

Dear Editor:

As Madison West High School parents who care deeply about the Madison schools, we urge district leadership to slow its implementation of the High School Alignment Process Plan, so that all members of the community, including parents, students and teachers, have a voice and are at the table as different options are explored.

Last fall, hundreds of students walked out of West to protest the proposed changes and many parents and community members raised questions and concerns. Today, many questions remain unanswered, and parents, teachers and students have been effectively sidelined from key discussions and decisions.

The proposed changes have been presented as strategies to 1) align all four high schools with each other and with state and national standards; 2) close the achievement gap; and 3) address concerns by parents of Talented and Gifted students.

While we strongly support some of the plan's strategies to close the achievement gap, including the use of mentors and increased focus on parent involvement, we have concerns that more grouping of students by perceived ability into freshman and sophomore classes will only accentuate the achievement gap and further segregate students. We are concerned that the current plan:

- 1) May eliminate some of the most innovative and inspiring classes that make West an engaging and nationally-recognized school for many students. We worry that many of West's talented teachers who are committed to equitable and socially just educational strategies would lose the autonomy to teach diverse classes in ways that play to their strengths and expertise.
- 2) Further racially and socio-economically segregates students. This is a problem for all students and their parents who care about living in a community where people can understand and relate to those who do not share similar backgrounds or experiences. Many West students who were leaders in the fall protests spoke eloquently about West's rich diversity and argued strongly that more segregation would be of great harm to *all* students.
- 3) Disregards the knowledge and expertise of our best teachers and administrators, and puts expediency before the concerns and discussion with families, students, and staff.

Many of us have been actively working to eliminate the achievement gap for many years, and simply do not see how this proposal offers a solution. We see no benefit in segregating at-risk students into specific tracks and increasing AP coursework at the potential expense of high-level, engaging, interactive classes that are currently open to all students. We believe that aligning standards across the district is an important and welcome step, but we must also recognize the serious challenges that well-respected

educators have posed to increased standardized testing and realize that if this is not done carefully we run the risk of turning high school into a prolonged prep course for the ACT.

We urge the district to more fully include our talented high school teachers, a broad range of families, and the students themselves in examining what is truly working across the country to both close the achievement gap and more fully engage the broad range of high school students, to ensure that all leave high school prepared for successful careers and lives.

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