

Good afternoon, my name is Madeleine Messier, and I am a sophomore at Bellows Free Academy in Saint Albans. I play violin in my high school orchestra and the Vermont Youth Orchestra. I am a member of the Vermont Youth Orchestra String Quartet, and I also sing in the BFA chorus and chamber choir. I have been playing violin for 11 years and have been singing for as long as I can remember. I also take private violin lessons through the Vermont Youth Orchestra Association. I have been in the VMEA District 1 choir for two years now, I have received two District 1 scholarships and I have recently been awarded a Vermont Allstate Scholarship. Last year, I had the privilege of being part of the All-New England and Vermont All-State Orchestras, and this year I will be the concertmaster of the All-New England Orchestra. Music has always been a part of my life. Both of my parents are public school music teachers, and I am fortunate to have such an amazing school music program at BFA-Saint Albans. My father plays piano and is the chorus director at BFA St. Albans, and my mother is a violinist and is the band and orchestra director at Swanton Elementary School. Outside of music, I like to run outside for cross country and track and field, and I love to learn about astronomy. I am in BFA's Student Government, and I enjoy spending time with friends and family.

I remember the first time I went to the violin shop to get my violin. I was 4 years old and I was very excited. The first time that I held my violin, I remember thinking, "Wow." I had seen and heard my parents playing instruments and singing for my entire life, and I instantly fell in love holding an instrument for the first time. When I started violin, I had no idea what was to come of my love for it. I took private lessons soon after and gained more skills as time went on.

I started playing in the Vermont Youth Orchestra Association when I was in sixth grade, and my friendships doubled, my happiness doubled, and my love for music and the arts quadrupled. I started in Vermont Youth Strings, where I made so many friends and had an amazing experience. I performed a solo with a live orchestra at the Flynn Theater, and that opportunity helped me to grow and become more confident in myself and my playing. Once I moved into the Vermont Youth Philharmonia, I started private lessons with one of my former

teachers. He pushed me to become a better musician, and he taught me to be methodical as a student in school from applying practicing techniques to studying techniques and managing stress.

Once I got into VYO, I gained many opportunities. Making it into the Vermont Youth Orchestra and being surrounded by supportive adults and talented peers has helped me gain the confidence to pursue a placement in the All New England Orchestra, Vermont All-State Orchestra, Vermont All-State Scholarship, and the District 1 Scholarship. Having a busy schedule and practicing violin efficiently has helped me to learn time management. These music festivals give me something to look forward to and to work toward, and I am positively impacted by the feeling of joy when I perform. From my experience, performing often can lead to less anxiety and more confidence in presentations, social interactions, and speeches like this one!

Numerous studies have shown that learning an instrument at a young age can positively develop the left and right hemispheres of the brain to connect them more. The Portland Chamber Orchestra reports that after only 15 months of playing an instrument as a child, multiple structural changes can be found in the brain. When a child learns to play an instrument, the hippocampus, a part of the brain involved in memory and learning skills, increases the neural connections, showing improved memory and learning in students. Another aspect of learning an instrument regarding development is that I notice that a lot of people in VYO and also kids in band, orchestra, and chorus are in accelerated classes and are generally on Honor or High Honor Roll in school. They are also usually involved in many activities and sports both in and outside of school.

It is proven through studies that students engaged in musical activities in schools academically perform higher, and their attendance is generally higher than for students who do not participate in school music courses. A major reason why some of my friends come to school is solely to play music in band, chorus, or orchestra because they have such a connection with musical students and teachers, and it makes their day.

Through my musical journey, I have learned, at least musically, about other cultures. In the BFA Chorus, we perform songs with German, French, Swahili, African-American Spiritual, Irish, and other influences. We dive into the history of these traditional songs and learn in a way you can't learn in a history class. In music, you have to put tone and expression into the performance the way the composer wrote it. This gives the audience and performers a chance to understand what the composer expresses or tries to say with this music. This helps us to understand historical references in the music and how the composer felt about these events. In the BFA orchestra and VYO, we perform pieces with all kinds of influences from around the world like Chinese, Russian, Spanish, Czech, Greek, and more.

Music and other arts classes are crucial to include for students in school. Not only is it an emotional outlet and teaches students to have emotional maturity, but it also advances their brains cognitively, as well as creates bonds, connections, and relationships with many people. I am fortunate to have an amazing music program, but not everyone will get equal opportunities regarding the arts if cuts are made to schools. Music has made such an impact on my life, especially at an early age, and it can similarly influence other students, even giving them a purpose to go to school.

I am very lucky and glad to be a part of the Creative Sector Day and Vermont Outdoor Recreation Day at the Vermont State House. I have actually dreamed of speaking in an environment like this for years, and I am thrilled that I have the opportunity to speak to all of you. I love to play violin outside on my deck in the summer sometimes because I can feel more focused and connected. This may also be why I love running outdoors too. Music is often inspired by nature and the outdoors. For example, Ludwig van Beethoven got a lot of his inspiration from the woods, birds, and other forest animals. Many famous composers took inspiration from rivers and even the planets of the solar system to make their interpretation of them through music. The music then inspires me to play outside where I can interpret it and truly perform. Thank you for having me, I am honored to speak today.