YEAR IN REVIEW 2023 - 2024



The People's Music School is the largest completely tuition-free music school serving Chicago metropolitan area children, focusing on removing barriers to access for students who otherwise would not have the benefits of intensive music instruction.

People' Nusic chuo The People's Music School

Dear Community,

At The People's Music School, we believe in the transformative power of music education. We're more than just a 100% tuitionfree after-school music program; we're a community dedicated to changing lives through the gift of music. We exclusively serve students facing financial barriers to a high-quality music education and ensure they can access the unparalleled benefits that music education provides.

I'd like to share a story that embodies the heart and soul of our community. The Alvarez family has been with us since 2017, at our Back of the Yards site. We've had the privilege of nurturing four talented siblings:

- **Osbeida** plays the oboe and is now majoring in music composition on a scholarship at North Park University.
- **Emely**, a trumpet player, graduated high school this year and is pursuing a Bachelor of Arts in Music at University of Illinois - Chicago.
- José, also an oboist, is a senior in high school and applied to Chicago Youth Symphony Orchestra for oboe. José is autistic, and our individually tailored program has helped him thrive.
- **Maria**, an 8th grader, plays percussion at our Back of the Yards SLAM program.

Their accomplishments speak volumes about the impact of our program. Each sibling has excelled in music and academics, participating in All-City Performing Arts and securing college scholarships that were enabled by the intensive, tuition-free music education they received in their own neighborhood of Back of the Yards. As Dr. Megan Robbins, Osbeida and José's teacher, beautifully puts it, "There is all this talent in their family that has had the opportunity to flourish with access to a program like People's."





Music education is more than just an extra-curricular activity; it is a critical component that supports academic success. Research shows that students from underserved communities who are able to access music lessons see a 73% increase in their math scores compared to their peers. Their reading, history, geography, and social skills also improve by 40%.

A high-quality music education can cost more than \$4,500 per year per student, and underserved communities lack adequate in-school and after-school music programming. **Our program removes the financial, geographic, logistical, cultural, and linguistic barriers faced by low-income families so that students like the Alvarez siblings can thrive.**

This annual report will give you insights into what makes our school unique. It features highlights from an amazing year, including student successes, national news features, and incredible strides in data-driven programmatic decision-making. Through these stories, we aim to demonstrate our unwavering commitment to our mission: providing access to the benefits of an intensive music education, for students all across Chicago.

In service,

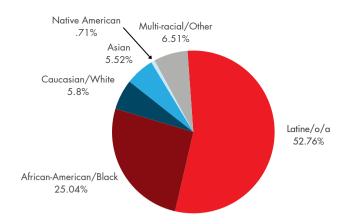


Miriam Owens President & CEO The People's Music School

OUR MISSION

Our mission is to deliver access to the benefits of high-quality, tuition-free music education. Through intensive instruction and performance, our students achieve excellence in music that transfers to other areas in life. They grow musically, socially, emotionally and intellectually, and develop a foundation of responsibility, self-esteem, resilience and purpose.





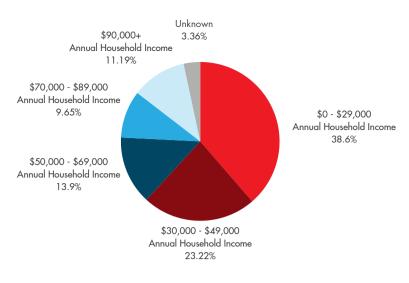
RACIAL DIVERSITY

OUR PROGRAMS

The People's Music School (TPMS) focuses our work where need is greatest, providing rigorous afterschool music programming to 717 students who have financial barriers to access. TPMS's original community school in Uptown has persisted for 48 years. Over time, we have added partnerships with public schools in Chicago's underserved communities to expand student access and increase our portfolio of sites. Through the cultivation of musical learning and growth, our ultimate goal is to empower students with crucial life skills, support socio-emotional development, and provide transformational opportunities made possible through music education. By geographically working in the communities that we serve, TPMS also strengthens local communities and contributes to the transformation of Chicago's underresourced schools.

