



Safety Ad Hoc Committee Feedback

Feedback received April 2022 through January 18, 2023 (20 Submissions)

1.

Date: 4/7/2022 6:07pm

Name: Barbie Jackson

Comment:

1. Does the scope of this committee include K-12, high schools primarily, other?
2. Does the existing MMSD Safety Plan serve as a basis for the work of the committee?
3. Does the 2021 16-point safety and security recs of the BOE serve as a basis for the work of the committee.

2.

Date: 4/10/22 at 9:47am

Name: Jennifer E Nordstrom

Comment:

Hello,

My daughter has special playlists I've created on YouTube and certain channels she has access to, but many recommendations come based on that. I've been monitoring what she watches and moving what she likes onto her playlist, if it seems fine to me. She started using voice search recently, and inappropriate adult material came up. I was so angry.

I know I need to install controls. There are a lot of guides online, and I will do what I can, but I think every school across the country needs an initiative on this front. It's easy enough to track progress by participation and feedback surveys.

Children are not as supervised as they should be in an online environment with busy parents. The issue around variation of what parents think is suitable is a separate issue; this is about ensuring that every parent is aware of the dangers and has been technically introduced to the mechanisms by which they limit access to adult and sexual content.

I am available to discuss collaboration, but I suspect there are experts who can give a talk on video, which is sent to all parents along with written material, such as step-by-step guides.

I know that children are surfing a wide-open Internet tland that parents need a push to action as well as a clear-cut action plan to implement.

I look forward to hearing from you!

3.

Date: 4/14/2022 3:05pm

Name: Jennifer Derke

Comment:

Hello. I would like to share an article on an incident that occurred to a fellow student in another state and I think this is an important topic to bring to our students about the dangers of online activity such as social media. Please read the story in this link (https://www.deadlinedetroit.com/articles/30238/you_win_i_m_going_to_kill_myself_dead_michigan_teen_was_victim_of_instagram_sextortion) and share with students the dangers of social media. I don't know what is being done for awareness in schools to keep our kids safe but this is an unfortunate reminder how children/teens can make life-altering decisions in an instant. I hope that no other teen or parent has to experience the hurt this family has to endure.

4.

Date: 4/19/2022 11:55am

Name: David Kuenzi

Comment:

As a parent of two children in the school system, I am strongly opposed to the extension of the school mask mandate. Our children are facing a an explosion of anxiety, depression, social isolation and other disfunction. I believe that the evident is clear that mask contribute to these ailments, at least in some small, but consequential way.

Evidence and science does not support the notion that masks will result in any substantial harm reduction (serious ailment among young people or heavily vaxed adult teachers).

So, on balance, it is very clear that mask are doing far more harm than good (likely doing no good at all).

Please end the mask mandate ASAP.

5.

Date: 5/3/2022 9:26am

Name: Katie Richgels

Comment:

I am a parent of 2 elementary students (4K and 1st grade) at Leopold. The pandemic has really delayed behavioral maturity of students in 4K - 1st grade (nation wide, but we're also seeing it in Leopold's classrooms), and it seems like early intervention is likely to have the biggest impact on reducing violence and improving wellness for later grades as well. Are you considering including elementary schools in the work of the ad hoc committee?

6.

Date: 5/5/2022 6:48pm

Name: Peter Anderson

Comment:

{This is a copy of a letter I previously sent to the Board requesting to be appointed as a member of the committee, which was not responded to. Nonetheless, I continue to believe it raises issues essential for the success of Madison's schools, which, to date, the Board declines to consider.]

My name is Peter Anderson. The reason I am writing is to ask to be appointed as a community member to the Ad Hoc Student Safety and Wellness Committee in order to add a critical perspective presently missing. That is, yes, we do need love, but in those instances where it doesn't resolve the disruptive behaviors, we also need consequences.

Our four adult children went, and our three grandchildren go or about to go to Madison's public schools, I myself have previously taught 5th grade in New York City, and I presently volunteer as a peacekeeper on the Dane County Community Restorative Justice Court, mentor an 8 year old boy at One City School, and help MOSES with data entry that supports its fight against mass incarceration.

Of note, when I was teaching in one of New York City's most disadvantaged schools in the once notorious Hunts Point section of the South Bronx (where the police were afraid to enter), I tumbled upon alternative, non-punitive ways of reaching disadvantaged kids, such as this...

In part for classroom management, and in part because I enjoyed getting to know them better, at the end of each week I would take those kids who had behaved for a treat downtown. At year's end, it occurred to me that the "bad" kids had never had a chance to go, and so I blurted out "this week the bad kids get to go on the trip, and" – I'm still not quite sure why I whimsically added – "they don't have to do anything good."

