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## **Stamford Public Schools Pilots *The Blues and Beyond***

### **A Unique Program That Teaches History through Music**

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Stamford, Conn – Stamford Public Schools (SPS) is the first district in the United States to pilot *The Blues and Beyond*, a 12-part educational program that tells the story of African Americans from slavery to present day through music, narration, video and still images. The program is delivered live using a videoconferencing webinar platform that allows students to interact with program performers and narrators.

Eric Finland, a classical and jazz pianist who holds a bachelor of Fine Arts in Music Performance from Berklee College of Music, is the creative director of *The Blues and Beyond*. The program teaches history by and through the African American musical journey. The program culminates with each student writing their own Blues songs. Select student creations will be set to music and recorded.

As described on the program's website, "*The Blues and Beyond* tells the story of African Americans in the United States from slavery to the present day by exploring and documenting, with music, videos, narration and illustrations, the evolution of African American music alongside U.S. history. From field hollers and camp meetings to old spirituals to the Blues to the popular genres of today, music is the means by which African Americans have told their story."

SPS students from **Dolan Middle School, Cloonan Middle School, Stark Elementary School, Northeast Elementary School** and **Stillmeadow Elementary School** are the very first to participate in this program as part of their music curriculum. The program has been customized for elementary, middle and high school level of instruction.

"It is difficult to find curriculum that can be delivered in a compelling, inspiring and entertaining way through the computer screen," said Natalie McClarty, SPS director of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment – secondary. "This program accomplishes just that. The students are really engaged and eagerly look forward to every session."

According to the organization, the interdisciplinary and culturally responsive program provides rich opportunities for connecting to history, literacy, social studies, social emotional learning, and the evolution of African American music in the United States. It highlights both historical and musical legacies.

"It is impossible to separate the African American journey from the music, or the music from the journey," said Finland. "At a time when there is so much racial tension in our country, we believe that this fresh approach to music and history will help students appreciate how far we have come as a country, but also how far we still have to go."

The program is co-narrated by Singer, Songwriter, Producer and Musician Adam Taylor along with Vocalist and Educator Anastasia René.

For more information about the musicians involved or the program, visit [The Blues and Beyond](#) website.

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[Stamford Public Schools \(SPS\)](#) comprises more than 16,000 students, over 1,500 professionals, and 21 schools, including seven magnet schools and three International Baccalaureate sites. SPS has a total of 13 elementary schools, five middle schools and three high schools. The mission of the Stamford Public Schools is to provide an education that cultivates productive habits of mind, body and heart in every student.

SPS is proud that our district is as rich in diversity as it is in talent. We have students from many cultural backgrounds and geographic locations—as demonstrated by the more than 70 different languages spoken in the homes of our families. SPS offers our students a learning experience rich in cultural diversity and reflective of the global society in which they will work and live.