

Letters of a teachers' union to Franklin School

This document shows why the teachers' union objected to the restructuring and how Deb Mercier responded to it.

Deborah Mercier, Principal
Franklin Elementary School
305 West Lakeside Street
Madison, WI 53715

Re: ESL Program

Dear Deb:

It has come to our attention that the administration is considering the idea of abandoning the ESL program at Franklin in order to combine the ESL allocation with regular classroom allocation in an effort to lower class size. Although MTI agrees with the idea of lowering class sizes, this initiative raises several potential problems which must be addressed on behalf of the ESL teachers. Specifically, as you may know, the establishment of an ESL program is a statutory requirement in the State of Wisconsin. Therefore, those teachers have completed course work to earn a certification in ESL instruction. Additionally, ESL instruction is most critical when students with limited English proficiency are young and at the lowest levels of English proficiency. The severity of the students needs are categorized by the Department of Public Instruction to enable those students that are most in need to receive the requisite services. Mainstreaming these students, even in small classes, will not provide them with the type of instruction required to prepare them for their educational career.

In addition, it is my understanding that you intend to obtain certification for regular classroom teachers in ESL through the University of Wisconsin-Madison. This raises a second question of who will pay for the classes and the time spent taking same. If the *District* intends to do so, this would be considered a *prohibited practice* by MTI. The District would then be required to extend similar benefits to all members of the Collective Bargaining Unit. However, should the District require the regular classroom teachers to pay for the classes, they should be made aware of this fact prior to the implementation of your program.

Finally, this decision must be made in accordance with the terms and conditions of the Collective Bargaining Agreement. Therefore, should the ESL program be terminated at Franklin Elementary School, the additional regular education allocation must first be offered to teachers in the building, and in the event that the remaining staff is not certified, surplus decisions will have to be made prior to July 1, 1998.

MTI believes that small class sizes are important, however, it is just as important that LEP students are afforded an equal educational opportunity. The current proposal which you have put forth would seem to jeopardize such an opportunity. MTI believes strongly that Franklin Elementary School should have *both* small class sizes and a valid ESL program. It is unfortunate that this initiative is creating divisiveness among staff when state mandated Revenue Controls are at the root of the problem. Should you wish to clarify the proposal which you have put forth, please respond to this matter at your earliest convenience. We look forward to working with you in this effort.

Sincerely,

May 4, 1998

Re: Letter Received April 29, 1998

Dear Mr.

I received your letter regarding the ESL program at Franklin last Thursday, April 30 and was very troubled by your comments. In an effort to clarify for you what is or is not happening at Franklin pertaining to ESL programming, I hope the following information is useful for you in guiding your thinking.

First, there is absolutely no intent to "abandon" or "terminate" ESL programming at Franklin. Franklin serves a diverse group of students including students with *Limited English Proficiency*. Franklin will continue to serve these students for 98-99 school year and beyond. However, it is my responsibility to oversee all of the programs at Franklin and to coordinate improvement

efforts both with my staff, as well as other administrators such as [REDACTED] who is in charge of ESL programming for the district. Because of this responsibility to work toward the absolute highest level of instruction for all of our students, I will continue to explore efforts to improve instruction and programming for the children attending Franklin School in collaboration with Franklin staff and M.M.S.D. administration including the Board of Education. During any kind of exploration of service delivery models for students, principals and other M.M.S.D. administrators must always keep in close contact with D.P.I. and the statutory requirements. I have met with D.P.I. ESL administrator [REDACTED] and D.P.I. Title I administrator [REDACTED]. I will continue to meet with D.P.I. throughout the exploration process and beyond because I too understand the necessity and purpose of remaining in compliance. I assure you, Franklin School will not proceed with any program changes that do not have D.P.I. approval or M.M.S.D. administrative approval.

In your second paragraph, you question whether I am trying to obtain ESL certification for teachers and the parameters of the contract if I was going to facilitate this kind of initiative. In fact, some teachers have asked me what the certification requirements are for ESL. I have told them that I do not know specific course work but that I would contact the University of Wisconsin- Madison since D.P.I. could not provide me with this information. I have merely been investigating course requirements on behalf of teachers and working to give them as much accurate information as possible. Certainly the union would not object to this activity. Because you have raised this issue, I have been advised also by labor relations, specifically Alma Gonzalez-Neimeiser, that providing information is well within the scope of my position. At this time, there is no initiative to pay for any course work for teachers at Franklin outside of the already established staff development.

In regards to your recognition of the surplus deadline, July 1, 1998, I will be adhering to this and all other contractual deadlines. In the event that Franklin School undergoes program changes, staff would be reassigned within their license at Franklin or possibly surplus and reassigned at another M.M.S.D. school. Nevertheless, the July 1 deadline will be upheld. It is also important to note that at this time I am not anticipating a surplus of any 1.0 position.

Lastly, I was extremely disappointed to read that you feel that our efforts to improve ourselves by exploring a range of options that will benefit students, including ESL students, has been divisive to the Franklin staff. I am in close contact daily with a large percentage of teachers and staff at Franklin and believe the staff has been working well together both in the realm of professional and personal support for each other. You must remember that our efforts to explore options to improve ourselves came from staff members. Teachers have brought issues to be addressed to me in hopes of creating improvement for children at Franklin. My efforts reflect their desire for change.

In conclusion, I sincerely hope that my response to your letter clarifies some of the misinformations you have obtained. I also hope that in the future you and I can communicate directly so that you have accurate information at your disposal.

Sincerely,

Deborah Mercier
Principal