I was, therefore, tickled pink at week's end when the same boys everyone at PS 36 saw as "bad" had behaved impeccably, so I took them horse back riding in Van Cortland Park. Because they had never before in their lives seen a real horse, the experience blew their minds. Looking back, I also suspect the

magic was that neither had they ever been accorded unconditioned love.

I mention this to illustrate that the importance of prioritizing love over anger to address disruptive behaviors is something that is deeply embedded in my psyche from personal experience.

That is why I understand the committee's preliminary discussions, which are reported to have been "to center safety and wellness for all students," "to provide a place of belonging," and "to ensure students feel a sense of community and overall wellness in a new environment [that is] responsive to their needs and shows more emotional support." To which I hope we also place an emphasis on finding mentors for the most disadvantaged through groups like 100 Black Men.

As a start, all of that is to the good. After all, the impatience of disciplinarians notwithstanding, disadvantaged kids did not select their parents, nor their place of birth in a country that consigns an underclass to persistent poverty, environmental assaults and discrimination.

Unfortunately, too often we will not succeed in this way to sufficiently reduce the growing turmoil in our schools, even when we layer on a raft of wraparound social services and restorative alternatives, and give the disruptive student a second, or a third, chance. There are implacable limits to what love can achieve that must be confronted.

Sometimes, the youth's traumas are so horrific, it is, tragically, too late to heal them. At other times, the teacher's skill-set will come up short; or the system's resources found inadequate; or time constraints and competing problems will intrude.

When those limits emerge, it is vital to summon something more – that, or the anti-social behaviors will ramp up and increase turmoil in more classrooms, culminating in an accelerating death cycle. At that point, we have no viable alternative but to next confront the necessity of imposing discipline in order for learning to occur in a safe environment – even if that results in disproportionate outcomes.

Please let me explain why I believe it would be wrong in Madison to unilaterally reject any disproportionate result in the belief that would be a racist (though it might be in other districts where discrimination is prevalent). If teachers cannot discipline when all else fails–

- Unless order is restored by the imposition of consequences, the end of that road will be flight by black as well as white families who value education, and a failed school system, in which it is the most disadvantaged kids who will be trapped; and
- If the troubled youth sees here that consequences are taken off the table, he will be emotionally crippled into thinking there never will be consequences for anti-social behaviors. When he gets older and continues to act on that delusion, he will be find himself trapped in the criminal justice system because the real world will not indulge him like the District had.

More so, we cannot ignore the flip side of the same coin from our common expressions of outrage about the damage inflicted on too many black youth by the horrible hangover from centuries of slavery and its aftermath. That flip side is a disproportionately high number of children born out of that experience who will involuntarily carry on their backs into the classroom the legacy of the harms that had been done to them. Until we provide the resources for those wounds to heal, disproportionality will

be baked in.

At the same time, though, undoubtedly some teachers raised in rural communities who have only known middle class life may well harbor unconscious biases, which would account for some, but not a major part, of those disproportionate outcomes. They would greatly benefit from direct personal engagement with the lived experience of others less fortunate (contact theory has been shown to break down prejudice, while research shows diversity training does not).

But, the question of how to understand disproportionality is just one way the District has made it impossible for teachers to maintain a safe environment for students and learning. Worse, teachers have been lacerated between a pincers with disproportionality on one side and reckless charges on the other. Trapped between the two, teachers have increasingly been made impotent, unable to maintain order. That other side of the pincers is, presumably out of fear of protesters' wraith, the District has a de facto policy to refuse to even give a fair hearing, or any hearing, to teachers accused of being racist by minority students seeking to avoid discipline. Instead, the teacher is forced to resign.

This policy was brought to a head in February 2019, in the case of Rob Mueller-Owens, the Positive Behavior Coach at Whitehorse Middle School, who had been one of the District's leading voices to help the disadvantaged. For example, he had led the implementation of restorative justice courts, which is why former Superintendent Cheatham took him to a White House conference on the subject in order to honor his work.

Yet, after spending hours in a valiant but fitful attempt to defuse outbursts by a deeply disturbed young black teen, the girl accused him of hitting her, which under the known circumstances would have been a physical impossibility. Neither his sterling reputation nor the untenability of the claim meant anything, however. Protesters pilloried Dr. Cheatham, claiming the School District was "racist" for, allegedly, allowing an innocent child to suffer a "brutal beating," that led her to be "violated," "violently brutalized" and "beaten bloody" with "her hair ripped out of her scalp" by "an ass-fucking white man," who is "a White Supremacist."

