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## reducing FRC

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**Signe Leirfallom** <sigleirfall@gmail.com>  
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Wed, Mar 26, 2025 at 10:21 PM

I am writing in support of Kristine Asanovich who runs the amazing Family Resource Center at Franklin School, and for the program in general across MCPS.

Children cannot learn, much less thrive, unless their basic needs are met. The Family Resource Center provides food, clothes, trusted adults, and connections to services and opportunities for families in transition, crisis, or facing economic hardship. To have these services integrated into each school is critical in order to meet children where they are, and provide the trust and support they need to build solid foundations as they grow and learn. I cannot think of a better program to help lift kids up and ease some of the challenges for families in need. I have been so heartened and encouraged by the community of students, staff, and parents at Franklin School, due in no small part to the work of Kristine and the FRC.

It is a mistake to reduce these services or spread the staff thin across schools. Kids and families cannot predict when they need help, and are not as likely to reach out for help without knowing and trusting the dedicated staff at their own school. I realize our schools are going through budget and funding challenges. But these services are not optional or extra. Please retain the Family Resource Center program in full at Franklin School and every other school where there is a need.

Sincerely,

Signe Leirfallom  
1857 S 13th St W  
Missoula, MT 59801

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## Educational cuts

2 messages

**Brittnee Crane** <bncrane@outlook.com>

Thu, Mar 27, 2025 at 11:05 AM

To: "publiccomment@mcpsmt.org" <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>, "mhill@mcpsmt.org" <mhill@mcpsmt.org>, "tlaboski@mcpsmt.org" <tlaboski@mcpsmt.org>

Cc: "javgeris@mcpsmt.org" <javgeris@mcpsmt.org>, "kgammill@mcpsmt.org" <kgammill@mcpsmt.org>, "woldperson@mcpsmt.org" <woldperson@mcpsmt.org>, "chayes@mcpsmt.org" <chayes@mcpsmt.org>, "kmercer@mcpsmt.org" <kmercer@mcpsmt.org>, "awalker-andrews@mcpsmt.org" <awalker-andrews@mcpsmt.org>, "mwhicher@mcpsmt.org" <mwhicher@mcpsmt.org>, "awake@mcpsmt.org" <awake@mcpsmt.org>, "jwalsh@mcpsmt.org" <jwalsh@mcpsmt.org>, "kwitt@mcpsmt.org" <kwitt@mcpsmt.org>, "ldavey@mcpsmt.org" <ldavey@mcpsmt.org>

To whom it may concern:

I hope this message finds you well. I am writing to express my deepest concern regarding the cuts that threaten the position of my son's kindergarten teacher at Chief Charlo Elementary.

This particular teacher has been an exceptional educator, demonstrating unparalleled dedication to my boy and the rest of her students. She has an amazing ability to engage and aspire to the young minds of the students, which has made a profound impact on my son. She has a personal relationship with each and every one of her students. This has genuinely complemented my son's journey of having to begin taking medication. Without her, assessing my son's struggles and creating a pathway to improvement would have been far more difficult.

Mrs. Trowbridge continuously goes above and beyond for her students to create a nurturing and stimulating environment. The loss of Mrs. Trowbridge would be significant, depriving future students of such a wonderful and positively fostering environment.

It is disheartening to think that such a valued member of our school community might be forced to leave. Taking away the number of classes allowed in each grade is not going to benefit the youth. Increasing class sizes will decrease the ability to foster the growth of our future.

I urge you to reconsider the decisions being made that are leading to the cutting of these positions.

Sincerely,  
Brittnee Crane  
bncrane@outlook.com

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## Protecting FIT/FRC positions

1 message

Jaclyn Vosler <voslerjackie@gmail.com>

Thu, Mar 27, 2025 at 8:29 PM

To: javgeris@mcpsmt.org, ldavey@mcpsmt.org, kgammill@mcpsmt.org, chayes@mcpsmt.org, kmercer@mcpsmt.org, woldperson@mcpsmt.org, awake@mcpsmt.org, awalker-andrews@mcpsmt.org, jwalsh@mcpsmt.org, mwhicher@mcpsmt.org, kwitt@mcpsmt.org

Cc: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org, mhill@mcpsmt.org

Good evening MCPS Trustees and Superintendent Hill,

First, I want to say thank you. I know each of you has a role that requires long hours, and it's becoming increasingly difficult to meet the needs and demands of our society. We recognize and appreciate the time and energy you invest in our school district and community.

I'm reaching out today because I just received notice that we may see significant cuts and changes to the structure of our FRC/FIT program. I wanted to reiterate, as a classroom teacher, the deep importance of these services. I don't believe a consolidated regional model, as I've seen proposed, could effectively meet the needs of our students – the number of families that depend on these services is too high. That's the most obvious argument here, but I also want to encourage us to go beyond that in our reasoning. Our students are more than just numbers, and the impact of these roles goes beyond any quantitative data we could show you. The number of families served by these programs is not just a reflection of need – it's a reflection of relationships, which have been carefully cultivated to build (and repair) trust so that people will actually seek out and accept the support available to them. These positions are most effective when staff are regularly present and visible – in our buildings and at our school events – and when families are greeted by the same faces during subsequent years of enrollment.

Our Meadow Hill FIT coordinator, Laura Reardon, (who has poured her heart into our school for nine years now) literally helps get, and keep, students in the building. Her full and normalized integration into our school community has helped to reduce the stigma around asking for and receiving help, which again increases the families we are able to reach. Right now we are seeing high levels of self-advocacy from our students when it comes to accessing support. Students know *who* "Ms. Laura" is, *where* her office is, and *how* she can support them. If Laura leaves, every relationship she has goes with her. Please understand how much we depend on these connections to serve our kids well – Especially with the amount of turnover this district sees in both building and district level administration. Our families deserve to be seen and known, and without stability in staffing we can't achieve and sustain this.

Furthermore, these positions do not just connect students with resources and services — they serve as critical liaisons between various stakeholders who need to communicate and coordinate with us in order to support our students who are simultaneously navigating multiple systems, with multiple community partners responsible for their care and supervision. This collaboration and coordination requires frequent and flexible access to students and buildings.

A few other concerns I have about decreasing the hours we see our FIT/FRC colleagues:

- Many of the things discussed with FIT/FRC staff can involve sensitive information, and being able to have these conversations in-person helps protect student/family privacy.
- FIT/FRC staff assist during a number of crises throughout the year, and our ability to adequately and appropriately respond in these moments depends on our timely access to these people and their skills, expertise, and connections.

This program is an important protective factor for children who are navigating school with very heavy things on their proverbial plates each day, and these positions are filled by some of the most passionate and dedicated people in our district. They are wearing so many hats, working so many hours, advocating in so many ways, and making salaries that are a fraction of what they truly deserve. I'd love to share the specific and meaningful ways I have seen Laura support

the safety and success of the students we work with, but those stories belong to our kids and their families. Just know that having her in our building regularly equips and empowers me to be a better teacher, and what she does has a lasting positive impact on the well-being and academic achievement of my students.

I recognize that funding decisions are always difficult, but this particular program is a crucial piece of our collective commitment to providing a high-quality public education for all students. I'm hopeful, for everyone's sake, that we'll work together to find a way to protect these positions.

