

Music on the Mend

School music programs slowly rise from the ashes BY AMY SCHNEIDER

Music teacher Tim Walter swings his arms through the air with gusto, directing a throng of Madison Middle School band members as a jazzy rendition of “Oye Como Va” rings from their instruments. Walter’s junior high students are performing the song for eighth-grade procession, where family members and friends pack the bleachers of the gym.

Cameras and smartphones point directly at Walter’s band, capturing the moment as parents and grandparents smile proudly. A man near the back of the gym dances with a baby in his arms, and when one student rattles off an impressive guitar riff, Walter gestures for the audience to lend a little extra applause. They delightedly comply.

Just a few months earlier, Walter stood before an audience of a different kind at a Eugene 4J school budget meeting, speaking publicly to 4J board members and superintendent Sheldon Berman and asking them to support public school music programs — at the time, Walter had been notified that due to budget cuts, his FTE (full-time equivalent) would be reduced, forcing him to bump another staff member in order to retain his full-time job.

An unexpected \$2 million in funds from the Oregon Department of Education helped close 4J’s budget gap this year, temporarily eliminating any cuts to 4J’s music programs.

But the Eugene School District doesn’t get a surprise \$2 million from the state every year, and the restoration of K-12 music programs in Lane County public schools is an arduous process. It’s hard to argue against the importance of music to a young mind when so many studies point to its value. And yet, when tightened budgets force school boards across the state to make difficult decisions, the arts are cut, and Lane County schools still bear the scars of these slashes.

Over the past 20 years, 4J schools went from having

consistent, connected music programs throughout the grade levels to completely losing music in most elementary schools throughout the district by 2011. Of 4J’s four high schools, only Sheldon has a marching band.

That’s not to say this is the day the music died — in the 2012-2013 school year, 4J allocated funds enabling all elementary schools in the district to have nine weeks of music, a number that doubled as of last school year. And Springfield elementary schools have maintained their full-year music programs, despite facing budget cuts of their own.

4J says it has a plan to restore music programs to what they were. Meanwhile, this generation of students continues to pay the price.

The Gift of Music

During the 2011-2012 school year, one in four Oregon elementary school students did not receive music instruction, according to data compiled by the Oregon Arts Commission. This discrepancy becomes problematic in terms of equality — students either get exposed to music at an early age or they don’t, depending on the school they attend.

And even when music is offered, as with some strings programs in 4J, parents have to pay for the instruction and instrument rental, leaving children whose parents can’t afford to pay without the benefit of music lessons.

“That brings a problem for me personally, that conflict between public and private instruction,” says Ruth Root, Eugene-Springfield Youth Orchestra instructor and former 4J strings teacher, who spoke in support of music at the budget meeting after Walter. “When you take it out of the public domain, you’re putting it into the hands of the people who can afford it. I know for myself, my parents could never have afforded lessons for me, and I was thankful for that public instruction,” Root says.

Local music teachers agree that all kids deserve to reap the benefits of a musical education. Even if music isn’t part of the rigorous standardized testing schedule that caters to reading and math, its propensity to help boost test scores is well documented.

A 2006 study published in the *Journal of Research in Music Education* found that in every standardized test subject and grade level tested, students who played

