

KIDS EMPOWERED BY YOUR SUPPORT

Celebrating 20 Years

OF MUSIC EDUCATION IN BRIDGEPORT CT



Founder Rob Silvan in 2004

Music emanated from a stairwell at an elementary school in Bridgeport, CT. Students passing by glanced in to see a few children learning how to play the piano and asked if they could have lessons too. That was 20 years ago.

Initiated by Rob Silvan, a local jazz musician, composer, and music director, KEYS Inc. (short for Kids Empowered by Your Support) began with a portable keyboard in the only space available at Columbus Elementary School in Bridgeport CT. Rob shared, "I founded KEYS in 2004 because I believe that all children benefit from music, especially through personalized one-on-one instruction. My belief stems from my own music education, experience as a musician, and years as a piano teacher."

- This belief evolved into an independent music education program that operates in partnership with Bridgeport schools, providing one-to-one music lessons in various disciplines to over 5,600 students from kindergarten to 12th grade. All services are provided free of charge, including instruments, supplies, and top-notch instruction by a faculty of 40 - many of whom are local professional artists. KEYS also offers a summer music program to prevent learning loss and provide job opportunities for KEYS high school graduates.

"Our program stands out by offering consistent music education to students throughout their school years, even if they change schools or relocate nearby. This fosters years of steady mentorship that develops genuine connections with our students and their families," explains Karen Cobham, KEYS Executive Director. Notably, all KEYS students graduate from high school, with many continuing their musical studies in college. Karen Cobham emphasizes that regardless of their path after high school, through music education all students gain essential social-emotional skills crucial for success in life.

Unfortunately, not all students have the same access to a high-quality music education. School districts such as Bridgeport are underfunded, and family resources are limited. School bands are often eliminated when a director retires, or course scheduling makes it impossible, leaving a void for a student musician to continue lessons and have ensemble experience.

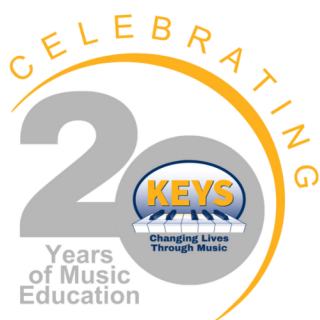
This is where KEYS bridges the gap.

KEYS provides an academic advantage for Bridgeport students through a music education that creates knowledge, builds confidence, and breaks down barriers to opportunity.

Audie Szymanski can attest to the positive impact of a KEYS music education on his life. He shares, "KEYS granted me a scholarship for individual violin studies and enrolled me in the Saturday morning orchestra. The summer camp provided orchestral experiences, musical workshops, meals, and more - all free of charge! As a reserved 7th grader, it was a dream come true. I eagerly anticipate passing on the musical gift from KEYS to the next generation of musicians." Audie, who began as a KEYS violin student at age 12, pursued a music education degree in college and continued as a KEYS intern, now serves as the KEYS Orchestra Director - a source of inspiration and a superb teacher for future KEYS students.



KEYS Orchestra Director and former student Audie Szymanski in 2024



KEYS is proud to celebrate 20 years of music education in Bridgeport schools. They welcome you to join them and commemorate this significant milestone at their annual benefit on November 8th at the Fairfield Theatre Company in Fairfield, CT. For more details about KEYS, please visit [keysmusic.org](https://www.keysmusic.org).