Respectfully,

Jaclyn Vosler

Spanish teacher at Meadow Hill *(Note: I'm currently on leave and out of state with family until April, or I would have attended the board meeting to provide public comment last night)*

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**FIT/FRC**

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**Dianne McBride** <dianнемcbride@gmail.com>  
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Sat, Mar 29, 2025 at 4:21 PM

Dear Trustees,

I am a life skills special education teacher in MCPS and I am writing to share with you how unbelievably important and necessary the Family Resource Center Coordinator is at our school, Meadow Hill Middle School. Laura Reardon has filled that role for several years and she has been outstanding for each and every one of them. We have over 30 students at our school who are served under the McKinney Vento Act and Laura has years-long relationships with each of those families as their siblings move through Meadow Hill. Having a trusted point of contact at school when your family is in crisis is important beyond words. She builds relationships with families and students as well as staff and she is our go-to resource when one of our families is in some sort of crisis. Our families that are experiencing sudden homelessness, food insecurity or lack of other basic necessities like shampoo or toothpaste depend on Laura and the services she provides for our families and students. I have personally seen the comfort that she has provided over the years to my life skills students and families. She always responds quickly with empathy and compassion. I understand the need to save money but I beg of you to cut elsewhere. The loss of Laura and her compatriots at other schools would be outsized compared to the amount of money saved. The cost benefit analysis doesn't work in this instance.

Sincerely,

Dianne McBride  
Life Skills Teacher  
Meadow Hill Middle School

## FRC consideration

Misty Jarvis <mjarvis@mcpsmt.org>

Mon, Mar 31, 2025 at 11:15 AM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org, Jeffrey Avgeris <javgeris@mcpsmt.org>, Lisa Davey <ldavey@mcpsmt.org>, Christina Hayes <chayes@mcpsmt.org>, Koan Mercer <kmercer@mcpsmt.org>, Wilena Old Person <woldperson@mcpsmt.org>, Ann Wake <awake@mcpsmt.org>, Arlene Walker-Andrews <awalker-andrews@mcpsmt.org>, Jenny Walsh <jwalsh@mcpsmt.org>, Megan Meg Whicher <mwhicher@mcpsmt.org>, Keegan Witt <kwitt@mcpsmt.org>, Micah Hill <mhill@mcpsmt.org>

To whom it may concern:

My name is Misty Jarvis, I am a Paraeducator at Hawthorne Elementary. I have worked in the Resource room and now currently work in the Extended Resource 3-5 Grade Room. I am writing today with my concerns regarding the changes proposed for the Family Resource Center coordinator positions in the Missoula County Public Schools. This letter will be lengthy but I encourage you to read it all. It encompasses the things our FRC coordinator does for our school and I feel like administration and the school board may not understand all she does.

As a paraeducator in special education, I have taken many childhood courses which all agree on one thing, if a child's basic needs are not met, they cannot learn. If children's basic needs aren't met, they cannot learn. Unfortunately students family's are not always able to meet them and I know we have been privileged to offer that help here at school. If we did not have the Family Resource Center coordinator Megan Meyers, or if she was given the responsibility of multiple schools, many of our students would not have their BASIC NEEDS met. Food, water, shelter, and sleep, clean clothes and comfortable shoes for the weather. Not only for families in transition(unsheltered. Not only for families that are low income, but families that were considered middle class but had a life event that devastated their income. Losing a job, a medical issue, a car breaking down. As I am sure you are aware, Missoula is in a housing crisis right now. Missoula has extremely high living costs and they continue to rise when pay is not. Many people are struggling financially, which includes basic needs for their children. I have heard countless stories of how thankful the community is to have the FRC. How they literally would not have had christmas gifts or dinner for their family. I would like to explain in detail what Megan Meyers has done for my students, and our whole school. In no particular order,

- When our administrative secretary at the front office is out, not just anyone can cover for her. Megan is our go to if we cannot get a substitute to cover the front office from the district, which is often especially on short notice.
- She builds rapport with our students who need a Check in/Check out each day. She is that sweet encouraging spot to check in, especially if a student had a hard day.
- She hosts social groups and offers incentives to our chronically absent students who are having a hard time at home and at school and need some extra support.
- Coordinating Thanksgiving dinners with the help of the Good Fellows program.
- Coordinating Christmas meals with the help of the Good Fellows program.
- Coordinating and making Christmas possible for SO many families. FORTY EIGHT families just last year. Families, not just children. So much planning goes into this to make sure each child has a gift they want, need, something to wear and a book to read, wrapped and ready before the holiday break. It is a HUGE task just for Hawthorne alone.
- The FRC helps with gas cards for families struggling with transportation
- Whenever there is a school event, Megan makes sure every student has what they need. Sometimes that is a towel and swim trunks that fit. Sometimes that's tennis shoes to go on an outdoor field trip, or a white shirt and jeans that fit for their holiday program.
- SHOES. So. many. shoes. Snow boots in the winter. Tennis shoes for PE and for children coming in shoes that don't fit or aren't safe for running on the playground.
- SO many pants and underwear for children who get their clothes wet by accident at recess or have accidents. Those items never make it back so restocking constantly.
- Hair ties, hair brushes, hair detangling spray, shampoo, and conditioner for children who come to school with matted hair and don't have those supplies at home.

- Laundry supplies and money for the coin operated system at the Meadowlark especially.
- Toothpaste, toothbrush, and body wipes for children not coming to school clean.
- Period supplies. Yes, in elementary school. Unfortunately we have had many students start their period while at school. So Megan put together some little pouches with a pad, clean underwear and a body wipe for the office and teachers to keep if they have a student who needs one.
- Putting together the Empower packs (extra meals and snacks for kids over the weekend) with food from the FoodBank. She has to put all the supplies into each bag and make sure a bag is in the backpack of each child who has signed up, before the weekend. Currently there are 115 children needing this weekly. That is a lot of work for ONE school.

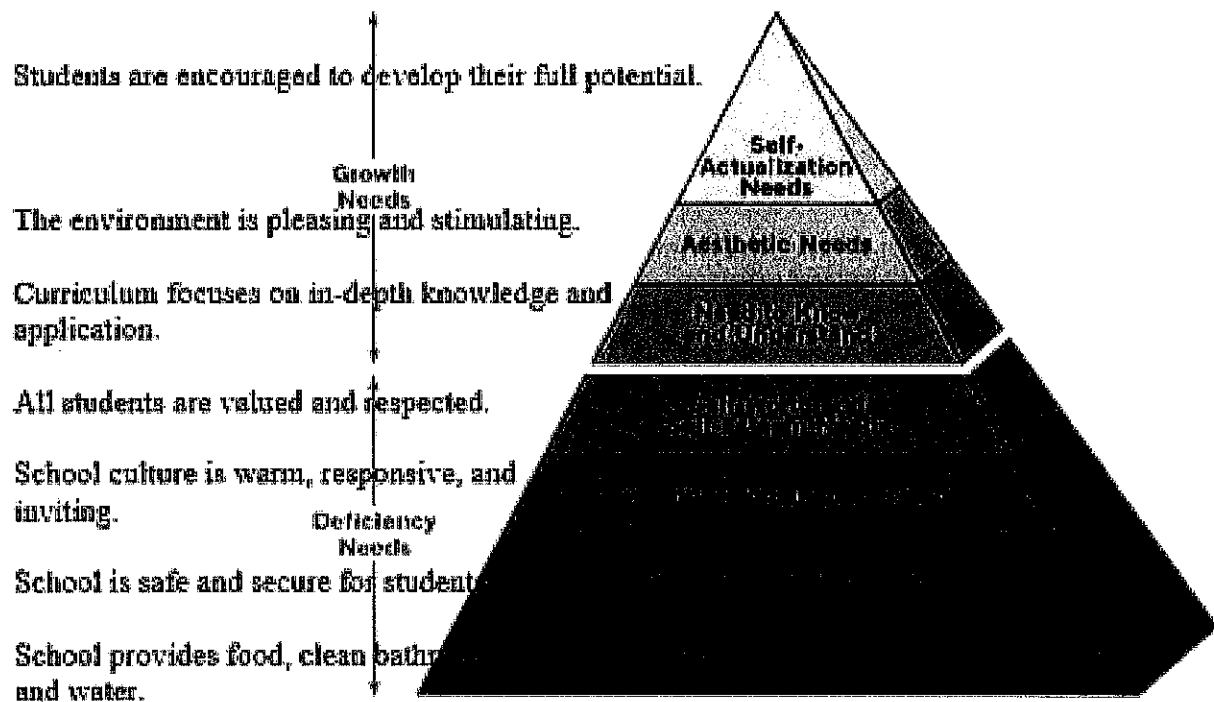
When I was working with one student in particular, who was hoarding snacks to bring home, Megan made sure the student had TWO Empower packs on weekends and talked to the head of the school lunch programs to see if this student could get a 2nd entree at lunch. This student required almost all of our FRC resources as well and Megan made sure he had everything he needed, to include toothpaste, toothbrush, body wipes to keep at school (he was not bathing at home) soap and shampoo were sent home. She made sure he had clean clothes, and a lot of underwear because he was having accidents at school. He came in shoes that were way too large, so was given tennis shoes that fit correctly. Also socks as he was not coming in socks. His family was also given laundry supplies, coins for the coin operated laundry at the Meadowlark center. Gas cards. Swim trunks and a towel for a YMCA swim field trip. This may seem like an extreme case, but it happens frequently especially with Families In Transition.