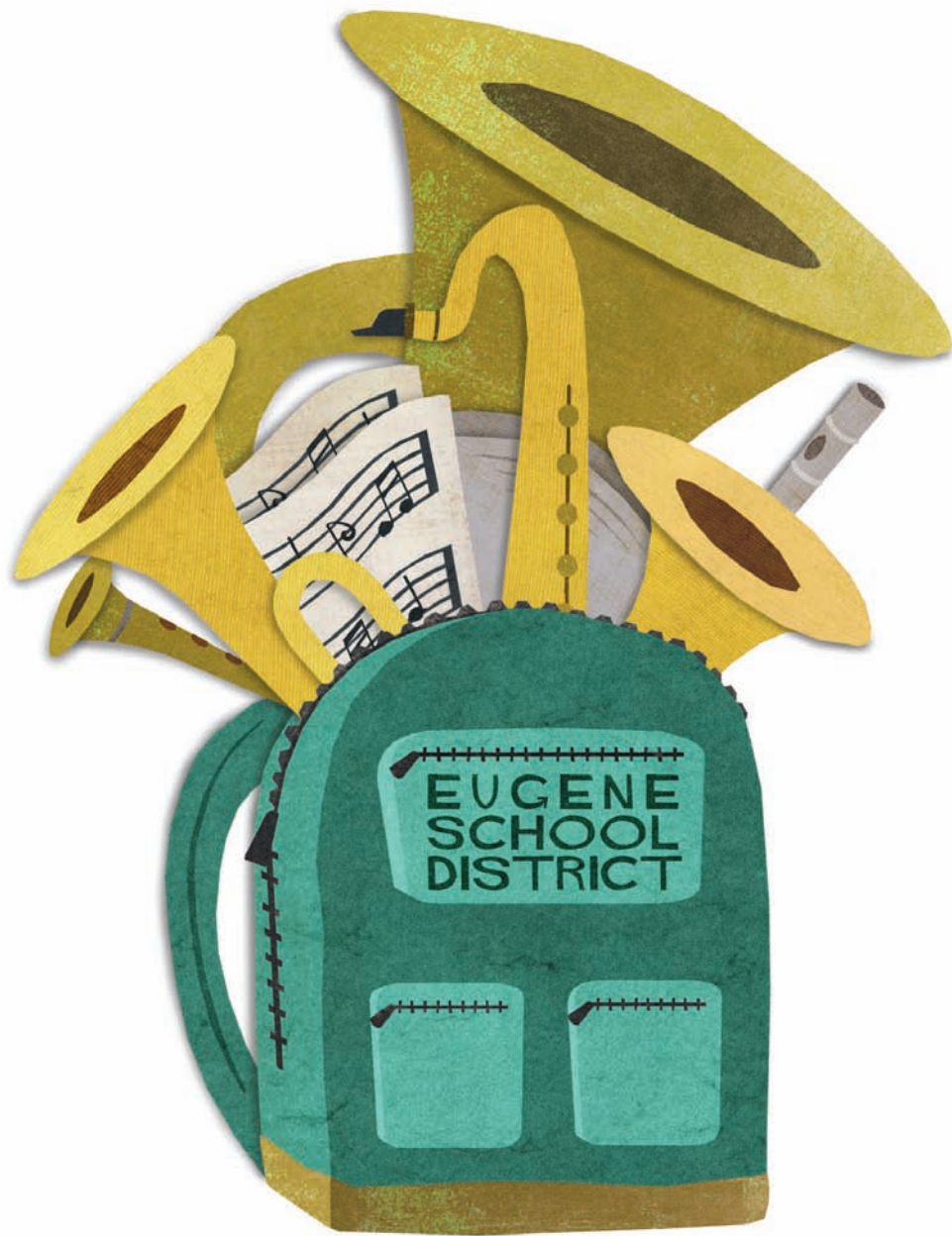


ILLUSTRATION BY ALICE FEAGAN | ALICEFEAGAN.COM

An Inspired Approach to Life-Long Learning

The Eugene Waldorf School is an independent, nonsectarian school that educates the whole child for the future, equally engaging body, mind and spirit. Our teachers foster a love of learning by enlivening the imagination, strengthening the creative will, deepening understanding, and awakening a sense of community. Our academic program integrates the arts, humanities, and sciences. We strive to help all children develop their unique physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual capacities. This enables each individual to responsibly enter in freedom into an ever-changing local and global community.

Toddlers through grade 8 since 1980

EugeneWaldorf.org | 541-683-6951

**OPEN
HOUSE
Saturday
10-12**

**EUGENE
WALDORF
SCHOOL**