



December 17, 2015

Dear Assembly Education Committee Members,

I am writing to voice concern about several bills that you will be hearing today. Thank you for your time and consideration of our questions and concerns about these bills.

AB 481

As school districts, we experience an ever changing and unstable environment at the state level – from taking resources out of public education to fund private or charter schools, to changes in requirements or accountability measures, to changing state testing requirements. That, combined with repeated cuts to funding, makes our work sometimes unpredictable.

Instead of providing greater support in this unstable environment, this bill would put arbitrary restrictions on how we work with our local community. It could prevent us from being responsive to the needs of our district or the feedback of our community. After repeatedly cutting resources from public education, this bill would tie the hands of local communities to make their own decisions.

We are fortunate that our local community has overwhelmingly supported our public schools. We urge legislators not to put restrictions on our community's ability to do that.

AB 581

As a district, we work hard to attract and retain the very best educators to support our students.

In fact, over the past year, our district revamped its teacher screening and selection process. Candidates are now asked to demonstrate that they have the skills we know a Madison teacher needs to be successful – things like cultural competence, the ability to collaborate, data proficiency and holding high expectations for all students. By using this skills-based process, we are able to find high-quality candidates, and we are able to target specific candidates to the specific needs of a school.

However, we do experience shortages and need more support from the state to fill those shortage areas with qualified candidates. We do not believe this bill provides a solution to filling those shortage areas with high quality educators. Rather than simply fill those areas with candidates that don't have the training or experience that our students deserve, we need better support from the state for our educators.

Through things like incentives or tuition assistance for educators working to get licensure or endorsement in hard to staff areas, we could attract more qualified teachers to our shortage areas. We know there are additional teachers who would love to attain these licenses but face significant financial barriers that prevent them from doing so. Better support through incentives or tuition assistance would help us fill these shortages.

Only providing a pathway for candidates with little to no training or professional experience as an educator does not solve the problem for us. We need the very best teachers supporting all of our children, and this bill does not take us in that direction.

AB 517

Like any school district, the safety of our students is our top priority in Madison Schools. We have strong safety protocols in place, and we continuously review, improve and train staff.

We are also committed to open, transparent communication around school safety with our families, staff, students and community members. We report on overall data, and we report to our school communities when incidents happen. We support full transparency and openness about safety in our schools, and we support any effort to help us keep our schools as safe, positive learning environments.

However, there are too many unanswered questions in this bill. Any report would need to give fully accurate information to our families and community, and we are not sure how that would be accomplished in this bill.

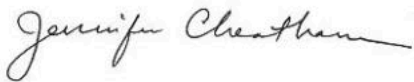
For example there are sometimes calls to police that do not result in further action but are still documented. There might be incidents that happen outside of school that a student reports to a teacher or counselor at school, which results in police action. We want students to feel they can report things to us, even if those incidents don't happen at school.

Without a comprehensive system for compiling data, ensuring its accuracy and consistency, we could risk putting inaccurate or inconsistent information out to our communities.

Again, the safety of our students is our top priority and we would urge legislators to seek clarity and answers to the questions regarding this bill before moving forward.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jennifer Cheatham".

Jennifer Cheatham
Superintendent