Most students receive four hours of intensive afterschool music instruction weekly, includina instrumental instruction, ensemble instruction, music theory, and performance opportunities. This degree of intensive music education produces valuable life skills, such as growth mindset, resilience, and improved literacy and math skills.' TPMS's intensive after-school music education programs are designed to drive these benefits and to eliminate barriers to access, including financial, geographic, linguistic, and cultural barriers.

¹ "Music-based mentoring and academic improvement in high-poverty elementary schools. Journal of Youth Development."; "Planting the Seeds: Orchestral Music Education as a Context for Fostering Growth Mindsets. Front. Psychol."



SOCIOECONOMIC DIVERSITY

Young students at The People's Music School begin their musical journeys with **General Music**, a program that teaches the foundations of music, designed for elementary students in first grade.

Music Theory curriculum at The People's Music School trains students to think critically and apply new tools for creative self-expression. All students take a rigorous annual theory exam to assess progress.

Lessons, both private and group, offer students the opportunity to refine their skills, nurture their creativity, and demonstrate musical excellence. All students participate in an annual solo jury assessment to assess their musical progression.

Ensembles offer our students the opportunity to collaborate as young musicians, learn from their peers, and perform for live audiences. Every student has multiple opportunities to perform annually.

Our **Service, Leadership, Artistry, and Mentorship (SLAM)** honors program gives advanced, older students the opportunity to build on their skills of discipline, teamwork, critical thinking and self-assurance and apply them as they face new challenges and experience new opportunities.





We enrolled **717 students** across **4 program sites**, with intensive instruction provided by **65 teaching artists**.

We upheld the pillar of phenomenal teaching, offering over **50 hours of professional development** opportunities to teaching artists and building our library of diverse teaching resources.





We maintained a **90% inyear student retention rate**, with data showing that the longer students remain in the program, the deeper and more sustainable the impact.

We raised over \$650,000 at our Big Night, Bigger Dreams gala, honoring John W. Rogers of Ariel Investments.

We welcomed **6 new members to our Board of Directors**: Juanna Blackwell, Emerald-Jane "EJ" Hunter, Joe Idaszak, Nancy Power, Anthony Salazar, and Rob Whiteman.

We secured **3 new major funding partnerships** and celebrated renewed relationships with lapsed individual donors and institutional funders.





Chief Program Officer Natalie Butler and Greater South Side Band Director Nyle Taylor appeared on the Jennifer Hudson Show to talk about the importance of accessible, high-quality music education.

Students at Uptown Academy performed their winter concert on stage at the historic **Riviera Theater**, as part of The People's Music School's **Winter Spectacular.**





Over the course of the year, we offered **40+ performance opportunities** and teamed up with nearly **20 organizations and artists** including Berklee College of Music, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, D-Composed, Lyric Opera, Jessie Montgomery, Pacifica Quartet, Third Coast Percussion, and more, to provide enriching musical experiences.

We closed out the school year with Performapaloozathon, featuring 50+ student performances. TPMS congratulated the **Class of 2024**, with 17 students college-bound.

Jennifer Hudson Knows the Power of Music Education on the South Side



On a freezing February afternoon, Chief Program Officer Natalie Butler and Assistant Band Director Nyle Taylor received an unexpected phone call: an invitation to fly out to Los Angeles and join Jennifer Hudson on her show to discuss the transformational impact of an intensive, tuition-free music education at The People's Music School.

Both Butler and Taylor teach band at our Greater South Side program – just around the corner from where Hudson was raised and where she first discovered her passion for music.

"Music makes all the difference, and it did for me growing up in Chicago on the South Side," Hudson told Butler and Taylor. "It was being in music and being able to get involved in that way that helped me build my craft. It's something that we always need to keep present for kids." And that's exactly what The People's Music School aims to do. By providing access to the benefits of an intensive music education, our organization impacts the lives of hundreds of students across Chicago. We see our impact growing the most rapidly on the South Side. Since opening our Greater South Side site in 2016, the program has grown by more than 150 students and has the longest waiting list of any of our community sites. There is significant need and demand for our work on the South Side, with most of this site's students coming from south of 70th St.

