

MMSD STUDENT SENATE

*Megan Wilcots, President
Luke Gangler, Vice President*

Memorandum

DATE: June 8, 2014

TO: Madison Metropolitan School District Board of Education

FROM: Madison Metropolitan School District Student Senate

SUBJECT: Recommendations for 2014-15 budget

Please see the attached report regarding the 2014-15 MMSD budget.

This report was compiled by the MMSD Student Senate and sets forth a series of proposed amendments to the the 2014-15 proposed budget. It includes a budget overview, review of student opinion, proposed changes, and a fiscal summary.

Please direct questions via email to MSS President, Megan Wilcots and Student Liaison, Luke Gangler.

cc:

Jennifer Cheatham, Superintendent of Schools

Michael Barry, Assistant Superintendent for Business Administration

Kelly Ruppel, Chief of Staff

Barb Lehman, Secretary to the Board of Education

Molly Beck, Wisconsin State Journal

Pat Schneider, Capital Times

MMSD STUDENT SENATE

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2014-15 Student Senate Budget Report



MMSD STUDENT SENATE

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Table of Contents

- Table of Contents
- Introduction
- Summary of Preliminary Student Survey
- Amendment Proposal #1
- Amendment Proposal #2
- Amendment Proposal #3
- Amendment Proposal #4
- Fiscal Summary
 - Net Expenditures
 - Net Revenues
- References
- Appendix
 - Preliminary Survey of Students
 - Student Fee Elimination — Cost Estimate
 - Lunch Cost Comparison
 - Lunch Increase — Impact on Students and Families
 - Fee Increase - Impact on Students and Families

Introduction

This report serves as a synthesis of student feedback on the 2014-15 budget process and provides specific recommendations for amendments. The content and recommendations of this report are based on a wide breadth of student input and represents, to the best ability of the authors, a synthesized perspective of student opinion on the 2014-15 proposed budget.

Before compiling this report, Student Senate wrote and disseminated a survey to gather student feedback. In order to gain preliminary feedback and to avoid bias, no summary or explanation of the proposed budget was provided to students—questions were open-ended and intended to

MMSD STUDENT SENATE

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identify student budget priorities. Please see the appendix for the specific questions asked.

Student Senate members then worked to organize student input and generate policy recommendations. Student input was key to informing this process from start to finish.

This report recommends four specific amendments to be made to the 2014-15 proposed budget. While Student Senate proposes a net increase of expenditures, careful consideration went into creating a balance of cost savings and cost increases.

Student Senate strongly feels that student input is essential to any school district's budgeting process. Students are both the key stakeholder in their education and the central purpose of the district's operation. Students also have valuable experience and perspective on issues that other stakeholders do not directly experience. Thus, student influence during the budgeting process is vital to ensuring that high-level district decisions reflect the realities within MMSD schools.

This report was compiled by the MMSD Student Senate (MSS). Student Senate is a student run organization, advocating on the interests of MMSD students and acting as the main connection between the student body, MMSD administration, and the MMSD Board of Education. The MMSD Student Senate was initiated by Board policy 4501 and is funded by the Madison Metropolitan School District. MSS maintains independent decision making processes and all views in this report are those of the student membership.

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Summary of Preliminary Student Survey

(top 5 responses)

Need greater prioritization:

Building Maintenance



Student Services/Student Resources/non-Curricular Learning



Teacher/Staff Compensation



Arts



Foods Services



Less prioritization necessary:

Technology



Athletics



Aesthetics



Disposable Resource Waste



Common Core/Curriculum



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Amendment Proposal #1

This proposal would fund the capital maintenance budget at 1,184,560 dollars above the 2014-15 proposed budget. The proposed budget included a 1,500,000 dollar reduction in the capital maintenance budget in relation to the 2013-14 budget, a 25 percent reduction. Under this proposal, the capital maintenance budget would be funded at 315,440 dollars less than the 2013-14 budget (5,684,560 dollars), a 5.3 percent reduction.

This proposal would be offset by a reduction in dollars allocated in the proposed budget.

