



## **Eastern Lancaster County School District shifts strings**

**After-school option assailed by critics**

The strings music program is no longer a core academic subject in Eastern Lancaster County School District.

The Elanco school board voted unanimously Monday to follow Superintendent Robert Hollister's recommendation to shift the orchestra program to a co-curriculum, after-school program.

The board's decision outraged dozens of parents and former Garden Spot High School students in the audience, who pleaded with the board to maintain an in-school program led by a full-time certified orchestra instructor.

But the board agreed to hire a part-time music instructor at \$10,000 per year and will send four current music teachers to learn string instruction this summer. The board also agreed to pay a \$1,000 stipend to a district elementary school orchestra instructor.

"It's just not possible. A part-time teacher will be overwhelmed," said Tegan Connor, a 2004 graduate of the Garden Spot strings program who is a graduate student at the University of Pittsburgh.

Hollister in May suggested that the district disband the 50-member strings program when Elanco orchestra teacher Jeff Hackenberger decided to retire after 30 years. Hollister believed the district could save money by eliminating the program and Hackenberger's \$80,000-plus salary.

Hackenberger managed the entire program, even meeting at elementary schools in the district to provide individual, 30-minute string instruction each week to students in the program.

But Hollister reconsidered and offered a compromise after supporters — including several members of a grassroots organization called Save Our Strings — flooded the district office with protests.

Trish Doll, a professional violinist and mother of two music students who launched SOS, said the district's decision to curtail a successful music program is misguided and suggested the orchestra will die a "slow death" as an after-school program.

"The program will be gradually eliminated," Doll said. "It cannot be co-curricular. Kids have jobs, band, sports and other things to do after school."

Loren Martin, Elanco school board president, defended the decision to remove the strings program from the academic curriculum and have it operate with a part-time instructor.

"The administration has done an incredible amount of research in recent weeks about the utilization of staff and structuring a program correctly for the number of student that we have and the number of staff we have," Martin said.

Hollister said recently that the strings program also was squeezed because of time restraints on teachers who are forced to focus on mandated standard testing and requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act.

But Doll and others reminded the board that arts and music are considered core academic subjects under NCLB.

William Briner, whose daughter is in the strings program, said the after-school program will fail and that hiring a part-time instructor serves to "dumb down the string curriculum."

"You're depriving kids of a future in many cases," Briner said. "The children who attend (Elanco) School District schools in the future will lose yet another opportunity of positive growth."

School board member Chuck Trupe challenged Briner's statement.

"We are not taking their ability to get good lessons away from them," Trupe said. "That's your responsibility as parents to provide lessons for them, that's not the government's job to pay for them with tax dollars."

Trupe said he understands that not all parents can afford music lessons.

"That's where the booster clubs come in that are spending tens of thousands of dollars to go to Disney World," Trupe said. "They need to help provide lessons if you can't afford them."