



**NEIGHBORHOOD
MUSIC SCHOOL**

IMPACT REPORT

2024-2025



Neighborhood Music School brings everyone together under one roof. We are more than a school. We are a cultural center that uses the arts as a means to build an intergenerational, diverse, and endlessly supportive community - a place where people discover not only the work they can create, but the person they can become.



This has been true since 1911, when our founders looked out at New Haven and saw the educational and resource disparities that shaped daily life, especially for immigrant families building new futures in an unfamiliar city. They imagined a space where opportunity was not rationed but shared, where every person could feel joy upon entering, and where joy itself was understood as the necessary first step toward genuine success. They believed deeply that every voice has value, and sharing it with others cultivates a courage that lasts.

In those early decades, our programming reflected the artistic and cultural heritages of the communities we served, with Western classical music taking root as a defining and enduring part of our teaching. That lineage remains, not as a relic, but as one of the many pathways through which students explore identity, discipline, collaboration, and the thrill of being heard.

Today, our offerings continue to evolve in direct response to our students' interests—a social contract that has guided us for more than a century. This looks like bringing piano classes to the Stetson Library and the Boys & Girls Clubs; offering classes in Spanish; expanding DELTA; and supporting ATLAS students who love attending their middle school because it is a place where they feel seen. As we grow our programs in response to our community, we stay anchored in the deeper purpose behind them.

This commitment is urgently needed as diversity, free self-expression, and the arts come under increasingly explicit attack in our country. The arts bring people together. An arts education gives a person the time and support they need to develop their own perspective—to look at the world and imagine how they could make it different—to practice empathy in real time.



Read on to learn about the ways in which our vibrant arts community activates these values every day.

Foundations



“NMS is such a wonderful place because the lessons so often extend beyond the music and into regular life.”

- NMS PARENT

A child whose education begins with creative expression and joy will carry that confidence and curiosity into future learning experiences. Beginning with our early exposure programs, like Early Childhood Music and Movement Classes, our Preschool and Toddler Program, and Instrumental Classes for Youth, we plant the seeds for learning how to learn. In contrast, a child who first associates education with rules and restrictions will likely continue to view learning through that lens. By keeping joy at the center of our teaching, as our founders intended, we give children a strong foundation for life.

Our classes emphasize somatic learning, encouraging hands-on experiences like rhythm, sound, and movement to engage the mind-body connection. Using multiple senses creates a more complete learning experience and leads to knowledge that is more deeply ingrained, natural, and lasting.¹

Arts education is a study in contrasts, offering students unique perspectives that last a lifetime. When kids are exposed to a variety of shapes, sizes, colors, sounds, and relationships from an early age, they learn to expect a range of experiences and grow more empathetic to diversity. They learn that strength and beauty lie in differences.

These benefits appear immediately and grow over time. A recent study from USC’s Brain and Creativity Institute found that learning an instrument helps children’s brains develop faster. Children who played instruments had more-developed auditory pathways—the connections between the ear and the brain—which can support skills beyond music, including language and reading.² These effects may even last into adulthood: a study in the Journal of Neuroscience found that children who start music lessons before age seven develop stronger connections in the parts of the brain that control planning and movement.³

Taken together, the research affirms what we see every day: early arts experiences shape stronger learners and more confident children.

1. Cai, Y., Kang, D., & Xu, X. (2025, September 5). Boosting executive function in children aged 3–12 through musical training: A three-level meta-analysis. *Frontiers*

2. Greiving, T. (2023, September 19). Does learning art, dance and Music Boost Young Brains?. *USC Today*

3. Steele, C. J., Bailey, J. A., Zatorre, R. J., & Penhune, V. B. (2013, January 16). Early musical training and white-matter plasticity in the corpus callosum: Evidence for a sensitive period. *Journal of Neuroscience*



Developing

“I’m the musician I am, I’m the person I am, I’m the friend I am, because of being [at NMS] for so long.”

- HANNAH, NMS GRADUATING SENIOR



A strong artistic foundation becomes a cross-disciplinary fluency—a way of thinking that values hard work, imagination, and the belief that one’s perspective matters. Our students have the confidence to speak up, the focus to refine an idea, the ability to hear themselves amid the noise. These are the traits that shape strong thinkers and compassionate leaders. It is no wonder our students go on to succeed not only in the arts but in law, education, broadcasting, communications, public service, and countless other fields.