Why such high demand? "For many of our local schools, there isn't any music instruction at all," says Butler. "So if the programs we provided were not available, these amazing students wouldn't have any opportunity to study music at all."



At The People's Music School, students not only gain the opportunity to learn music-they also gain safety and community. Butler explains, "Chicago has a reputation for having a lot of gun violence, and it is very real. The programs that we provide are a safe haven for our students and their families. It is a safe, supportive environment where they're exploring music, growing, and transforming their entire lives."

Taylor, too, knows firsthand the importance of accessible, intensive music education: "Being a South Side native," he says, "there's just not as much opportunity here as there is on other sides of Chicago. I know my first taste of music education didn't come till I was at church. And I didn't get the second taste till I was at high school. You have these huge gaps in learning. But at The People's Music School, we often take them in at first grade and move all the way through high school, so we get to see them grow."

Music makes all the difference, and it did for me growing up in Chicago on the South Side. I cannot express how amazing it is what you guys are doing. You're going to birth so many stars!"

Jennifer Hudson

He admires Hudson for championing access to music education: "The fact that [Hudson] was able to come from Chicago-it's a great inspiration for our youth. Just to show them that regardless of where you come from, and all the factors that may be against you, you can still make it. And she is that role model for us."

We're deeply grateful to Jennifer Hudson and American Family Insurance for granting our organization \$10,000 to enable us to do what we do best: transform lives, one note at a time. **K**

Some quotes have been edited for length and clarity.

Measuring Student Impact: The D'Addario Foundation's Immersive Music Challenge

An intensive music education is socially, emotionally, and academically transformational. Students who receive music instruction perform better in school, show increased growth in language and literacy, and achieve higher standardized testing scores. And for students who struggle the most, the increase in achievement is most pronounced.¹

It is this kind of impact that excites us to be selected for the Immersive Music Challenge (IMC), an implementation and longitudinal study led by the D'Addario Foundation. As an IMC implementation partner, TPMS will receive five years of generous grant support from the D'Addario Foundation, as well as donations of instruments and supplies for our students and our program.

Over a five-year period, the IMC will provide formal evaluation of our Albany Park program at Hibbard Elementary School, a cornerstone of our work since 2008 that consistently demonstrates the transformative power of sustained, high-quality music education. Serving approximately 125 students, with nearly 80% attending the school during the day, our Albany Park program offers a robust curriculum that includes small group lessons, music theory, ensemble training, and performance practice.

"The inspirational growth and development I've seen in our students, fostered by TPMS's unwavering dedication and passion, have opened new horizons of creativity, confidence, and personal growth," says Hibbard Elementary Principal Hiliana Leon. "Their journeys have touched the lives of those around them, creating a ripple effect of inspiration and hope that is evident throughout our community."

In partnering with IMC, TPMS will be matched with an academic researcher who will evaluate our program's impact on students' academic and social-emotional growth. This external evaluation through the IMC will provide The People's Music School with the key outcomes needed to further understand the power of music education. By assessing student achievement, school engagement, and social-emotional growth, the IMC seeks to demonstrate how intensive music instruction can foster a growth mindset, resilience, and improved academic performance among students.

We extend our deepest appreciation to the D'Addario Foundation for empowering us to provide even higher quality music education programming to even more students. The potential long-term impact of this study is immense, offering a foundation for integrating music education more broadly into school curricula and supporting the overall well-being of students. §

ABOUT THE D'ADDARIO FOUNDATION

The D'Addario Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that believes in the power of music to build community and transform lives. Each year, the D'Addario Foundation awards cash and in-kind grants to approximately 200 community music programs throughout the world. The Foundation focuses support on nonprofits that primarily serve children from underresourced communities. Since 2019, the Foundation has annually awarded college scholarships to students who were impacted and inspired by grantees. Affiliated with D'Addario & Company, a privately owned manufacturer of musical instrument accessories, the D'Addario Foundation receives generous resources from the company and relies on substantial additional support from institutional and individual donors to help nurture musical talent and both evaluate and influence the future of education.

