



THOUGHTS ON EDUCATION

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The City Education Committee has submitted a series of questions regarding education and the challenges we are facing. I know this is not a problem that will be solved overnight and I know it will take multiple partners, especially you, the residents of Madison. I am sharing my responses with you and look forward to your continued involvement.

The city of Madison provides considerable funding through Community Services and Community Development Block Grants, which enhances the educational environment. The following are areas of concern, where the city should continue, expand, or introduce new support. I provide this list to provide a framework to your questions.

- Quality Childcare – part of a collaborative effort focused on support from cradle to career.
- Hunger – hungry children do not learn. Free and reduced lunches are not sufficient if the child does not have a nutritious supper, complete meals on the weekends as well as over vacation periods.
- Student attendance – as Woody Allen famously said, "Eighty percent of success is showing up."
- Every child should live within a reasonable walking distance of a community, neighborhood, school-based, or housing site-based center to ensure adequate after-school and summer programming. This programming is part of the longer school day and ensures educational and recreational activities during the summer.
- Safe places free from trauma and violence both inside and outside the home.
- As the MMUSD rolls out its Parent University, another cradle to career program, the city will be supportive.

1. We are interested in knowing what you think your role is in supporting public education in Madison.

There is nothing that the city government does, that contributes to the quality of life in Madison, that is as important as public education. Our role is to provide strong neighborhoods, reduce poverty, and create a safe and healthy community, which in turn, improves educational outcomes.

2. What initiatives/programs does your governmental entity support that interfaces with MMUSD directly or affect student age kids indirectly?

Support the longer school day and summer programming through cradle to career initiatives. The city is expanding its support for neighborhood centers. Last week, the Wallace Foundation invited the City of Madison and the school district to participate in a February 2013 conference designed to focus on coordinating public and private after-school programming. The City will participate in this conference. Such programming is essential to expanding the school day and school year.

As the city and county develop their food policies, it is desirable for all agencies to focus on eliminating hunger and ensure healthy food choices in our schools.

Parent University is a MMSD program. The city and county should assist the MMSD in getting resources to parents to ensure that all parents have access to public schools and can provide their children the necessary tools for a sound education.

3. We would like to hear how you see your governmental entity working with the other two to support and improve the quality of public education for our students.

City support can be in the form of reallocating resources, participating in collaborative programming and using our influence to guide private resources.

4. We would love to hear any ideas you might have as to how our committee can work toward and advocate for meaningful partnerships between the three entities. We would also be interested in hearing any specific ideas or projects you think our committee could/should focus on in 2013.

Encourage the speedy development of our collaboration; the clock is ticking.

5. Anything else you would like to talk about in regards to education, partnerships/collaborations, etc.?

We are not interested in the development of new charter schools. Recent presentations of charter school programs indicate that most of them do not perform to the level of Madison public schools. I have come to three conclusions about charter schools. First, the national evidence is clear overall, charter schools do not perform as well as traditional public schools. Second where charter schools have shown improvement, generally they have not reached the level of success of Madison schools. Third, if our objective is to improve overall educational performance, we should try proven methods that elevate the entire district not just the students in charter schools. The performance of non-charter students in cities like Milwaukee and Chicago is dismal.

In addition, it seems inappropriate to use resources to develop charter schools when we have not explored system-wide programming that focuses on improving attendance, the longer school day, greater parental involvement and combating hunger and trauma.

We must get a better understanding of the meaning of 'achievement gap.' A school in another system may have made gains in 'closing' the achievement gap, but that does not mean its students are performing better than Madison students. In addition, there is mounting evidence that a significant portion of the 'achievement gap' is the result of students transferring to Madison from poorly performing districts. If that is the case, we should be developing immersion programs designed for their needs rather than mimicking charter school programs that are more expensive, produce inadequate results, and fail to recognize the needs of all students.

It should be noted that not only do the charter schools have questionable results but they leave the rest of the district in shambles. Chicago and Milwaukee are two systems that invested heavily in charter schools and are systems where overall performance is unacceptable.