Allocation for "School Learning Spaces," as set forth in the 2014 Information and Technology Plan would be eliminated. As detailed in the proposed budget appendix (page 118 of proposed budget), this allocation amounts to 1,184,560 dollars.

Rationale

- Student feedback has made clear that the current level of funding for Building Services (6,000,000 dollars in the 2013-14 budget) is inadequate. The robustness of this viewpoint is well demonstrated as it was the most discussed aspect of district resource allocation that needs greater prioritization in the preliminary survey of students. It is important to note that the frequency of responses regarding Building Services (or related) was not impacted by the proposed reduction as no information was provided about the proposed budget. Instead, this input reflects the current inefficacy of the Building Services budget. Anecdotal accounts reveal that MMSD buildings do not currently provide an environment conducive to learning. As students strongly feel that the status quo expenditures (6,000,000 dollars) are not enough to maintain an adequate learning environment, the 25 percent proposed reduction is clearly not aligned to the experiences of the student body.

MMSD STUDENT SENATE

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- Student feedback has made clear that expenditures on technology should be prioritized below expenditures on Building Maintenance. While evidence from the student survey and personal accounts suggests this is a categorical preference, opinion is particularly strong about the lack of need for expenditures that fall into the “School Learning Spaces” aspect of the technology budget. “Interactive projectors” are specifically mentioned (by a variety of names) by four respondents in the preliminary survey as a waste of resources, while many others used more generic descriptions of new technology that fall into this category.
- Students explicitly and implicitly suggest that the district needs to prioritize foundational expenses before increasing expenditures on technology in learning spaces. While significant distractions due to the failure to properly maintain the learning environment persist, new fangled technology purchases cannot be justified and are not grounded in an understanding of the day-to-day experiences of students.
- The specific aspects of the Information and Technology Plan that are proposed to be reallocated are chosen in order to not disrupt the Board of Education’s long-term plan to increase technology use in MMSD, and does not target the heart of the proposal—student device access.

	2013-14 Actual	2014-15 Proposed	2014-15 MSS Proposal	% change (14-15 proposed to MSS proposal)
Capital Maintenance (fund 41)	6,000,000	4,500,000	5,648,560	26.3%
Technology -- School Learning Spaces	0	1,184,560	0	(100%)
Tax Levy Increase	3.38%	2.11%	2.11%	0%

MMSD STUDENT SENATE

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Amendment Proposal #2

This proposal would fund employee health insurance increases, by allocating an additional 1,350,000 dollars to the respective Fund 10 budget lines. The proposed 2014-15 budget covered 5 percent of healthcare increases, leaving 1,350,000 dollars unaccounted for. This proposal would fully fund health care increases, leaving the expected financial contribution of employees at 0 dollars.

This proposal is funded by revenue and expenditure changes. We propose reallocating the additional funds earmarked for teacher screening (TeacherMatch) as well as increasing revenues through the tax levy to cover the increased fiscal burden of this proposal. The allocation for TeacherMatch (110,000 dollars) will be reduced to the cost of the current teacher screener (approx. 22,000 dollars). The tax levy would be increased by 1,262,000 dollars.

Rationale

- Student opinion was unilaterally in support of greater staff compensation. Students feel strongly that their teachers need to be fairly compensated in order for the district to retain and attract quality teachers and to reduce teacher stress.
- The proposed budget uses creative accounting to suggest that staff will be fairly compensated, including a cell increase of .75 percent. However, the budget simultaneously reduces staff income by requiring an expected financial contribution (EFC) to health care. Students recommend removing the need for an EFC by fully funding the increase as they believe that the current health care package is important to the value of MMSD employee compensation packages. Renegotiation through reduction of benefits is not supported by students.