The YWCA Meadowlark (transitional housing, or housing for homeless families) is in Hawthorne's district, which means all of those homeless children come to Hawthorne. Families In Transition need A LOT of support from our whole school but especially our FRC. I am truly concerned how we will be able to help support these children in particular if the position has to take care of multiple schools.

I understand that a lot of areas in public education are experiencing lack of funding, my position as a resource Para was cut last year due to this, but I urge MCPS to do anything they can to help keep this program going, without consolidating schools. Last year we saw so many support positions cut and our FRC coordinator has picked up a lot of that slack. If they are also cut or given a huge workload with multiple schools, it will be detrimental to our school and our community. FRC coordinators are already burnt out, giving them more schools is not the answer. We will lose good employees who really care about our students. We have already lost too many due to cuts.

Thank you for your time,

**FIGURE 3.1**  
Maslow's hierarchy of needs







**FRC letter.docx**  
140K

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**Public Comment** <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>  
To: mjarvis@mcpsmt.org

Mon, Mar 31, 2025 at 11:16 AM

Thank you for submitting your public comment. Just like comments made in person at a public board meeting, the comments you submit through email are public record and are available for any member of the Board and public to read. Please refrain from referring to confidential student or staff information, or making derogatory comments about students or staff members. If you do provide private confidential information, we will redact that information before placing it in any public document. Please refer to Board Policy 1441 for more information about public comments in general. Thank you!

## Support for FRC

Deana DeWire <birdondewire@gmail.com>  
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Mon, Mar 31, 2025 at 12:28 PM

Dear School Board Trustees,

I am writing to express my gratitude and support for continuing the Family Resource Center program. My son is in first grade at Franklin Elementary and we have had a chance to get to know Kristine Asanovich, who is such a wonderful, caring and compassionate resource for the students of Franklin and their families.

My family has been fortunate enough to not need to rely heavily on the FRC; however, recently my husband and I are faced with job insecurity and are worried about the financial consequences of what that could mean. As such, we've been utilizing the FRC and Kristine is always welcoming, compassionate and supportive. I know that there are many families and kids at Franklin that need her and FRC program more than we do! And I believe that need is only going to grow as our economy shifts downward.

My son knows Kristine - she is a trusted adult for him and many of the kids at Franklin. These kids need to know that there is some stability in their lives and Kristine helps to provide that. I'm sure that the FRC Coordinators at other schools do the same for their students. That will be lost if these positions become shared across schools in the district; both the resources and relationships will be less meaningful.

I understand there are budget concerns for the district. I was hoping that we would have a year or two of stability after losing so many amazing staff from Franklin since last school year. I don't have any recommendations on how to right the ship, but I do hope that the board will prioritize supporting some of the most vulnerable kids in the district by continuing to fund the FRC in its current configuration.

More generally, it seems that traditional means of public school funding is becoming less reliable. I would encourage the board to think about innovative ways to raise revenue so that our kids can continue to receive quality education and services!

Thanks for all you do to support our kids!  
Deana

## Please do NOT cut teachers or increase class size at Rattlesnake

brianna.randall@gmail.com <brianna.randall@gmail.com>

Tue, Apr 1, 2025 at 1:57 PM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org, "javgeris@mcpsmt.org" <javgeris@mcpsmt.org>, "woldperson@mcpsmt.org" <woldperson@mcpsmt.org>, "mwhicher@mcpsmt.org" <mwhicher@mcpsmt.org>, "chayes@mcpsmt.org" <chayes@mcpsmt.org>, "jwalsh@mcpsmt.org" <jwalsh@mcpsmt.org>, "kwitt@mcpsmt.org" <kwitt@mcpsmt.org>, "kmercerc@mcpsmt.org" <kmercerc@mcpsmt.org>

Dear MCPS Board Members,

I am very concerned about the recommendation to cut a third-grade classroom at Rattlesnake Elementary, and deeply disappointed in the recent termination of Mr. Crider. As the mother of two students at the school, I know that small classroom sizes make all the difference for children to learn effectively and to feel safe.

This cut will result in classes of 33 students, a drastic and alarming leap from current class sizes. It goes against the Montana Office of Public Instruction class size regulation of a maximum of 28 students. This cut will negatively affect all third graders at the school, and also impact fourth and fifth grades moving forward.

I understand that the state tax cuts and budget cuts are affecting MCPS. But I beg you to PLEASE KEEP TEACHERS and look into cost-savings in other areas (such as technology, building improvements, bus stops, etc). Teachers are the backbone of our public schools, and the most important part of students' education.

Please keep class sizes at the regulation size or below to help meet our children's learning needs and goals.

Thank you for your support!

Best,  
Brianna Randall

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## **The Importance of Teachers**

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**Debra Randall** <1debrandall@gmail.com>

Tue, Apr 1, 2025 at 2:45 PM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org, "javgeris@mcpsmt.org" <javgeris@mcpsmt.org>, "woldperson@mcpsmt.org" <woldperson@mcpsmt.org>, "mwhicher@mcpsmt.org" <mwhicher@mcpsmt.org>, "chayes@mcpsmt.org" <chayes@mcpsmt.org>, "jwalsh@mcpsmt.org" <jwalsh@mcpsmt.org>, "kwitt@mcpsmt.org" <kwitt@mcpsmt.org>, "kmercer@mcpsmt.org" <kmercer@mcpsmt.org>

**Dear Board Members:**

**My heart is heavy to hear about the plan to increase class sizes in elementary schools next year.**

**Elementary school years are a crucial stage in the developmental process: The building blocks of the future and the very foundation.**

**It sounds as if third grade is the current focus. This is a critical stage in many respects, as are all elementary school grades.**

**I am sure you will want to keep any funding cuts as far away from children's lives as possible.**

**Teachers are the front line. Lights guiding the next generation.**

**Any increase in class size will have a huge impact upon progress, test scores, and learning, in general.**

**Teachers are the face of learning: the foundation; the role models; the reason children want to go to school each day.**

**Without them, what is the point? Education absolutely revolves around instructors. They are the center of all that ripples out.**

**As an example, Rattlesnake Elementary has a stellar teacher in Mr. Crider: a gifted instructor who makes a huge difference in the lives of his students. Under the current budget decision, his position will be terminated.**

