funded by PTAs. Some of these programs, like the Three Piggy Opera and Gold Dust or Bust have become part of the culture of our schools. I would look at available grants, possible corporate sponsorships as well as partnerships with MBEF and PTAs to support additional programming.

Do you believe that music education, including early childhood music education (k-3) provides benefits to healthy brain development? If so, what are those benefits? Are they specific to music, or do they impact other learning areas?

Studies show that early music education has continuing long lasting effects on the adult brain, including enhanced cognitive behavior, heightened auditory perception, executive function, and auditory-based communication skills. These skills can be applied to other learning areas.

Given the years-long investment the District has already made in the music program, and in light of the fragile state of that program now, as well as the fact that the outstanding music faculty are currently stretched to untenable limits, what do you think is the right thing to do in terms of continued funding for the program?

The District funds the current program, which is supplemented by funding from MBEF grants. In the past, MBUSD additionally received grants for VAPA programming and I would strongly urge the district to continue to pursue any grants that might be available to help alleviate funding issues. The MB Music Coalition could be a great resource in these efforts. In addition, I would encourage the District to pursue partnerships with outside organizations for additional resources. The music program is a hallmark program in MBUSD and we need to make all efforts to ensure that it remains viable and successful.

How, specifically, can the District strengthen and support music programs?

In order to strengthen music programs, the District should incorporate music assistants into elementary music classrooms. Specifically, the District should develop relationships with local colleges to bring student teachers/interns to our schools to serve in this capacity. Alternatively, perhaps as with Honor Band, high school students could act as Teacher Assistants during elementary band classes. Both options would be at no cost to the District.

Do you believe there are “excess” or “extra” parts of the music program that could be cut? If so, what are those specific areas?

I am not aware of “excess” or “extra” parts of the music program that could be cut.

Do you believe there are financial benefits uniquely provided by the music classes at the secondary level? If so, what are those financial benefits?

Yes, Music classes at the secondary level often include 60 or more students on their roster each class period. The obvious benefit of this large class size is that the District can hire one music teacher to teach 60 students rather than hiring 2 teachers to teach 30 students in other classes. This translates into a cost savings for the District.

Do you see the music program as a “draw” to the district - an inducement for families to enroll, or a reason they stay in the district? If so, what steps would you recommend to utilize the value that the Music Programs bring to the community as an inducement to increase overall district enrollment. Do you believe that the district should actively be recruiting music students using permitting as a viable tool?

The music program is a “draw” to the District. I know many parents personally who have stayed in the District so their children could participate in the excellent music programs. Marketing the music program, through free tickets to seniors (Be My Guest Program), and All-District concerts, which are attended by elementary and middle school parents are also important to this effort, whether it be to attract permit children or children already in the District.

Do you believe the music program is a particular source of pride for the community? What is your personal experience in witnessing community outreach and pride related to music programs?

I do believe that MBUSD and the community of Manhattan Beach greatly value and take pride in the music program. It is highlighted on the Mira Costa School Profile and always advertised as a “Grammy Award winning” program. I have seen the music program in many events in the City, including holiday events at the MB Village Mall and the Pier, as well as MBYB Opening Day, and other community events.

What is your vision for the Music Program? What do you believe the program should look like in 5 years?

In 5 years, my vision would be for MBUSD to offer a robust Music Program. The program would cater to all levels of musicianship, offering options for beginning students as well as challenging curriculum for our focused and passionate musicians. Instruction would be offered in vocal music, band and orchestra. In addition to core classes, the program would also include co-curricular opportunities to supplement the learning opportunities in the classroom.