¹ Holbrook, et al (2022), Music-Based Mentoring and Academic Improvement in High-Poverty Elementary Schools, Journal of Youth Development

Cultivating Community through Service

by Emily Cubas

The People's Music School (TPMS) fosters a unique and successful environment through its commitment to service. As a non-profit organization, TPMS relies on the dedication of families and volunteers to ensure its continued operation and mission of providing accessible music education. In lieu of traditional tuition fees, families contribute service hours, forming the backbone of the school's day-to-day functioning.

These service hours encompass a variety of tasks crucial to a smooth-running school. Families might find themselves cleaning classrooms, organizing furniture, providing administrative support at the front desk, or assisting instructors with younger students. This not only alleviates the burden on staff but also allows them to dedicate more time and energy to core educational activities.

A significant service opportunity arises during the annual gala. This event serves a dual purpose: showcasing the talents of advanced ensembles and raising essential funds through donations. Here, both students and families play vital roles. Students take center stage, performing for the audience. Families, meanwhile, volunteer for tasks like registration, guest reception, coat check, stage setup and breakdown (including instruments and furniture), lighting operation, and even auctioneering. Similar service opportunities present themselves during the fall and spring concerts, ensuring a seamless experience for all attendees.

The impact of service extends beyond practical benefits. By contributing their time and effort, families become more invested in the TPMS community. Witnessing rehearsals, performances, and the dedication of the staff fosters a deeper understanding of their child's musical journey and the educational philosophy of the school. This shared experience strengthens the bond between families, staff, and students, fostering a collaborative and supportive environment. In conclusion, service is not merely a function of maintaining operations at TPMS; it is a cornerstone of its philosophy. This unique system allows the school to remain 100% tuition-free, making high-quality music education accessible to all in the Chicago area. By working together, students' families, volunteers, and staff cultivate a vibrant community where a love for music can flourish, while ensuring an exceptional learning experience for every student. §

Emily Cubas, 14, is an advanced cello student enrolled in the SLAM program. She has been a student at The People's Music School for eight years. The Cubas family are exceptional members of our community, providing over 24 hours of service during the 2023-24 school year alone. We extend our heartfelt appreciation to the Cubas family for all they do to contribute to The People's Music School community.



How The People's Music School "Completely Changed my Life"

People's alum Sheila Esquivel is an accomplished musician, educator, and scholar. Her current work as the Director of External Relations at New England Conservatory is a strong testament to her passion and her brilliance. But she never pictured herself being where she is today. "I probably never would have gone to college, and never would have had a career in classical music. If it had not been for People's, for that program, I wouldn't have been able to do all I did. It completely changed my life."

Sheila's musical journey began at 10 years old, when she participated in The People's Music School's El Sistema program at Hibbard Elementary in Albany Park. Immediately, Sheila was mesmerized by the violin. "All I wanted to do in my life was become a violinist, audition, and get into a major symphony orchestra." She worked hard at the violin through middle school and high school, earning herself a spot at the Peabody Institute at Johns Hopkins studying Violin Performance. Soon, her music studies led her to a newfound passion: teaching. After graduating from Peabody, Sheila got a teaching fellowship with the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, where she not only gave private lessons but also worked on early childhood musicianship programs. With this work, she became increasingly interested in research. "I wanted to find out: Why does music education positively contribute to a person's life? How can we use that to create programs that have lasting effects?"

Sheila began studying at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, receiving a research fellowship for early childhood musicianship. "I had this feeling that I had to bridge my knowledge gap between early childhood and access programming. I decided to take on a higher education concentration at Harvard. That's how I ended up at the New England Conservatory. It's probably one of the most neat things to have happened – a full circle moment."



Left: TPMS Alumna Sheila Esquivel performs violin alongside fellow TPMS alumna and her longtime friend Melanie Moran. Right: Sheila visits Hibbard Elementary in 2017 to provide a masterclass to TPMS string students while an undergraduate student at Peabody Institute.