**It is my fervent wish that you will reconsider.**

**The music and art teachers are highly valued and of great importance in student's lives, as well, and I hope you will continue to employ them to enrich students' lives and learning.**

**Bright, curious, thirsty-for-knowledge children are depending upon you to come up with innovative solutions that will not involve teacher cuts and classroom enrollment increases.**

**Teachers are the crux of learning.**

**I know you want the very best for our school district's children. They are, after all, what it's all about.**

**Thank you for your hard work and willingness to weigh our public comment.**

**Sincerely,**

**Debra Randall**

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## Third grade cut

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Kali Lindner <kali.lindner@gmail.com>

Tue, Apr 1, 2025 at 3:14 PM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org, mwhicher@mcpsmt.org, chayes@mcpsmt.org, jwalsh@mcpsmt.org, kwitt@mcpsmt.org, kmercer@mcpsmt.org, "woldperson@mcpsmt.org" <woldperson@mcpsmt.org>, "javgeris@mcpsmt.org" <javgeris@mcpsmt.org>

Dear MCPS Board Members,

I am very concerned about the recommendation to cut a third-grade classroom at Rattlesnake Elementary, and deeply disappointed in the recent termination of Mr. Crider. As the mother of three students at the school, I know that small classroom sizes make all the difference for children to learn effectively and to feel safe.

This cut will result in classes of 33 students, a drastic and alarming leap from current class sizes. It goes against the Montana Office of Public Instruction class size regulation of a maximum of 28 students. This cut will negatively affect all third graders at the school, and also impact fourth and fifth grades moving forward.

I understand that the state tax cuts and budget cuts are affecting MCPS. But I beg you to PLEASE KEEP TEACHERS and look into cost-savings in other areas (such as technology, building improvements, bus stops, etc). Teachers are the backbone of our public schools, and the most important part of students' education.

Please keep class sizes at the regulation size or below to help meet our children's learning needs and goals.

Thank you for your support!

*in joy,*  
*Kali*

## RATTLESNAKE ELEMENTARY

Danielle Chapin <danielle.c.chapin@gmail.com>

Tue, Apr 1, 2025 at 5:09 PM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org, mwhicher@mcpsmt.org, chayas@mcpsmt.org, jwalsh@mcpsmt.org, kwitt@mcpsmt.org, kmercer@mcpsmt.org, javgeris@mcpsmt.org, woldperson@mcpsmt.org

Dear MCPS School Board Members,

As the parent of an incoming third grader, I am writing to express my sincere concerns regarding the recommendation to cut a third grade classroom at Rattlesnake Elementary school and my deeply rooted disappointment in the termination of Mr. Crider. He is not only a beloved teacher to students and parents alike, he was a personal gift to my oldest child during a challenging time in her young academic journey. The absence of his positivity and allyship for all the kids at Rattlesnake will leave an immense hole in the hallways of the school.

The decision to reduce to two classrooms will result in class sizes of 33-34 students. Not only is this over 20% greater than the recommended class size set by the Montana Office of Public Instruction, it is antithetical to robust research that repeatedly demonstrates that smaller class sizes in grades K-3 lead to improved student achievement, particularly in reading and math. Furthermore, this research has shown that increased academic performance in these early primary grades have benefits that persist for years.

I do believe that this recommendation is being made under the duress of state funding cuts, and while that is a sad and infuriating reality, I do not believe that cutting teachers and turning classrooms into crowd control rather than thriving learning environments is the ideal place to trim the fat. We need teachers, who are already overworked and underpaid, to have the capacity to reach all students; to see their individual strengths and weaknesses and be able to accommodate their individual learning styles. Not even the most skilled and veteran of teachers can do that when they are managing more than 30 nine year olds day in and day out. Please consider making cuts elsewhere (building improvements, technology, consulting fees, bussing, admin) and keep our teachers in their classrooms. They are imperative to our children's academic futures.

Please know that my letter writing does not end here and that I have sent many letters to our state legislators pleading with them to prioritize education. I will continue to do so regularly. I know you all are in a hard position, and I appreciate your consideration and support.

With much admiration,

Danielle Chapin



**SOFT LANDING**  
MISSOULA

**Natalia Boise**  
**Youth Program Manager**  
**Soft Landing Missoula**  
**[natalia@softlandingmissoula.org](mailto:natalia@softlandingmissoula.org)**

Members of the MCPS board,

My name is Natalia Boise, and I work with over 150 refugee students each year through social, recreational, and academic programs and in collaboration with Missoula County Public Schools and other community partners. These students represent only a fraction of the total number of English Language Learners (ELLs) in the district who dedicated MCPS staff work with every day, and their needs are extensive, varied, and ongoing. There are many English learners in Montana, including Native American students, but today I will focus on refugees as that is my realm of experience.

Many of the students I work with came here as refugees. They are brilliant, hardworking, and determined to succeed, and with the opportunity for building a new life here, they love America like no one else I have ever met. They come here with dreams to give back by becoming nurses, doctors, and social workers, all of which are experiencing shortages in our current labor force. Without proper English language support, their journeys would be much harder.

Thankfully, programs and dedicated teachers in Missoula help them to thrive, and pursue higher education. I have had the privilege to witness first-hand the impact of these programs, getting to see students go from hardly speaking English when they arrive in 8th grade all the way to applying for college to study pre-med. These in-school daily supports ensure that every English learner in Missoula has that same opportunity.

I am here today to ask for your support for consistent, district-funded support for ELL students by ensuring that our ELL support teachers are not reliant on unpredictable federal grants. Currently, the primary ELL teachers in MCPS are funded through the general fund, and that must remain the case. However, the additional support teachers—who play a crucial role in students' success—are funded through federal grants such as the Refugee School Impact Grant. That funding fluctuates and is not a reliable way to sustain these positions. The need for ELL support is not temporary, and our district must take steps to ensure that these essential positions are funded locally.

ELL students have unique educational needs that extend beyond just learning English. They are navigating a new culture, a new school system, and in many cases, new expectations for





**SOFT LANDING**  
MISSOULA

academic success. One ELL teacher per school level is simply not enough to meet the depth and variety of these needs. These students require targeted instruction from teachers trained specifically in ELL education—not just general classroom support. Without these dedicated educators, the burden falls on already overextended classroom teachers, social workers, and service providers who must provide translation services on top of their regular duties.

ELL support teachers also play an essential role in helping students gain the language skills they need to support their own families and become successful participants in our society. Many of these students become the bridge between their parents and the school system, helping their families navigate everything from report cards to medical appointments. Without strong language support at school, that responsibility becomes even heavier on them and the community at large.

Beyond academics, these teachers are deeply valued by the students. Whenever I ask high school students what their favorite class is, the answer is almost always the same—Miss Aria's English class. These teachers provide not just instruction, but also a sense of belonging and stability for students who have already faced significant upheaval in their young lives. Their impact is immeasurable.

Our ELL students are an integral part of the MCPS community, and their education deserves stable, reliable funding. I urge you to prioritize funding for these critical support positions so that we can continue to provide high-quality education for all students, regardless of their language background.

Thank you for your consideration.

***Natalia Boise***

Natalia Boise  
Youth Program Manager  
Soft LAnding Missoula

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## Rattlesnake 3rd grade plan for 2025-26 school year

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**Alison Dimond** <alison.dimondkardos@gmail.com>

Wed, Apr 2, 2025 at 12:48 PM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org, javgeris@mcpsmt.org, Wilena Old Person <woldperson@mcpsmt.org>, mwicher@mcpsmt.org, "chayes@mcpsmt.org" <chayes@mcpsmt.org>, "jwalsh@mcpsmt.org" <jwalsh@mcpsmt.org>, "kwitt@mcpsmt.org" <kwitt@mcpsmt.org>, kmercer@mcpsmt.org

Dear MCPS Board Members,

I am writing to share my concern about the plan I understand is in place for Rattlesnake Elementary's third grade class for next year, as well as the plan to terminate Mr. Crider as a teacher at Rattlesnake. I have had the great pleasure of having two kids attend Rattlesnake from K-5th grade. In that time, I've seen that the greatest strength of the school and the best service to our kiddos comes from great teachers and smaller class sizes.