The arts give students a place to step away from constant stimulation and return to themselves. Emerging research shows that overexposure to technology depletes cognitive function and affects our attention spans, memory retention, and sleep.¹ Musical instrument study has been shown to regenerate the very synapses of the brain that over-exposure to technology most directly affects. The arts provide not only a break from our phones, but allows us the experience of being fully present.

Our students find that the discipline and problem-solving skills instilled by our classes helps them in every aspect of their education and life. They are better equipped to manage their time, and to show sustained grit and commitment when working to solve complex problems. This leads to higher grades, but also to an appreciation of learning of all kinds. They know how to effectively collaborate, to both support and lead, and to find creative solutions at every turn. An arts education equips students not just to succeed, but to approach challenges with curiosity, resilience, and confidence—skills that serve them in school, work, and life.

1. Wacks, Y., & Weinstein, A. M. (2021, May 28). Excessive smartphone use is associated with health problems in adolescents and young adults. *Frontiers in psychiatry*.

Succeeding

The paths our students take, artistically, academically, and personally, demonstrate the enduring value of an NMS education. Their successes reflect both their hard work and the strong foundation built here. From their earliest classes through advanced studies and ensembles, students develop the confidence, discipline, and creativity that prepare them for whatever comes next. The accomplishments of our students and alumni show how deeply their time at NMS shapes who they become and how they thrive in the world.

COLLEGE BOUND

- Students from our first graduating class of **ATLAS** (2021) are attending top colleges this fall, including: Yale, Vassar, Swathmore, Northeastern, and NY Institute of Technology.
- Several of our 2025 high school graduates are continuing their rigorous arts training this fall at top programs including Oberlin Conservatory; University of Michigan SMTD; Hartt School of Music; University of Minnesota/Guthrie Theater BFA Actor Training Program; and SUNY Purchase Conservatory of Music.



FESTIVALS, AWARDS & COMPETITIONS

- 38 NMS students participated in the Connecticut Music Educators Southern Regional Festivals, and seven of our students earned spots in the All-State Jazz band.
- NMS student **Dontae James** performed with the first-place combo at the National Jazz Festival for the second straight year and earned first place at the Litchfield Jazz Talent Show.
- Eighth grader **Claire Wang**, an NMS student since age five, won first place in the HMTA Virtuoso Pianist Competition.
- **Emmy Rosario** received the Regina Lily Warner Scholarship, which helped fund the purchase of a new French horn. Emmy enrolled this fall at the Hartt School of Music.



NMS ALUMNI

- NMS alum **Tyler 'Goldchain' Jenkins** (Artist and Composer) received the Bitsie Clark Fund for Artists Award in 2024.
- NMS alum and composer **Will Aronson** (lessons, Premier Jazz, Danko/Todd Jazz Scholarship) won six Tony Awards for *Maybe Happy Ending*, including Best Musical, Best Book, and Best Score.
- NMS alum **Harris Han Anderson** received a Solti Foundation Career Assistance Award and the 2025 Seoul Philharmonic Conducting Fellowship. He is Assistant Conductor of the Palm Beach and Frost Symphony Orchestras.
- Grammy-winning mezzo-soprano **Annie Rosen**, a former longtime NMS recorder and voice student, performed Beethoven's Ninth at the New Haven Symphony Orchestra's 131st season opener.



Creating



Creativity is a practice of possibility. Through creating new works, students at NMS discover their original voice and the power it carries. They learn to imagine the world they want to see, challenge assumptions, and translate ideas into tangible work. The act of creating something entirely their own—whether an original song, a devised scene, new choreography, a podcast episode, or a piece of music—builds a singular kind of confidence. Students experience the pride of shaping an idea from within and the courage of sharing it with others. In nurturing their creative voices, they learn that their stories matter, that their perspectives have value, and that their work can influence their community and extend far beyond the studio or stage.

Artists have long been at the forefront of social change, using their work to express dissent, possibility, and hope. Today, young people are increasingly vocal about shaping a brighter future, and many of our programs provide a platform to explore contemporary issues, engage with social justice themes, and discover the power of their own creative voice to influence conversations and inspire action.

Our students understand that school isn't only about learning how the world works, but learning how to communicate what they care about and use the arts as a means of systems change. They know that they make the world a better, more interesting place for being in it.

