

A letter of a school board member who opposed
the request of Title I waiver in 1998

June 2, 1998

Board member

Ms. Deb Hoffman Mercier, Principal
Franklin Elementary School
305 W. Lakeside Street
Madison, WI 53715

Dear Deb:

I am writing to voice my concerns about the Title I waiver application has been handled. Unfortunately, the issue of whether or not this proposal would be a positive change for Franklin is unclear because the process has not been open.

I have always been proud to claim Franklin and Randall as my children's school. Even though my children haven't attended Franklin for two years, I have deep ties to the school. During the seven years my four children attended Franklin, I had been a member of the original SIP Committee, a regular volunteer in the classroom and with the breakfast program, as well as a mentor. It was a privilege to be involved in a school where the staff and the parents worked cooperatively to provide the best environment for all our children to learn.

There has been a tradition at Franklin School of open and honest communication. From the beginning of the pairing, the principals, staff and parents worked together to make this unique opportunity a success. I am very distressed that communication seems to have broken down at Franklin.

When a proposal that so dramatically changes a school is made, it would make sense to bring together the partners in the school. I believe that you should have fully informed the staff before the waiver was requested giving them the opportunity to hear of your plan, ask questions and fully understand what your intentions were. By not doing so, an atmosphere of uncertainty and distrust has been created in the school. I also believe that you should have called a meeting to explain the waiver request to the entire school population. As a Board member, I was not pleased to find out about the waiver request in May when it was apparent the process had been in progress for months before that. I cannot imagine how parents who have a language barrier that already makes communication difficult must feel about the lack of information about this issue.

I realize that smaller class size has been the highest priority at many meetings, but I don't believe that concern necessarily translates into a waiver request. Since all the details of your proposal haven't been made available, it hasn't been possible to consider the pros and cons of the plan. It has been impossible to assess how this plan will be implemented to arrive at a 16:1 ratio and how it will affect students and teachers.

I am concerned the impression has been given that parents and the community have been included in the decision making process (see Supt. v's letter). While it is not the role of parents to dictate how the school is run, we can help to ensure that all our children receive the best education possible. If there had been open discussion of this plan, letters of support from parents and teachers may have been possible. Instead we are now reading about this plan on the Wisconsin State Journal editorial page.

You are very fortunate to have a committed, experienced and professional staff at Franklin. They set high standards for the children and themselves. It seems a shame that their years of experience were not called upon to help reduce class size at Franklin.

I hope you will have the opportunity to reexamine how you went about this waiver request and use it as a learning experience. Much of the distress that has been caused could have been avoided if there had been opportunities to be informed and ask questions about the waiver application before it was submitted. It is a real skill to bring diverse viewpoints together to reach a common ground. The final product may not look like the original plan but it is a much stronger proposal because the larger community is invested in it.

Sincerely,

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Copy to Franklin-Randall PTO Board
 Interested Staff