Mr. Crider is one of the best teachers my child had while at Rattlesnake, and that is among so MANY great teachers at the school. It will be a great loss for the school and the district if he is fired.

I am also concerned about the possibility of having only two third grade classes and what that will mean for class sizes. Third grade is a pivotal year for student development, and not one where class sizes of over 30 kids is appropriate for our kids or teachers.

I understand the incredibly difficult choices that have to be made about budgets. But I urge you to prioritize smaller class sizes and keeping incredibly quality teachers and seek cuts elsewhere.

Thank you for all you do and for considering my comments.

Best, Ali

Alison Dimond Kardos  
Sustainability Consultant  
alison.dimondkardos@gmail.com  
Missoula, Montana  
406-241-3398

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## Cuts at Rattlesnake

Lynette Johnson <bubsmama246@gmail.com>

Wed, Apr 2, 2025 at 1:06 PM

To: chayas@mcpsmt.org, "javgeris@mcpsmt.org" <javgeris@mcpsmt.org>, jwalsh@mcpsmt.org, kmercer@mcpsmt.org, kwitt@mcpsmt.org, mwhicher@mcpsmt.org, publiccomment@mcpsmt.org, woldperson@mcpsmt.org

Dear MCPS Board Members,

I am very concerned about the recommendation to cut a third-grade classroom at Rattlesnake Elementary, and deeply disappointed in the recent termination of Mr. Crider. As the mother of a student currently at Rattlesnake and a former pupil of Mr. Crider, I felt compelled to reach out to express my concerns. I know from experience that small classroom sizes make all the difference for children to learn effectively and to feel safe.

This cut will result in classes of 33 students, a drastic and alarming leap from current class sizes. **It goes against** the Montana Office of Public Instruction class size regulation of a maximum of 28 students and goes against MCPS mission statement of "Forward thinking, High achieving". This move would be short sighted and no doubt stifle achievement. This cut will **negatively affect** all third graders at the school, and also impact fourth and fifth grades moving forward. Not only is small classroom size essential for learning but also for students' social and emotional growth. As a mother to a child that struggles with anxiety, I know how **detrimental** it would be for her to be thrown in a classroom with 10 more kids than she has currently. Mr. Crider was able to devote attention to his kids and notice when my daughter was having an off day when he had a reasonable classroom size. This would be virtually impossible with the new class sizes and students will no doubt suffer from this **unreasonable** burden placed on teachers trying to manage a class of 33 students.

I understand that the state tax cuts and budget cuts are affecting MCPS. But I beg you to **PLEASE KEEP INVALUABLE TEACHERS** and look into cost-savings in other areas (such as technology, building improvements, sports programs, bus stops, etc). Teachers are the backbone of our public schools, and the most important part of students' education.

Please keep class sizes at the regulation size or below to help meet our children's learning needs and goals.

Thank you for your support!

Sincerely,  
Lynette Johnson

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## Please do not reduce 3rd grade classrooms at Rattlesnake Elementary

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Erik Iwanski <erik.iwanski@gmail.com>

Wed, Apr 2, 2025 at 1:39 PM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org, mwhicher@mcpsmt.org, chayas@mcpsmt.org, jwalsh@mcpsmt.org, kwitt@mcpsmt.org, kmercer@mcpsmt.org, javgeris@mcpsmt.org, woldperson@mcpsmt.org

**+1 to the sentiment expressed in the below email.** As a parent of two Rattlesnake children (grades 1 and 3), and a former California native who was in classroom sizes of +32 kids, I would like to reiterate the below message as I do believe increasing classroom sizing will negatively impact our children.

<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/class-size-what-research-says-and-what-it-means-for-state-policy/>

Thank you,  
Erik Iwanski

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Dear MCPS Board Members,

I am very concerned about the recommendation to cut a third-grade classroom at Rattlesnake Elementary, and deeply disappointed in the recent termination of Mr. Crider. As the mother of two students at the school, I know that small classroom sizes make all the difference for children to learn effectively and to feel safe.

This cut will result in classes of 33 students, a drastic and alarming leap from current class sizes. It goes against the Montana Office of Public Instruction class size regulation of a maximum of 28 students. This cut will negatively affect all third graders at the school, and also impact fourth and fifth grades moving forward.

I understand that the state tax cuts and budget cuts are affecting MCPS. But I beg you to PLEASE KEEP TEACHERS and look into cost-savings in other areas (such as technology, building improvements, bus stops, etc). Teachers are the backbone of our public schools, and the most important part of students' education.

Please keep class sizes at the regulation size or below to help meet our children's learning needs and goals.

Thank you for your support!

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Dear MCPS Trustees,

My name is Susan Ray, I teach second grade at Chief Charlo. I am writing in support of Coryll Rupert and the other Families in Transition and Family Resource Center Coordinators in the district. I urge you to protect the vital role they play in our community.

For many families facing economic hardship, housing instability, food insecurity, and other challenges, FIT and FRC Coordinators serve as a critical bridge to assistance. They connect parents to vital services, advocate for children's educational and social needs, and provide guidance that can make all the difference in a child's success. Without them, many vulnerable families would be left without the support they need to navigate these difficulties.

At Chief Charlo, Coryll is one example of the incredible impact a FIT Coordinator can have. She works with one of my second graders each week, helping her keep up with math skills and ensuring she stays on track academically. Beyond academics, Coryll's even gone so far as to wash the student's clothing and advocated for her to utilize a school shower when the water was disconnected at the child's home so she felt comfortable and was able to focus on her daily work. This demonstrates the level of care and dedication FIT and FRCs bring to their work. She, like so many others in her role, goes above and beyond for families in need. FIT and FRC Coordinators play a crucial role in supporting students beyond just the school culture. By ensuring that students and families have access to basic needs — such as food, clothing, housing assistance, and healthcare — they help remove barriers to learning. When students feel safe, supported, and have their essential needs met, they are better able to focus in the classroom, leading to improved attendance, engagement, and academic performance.

Additionally, many of our Chief Charlo families, like many at other schools in the district, rely on this program to make Christmas happen for their children. The support provided by FIT and FRCs ensures that families struggling financially can still give their children a holiday filled with warmth, joy, and a sense of normalcy. Without this program, many of our community's most vulnerable families would go without.

Changing individual school FIT and FRC positions into 4 'Regional' FRCs would create devastating gaps in services, disproportionately impacting low-income and at-risk families. These coordinators are not just support staff; they are lifelines for

parents and caregivers who are doing their best to provide for their children under challenging circumstances. Their work directly contributes to student success by reducing absenteeism, addressing mental health concerns, and fostering a strong connection between families and schools.

I urge you to prioritize the well-being of struggling families by maintaining and strengthening the role of each FIT and FRC Coordinator. Their impact is immeasurable, and their absence would be deeply felt by the families who rely on them the most.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I hope you will take action to ensure that these invaluable services remain available to those who need them most.

Sincerely,  
Susan Ray

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## Keep our teachers!