“An NMS student is no stranger to stepping out of their comfort zone to experiment. It’s creative thinkers like these that support and shape communities.”

- BLUEBELLE CARROLL, PROFESSIONAL WRITER



Thriving



"As someone who came very late to the world of music and artistic expression, recognizing how powerful the connections are between the arts and all other forms of learning has been transformative."

- NMS ADULT STUDENT

Our programs for adults are designed for growth. In lives crowded with obligations, caretaking, work, and worry, making space for creativity becomes a form of renewal. At NMS, adults rediscover the part of themselves that still wants to stretch, to learn, to feel engaged in the world—and they find their people along the way.

An adult student delayed his retirement because he wasn't ready to stop "challenging his brain." When he found music at NMS, he found a new way to stay sharp, curious, and energized—proof that thriving doesn't have an age limit. Along the way, he joined a community of learners who inspire and support each other, and boldly proclaimed, "Now I can retire!"

The arts are a lifelong companion. Participatory practices—music, theatre, dance, creative writing—support cognitive health, memory, emotional well-being, and confidence at every stage of life. They give adults permission to be beginners again, to work with their hands and bodies, and to reconnect with a sense of forward motion. The relationships built through shared creative work often grow into dependable networks of support, helping adults feel seen, challenged, and valued.

Millie knows this well. She is so devoted to her Bluegrass ensemble that when she broke her arm, she asked the doctors to set her cast at a particular angle—just so she could keep holding her upright bass. That kind of determination, that joy in being part of something, is the very essence of thriving.

Adults come to NMS seeking creativity. They stay because the arts make their lives richer, stronger, and more deeply lived—and because they have found their people.



Supporting Professional Artists

As Connecticut's largest employer of teaching artists, NMS is more than a workplace—it's a place to learn, experiment, and collaborate.

Our instructors have opportunities to grow as artists by participating in our Teaching Artist Concert series, collaborating with fellow musicians, or using our state-of-the-art recording studio.

Lifelong learning is at the heart of our community: we believe teachers must continue to learn in order to be effective in their studios. We provide a wide range of professional development that keeps teaching innovative and impactful. Our Preschool and Middle School teachers share developmentally specific teaching strategies with music and dance instructors. Experienced teachers host office hours. New teachers are paired with mentors, and the Teaching Artistry Lab workshop series encourages peer-to-peer learning. Master classes with field experts offer additional training and inspiration.

Beyond the artists employed at NMS, we extend support to local artists through partnerships with Seeing Sounds, Long Wharf, Collective Consciousness Theatre, New Haven Symphony Orchestra, and The Word. We open our stages and classrooms to the broader artistic community, ensuring our resources are shared widely.



Teaching Artist
Professional Development



Mentorship
Opportunities



Professional Artist Lecture
with Christian Sands

Community

New Haven is a city of extraordinary cultural richness, but also a place shaped by longstanding social and economic divides. NMS works to bridge those divides through the arts, creating opportunities for people of all cultures, ages, interests, and means to learn together, celebrate together, and imagine a stronger future together.

Our school is made up of many microcommunities, each one humming with its own energy.

What sets NMS apart is our focus on bringing everyone together under one roof. The intersections—between rehearsals, in the courtyard, outside a studio door—are where the magic happens.