MMSD STUDENT SENATE

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- Students do not support using any EFC increase to offset this shortfall. EFCs obfuscate the compensation of employees and allow the district to claim a “raise” while the take-home pay of staff falls. Any changes to staff compensation should be made through changes to the “cell” compensation level.
- Using an EFC also creates new precedent for budget balancing. As health care costs increase annually, employees will be losing pay even if their EFC percent remains constant.
- The cost of this proposal is partially offset by not contracting with TeacherMatch and maintaining current teacher screening tools. Students do not believe that teacher candidates should be evaluated by TeacherMatch or a similar tool that claims to predict student test score increases. Students do not believe that high stakes testing is a valid reflection on staff quality and reject the premise that the goal of teachers is to increase these scores. Students believe that using a tool such as TeacherMatch would be counterproductive at determining true candidate quality, such as the ability to be a mentor for students, engage students in full-spectrum learning, and create a positive learning environment for students.

	2013-14 Actual	2014-15 Proposed	2014-15 MSS Proposal	% change (14-15 proposed to MSS proposal)
Fund 10	235,763,436	239,422,991	240,684,991	.53%
Teacher Screening	22,000	110,000	22,000	(80%)
Tax Levy Increase	3.38%	2.11%	2.60%	23.22%

MMSD STUDENT SENATE

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Amendment Proposal #3

This proposal would readjust the funding for Food Services. The 2014-15 proposed budget attempts to make the Food Services fund self-sustaining through a variety of cost savings. This proposal would eliminate cost savings from increased student lunch fees and chargebacks on alternative programs. The proposed budget increases all lunch fees for staff and for students not eligible for or participating in the Free/Reduced Lunch Program (FRLP) by 10 cents per lunch. This proposal would keep lunch prices at the 2013-14 level for staff and students at all grade levels while maintaining the proposed Food Services budget expenditures. Additionally, the proposed budget found cost savings in the Food Services budget by charging alternative program site budgets for Food Service delivery. This is a cost only proposed to affect alternative programs on the basis that these programs often have low enrollment and thus less efficient for food delivery purposes. This proposal would eliminate the proposed cost for alternative programs and replace it with Fund 10 expenditures.

All funding for this proposal would be allocated from increased tax levy. While district administration has not provided exact numbers for anticipated increased revenue, the proposed food services budget found in the appendix of the proposed budget (page 125) allows for close estimates regarding the cost of much of this proposal. The proposed budget allocates 153,980.34 dollars more student and staff sales revenue than this year's projected total. Some of this increase is likely to be explained by greater enrollment next year, however, our estimate assumes that this increased revenue is entirely due to increased lunch prices and is thus, likely exaggerated. The fiscal impact of funding Food Services without charging alternative programs

MMSD STUDENT SENATE

Megan Wilcots, President
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has not been provided within the proposed budget or by district administration. However, if the amount charged from alternatives is relatively minimal, little fiscal effect would result. In the case that the fiscal impact is relatively large, the associated cost will be unacceptable from a standpoint of innovative alternatives, and must be eliminated nonetheless. For the purposes of this report we assume the cost to be 15,000 dollars (more than 1,000 dollars per non-integrated site).

Rationale

- Students strongly oppose balancing the budget on the backs of students and families. Students feel that increased burdens to the cost of attendance detract from their constitutionally held right to a free and public education.
- Student lunch fees are already significantly higher than surrounding communities. The average charge for non-FRLP school lunches in 9 Dane County districts (including Madison) is 2.52 dollars while it is 2.77 dollars in Madison. Including staff costs in the average, surrounding districts charge 2.74 dollars while Madison charges 2.97 dollars. This does not include the proposed increase, which would further exacerbate this discrepancy. See the appendix for a complete table of comparative lunch prices.
- Although it may seem that this increase only goes to the students and families who can afford the increase as it does not have an impact on students participating in the FRLP, it is important to note that the FRLP only covers families living at or below 185% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). According to Richard Rothstein, families below 200% of the FPL are at a substantially increased risk of experiencing food insecurity. The proposed increase would further burden families that already find it difficult to keep food on the table.