Ana Pederson <ana.pederson@gmail.com>

Wed, Apr 2, 2025 at 8:34 PM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org, mwhicher@mcpsmt.org, chaves@mcpsmt.org, jwalsh@mcpsmt.org, kwitt@mcpsmt.org, kmercer@mcpsmt.org, javgeris@mcpsmt.org, woldperson@mcpsmt.org

Dear MCPS Board Members,

Our community is deeply concerned about the recommendation to cut a third-grade classroom at Rattlesnake Elementary, Chief Charlo, and Lewis and Clark schools. Additionally, we are deeply disappointed in the recent termination of Mr. Crider. As the mother of two students at the school, the daughter of a public educator, and a Montana public school alum I know that small classroom sizes make all the difference for children to learn effectively and to feel safe. We know that we can do better than this.

This cut will result in classes of 33 students, a drastic and alarming leap from current class sizes. It goes against the Montana Office of Public Instruction class size regulation of a maximum of 28 students. This cut will negatively affect all third graders at the school, and also impact fourth and fifth grades moving forward. You all know this.

I understand that the state tax cuts and budget cuts are affecting MCPS. But I beg you to PLEASE KEEP TEACHERS and look into cost-savings in other areas (such as technology, building improvements, bus stops, administration, etc). Teachers are the backbone of our public schools, and the most important part of students' education.

Please keep class sizes at the regulation size or below to help meet our children's learning needs and goals.

Thank you for your support. Make the correct decision.

Respectfully,

Ana Pederson

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### 3rd Grade position cuts

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Julie Kubik <sukha1979@yahoo.com>

Wed, Apr 2, 2025 at 9:26 PM

To: "publiccomment@mcpsmt.org" <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

Dear MCPS Board Members,

I am writing to you as a concerned parent of two children currently enrolled at Rattlesnake Elementary in MCPS as well as a substitute teacher. It recently came to my attention that MCPS is making cuts across the district due to low enrollment and decreased funding from the state. The recommended cuts include a third-grade classroom at Rattlesnake. The cuts to third-grade teachers will result in classroom sizes of around 33 students despite the Montana Office of Public Instruction class size regulation of a maximum of 28 students. This class size increase will also impact fourth and fifth grades moving forward. I am deeply concerned about these cuts and their effect on both the students and teachers at Rattlesnake.

Smaller class sizes offer numerous advantages, not only in academic achievement but also in fostering a positive, nurturing, safe learning environment. With fewer students in each class, teachers are better able to give individual attention to each child, meeting their unique learning needs and helping them grow both academically and personally. Teachers can more effectively address behavioral challenges and ensure that all students, regardless of their background or learning needs, receive the appropriate support they need.

I understand that the state tax cuts and subsequent budget cuts are affecting MCPS. I also understand that funding is based on student enrollment but I ask that you please keep teachers and find other cost saving measures.

Thank you,

Julie Kubik

4620 Rattlesnake Dr. Missoula, MT 59802

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## **Rattlesnake school cuts**

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**Katherine Wright** <kwright.tx@gmail.com>

Thu, Apr 3, 2025 at 6:37 AM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org, mwhicher@mcpsmt.org, chayas@mcpsmt.org, jwalsh@mcpsmt.org, kwitt@mcpsmt.org, kmercer@mcpsmt.org

Dear MCPS Board Members,

I recently learned about the thirds-grade class cuts. I am very concerned about the recommendation to cut a third-grade classroom at Rattlesnake Elementary, and deeply disappointed in the recent termination of Mr. Crider. As the mother of THREE students at the school, I know that small classroom sizes make all the difference for children to learn effectively and to feel safe.

This cut will result in classes of 33 students, a drastic and alarming leap from current class sizes. It goes against the Montana Office of Public Instruction class size regulation of a maximum of 28 students. This cut will negatively affect all third graders at the school, and also impact fourth and fifth grades moving forward.

I understand that the state tax cuts and budget cuts are affecting MCPS. But I beg you to PLEASE KEEP TEACHERS and look into cost-savings in other areas (such as technology, building improvements, bus stops, etc). Teachers are the backbone of our public schools, and the most important part of students' education.

Please keep class sizes at the regulation size or below to help meet our children's learning needs and goals.

Thank you,

Katherine Wright

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## **Rattlesnake School 3rd grade- Mr. Crider**

**Mary Poole** <maryopoole@gmail.com>

Thu, Apr 3, 2025 at 8:45 AM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org, javgeris@mcpsmt.org, "woldperson@mcpsmt.org" <woldperson@mcpsmt.org>, "mwhicher@mcpsmt.org" <mwhicher@mcpsmt.org>, "chayes@mcpsmt.org" <chayes@mcpsmt.org>, "jwalsh@mcpsmt.org" <jwalsh@mcpsmt.org>, "kwitt@mcpsmt.org" <kwitt@mcpsmt.org>, kmercerc@mcpsmt.org

Hello and thank you MCPS School Board for your hard work and attention for our community's kiddos.

I am one of many writing in support of retaining Mr. Crider as a third grade teacher at Rattlesnake school.

First, I understand that you have an incredibly challenging job in figuring out how to best serve all of our city's kiddos with not enough resources. I appreciate the challenging puzzle that this most certainly is. With this, and knowing the needs are great, I am writing to advocate for my kids and the other kids at Rattlesnake school and I ask that you not only keep 3 third grade classes at Rattlesnake, but that, specifically, Mr. Crider gets retained in this position.

I have a 4th grader who had Mr. Crider in 3rd grade and it was a PIVOTAL year where I watched him blossom in the kindness he showed others, the cooperation he gave his teacher and his peers, and his love of reading, math, and school grew. This was due to the caring, gentle, kind, thoughtful, and loving hand of Mr. Crider. The very first day of 3rd grade, my son came home from school just lit up saying "My teacher is soooooo kind!". This is exactly the type of teacher we need in the third grade.

I also have a second grader and it is my ultimate hope that she too gets to experience the supportive and encouraging classroom of Mr. Crider. She struggles a bit more at school and doesn't always have the academic confidence that my son has. I know that Mr. Crider builds the kind of classroom community that supports all students and at this age, support and confidence has a huge impact on how a student performs academically and how "worthy" they feel of being "smart".

On top of all of this, it is worrisome to think that there may only be two third grade classrooms at Rattlesnake, which would apparently increase class sizes beyond the Montana Office of Public Instruction class size requirements. My quiet, sweet, and accommodating daughter (quite different from my son! HA!) already gets lost in her current class size- something that I believe contributes to her academic challenges. It isn't good for her, or any kiddo, to have a class size that forces teachers to focus more on managing a classroom than teaching and building deep relationships with students.

Again, I realize you have a hard job ahead in figuring all of the complexities of next year's budget but I urge you to not get rid of Mr. Crider and/or a third grade class at Rattlesnake school.

In love and gratitude,

Mary

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## Family Resource Centers

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**Theresa Cox** <ponykeepr@gmail.com>

Thu, Apr 3, 2025 at 11:41 AM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Greetings:

As a Missoula taxpayer, whose children attended local public schools and whose grandchildren also attend those institutions, I urge you not to regionalize the Family Resource Centers in our schools. I have seen the value in those positions and would hate to have it reduced by a reduction in time at each school.

I am also a volunteer for the Missoula Food Bank, running a weekly 'market' at Russell School. I watch Laura, the family resource person, at that school work hard for her students - the children who need the most from all of us. It would be a shame if the services she offers were no longer available to the children.

Please do what you can to retain these important positions in our public schools.

