

Computers vs. Real Education

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At our annual Town Budget Meeting, Lori Gibb told us about a program that teaches young children to play the violin. Mrs. Gibb spoke about the need for a string instrument program in the early grades and cited well-known studies that conclude that children develop better learning and reasoning skills with early string instrument education. Yet, even with the growing evidence of their value, many public schools have eliminated such programs while increasing spending on computer technology in the elementary grades.

Mrs. Gibb described a two year-old string instrument program at the Hinsdale and Batcheller Schools that was developed and is implemented by a parent volunteer, Diane Silverio. Diane is an accomplished violinist who plays with the Litchfield Chamber Orchestra, the Farmington Valley Symphony Orchestra and the Torrington Symphony. Last year, Diane had the help of the music teachers at the schools. This year, the superintendent directed the music teachers not to assist Diane, so she has been teaching the program herself. The resistance to this program and the dismissive attitude toward this talented and eager parent are puzzling.

Why is the superintendent opposed to a program with proven benefits to the children? —continued on page 28

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continued from page 17—The likely reason is a philosophical one that is revealed in the education budget. The proposed funding for computer technology increased by 10.33%—from \$293,000 to \$312,000. The education budget priority list includes a \$34,000 computer technician and a \$35,000 computer teacher for the elementary school! There is no funding proposal for a string instrument program.

The Board of Education and the superintendent evidently agree that computer technology is more valuable in a young child's education than an early string music program. The superintendent writes: "Our children's probability of success has been and will be geometrically multiplied with the implementation of our technology plan." On what does he base this incredible statement? Did anyone on the Board of Education question this bald assertion?

Many people believe that investing in

early music programs will achieve more in the long run than investing in computer technology. Early string instrument programs and computer technology are not mutually exclusive, and both can be a part of the curriculum. But early string instrument education should not be eliminated for any reason. If cost is a factor, computer technology should be the first to be reduced. After all, computers are just tools, and ever-changing tools at that.

Most of us never had computer courses in public school, college, or ever. This does not prevent us from now using computer technology, and most people I know (including my mother) have had no difficulty learning to use it. This is because we learned to calculate, write, spell, construct sentences, and think—in other words we were educated—long before computers came into our lives. ▼