

April 29, 2003  
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### **A. Introduction:**

There's no need for community action if the MMSD Administration and BOE state support for the current elementary strings academic curriculum. They don't. When the Board members don't say yes, it means no, given their recent history with this curriculum.

The MMSD Board of Education adopted and approved the elementary strings program as a necessary component of its Music Education Curriculum in the late 1980s. Standards and benchmarks were added in the late 1990s. The BOE has neither discussed nor changed its decisions on this curriculum.

The recent treatment of the elementary strings curriculum is another example of what happens when our BOE is lacking Long Range Plans for curriculum, for funding and for letting the Administration call the shots for kids rather than the BOE.

### **B. Background:**

For the 2 previous MMSD budget cycles, the District Administration has used various approaches to try to eliminate the 4-5th grade strings academic curriculum.

- **Spring 2002** - included elimination of Grade 4 strings on cut list - at least this approach gave parents, teachers and the community notice - opportunity to propose ideas for alternative funding, etc. There was no follow up by the Administration during the 2002-2003 school year.
- **Spring 2003** - after waiting until BOE completed its budget amendments, the District administration proposed a huge fee for families (a fee so large that the BOE would have cut the program rather than charge the fee). The District Administration and the BOE did not use this interim academic year (2003-2004) to engage the community and to seek alternative options or funding by foundations, different fee structure, etc
- **Spring 2004** – There is no Administration proposal to cut the elementary strings curriculum, but Board President Bill Keys has asked the District Administration for the kind of information that would justify elimination of the program.

I directly asked Mr. Keys and all of the other Board members during public appearances at the Board meeting on Monday night, April 26<sup>th</sup>, whether a cut proposal was coming – I did not get an answer. Based upon the Board's lack of response, a rally was discussed among parents, teachers and community

members. The decision to share the information and to take action on Monday, May 3, 2004 was decided.

### **C. Concerns/Issues:**

- It was irresponsible and unfair of Mr. Keys to singularly identify this curriculum/activity without applying the same request to all district activities. It is unclear what criteria were used in the analysis the School Board received and if the same criteria have been applied to other activities/curricula. I prepared a critique of the District Administration's analysis, which was given to the Board on Monday, April 26<sup>th</sup>.
- The District Administration said that eliminating this academic curriculum would save 5% of the needed budget cut. What does that mean out of context of educational goals and objectives for the district, etc.?
- Why doesn't the district have a comprehensive set of criteria to use for a cost analysis which is applied to ALL programs, curricula and activities? The board does not have an understanding and agreement about what is curriculum, what an extra-curricular activity is and what a co-curricular activity is.

Upon determining the base-line costs of all activities, then an equitable decision framework can developed as to how and to what degree such activities can/should be funded on an equitable basis across the total list. It's not okay simply to say sports yes, elementary strings no. Attached is a proposal for equitable funding prepared by Don Severson.

- It's not okay to eliminate a valued Board approved academic subject that is in high demand (more than 50% of 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders – about 1900 kids in September) by many students who cannot afford to study privately. Each year the demand from minority and low income students increases.

Why does the School Board continue to consider cutting an academic curriculum that is part of a Board approved curriculum that has standards and benchmarks in place? Why would the School Board want to dumb down its curriculum two years? (Current 12<sup>th</sup> graders in strings would have two years fewer of study.) Colleges often look to a student's sports and music accomplishments in addition to core academics.

- What are the motivations of board members to identify "lightening rods" of selective programs for parents, teachers, and the public to 'fight' against each other to 'save' whatever program/activity? Our excellent school system demands that we work together to problem solve the issues facing us.

- Why isn't the Administration and the School Board working with the community?