Sincerely,  
Theresa Cox

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Theresa Cox  
Pastor, Lincoln Community United Methodist Church  
(406) 370-3922

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## Urgent: Third-Grade Class Size Concerns

Blair Elizabeth Ware <ware.blair@gmail.com>

Thu, Apr 3, 2025 at 1:17 PM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org, mwhicher@mcpsmt.org, chayes@mcpsmt.org, jwalsh@mcpsmt.org, kwitt@mcpsmt.org, kmercer@mcpsmt.org, "woldperson@mcpsmt.org" <woldperson@mcpsmt.org>, "javgeris@mcpsmt.org" <javgeris@mcpsmt.org>

Dear MCPS Board Members,

I am reaching out not just as a concerned parent, but as someone who deeply values the quality of education that shapes all children's futures. The proposal to eliminate a third-grade classroom at Rattlesnake Elementary (and more) is more than just a budgetary decision—it's a choice that will directly impact the learning, confidence, and well-being of our students. A jump to **33 students in a single third-grade classroom** is not just unreasonable; it is **detrimental**. Our children deserve classrooms where they can be seen, heard, and given the attention they need to thrive—not just to pass tests, but to truly learn, grow, and develop a lifelong love for education.

**The research is clear:** Large class sizes negatively impact student learning, particularly for young children. A report from the National Education Policy Center (NEPC) found that reducing class sizes in early grades leads to **higher achievement, better engagement, and improved behavior** (NEPC Report). Additionally, a study published by the American Educational Research Association (AERA) concluded that **smaller class sizes contribute to long-term benefits, including increased graduation rates and better college and career outcomes** (AERA Study). These findings reinforce what parents and teachers already know—overcrowded classrooms make it harder for children to learn and for teachers to teach effectively.

Beyond academics, the relationship between a young student and their teacher is foundational. Children thrive in environments where they feel seen, heard, and supported. Overcrowding classrooms puts teachers in an impossible position—forced to manage chaos instead of fostering curiosity, to control distractions instead of inspiring a passion for learning. *How can one teacher effectively reach 33 developing minds when even the current 22 (Rattlesnake Elementary, Second Grade) is already a challenge?*

Montana's Office of Public Instruction and the Administrative Rules of Montana state that in single-grade rooms, **the maximum class size shall be no more than 28 students in grades 3 and 4** (rules.mt.gov). Why, then, are we willing to push beyond that guideline at the expense of our children's education?

I recognize the financial challenges facing MCPS, but I urge you to look elsewhere for cost-saving measures — whether in administrative spending, technology upgrades, or non-essential building projects. Cutting teachers is not the answer. Teachers are the backbone of our schools, and their ability to provide a quality education is directly tied to reasonable class sizes.

I implore you: Do not let these young learners become casualties of budget cuts. Now, more than ever, education must be protected, prioritized, and invested in—not sacrificed.

Please reconsider this decision and ensure that our third-grade classrooms remain at a size where true learning, growth, and success are possible.

With deep concern and hope for a better solution,

Blair Ware

Parent of Two Children in Missoula County

**Blair Ware**

**770.598.9948**

**[www.linkedin.com/in/blairware](http://www.linkedin.com/in/blairware)**

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## Writing in support of ELL funding

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Thu, Apr 3, 2025 at 3:33 PM

**Mary Poole** <mary@softlandingmissoula.org>

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Hello members of the MCPS School Board-

I am writing as the Executive Director of Soft Landing Missoula, a local refugee and immigrant support organization in Missoula. We work with over 150 refugee students every year through social and academic programs in partnership with MCPS. These students, along with other English Language Learners (ELLs), face unique challenges in their education and I'm reaching out to advocate for more stable funding for ELL support teachers.

The students we work with are hardworking and determined, but without consistent language support, their paths are much more difficult. While the full-time ELL teachers are funded through the district, additional support positions rely on uncertain federal grants, which fluctuate and threaten the stability of these roles.

One teacher per school level is a start, but realistically not enough to meet the diverse needs of ELL students. These teachers provide specialized support and help students navigate a new culture, language, and education system. Without them, the responsibility falls on overburdened classroom teachers and other staff.

I know you have a lot of hard work ahead to balance need with resources, but I urge you to prioritize reliable, district-funded support for these essential roles. Our ELL students deserve the same opportunity to succeed as all others.

In love and gratitude,

Mary Poole



ED Soft Landing Missoula



**SOFT LANDING MISSOULA**

Mary Poole, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

2925 Palmer St. Suite A | Missoula, MT 59808

softlandingmissoula.org | (406) 493-0504 |  

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## Classroom Size at Rattlesnake School

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Thu, Apr 3, 2025 at 7:35 PM

**Katrina O'Neil Weckenbrock** <katrinaow@gmail.com> To:  
publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Dear MCPS Board Members,

I am very concerned about the recommendation to cut a third-grade classroom at Rattlesnake Elementary, and deeply disappointed in the recent termination of Mr. Crider. Mr. Crider is one-of-a-kind, and made an incredible difference in the lives of both of my children. As a parent, and a professional, I know that small classroom sizes make all the difference for children to learn effectively and to feel safe.

This cut will result in an alarming leap from current class sizes, to upwards of 33 or 34 students per classroom. It also violates the Montana Office of Public Instruction class size regulation of a maximum of 28 students. This cut will negatively affect all third graders at the school, and will also impact fourth and fifth grades moving forward. My son is currently in the smallest classroom in the building, with 27 students, and while his teacher is making the best of what she has to work with, it is certainly the loudest, most stressful learning space he has had to manage so far.

I understand that the state tax cuts and budget cuts are affecting MCPS. But I beg you to PLEASE KEEP TEACHERS and look into cost-savings in other areas (such as technology, building improvements, bus stops, etc). Teachers are the backbone of our public schools, and the most important part of students' education. Also, please keep class sizes at the regulation size or below to help meet our children's learning needs and goals.

Thank you for your support!

Katrina Weckenbrock, LCSW LMFT

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## ELL Program Concerns

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Helen Maas <hmaas@mcpsmt.org>  
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Fri, Apr 4, 2025 at 3:45 PM

To the MCPS School Board,

Thank you for your support last spring in your decision to continue the funding for the ELL program. It has made a significant difference for our students at all levels and the program in general. Unfortunately, we have concerns about the future of the ELL program based on the current federal funding situation. We know that HB361 is on the floor, however, the funding that is needed goes beyond what this bill can provide. Sufficient and consistent funding remains an issue for our program.

The ELL program in MCPS serves students with varying levels of English proficiency and educational experience. Currently within all three divisions, students are being served who are preliterate in their home language as well as English; many have never been to school or have limited formal education. These high needs students will continue to require services for years to come, as well as existing ELL students who are entitled to our services based on their language proficiency scores. In addition, teachers continue to need support to meet the needs of ELL students in their classrooms.

There are 62 middle school students identified as ELL within the district, and at Porter, there are approximately 49 students identified as ELL. We are unable to serve the other 2 middle schools and 14 students here at Porter due to program criteria and capacity. 7 out of the approximately 35 ELL students we are currently serving, have been enrolled at Porter with no formal education and are nonliterate. This year we have provided beginning and intermediate English language and ESL Math classes, for a total of 6 classes. 4 students have transitioned back into the mainstream English class and 1 student has rejoined the mainstream Math class. These 4 students have been here for approximately 2 years and arrived with consistent formal education. Between the 2 of us, we push into 7 classes to provide support for students who are not in our pull-out classes, and whose language proficiency scores show that they can benefit from extra support. We participate in weekly grade level meetings, and communicate regularly with staff. In addition to answering questions, this involves presenting information about strategies on how to best support students, updating program specifics about communication, student welfare and really just about anything that concerns the ELL program.

Our concern is how we can continue to meet the needs of our students and provide support to staff without sufficient funding to the ELL program. Based on time alone, one person could not successfully accomplish what we have outlined above. While accommodations and modifications can be made to the program structure, there will be a loss to the growth and development of the ELL students. As students move through each division, without adequate support, their high needs will not be met and their gaps in learning will grow.

We hope that in the absence of federal funding MCPS will continue to meet the needs of the ELL program and its students with sufficient resources and staffing.

