

YEAR IN REVIEW

2024-2025



The People's Music School

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.



Dear Community,

In the 2024-25 school year, The People's Music School thrived, grew, and provided a reliable, welcoming, and musical home for the over 800 children we serve. Against a background of ever-increasing change in our world, we are there for our students and their families, day in and day out, delivering access to the benefits of music education.

Since 1976, our work at The People's Music School has fostered and sustained an environment in which the arts benefit everyone in our community. Our mission compels us to deliver access to the benefits of the arts, that our students might grow not only musically, but also socially, emotionally, and intellectually. These benefits lead to economic mobility, community vitality, a sense of overall wellbeing and belonging, for those students in communities historically most excluded from these benefits.

Ninety-six percent of our seniors go on to attend college, when only 65% of CPS students do the same. 50% percent of our students are Latine, and 25% percent are Black. 62% percent of our students come from households with less than \$50,000 in family income and wouldn't have access to the benefits of high-quality music education without The People's Music School.

Students like Alexa: "TPMS has helped me grow my self-confidence and has given me the opportunity to find my own success. TPMS has also helped me grow my discipline and helped me understand music, which is something I never thought I was capable of. I am thankful for the opportunities this program has brought me. I have grown in so many ways because of TPMS." And students like Javier: "Back in the day, I was a really troubled kid. It was The People's Music School that showed me a different world. One of composure and being able to become something different. I don't know who I would have been without TPMS."

This annual report will give you insights into what makes our school one-of-a-kind. It features highlights from an amazing year, including student achievements, alumni success stories, testimonials from families, and exciting strides in teaching excellence. 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,

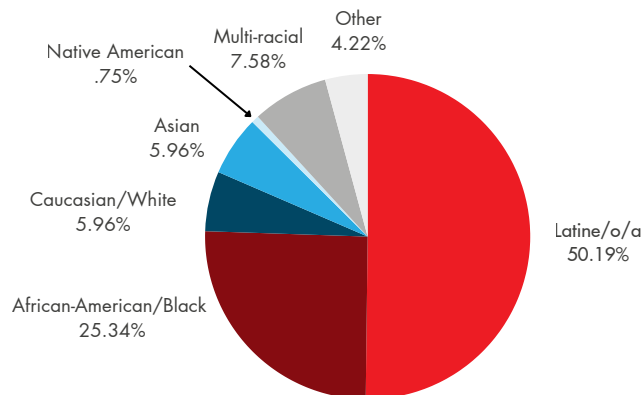


A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Miriam Owens".

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

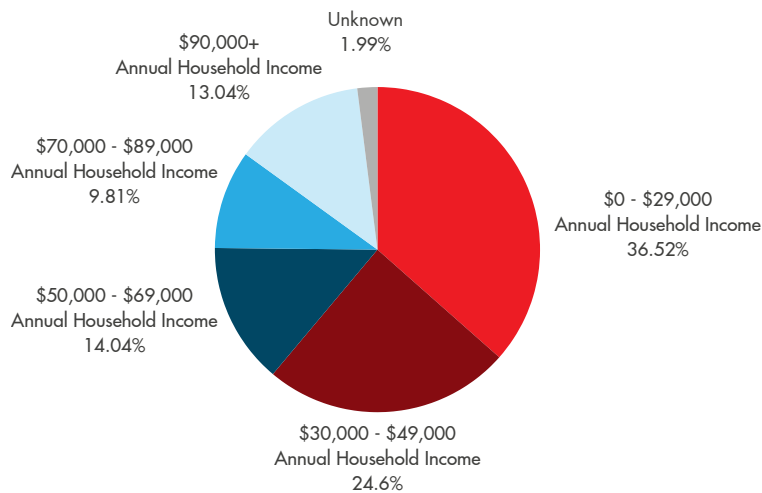
OUR PROGRAMS

The People's Music School (TPMS) focuses our work where need is greatest, providing rigorous after-school music programming to 805 students who have financial barriers to access. TPMS's original community school in Uptown has persisted for 49 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. TPMS also strengthens local communities by geographically working in the communities that we serve.

Students receive on average four hours of intensive after-school music instruction weekly, including 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.¹ 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.

