



## FROM THE TOP ARTS LEADERSHIP SPOTLIGHT

### Phuong Nghi Pham Appeals to her District's Superintendent for More Focus on Music Education



**PHUONG NGHI PHAM**  
Piano, 14, Dorchester, MA  
*Jack Kent Cooke Young Artist*

*Phuong Nghi Pham, a 14-year-old pianist from Dorchester, MA and Jack Kent Cooke Young Artist Award recipient, wrote a letter to Dr. Carol R. Johnson, Superintendent of the Boston Public Schools District, appealing for a spending increase on the region's musical education programs for the following school-year budget.*

**She shares her letter to Dr. Johnson below:**

**Dear Superintendent Johnson,**

As you know, most schools had to make large budget cuts due to the recent economic recession. This included laying off teachers as well as cutting back or eliminating parts of the curriculums that may be perceived as unnecessary in the students' growth and development. The budget crisis has and will have huge impacts on the arts departments in schools because many people do not consider art to be part of the core curriculum. I write this letter to ask for your support in saving the arts and funding the musical education of youth.

My name is Phuong Nghi Pham. I am a 14 year-old pianist from Dorchester and am currently in the eighth grade at Boston Latin School. This past February, I had the honor of performing in Jordan Hall on *From the Top*, a National Public Radio program showcasing America's top young classical musicians. It is simply impossible to forget the passion and commitment I received from the staff and the two other talented young musicians who also performed in this taping with me. *From the Top*, however, is not just about that sole performance. It is about young classical musicians reaching out and communicating to others through music.

We're on the Web!  
[www.fromthetop.org](http://www.fromthetop.org)

*"Regardless of whether one plays an instrument or not, music is still an integral part of everyday life."*

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Regardless of whether one plays an instrument or not, music is still an integral part of everyday life. After all, it is everywhere and has lasted through the most difficult times in history. For me, music has the power to invite both relaxation and self-expression. I believe that the more people are introduced to classical music, the more they will appreciate the influence it has had on the different societies and cultures today. I think arts programs in schools are great opportunities for this exposure because kids explore, learn, and retain better in a learning environment. In addition, the skills gained from studying music can improve academic performance because they have to practice self-discipline, think creatively, and work collaboratively.

In fact, it was a school music program that opened the musical door to me. I was in a small class in kindergarten with other five year-olds. The main goal was simply to get the kids more familiarized with music. In the room, there were several tiny keyboards where we played and tried out various sounds. The teacher had seen potential in my playing and recommended that I move up to the piano – a more challenging instrument. And it all began from there...

At my school last year, there were decisions to reduce the number of teachers from the arts departments as part of the budget cuts. That meant that there would only be about three or four teachers in total for both visual arts and music. As a result, fewer students will be able to participate in music classes, ensembles, and bands. The chance of these programs lasting is slim. However, they have been extremely helpful to me and other students. They allow us to create a positive learning environment that encourages creativity, independence, and communication. In a time when there are many difficulties and hardships in life, music is one of the things that can comfort and give us the courage to keep going. Not only that, young musicians like us will be able to share this gift by inspiring others and enriching the world through our music-making!

I understand that as the school superintendent, you have to make very difficult decisions in creating the budgets for the coming school year. Please keep in mind that small as they may seem, these arts programs really can provide opportunities for young musicians to explore their own abilities and help many others cope with challenges in life. Thank you for your time and consideration.

**Sincerely,  
Phuong Nghi Pham**



*“...arts programs really can provide opportunities for young musicians to explore their own abilities and help many others cope with challenges in life.”*



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**We asked Phuong Nghi a few questions about her letter to Superintendent Carol R. Johnson:**

**FTT:** Why did you choose this project?

**Phuong Nghi:** Because of the unstable economy, most school budgets have been and are being cut. People like Dr. Johnson are involved in making the decisions on which curriculum should be kept and which are not as necessary.

Last year in my school, there was the decision to lay off some teachers who teach music and arts because it was not considered as important as other academic subjects. I do not want something like this to keep on happening.

**FTT:** What did you hope to communicate to Dr. Johnson in your letter?

**Phuong Nghi:** Through this letter, I wanted to make her aware that musical education is very essential to students. It helps you to express yourself in new ways, acquire new skills, and it can improve academic achievements as well.

**FTT:** What did you learn from the experience?

**Phuong Nghi:** It redefined the role that music plays in my life. Because this is the first time I wrote a letter to an official, this experience helped me gain skills in advocating music to other people, and being persuasive as well.

Writing this letter helped me understand how there are many, many ways to share music with others besides performing on stage.



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