

2 February 2005

Superintendent Rainwater
Madison Metropolitan School District
545 West Dayton Street
Madison, WI 53703-1995

Dear Superintendent Rainwater,

Thank you for coming to Warner Park to meet with East High School parents and to share your thoughts on the hiring of the next principal. We appreciate your time and your candor.

We are writing to you on behalf of the PTO coalition of the East feeder schools. We would like to follow up with you on several suggestions that were discussed at the meeting on Tuesday.

(1) It was questioned why district hiring policy only allows sophomores and juniors to serve on the principal selection committee. You remarked that it was the first you had heard of this issue and would need to look into it. We would like to reiterate that many of us would like to see one senior serve on the committee. Not only are they older and wiser, but also they tend to be much more outspoken. In addition, they have attended East under the leadership of Milt McPike, Catherine Tillman, and now Loren Rathert, which gives them a breadth of experience not shared by other students at East.

(2) It was proposed that a forum be held at East High School with the final three candidates so that parents could meet them. As you know, this is what the University does with candidates for the post of dean so that the staff and students can meet them, ask questions, and get a better sense of the person applying for the job. You replied that you would need to think about this proposal. Given the very strong interest in the selection of the next principal, we hope you will schedule a forum. This would be a great opportunity for people to get to know the candidates. In addition, it would give the candidates a chance to show their skills and an opportunity to meet with the East community.

(3) It was requested that you meet with the members of the selection committee once they had ranked the top three candidates to get more feedback on their rankings. You responded that you would be happy to, but you were not sure how it would work. You also offered that you believed the rankings by each committee member were enough information for you. We urge you to provide the selection committee with more meaningful input. As you stated in your presentation, the committee members end up spending a day with each candidate. A number cannot adequately represent their views and knowledge.

Given the strong interest everyone has in the outcome of the next hire, it would be very beneficial for you to give committee members an opportunity to elaborate on their rankings. It would not need to be an exceedingly long meeting. You could limit the time spent on each candidate. It could be as simple as you asking members who ranked a particular candidate very low what their concerns are, and conversely, those who ranked a candidate very high what their accolades are. This would allow you to make a more informed decision.

We would like to hear back from you on these three proposals. They seem quite simple to implement and do not change the process in any fundamental way, yet they allow for more input from our community on this important decision. Although it has been stated at several public meetings that there is a loss of trust on the east side, there is also hope given the turnaround that has occurred at both Sherman and Black Hawk Middle Schools. We want what you want for East — a strong leader who will be there for students, who will support the excellent teaching staff, and who will advocate for East at every level. Let's work together to make it happen.

(4) Finally, we would like to set the record straight on one side issue brought up at the meeting that we feel is very important. A parent asked a question about the high number of low-income students at EHS and the shortfall in funding to meet their needs. Your response was that the poverty numbers at East are similar to West and the other high schools. This is not accurate. East's poverty rate is 39%, compared with only 25% for West and Memorial, and 29% for La Follette and Shabazz. Further, if you look at poverty levels at the feeder elementary schools, the east side carries a bigger poverty load than the rest of the high school attendance areas. Of the 12 elementary schools with 50% or greater poverty, only 1 feeds into Memorial, 2 into La Follette, 3 into West, while 6 feed into East. It is important that this is recognized and understood.

It needs to be addressed by an equity policy, which provides for extra allocations for schools that have a large number of low-income students. If we want to close the achievement gap, then funds must follow these students so that they can succeed. It is great, as you mentioned, that West has the personal resources to rebuild their theater because 75% of their population is above poverty with a large percentage that is affluent. That, however, does nothing to address the needs and limited resources of the East High School attendance area. We urge you to follow your equity policy to assure that the students with the greatest needs are well served by this city and its school district. It should not be left up to the individual neighborhoods to provide.

Sincerely,

Kari Douglas & Jeff Fleinblatt
PTA/O Co-Presidents Lake View

Patty Castillo & Kathy McCosky
PTA/O Co-Presidents Gompers

Jody Murphy
PTA/O Representative Lindbergh

Michelle Brokaw
PTA/O Representative Mendota

Barb Kyle & Cindy Maitland
PTA/O Presidents Blackhawk MS

Kathy Welling
PSCT Chairperson Emerson

Carolyn Clow
PTA/O President Hawthorne

Wendy Sauve
PSCT Representative Emerson

Karen Morrison
PTA/O Presidents Sandburg

Lawrie Kobza
Sherman PACTS, Sherman MS

Mike Wygocki
PTG President Marquette/Lapham

Stuart Seaborne
PTA/O President Lowell

Mike Park
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Greg Lofgren
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Jim Powell
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Jill Jokela
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Lisa Wiese
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Vernon Blackwell
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David Cohen
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Cc: MMSD Board of Education
Madison Newspapers, Isthmus