805 students enrolled

94% BIPOC students

21 instruments taught

1,222 individual donors supporting TPMS

4,672 hours of service provided by families

70 teaching artists

4 hours on average of weekly programming per student

106,860 learning hours per year

100% high school graduation rate

100% have financial barriers to accessing music education

2024-2025 HIGHLIGHTS

We enrolled **805 students** across **4 program sites**, with intensive instruction provided by **70 teaching artists**.

We upheld the pillar of phenomenal teaching, offering over **38 hours of professional development** opportunities to teaching artists and building our library of diverse teaching resources.



We maintained an **80% year-over-year student retention rate**, with data showing that the longer students remain in the program, the deeper and more sustainable the impact.



We raised over **\$750,000 at our Big Night: Crescendo** gala, honoring People's Music School Lifetime Trustee **Michael Buck** of Driehaus Capital Management LLC.

We welcomed **5 new members to our Board of Directors**: Manuel Chavez, Christie Crouch, Fernando Ferreyra, Adam K. Jackson, and Cindy Murray.

We secured **13 new major funding partnerships** and celebrated renewed relationships with individual donors and institutional funders.





Over the course of the year, we offered **30+ performance opportunities** and teamed up with nearly 20 organizations and artists including **Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Civic Orchestra of Chicago, Chicago Sinfonietta, Sphinx Organization, Third Coast Percussion, D-Composed, Music of the Baroque, Àkóḵòpò Music Foundation, Crossing Borders Music**, and more, to provide enriching musical experiences.

We closed out the school year with **Performapaloozathon**, featuring **39 student performances**. TPMS congratulated the **Class of 2025**, **96% of whom are college-bound**.



We sent **25 Summer Ambassadors** to intensive summer music programs, including **Interlochen Arts Camp, Berklee Five-Week Music Performance Intensive, Blue Lake Fine Arts Camp, Birch Creek, Luzerne Music Center, Aria International Summer Academy, and Lutheran Summer Music Academy & Festival**, and **CYSO's Tour of Spain**.

We secured a **new home for our Greater South Side program** at 5410 S State Street, the first time since the mid-1990s that we have made an investment to launch our own physical space.



“A Second Home to Me”

Oliver Talukder '20 Brings TPMS Values to the World Stage



Image Credit: Nicole MCH Photography

This year, Philadelphia-based oboist Oliver Talukder won Cedille Record's 2025 Emerging Artist Competition, a prestigious award that provides him with the opportunity to record his debut record. Oliver is Second Oboe at the Opera Philadelphia Orchestra, a seat he earned shortly after graduating from the Curtis Institute of Music in 2024. His career has led him to collaborate with numerous esteemed orchestras, including the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, St. Louis Symphony Orchestra, the Civic Orchestra of Chicago, the Chamber Orchestra of Philadelphia, and more.

But before he was an accomplished musician, Oliver Talukder, TPMS Class of 2020, was a young oboe student at The People's Music School.

Oliver first dreamed of becoming a professional musician while still a student at TPMS. With the school's support through the TPMS Summer Ambassador program, he earned a coveted spot in the National Youth Orchestra of

the United States of America, embarking on a 2019 European tour that included five world-renowned concert halls.

He remembers his “ah-ha” moment sitting in on a sound check at Royal Albert Hall: “I always watched great orchestras play at the BBC Proms there, and I was inspired to have joined the lineage of musicians who have performed on that stage. I looked up at the iconic blue lights and decided that I wanted to be a performer and travel the world spreading music and joy.”

Oliver still carries with him the lessons and values he learned at TPMS. The one that has stayed with him the most? Believing in himself.

“Being a professional musician requires a great deal of grit and resilience, and it can be easy to measure your worth only by external achievements-- winning jobs, performing in prestigious venues, or playing with top



Oliver Talukder leads an oboe master class at the Back of the Yards program site, March 2025.

orchestras. At TPMS, I learned that my value as a musician, and as a person, goes far beyond accolades. What matters most is the dedication I bring to my craft, the joy I share through music, and the community I build along the way. That lesson continues to guide me through challenges and reminds me to carry myself with confidence and purpose."

Oliver feels that the close-knit community is what made TPMS a special place. "Every time I walked into the Uptown building, I felt valued not only as a student, but as a person. It was a place where I felt safe, welcomed, and free to be my authentic self. Even now, five years after having graduated from the school, I feel I have my cheerleaders back in Chicago supporting all my endeavors."