Sincerely,  
Helen Maas and Brady Baughman





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## Please support Porter's FRC and ELL programs

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Brianna Lipke <blipke@mcpsmt.org>

Mon, Apr 7, 2025 at 4:18 PM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org, Jeffrey Avgeris <javgeris@mcpsmt.org>, Lisa Davey <ldavey@mcpsmt.org>, Kate Gammill <kgammill@mcpsmt.org>, Christina Hayes <chayes@mcpsmt.org>, Koan Mercer <kmercer@mcpsmt.org>, Wilena Old Person <woldperson@mcpsmt.org>, Ann Wake <awake@mcpsmt.org>, Arlene Walker-Andrews <awalker-andrews@mcpsmt.org>, Jenny Walsh <jwalsh@mcpsmt.org>, Megan Meg Whicher <mwhicher@mcpsmt.org>, Keegan Witt <kwitt@mcpsmt.org>

Dear Missoula County Public Schools Board of Trustees,

I am writing to express my deep concern regarding the proposed reduction or elimination of two essential positions at C.S. Porter Middle School: the Family Resource Center (FRC) Specialist and one of our English Language Learner (ELL) teachers. As an educator who works closely with students every day, I can confidently say that these positions are not optional—they are *vital* for the academic success, emotional well-being, and future opportunities of many of our most vulnerable students.

Approximately 55% of the students in our school live at or below the poverty line. Fifty of our students are currently houseless. These numbers are not just statistics—they are children walking into our classrooms each day, carrying the heavy weight of unmet basic needs. We know that students cannot focus on academics if they do not have a safe place to sleep, food to eat, or clothing to stay warm. That is where our FRC Specialist, Jen Pfeiffer, comes in.

Jen is a lifeline for so many of our families. She provides food, clothing, and hygiene products to those in need, helps new families navigate enrollment at The Meadowlark, a local shelter for families experiencing domestic violence, and builds trusting relationships with students that foster a sense of belonging and safety. She collects donations and runs the Gift Thrift, a program that allows students to "purchase" holiday gifts for their loved ones for 25¢ or in exchange for coupons earned for positive behavior. This initiative not only supports families economically but also builds confidence and joy in our students during what can be a difficult season.

The idea of reducing Jen's hours is simply not feasible given the level of need in our school. The work she does cannot be compressed into part-time hours. Without her full-time support, we risk letting dozens of families fall through the cracks.

In addition to the FRC, I must emphasize the critical need for continued full staffing in our ELL department. We currently have 50 students who qualify for English Language Learner services. These students come from more than a dozen different countries and speak a plethora of mother tongues. Many are refugees, having fled violence and trauma in their home countries in search of safety and opportunity here in Missoula.

The academic backgrounds of these students vary widely. Some arrive with a strong educational foundation, while others come with no literacy experience at all. As we were reminded in February at the Missoula Community Education Summit when we viewed the documentary Sentenced, students who are not reading proficiently *by third grade* face long-term consequences such as decreased graduation rates, limited earning potential, and increased risk of involvement with the criminal justice system. This reality is even more urgent for our ELL students, many of whom are learning to read for the first time—in a *second language*.

Currently, two full-time ELL teachers are doing everything they can to meet the diverse and intensive needs of these learners, many of whom are also processing deep emotional trauma. To reduce this team to one full-time teacher would be catastrophic. It would mean less individualized support, larger caseloads, and a significant setback in helping these students catch up academically and thrive as successful, contributing members of our community.

Please understand: this is not just about staffing numbers. It's about children—real, resilient, deserving children—whose success and well-being depend on the resources we provide at school. Cutting these positions would be a disservice not only to them but to our entire school community.

I want to acknowledge that working with a public school budget is an incredibly difficult and often thankless task. I deeply appreciate the time, care, and tough decisions you are asked to make on behalf of our students and staff. That said, I urge you to consider the very real consequences of cutting these two essential positions. Our students who are experiencing poverty, trauma, and the challenges of adjusting to a new country cannot afford to fall between the cracks.

We don't need more instructional coaches sitting in rooms by themselves—we need more people working *directly with students* and making a meaningful impact on their lives. That is the purpose of education. That is how we break cycles of poverty, how we support families in crisis, and how we give every student—regardless of their background—a chance to succeed.

In this current political climate, where public education and the support systems it provides are increasingly under threat, I ask you to choose to be on the right side of history. Stand with the students who need us most. Protect the positions that serve them *directly*. Be the kind of leaders our community and our children deserve.

Please protect the positions of our Family Resource Center Specialist and both of our ELL teachers. Our students are counting on us.

Sincerely,

Brianna Lipke

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Brianna Lipke, B.S.Ed., M.L.S

6-8 Grade Librarian

C. S. Porter Middle School

2510 Central Ave

Missoula MT 59804

(406) 728-2400 ext 4617

blipke@mcpsmt.org

It's unknown how many students' lives  
librarians have saved  
by welcoming loners at lunch.

~Excerpt from Starfish by Lisa Fipps

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## Choosing to Fund ELL Education in MCPS

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Brady Baughman <brady.baughman27@gmail.com>  
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Mon, Apr 7, 2025 at 4:01 PM

To the Members of the MCPS School Board and Missoula County,

I am writing today to express concern about funding for the continued and necessary support of our English Language Learner (ELL) population in Missoula County Public Schools. As one of two Middle School ELL Teachers on Special Assignment (TOSA), I work closely with these students and their families. For the last two years, my teaching partner and I have served the ELL student population and their families at C.S. Porter Middle School. However, there are students who are also qualified for our services at Meadow Hill Middle School and Washington Middle School. At this time, there are approximately 62 students in MCPS middle schools who have a federal right to receive ELL services. At Porter, there are 49 students who are qualified for these services. Unfortunately, due to staffing and resources, we are only able to serve our students with the highest needs in our classroom at Porter. Of the 49 qualified Porter students, we see 35, and 7 of these students came to our schools nonliterate, having none or limited formal education in either English or their home language. These students receive academic support in math and English. We also provide education on social and cultural norms that may differ from their home countries, and we help support their families in making connections with the school. In addition to the educational and social emotional support to students and families, we provide training to teachers, conduct standardized testing mandated by the state, collaborate with community partners, and meet with grade level teachers on the day to day business within our schools.

Stated above are the realities we are currently living with. Prior to the 2019-2020 school year there were no certified ELL staff in Middle School. Until the 2023-24 school year, we had only one certified ELL staff in Middle School. By the 2025-26 school year, without funding, the district has planned to support only one ELL staff in the Middle Schools paid out of the general fund. However, our student numbers are not decreasing and their needs for language intervention continue to grow. At C.S. Porter, there will be 12 students in the 8th grade from the ELL program who will be moving on to high school. In the 2025-26 school year, there are 17 incoming 6th grade students in the ELL program, and this does not include all ELL qualified students entering the 6th grade at Porter nor does it include those attending Meadow Hill and Washington Middle Schools. Many of these students have been in our district for less than 2 years and still need significant language support. The gap in their language development will only continue to grow as they move through our schools without the English courses they need.

These students have a right to an education. They have a right to access content in English that is suited to their needs, but this cannot happen if we do not have staffing to do so. In the current political climate, we are going to see a reduction in the number of families being resettled in Missoula, however, this does not mean we will no longer have ELL students in our classrooms. We still have an obligation to support the students and families who are currently in our city and in our schools as they move from one grade to the next. We cannot keep relying on grants that provide funding for 1 year or 3 years to fund these positions. The district needs to choose to continue to support these amazing, resilient students by funding these necessary positions at all levels.

Thank you for your time,

Brady Baughman

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**Brady Baughman**

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