Without even giving him an opportunity to be heard, presumably in order to get the protesters off her back, Dr. Cheatham forced the District's exemplar of racial enlightenment to resign in ignominy.

While forcing well-intentioned teachers to walk the plant had been trending for years, the Whitehorse Middle School incident was the catalyzing event that led to the collapse in discipline in the middle and high schools in the weeks and months that followed. If it could happen to Mr. Rob, teachers felt it could happen to anyone, and pulled back from intervening to maintain order.

Intervening to break up fights in schools, critical though that is to maintain a safe environment for students, now can destroy the career of even the most dedicated teacher in a flash if things turn out messy, as often they inevitably do. Even if they nonetheless were to recklessly undertake the risk, their decision would almost certainly be reversed because of its disproportionate impact. Memorial High School's dean reported that disruptive students ignored his warnings, sassing him "You can't suspend us anymore." When the dean tried to suspend "a kid shouting obscenities in classrooms and pounding on doors ... a district staff attorney said I should have let him go." The fact that few if any teachers will any longer undertake the essential task of intervening when to prevent violence has the most profound implications.

We can see this graphically in the direct line connecting the forced resignation of Mr. Rob to the choice last month by the East High School teacher who refused to intervene in a dangerous fight between two teenage girls in front of him, which is what impelled the Board to form the wellness committee. Instead, he remained planted in his seat calmly calling Downtown to inform the Administration, as set forth in the oblivious BEP guidance. According to the State Journal coverage, “a teacher was present and on the phone calling for support per district protocol as the incident unfolded.” An urban school system can not long endure with teachers retrenched behind their desks.

My grave fear is that unless the Board adds to its safety considerations not just the need for more love, but also the urgency to confront the fatal problems with these two policies, no amount of additional social services can be expected to resolve the crisis.

As someone applying for an appointment, I have laid these concerns on the table with some trepidation because, obviously, this view is not one that the Board majority has so far embraced. But, after eight years adhering to its love-only approach, which began with the adoption of the Behavior Education Plan in 2014, three deeply disturbing facts on the ground make it clear that the current approach is not working –

- The disproportionate suspension and expulsion rates for black students, which is the key metric that the Plan was intended to eliminate, have not improved; yet
- The serious black achievement gap also remains unchanged; and
- Classroom discipline – the foundation for learning – has deteriorated to an extent that has alarmed the community, and has significantly contributed to that accelerated black as well as white flight from the District.

By May of 2019, just three months after Whitehorse, the mounting chaos in the schools not only led Dr. Cheatham to bail out by resigning before the roof crashed on her head, but also impelled Isthmus to run an in-depth analysis of what was happening. Titled A Rotten Year, the feature graphically documented these facts through the words of the teachers who are deeply concerned about constructively reaching those disadvantaged students, but are distraught that the District will no longer make it possible for them to any longer do their jobs.

All this happened a year before COVID shuttered the schools, which made clear that, however much the pandemic worsened the situation, conditions had already reached the boiling point before the District closed. Here are some of the telling excerpts –

Leah [a middle school special ed teacher] supports the Behavior Education Plan’s principles, but calls its implementation “a complete failure.”

“What’s changed is kids have the mindset that they are in charge now. You walk into the school and there are just kids everywhere. Walking the halls. Leaving the classrooms whenever they want,” says Leah. “I do believe in restorative practices. I also believe in holding kids accountable. If we don’t, we aren’t preparing them for the real world. Cheatham really thinks she can close these achievement gaps by just loving and hugging them all.”

Leah says some teachers have grown accustomed to daily confrontation in the classroom.

“Today in a math class, I asked a kid to put her phone away and was told to ‘fuck off,’” says Leah. “I said, ‘Okay. But could you please put your phone away? Her response, ‘Don't fuck with me now because I'm not in the mood. I'm going to call my mom.’”

Peter Opps, a history teacher at La Follette High School, estimates that up to 5 percent of students hang out in the halls on any given day.

“It can be a real circus and it's happening at every high school and at middle schools, too. It's like the district is lost on what to do. This year is different because we are seeing respect break down on so many different levels,” says Opps, who notes that most of the students in the halls at La Follette are African American. “There has been a morph from an educational environment to more of a housing environment. You want to know where our achievement gap is? It's out in the hall.”

Leah doesn't blame the students.

“I love these kids. But they are going to push the envelope as far as they can,” she says. “That's what middle schoolers do. This isn't their fault.”