Oliver continues to give back to young musicians, too – students whose shoes he was once in. This year, he returned to TPMS to present an oboe master class to

“ Every time I walked into the Uptown building, I felt valued not only as a student, but as a person. It was a place where I felt safe, welcomed, and free to be my authentic self.”

Oliver Talukder '20

advanced SLAM students at our Back of the Yards site. Students were excited to have the chance to work with an accomplished professional musician who got his start in the same program, and Oliver's joy and passion shone through every note he played with them.

"TPMS truly became a second home to me," says Oliver. "I strive to create a community as supportive as TPMS anywhere I go." 🎵

Building Strong Foundations in Learning & Teaching

Curriculum Revamp Supports Student Success



At The People's Music School, our goal is to create the conditions that give every student that joins TPMS an opportunity to persist in a long-term journey of growth and progress in our program. We measure this progress through our cumulative curriculum, in which each student has the opportunity to advance through our Beginner, Intermediate, Upper Intermediate, and Advanced instrumental levels. With 75 faculty providing instruction to 800 students across 21 different instruments, it is essential that our curriculum is not only comprehensive, but consistent.

This year, our Learning and Teaching team began revising and reshaping our curriculum in order to better equip teaching artists with the tools needed to provide consistent, high-quality instruction. Starting with beginner-level violin and percussion, Senior Manager of Learning and Teaching Dr. Megan Robbins and Learning and Teaching Associate Felipe Tobar began restructuring the format, creating a new curriculum template that clearly separates required skills based on the school's jury grading rubric from recommended topics. It also outlines musical skills that all students should master at each level, regardless of instrument. "For example, all level 1 students should know how to care for their instrument and accessories," says Megan.

The revision process was highly collaborative. Small panels of faculty experts for each instrument met to brainstorm and align on skill expectations, followed by a feedback process. "Before finalizing, we sent the drafts to

all faculty who teach that instrument and invited feedback, which the Learning and Teaching Team used to refine the final version," says Felipe.

The new curriculum streamlines expectations for students and guides faculty toward more consistent assessments. "This allows students to focus on one or two clear goals per jury category," says Megan. "Now first-year violin students are asked to focus just on keeping their instrument parallel to the ground and their left wrist straight, rather than demonstrate an overwhelmingly lengthy list of techniques."

For faculty, the clearer benchmarks are already making a difference. "The revised curriculum has given faculty clearer guidance on what to assess at each level, leading to more consistent jury evaluations," says Felipe. Megan adds: "It also helps guide faculty to focus more on developing the key skills that will help students succeed in their classes, ensembles, assessments, and performances." Students have already shown increased rates of progression through the program due to these curriculum revisions, with a 67% increase in percussion students' progression, and an 81% increase in violin students' progression.

The ultimate goal is continued improvement, says Felipe. "Long term, the vision is to keep evolving the curriculum to support clear, skill-based progress that works across teachers, ensembles, and sites." 🎵



Audrey Hunter, second from Yo-Yo Ma's left, in 2016 after performing on stage with The People's Music School in the Civic Orchestra's Bach Marathon.

When Access Meets Excellence

by Emerald-Jane Hunter

I was 26 years old, expecting my first child, and I was talking to a friend of mine about my desire to have my children exposed to music. He mentioned The People's Music School. I wrote it down, and I set an alarm on my phone so that five years later, I could apply.

12 years ago, both of my children had the opportunity to join The People's Music School. As a former People's parent, and now a proud board member, I can tell you: this school doesn't just teach music. It transforms lives.

Both of my kids were a part of People's for years, and the profound impact of the program has stayed with them to this day. My daughter, who is now a sophomore at Howard University, learned discipline, teamwork, and confidence. As a young violin student, she found her voice on stage and in life. And she hasn't stopped sharing the experience she had in 2016, playing in her TPMS string ensemble alongside Yo-Yo Ma. She's now a PreMed student, pursuing a degree in psychology with a biology-chemistry double minor. My son, who once struggled with focus and motivation, is thriving in high school and is playing the double bass. That's not just talent. That's what happens when access meets excellence.

But what truly stood out to me was how this school really engages the whole family. When my children had violin and viola lessons, or string ensemble rehearsals, I wasn't just dropping them off at the school. I became part of the community, too - volunteering, ushering at concerts, and watching children from every background rise to the

challenge of rigorous instruction. We weren't just witnesses to the change. We were part of it.

