

Guest Editorial to the Simpson Street Free Press

Dear [Editor](#):

Thank you for your comments regarding the reductions in Madison Metropolitan School District's 4th and 5th grade elementary strings program and other Fine Arts programs. I personally know the importance of the strings program. I played the violin many years ago as a student at Lindbergh Elementary School. I continue to support Fine Arts programming. My [board motions](#), budget amendments and voting record reflect those priorities. However, given our budgetary challenges I cannot make a strong commitment to any program in the future.

The reason that I cannot make this commitment is the reason for the threats to fine arts and public education funding itself. The MMSD like every other district in this state has a very difficult challenge with the state imposed revenue limits, state and federal mandates and high community expectations. The state imposed revenue caps allow a district to increase spending by only 2.6% every year. The percentage of everything else needed to operate the school district such as salaries, benefits, equipment, textbooks and utilities continue to increase beyond 2.6%. This leaves a "gap" in the budget, which in order to make up means we have to cut services or ask local taxpayers to increase their taxes to exceed the revenue cap. This is why the majority of the members of the Madison School Board voted to ask the community via referendum on May 24th for additional money for operating expenses. Although, this referendum failed, members of the school board made budget amendments that kept the 4th and 5th grade elementary strings program continuing at least one day a week. Additionally, the board decided to make additional cuts to restore smaller class sizes in elementary school gym, music and art classes. Making these

decisions were very difficult and probably even more difficult for the Madison community to understand.

In closing, I share your feelings of frustration regarding the reduction of services to our school children. This is a very complex problem that is not only happening in Madison but around the state. For instance, the Florence County School District decided to close due to fiscal limitations that made it impossible to continue to operate an effective school district. I assure you that service reductions are not just targeted toward Fine Arts although very vocal advocates continue to make that assumption. Reductions have also been made in sports, academic class sizes, special education, bilingual resources, library services, building custodians, administration and other departments to the total of around \$8 million dollars this year. If state and federal school financing does not change, coupled with the non-passage of future operating referenda will force the school board to make even more difficult decisions that affect our school district.

Although, the circumstances of school finance make things difficult, I am committed to providing a quality educational experience for all 25,000 students in this district. As a member of the Board of Education, I will always be equitable in reductions of service and try to think of alternatives for the MMSD to continue having a quality Fine Arts program as well as other educational and extra-curricular activities for students to learn and enjoy.

Johnny Winston, Jr. was elected to the board of education in 2004. Mr. Winston is currently Vice President and chairperson of the Finance and Operations committee. He is employed as a firefighter for the City of Madison. He is the father of three daughters including two school district graduates.