Sheila's dedication to music education and her commitment to diversity and equity in classical music led her to the BEAM (Bridging Equity and Achievement in Music) Program at the New England Conservatory. BEAM serves students who are historically underrepresented in the field of classical music, creating opportunities for students in order to make classical music a main component of their post-secondary studies.

"Classical music is a really hard space to exist in if you're traditionally marginalized by the field," says Sheila. "Being Black or Brown in that field – it's really tough and it takes a lot of vulnerability to actually voice that. But if there's one thing that cuts through that adversity, it's the community that is created through music. For me, the best part of the job is building that trust, building community, and getting to know families."

I want to express my heartfelt thanks to everyone at The People's Music School for believing in me and for offering the tools and resources that have allowed me to grow as a musician and as a person."

Sheila Esquivel, TPMS Alumna

Throughout her journey, Sheila has never forgotten her roots at The People's Music School. "My career is completely shaped by my experience at People's. The commitment to providing accessible music education for all has made an immeasurable difference in my life and in the lives of countless others. And there's no bigger thanks than to just do the work that I'm meant to be doing – helping students like myself get careers in this field, knowing that they can be successful in it despite all the adversity." §

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We are grateful for our **First Movement donors** who have become dedicated partners in our journey towards student impact.

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66 I had the opportunity to colead a clinic this past spring for The People's Music School on differentiating instruction for students with disabilities and diverse learning needs. Many organizations tend to view music instruction as "one size fits all," but it is evident to me that TPMS recognizes the distinct needs of each individual child and the challenges faced by teaching artists in schools. TPMS not only connects their instruction to learning standards and student individualized education programs, but also strives to make sure that each instructor is meeting students where they are and setting them up for success."

SARA K. JONES, PH.D. Director of Music Education and Associate Professor DePaul University



66 Earlier this year, we launched our educational series, Black Composers 101, as part of the Music Inclusion Hub. Partnering with The People's Music School to pilot the resources was a no-brainer due to their commitment to introducing their scholars to composers beyond the canon that are also representative of the communities they live in. The People's Music School has been incredibly instrumental in advancing our work, and I'm grateful to call them a true partner in this work."

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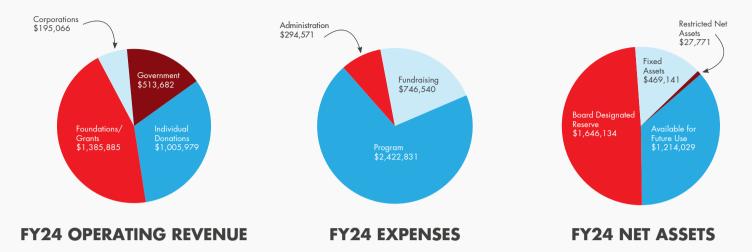
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The Hulsebosch Hope Foundation is honored to partner with The People's Music School in expanding its tuitionfree music program. HHF and TPMS's mission and goals are aligned in seeking greater employment and financial opportunities through better education for students on Chicago's south and west sides. We've been especially impressed with the correlation TPMS has established between children's participation in their program and their future academic success. We look forward to working with TPMS as together we foster thriving and sustainable communities."

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Tell a friend, follow and boost us on social media, or host an event! We always need more people to know about the great work happening here.

ATTEND AN EVENT

Head to our website to see our calendar of upcoming concerts, recitals, community programming, and more. We can't wait to see you!

JOIN A COMMITTEE OR TASK FORCE

Composed of expert volunteers, members of our People's community, and members of our Board of Directors, our committee and task force members serve as advisors and experts that guide our work. Learn more about our committees and how to inquire about involvement.

VOLUNTEER

We have nearly 30 performing events per year, and we always need help! Volunteering at an event is a great opportunity to get to know our close-knit community.

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Every dollar you give to The People's Music School goes towards eliminating barriers to access in music education and enriching young lives in Chicago.





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