It's this profound impact that leads me to serve on The People's Music School's Board of Directors. I have seen firsthand what's possible when we invest in potential instead of privilege. I believe in paying it forward, and I'm making sure that more families can experience what mine did: music as a pathway to a better future for my children. 🎵



Emerald-Jane "EJ" Hunter serves on The People's Music School's Board of Directors, where she is the Chair of the Marketing & PR Committee. She is Founder & Ringleader of myWHY Agency, an integrated marketing firm that works with purpose-driven brands, businesses,

and leaders to tell impactful stories with a specialized focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion. EJ shared this story at the 2025 Impact Grants Award Ceremony, where she spoke about being a People's Music School parent and the impact the program had on her and her family.

Giving Back Through Education

Luis Correa '18 Returns to Hibbard Elementary



When Luis Correa, TPMS Class of 2018, walks the halls of Hibbard Elementary School, he's not just an educator. He's an example of the full-circle impact of community support. Fifteen years ago, Luis was a Hibbard student just starting out on the clarinet at The People's Music School's Albany Park program. Now, he's giving back to his community, working as a Special Education Classroom Assistant at Hibbard and helping with student security and safety at TPMS's Albany Park program.

Luis joined The People's Music School's Albany Park program at Hibbard Elementary at 9 years old. He remembers eagerly awaiting the day everyone got to choose instruments.

"One day, upperclassmen came into our class and showed us a bunch of instruments. I remember hearing the sound of the clarinet and instantly falling in love with it."

Playing the clarinet allowed him to open up and express himself. "I was a shy and timid kid. It was at TPMS that I got to break out of my shell a little bit. Being in a big ensemble - it helped me make new friends and talk to teachers. TPMS really helped me with my own personal growth."

Luis's path to education started serendipitously. While working in a summer program at a nearby school, Hibbard Elementary Principal (and his former middle school principal) Hilaria Leon encouraged him to apply for a position at Hibbard. Luis seized the opportunity, excited to contribute to the community that raised him.

Now, as an Special Education Classroom Assistant, he works with diverse learners at Hibbard Elementary. "Working in education can be challenging, but it's also so rewarding," he says. "When I see a student's face light up or hear them say, 'Mr. Luis, I missed you,' it makes my day. It reminds me why I do this."

The values Luis learned at TPMS - dedication, creativity, compassion - are evident in his work. He also sees his role as a way to pay forward the support he received as a student. "What I like about being back at Hibbard is that I'm able to help out," he says. "Giving back is what I enjoy doing most."

Reflecting on his journey, Luis has advice for students following in his footsteps: "If you have a goal, go for it. There will be obstacles, but you can overcome them. And overcoming them will make you even more successful." 🎷

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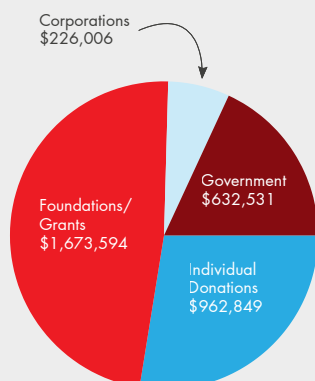
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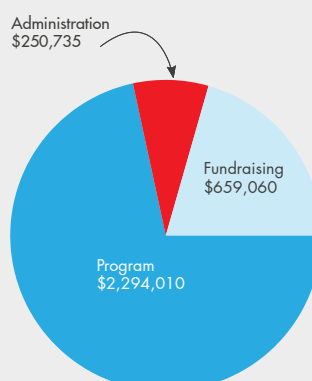
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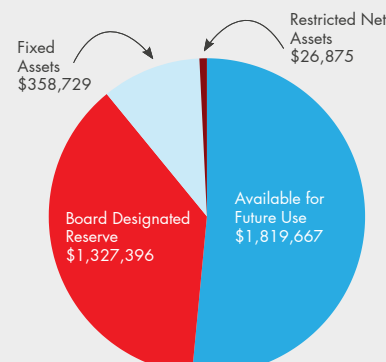
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FY25 OPERATING REVENUE



FY25 EXPENSES



FY25 NET ASSETS

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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.

DONATE

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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