Concert Audience



Greater New Haven
Youth Ensembles



Audubon Arts
Summer Program



Broadway & Beyond
Adult Students



Never Too Late
Ensemble



Seeing Sounds Jam



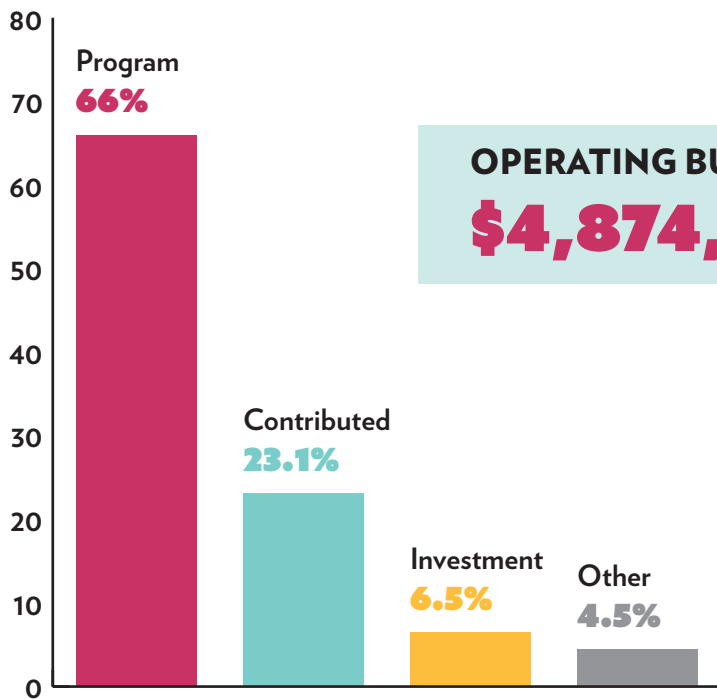
Preschool Program



Jazz Concert &
Celebration

Financials

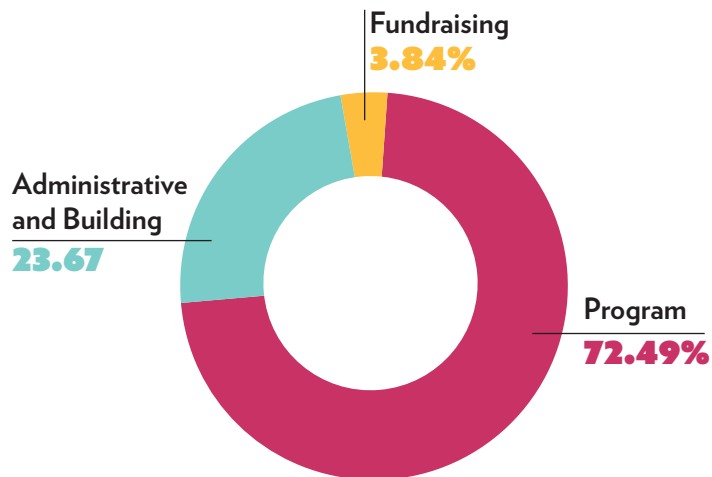
INCOME



OPERATING BUDGET

\$4,874,571

EXPENSES



10 THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT NMS

- 172 employees
- 121 teaching artists with 1,500 years of service at NMS
- 2,000+ students enrolled in programs
- Students from 92 different zip codes
- 30,000 hours of teaching provided
- 1,010 students receive one-on-one instruction
- 43% of students participate at reduced or no cost
- Over \$419,000 in financial aid (and free programming)
- 10,000+ audience members
- Programs provided at 14 locations throughout the state

IN MEMORIAM

This past year, the NMS community said goodbye to three extraordinary friends and longtime champions of our school, **Carol Ross**, **Anne Curtis**, and **Bitsie Clark**. Carol served on the NMS Board from 1997 to 2016, including as Board President from 2003 to 2006. Anne dedicated 30 years of service on the Board, including 16 years on the Executive Committee. Bitsie was an NMS board member for many years, and served as Board Chair in 1983 and 1984. Through decades of leadership, service, and generosity, these women helped shape the spirit and direction of Neighborhood Music School in profound ways. Their love for the performing arts, deep commitment to this community, and steady guidance will always be part of NMS—they are deeply missed.



A full list of donors can be viewed on our website: nmsnewhaven.org/donors

Gifts were given in honor and in memory of the following people:

MEMORIAL GIFTS

Micki Balaban
Paula "PB" Baraket
Marshall Barron
James Church
Baba David Coleman
Anne Curtis
Charles Born Davenport, Jr.
Gail Fowler
Pat Gara
Jane Crosbie Hylas
Mary Johnson
Carol Ross
Dante A. Rosselli
Katherine E. Taffel
Caterina Arena Visconti

HONORARY GIFTS

Tracey Albert
The Armstrong-Koski family
Rachel Balaban
Jonathan H. Bello
Mary Bloom
Noah Bloom
Slater & Arden Boms
Berclee Cameron
Gillian Eversman
Grace Feldman
Tim Gara
Kathy & Fred Giampietro
Ashley Hale
Amy Kapczynski
Rachel Kiel
Lauren Messina
The NMS faculty & staff
Robert Oakes
Our budding violinist & her
patient teacher
Leslie Prodis
Myron Radawiec
Julia Raspe
Laura Richling
Shayna Roosevelt
Debby Teason
Anne Tubis
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Larry Zukof

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