The Board deserves respect for boldly standing up for those kids who, through no fault of their own, have been dealt a rotten hand by life. Sadly, however, life isn't fair. Instead, it is riddled with damnable unescapable unintended consequences that make it impossible for the best of intentions to solve the deep-rooted problems of every single disadvantaged student without bringing down the entire house of cards. We can make progress, yes, but not see the Second Coming overnight.

That is why I ask for consideration for appointment to insure these critical concerns are included in the conversation, and that, when love fails, it must be followed by consequences.

And, my thanks to those who have waded through to the end of this too-long letter.

7.

Date: 5/7/2022 5:47pm

Name: Afraid of retaliation

Comment:

I am writing as a concerned parent whose partner teachers at an MMSD school. He comes home and tells me stories about the things students are allowed to get away with without any actual consequences (and total lack of enough special education support, an entire caseload of 7th graders at _____ Middle School who haven't had a special education teacher all year). I want to send my children to our neighborhood school, but not when disruptive, swearing, sexually harrassing students are sent right back to class without consequences. Teachers aren't allowed to do much. Having taught in Milwaukee Public Schools it seems Madison's schools are headed that way, kids just doing what they want all day and disrupting the learning of others. This is driving people from the district.

8.

Date: 5/12/2022 7:44am

Name: Daniela Rumpf

Comment:

The temperature in the classrooms at Emerson Elementary are getting higher and higher with this early heat wave and humidity. 86 degrees and hotter. This is not safe for kids, especially since children aren't always good at knowing when their body is over heating and keeping up with hydration. MMSD should at least have early release on these hot days.

9.

Date: 5/27/2022 7:40am

Name: Michelle Szymanski

Comment:

Will there be additional security measures in place for the next two weeks in the aftermath of the Uvalde school shooting? Data shows that school shootings happen in clusters and are more common in the two weeks after a nationally televised event. I am sure most families and teachers will agree that increased security is warranted. Is there a process and plan in place?

10.

Date: 5/25/2022 1:38pm

Name: Alison Stawicki

Comment:

Obviously we all are horrified by yesterday's events. I have long contributed to the Sandy Hook foundation and wonder if anyone has considered utilizing their programming to encourage peers to take notice of other peers that might be exhibiting warning signs of violence. Please refer to this website: <https://www.sandyhookpromise.org/our-programs/program-overview/>

Please let me know if there has been any feedback about this. Our kids are well aware of what has been happening and they might have less anxiety knowing more ways to be proactive.

11.

Date: 6/22/2022 6:50pm

Name: diana L klang

Comment:

I don't think students are taught, either at school or home, how to walk on a Madison street when there's no sidewalks. I live on Ridgeway Ave, the last block, off Mendota st both of which do not have sidewalks. The neighbor student does walk on the correct side because that's the side we live on. Middle school students, though, walk northwest from E Wash usually next to each other with no regard to traffic. My wish is that during announcements or something, please teach these kids, from K through 12 this important lesson because adults, too, never seem to walk on the correct side of the street. Next time someone is walking in the same direction I'm driving, they're going to get the horn blasted at them. Thanks.

12.

Date: 6/11/2022 1:49pm

Name: Margaret Leaf

Comment:

I have 3 kids in the district, and we are HUGE supporters of MMSD's awesome schools and teachers. However, I'm really dismayed that the district elected to again not implement the highly supported change to start/dismissal times. I understand COVID presented (and still presents) many challenges, including bus driver shortages. But I don't understand how the bus driver shortages impede the ability to implement the new start/dismissal times, or how the mental health/wellness of students would be weighed as less important than bus driver schedule consistency. We had planned for this change for this fall, just like we had planned for it in fall of 2021, so while it might seem like sticking with the same schedule as last year is more consistent for families, it's not what we personally planned for. It is challenging for my middle-schooler (at Whitehorse) to start the day at 7:30, especially since I have to transport her out of district (divorced parents -- I couldn't find an affordable home in district). Her siblings are in the elementary school next door (Schenk), and yet start almost an hour later. It is logistically difficult, to say the least. Is there any way to get an exception, so she can start closer to the time that they start? I'm trying to make this work for another year and I'm struggling.

13.

Date: 8/24/2022 12:57pm

Name: Janet Schuesko

Comment:

Let's use the remaining ESSER funds to put HEPA air cleaners in every classroom. With the mask mandate gone, and contact tracing and quarantining also gone, cleaning the air via engineering controls is the one remaining option. While better HAVC system and ULGI (UVC installations that are safe to use

with people present) would be ideal, both very expensive and would be disruptive to install at this point. HEPA air cleaners on the other hand can supply the equivalent of 5-6 air exchanges per hour for less than a dollar per student per year and would greatly reduce spread of infection, especially in the colder months when keeping windows open may be impractical.

