

Action alert: Class size matters!

This coming Monday, May 22, the Madison School Board will vote on a set of priority actions that the MMSD administration would like to implement before the board votes on the 2017-18 budget at the end of June. Administration is requesting early approval for adding positions—most of which are not based in classrooms—to support Pathways expansion, bilingual education, early learning and other priorities they have identified.

These budget items earmarked for early approval do not address a high priority overwhelmingly identified by district parents and staff: smaller class sizes. If they are approved on Monday, it will tie up close to \$1.5 million in funding that could be used to reduce class sizes across the district, especially in high-poverty schools. The administration's priority actions, and the specific actions targeted for early approval, are listed on pages 7-8 of this document: <http://ow.ly/Ybnf30bR2KP>.

Class sizes in the MMSD have crept upward the past few years. In response to declining enrollment and budget cuts, **the district has eliminated approximately 140 teaching positions since the 2014-15 school year and embraced changes in state law that provide an option to remove caps on class size at low-income schools.** As a result, some of our elementary classrooms have more than 25 students, middle school classrooms sometimes exceed 30 students, and high school classes may have 35 or more students enrolled. The 2017-18 MMSD budget does not currently include significant funding to restore the teaching positions we have lost.

Small class sizes matter for many reasons including closing achievement gaps, meeting the needs of English language learners, inclusion of students with disabilities, implementation of the Behavior Education Plan, school climate, and building positive relationships in our school communities. An op-ed recently published in the Cap Times, written by a MMSD educator, makes a compelling argument for reducing class sizes. (<http://ow.ly/oyoM30bSs0j>.)

Before Monday, May 22, please take a few minutes to email the MMSD Board of Education letting them know that pre-approval of budget items is not the right approach. Brief email messages are the most effective. Here are some points you can include in your message:

- Include your name, role in the district (parent, staff, student, volunteer, citizen, etc.), and school(s) (if applicable)
- Tell them you oppose early approval of the administration's priority actions (feel free to pick out specific actions you do not think should be considered for early approval, or to make a blanket statement that you oppose early approval of all identified priority actions). Approval of these priorities should be considered when the board votes on the full budget at the end of June. Early approval will make it harder to include meaningful class size reduction, as well as other changes identified through community input, in the final budget.

- While the priority actions identified by the administration are important, reducing class sizes should be a high priority.
- The 2017-18 MMSD budget does not do enough to address growing class sizes in the district. Smaller classes are a proven way to address achievement gaps, particularly in the early grades and at high-poverty schools, and are important at all grade levels (feel free to include reasons listed above).
- Tell them you support spending on smaller classes at our schools. The 2016 referendum gives the district additional budget flexibility that should be leveraged to address class size.
- If you have a connection with one or more MMSD schools, share a personal example that demonstrates the benefits of small classes or the challenges of large classes.
- Thank the school board members for considering the priorities of families, students, staff and the community when making decisions for our district, including budget decisions.

Here are the email addresses for individual MMSD School Board members:

Seat 1: Anna Moffit, ammoffit@madison.k12.wi.us

Seat 2: Mary Burke, mburke2@madison.k12.wi.us

Seat 3: Dean Loumos, dgloumos@madison.k12.wi.us

Seat 4: James Howard, jlhoward@madison.k12.wi.us

Seat 5: TJ Mertz, tjmertz@madison.k12.wi.us

Seat 6: Kate Toews, ketoews@madison.k12.wi.us

Seat 7: Nicki Vander Meulen, nkvdndermeul@madison.k12.wi.us

Student rep: Ameya Sanyal, asanyal2@madison.k12.wi.us

You can reach all school board members (except the student representative) at board@madison.k12.wi.us. Email sent to this address will also go to district administration.

If you are interested in providing public comments at the May 22 school board meeting, you can find instructions at <http://www.madisonscape.com/school-board/public-comments/>. The meeting is in the Doyle Building auditorium at 6pm.

Thanks so much for reaching out to the Madison School Board about this important issue! Together, we can make a difference.

Madison School Community Alliance for Public Education (SCAPE)

Madison Teachers, Inc. (MTI) Action Committee