

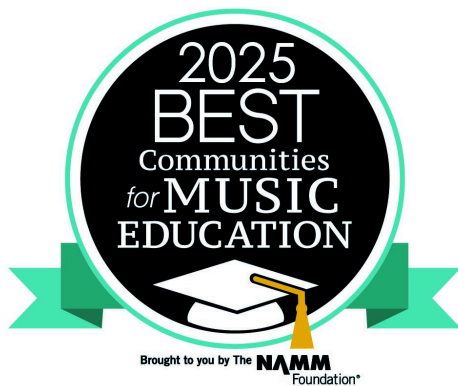


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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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**Suffolk Public Schools Receives National Recognition for “Best Communities for Music Education” for the Third Straight Year**

Suffolk, VA – Suffolk Public Schools has been honored with the Best Communities for Music Education designation from The NAMM Foundation for our outstanding support and commitment to music education. Now in its 26th year, the Best Communities for Music Education designation is awarded to districts that demonstrate outstanding achievement for providing music access and education to all students.



Two awards are given each year: Best Communities for Music Education (BCME) for school districts and the SupportMusic Merit Award (SMMA) for individual school sites. Both reach K-12 schools and districts throughout the U.S. and offer opportunities to increase awareness and support for music programs. Over 1,000 districts and individual school sites (public, private, charter, parochial) were recognized for having the highest commitment to producing exceptional music programs.

“In Suffolk Public Schools, music education is not just a program — it’s a promise we make to every child,” said Dr. Joleen Neighbours, Coordinator of Fine and Performing Arts. “We believe in providing opportunity and access to the arts for all learners of all ages, because we know that music builds confidence, creativity, and community. Being named a Best Community for Music Education is a powerful reminder that Suffolk stands behind its young artists, lifting them with pride, partnership, and purpose. This award is more than a recognition — it is a reflection of our vision and our values. It affirms that what we are building here matters: a community where every note played, every voice lifted, and every dream nurtured through the arts is shaping a

stronger, more connected future. Suffolk Public Schools is proud to lead the way, ensuring that music education remains a right, not a privilege, and that every student's potential is heard, seen, and celebrated."

"When music is a part of a child's education, we're building more than individual skills—we're creating a community where students connect, express themselves, and grow together through a shared love of music that can last a lifetime," said Sarah Haigh, music teacher at Col. Fred Cherry Middle.

"As someone whose life has been deeply shaped by music, I can say without hesitation that Suffolk represents the very best of what a musical community can be, said Jamie Hockady, music teacher at Creekside Elementary. "Music education teaches discipline, sparks creativity, and connects people in ways words alone cannot. For me, music has been more than a passion—it has been a lifeline. It has given me an outlet for emotion, a sense of purpose, and the strength to navigate life's most difficult challenges. I strive to pass on this same love of music to students, empowering them to discover their own voice and resilience through the power of music. Suffolk Public Schools exemplifies this spirit by providing every opportunity available for students to explore, engage with, and be embraced by music at every stage of their journey."

To qualify for the Best Communities designation, Suffolk Public Schools answered detailed questions about funding, graduation requirements, music class participation, instruction time, facilities, support for the music program and community music-making programs. Responses were verified by school officials and reviewed by Responses were verified by school officials and reviewed by the leading arts educational research firm, WolfBrown.

### **About Suffolk Public Schools**

Suffolk Public Schools is the public school division serving the city of Suffolk, Virginia. With a mission to provide student-centered instruction that prepares students to become responsible world citizens and lifelong learners, SPS is committed to fostering a safe and positive learning environment for over 13,000 students and a dedicated staff of over 1,800 professionals. For more information, visit [www.spsk12.net](http://www.spsk12.net).

### **About The NAMM Foundation**

The NAMM Foundation is the charitable arm of the National Association of Music Merchants, the global trade association for the music products industry. The foundation works to remove systemic barriers that limit access to music-making and career pathways in the music industry. By investing in bold ideas and innovative solutions, we strive to build inclusive and thriving musical communities. For more information about The NAMM Foundation, please visit [www.nammfoundation.org](http://www.nammfoundation.org).