The biggest contribution MMSD can make to student health, wellness, and safety right now is to reduce chances of contracting and spreading covid at school. Even mild or asymptomatic cases can result in long term neurological damage ('brain fog', seizures, slowed processing, reduced concentration) lung damage, and heart damage which are visible on imaging [references to peer reviewed scholarly publications available on request]. I would be happy to discuss sizing, costs, and specific units with anyone in MMSD. It has come to my attention that parents have offered to donate new high quality HEPA units to their children's classrooms and were told that this was forbidden by MMSD policy. Could you please clarify if this is indeed the policy of MMSD.

14.

Date: 9/30/2022 11:04am

Name: Anonymous

Comment:

This month I've been seeing a lot of students pushing, shoving, and verbally harassing each other during passing time. Some students can't seem to keep their hands off each other and tend to mess around, regardless if it was in the halls, or worse, the stairs, and I believe other students find it difficult to continue their way to their class because of that. Please find a way to ensure students learn to keep their hands to themselves and respect others spaces.

15.

Date: 11/3/2022 2:39pm

Name: Mary Jo Walters

Comment:

My daughter stated again (the first time was last year) that no one uses the bathrooms, they are not safe, drugs are done in there, and destruction, and even sex another student told me. Bathrooms when I was in school for the girls, were lounges, where we could relax and look in the mirror. I heard from other parents about this situation. Here it is a year later. Where are the safety surveys? What is a solution?

Please email me a response.

Thanks

16.

Date: 11/9/2022 10:17am

Name: Chandra Anderson

Comment:

I am concerned about the amount of alcohol and drug use happening inside the school building. I am also concerned with the lack of consequences for students. These are illegal for minors to use and illegal for anyone to use on school grounds. We have repeat offenders for whom we need to be concerned about forming bad habits and brain and body development.

We are responsible for not only keeping drug use out of our school buildings but for the health consequences of our apathy towards this behavior.

17.

Date: 11/12/2022 8:56pm

Name: Kristin

Comment:

Hi, I would like to see more play and more outdoor classrooms... especially for elementary school. I would like Kindergarten to be play-based as much as possible. These would be great wellness initiatives. Also, full-day play based 4K.

18.

Date: 11/15/2022 12:21pm

Name: Ryan Zea

Comment:

I often drive by this intersection at lunch time and very frequently the kids crossing the street blatantly disobey the walking signs. Today, kids started walking the intersection as the left turn light turned on and they walked in front of turning vehicles. As the weather worsens, I feel there will be a driver not paying laser sharp attention and will not be able to stop on a slick road.

This intersection needs police monitoring before some kid gets killed.

19.

Date: 11/16/2022 2:31pm

Name: Maria Ruiz

Comment:

Hi,

I want to comment that the lockouts, lockdowns, and drills may be creating stress and fear with our children especially freshman and new students. There has to be a less stressful way. I doubt many adults have to work in such an environment on a daily basis (except I guess public high school teachers, jail workers, and emergency room workers and police).

What measures can be taken to decrease the lock down/lock outs, and how can the children have clear communication that they are not in danger and what it going on? For example my daughter asked, I heard there was a lockout at school (when she was off campus for lunch) and then asked, "why would I walk back TOWARD the danger" and she decided to come home. This seemed like the best trust her gut decision and I don't blame her. if its a rare occasion that's ok, but if its happening multiple times a month, im afraid it will create a PTSD type experience. it is also creating a sense of that school is not safe, and that maybe private schools are safer, which statistically is not true, but is becoming a perceived dangerous environment that the students/adolescents experience.

thank you for your time

20.

Date: 12/14/2022 7:17am

Name: TB

Comment:

Last spring, while walking thru the hallways of the high school my child attends, I saw this: Two guys walking down the hall, yelling to their friend further down the hallway. Their (very loud) dialogue was sprinkled with profanity, most notably the F word. At least two teachers walked past - neither one of them so much as giving the young men a glance.

This sums it up in a nutshell. The permissiveness and lack of structure embraced by the school staff in this city has created a school culture in decline. When you let the small stuff go, the larger environment suffers. But, hey, what matters is they feel good about themselves right?

I'm kidding of course. You do the students no favors by lowering standards. Keep in mind the old trope: "soft bigotry of low expectations". I feel bad for these kids when they get out of school.