MMSD STUDENT SENATE

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- While this is a low leverage revenue generator (168,980.34 dollars) it comes at a high cost for MMSD students and families. This proposal would cost the average Madison property owner an additional 1.86 dollars. However, pursuing the lunch price increase would cost the average MMSD student/family purchasing lunch between 36.00 dollars and 72.00+ dollars (depending on family size). See the appendix for this calculation.
- Students believe that alternative programs are an essential aspect of MMSD and that taking funding from alternatives in order to make Food Services self-sustaining is unnecessary and an unfair targeting of alternative programs. Students believe that Food Services are a high priority, the desire to make Food Services self-sustaining and run “like a business” are unimportant to real student needs. By requiring a charge to some alternative programs, the proposed budget obscures that Food Services is not actually self-sustaining but indirectly relies on Fund 10. Students propose to codify this as an interfund transfer and to not further burden alternative program site budgets.

	2013-14 Projected	2014-15 Proposed	2014-15 MSS Proposal	% change (14-15 proposed to MSS proposal)
Food Services	10,198,247.91	10,720,851.71	10,720,851.71	0%
Avg Lunch Fee (non-FLRP) inc. Staff	3.09	3.19	3.09	(3.13%)
Alternative Program Food Services Charge	0	15,000	0	(100%)
Fund 10 Transfer to Food Services	286,809.98	0	168,980.34	n/a
Tax Levy Increase	3.38% (actual)	2.11%	2.18%	3.32%

MMSD STUDENT SENATE

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Amendment Proposal #4

This proposal would eliminate student fee increases as proposed in the 2014-15 budget proposal. The proposed budget increases fees for all non-FRLP students. Tables of these increases are provided below:

Elementary	2013-14 Actual	2014-15 Proposed	Percent Change
Consumable Materials	35.00	40.00	14.3%

Middle	2013-14 Actual	2014-15 Proposed	Percent Change
Consumable Materials	15.00	20.00	33.3%
Student Activity	12.00	17.00	41.7%
Textbook	35.00	40.00	14.3%
Total (of above)	62.00	77.00	24.2%

High	2013-14 Actual	2014-15 Proposed	Percent Change
Consumable Materials	12.00	17.00	41.7%
Student Activity	25.00	30.00	20.0%
Textbooks	35.00	40.00	14.3%
Total (of above)	72.00	87.00	20.8%

MMSD STUDENT SENATE

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This proposal would be funded by a tax levy increase. Although the fiscal impact of revenues foregone by this proposal is not directly available in the proposed budget, Student Senate estimates them to be 129,005 dollars. Please see the appendix for the full methodology of this estimate.

Rationale

- This proposal relies on similar rationale as amendment proposal #3.
- This proposal would cost the average property owner 1.31 dollars. However, pursuing the fee increase would cost the average MMSD student/family 20.00-40.00 dollars (depending on family size).

All Non-FLRP Fees	2013-14 Actual	2014-15 Proposed	2014-15 MSS Proposal	% change (14-15 proposed to MSS proposal)
Elementary*	35.00	40.00	35.00	(12.5%)
Middle**	62.00	77.00	62.00	(19.5%)
High***	72.00	87.00	72.00	(17.2%)
Additional Fee Revenue (over prior)	0	129,005°	0	(100%)
Fund 10	235,763,436	239,422,991	239,551,996	.05%
Tax Levy Increase	3.38%	2.11%	2.16%	2.37%

*Does not include strings participation or music rental

** Does not include music rental

*** Does not include athletic participation fee or music rental

°Please see appendix for calculation

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Fiscal Summary

This report covers four main proposals. The fiscal summary is intended to demonstrate and analyze the fiscal outcome if all MSS proposals were accepted.

Net Expenditures

Amendment Proposal #	Change	Net cost of MSS Proposal
1	Reallocation of expenditures to Food Services	0
2	Funding of health care increases	1,262,000
3	Eliminate lunch increases; eliminate alternative program chargeback	168,980
4	Eliminate fee increases	129,005
Total		1,559,985

Net Revenues

	2013-14 Actual	2014-15 Proposed	2014-15 MSS Proposal	% change (14-15 proposed to MSS proposal)
Fund 10	235,763,436	239,422,991	240,982,976	.65%
Tax Levy Increase	3.38%	2.11%	2.72%	28.91%

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Students feel that this levy increase responsibly balances the needs of students with the need for fiscal responsibility. The burden to the average property owner would be less under this proposal than was assumed in the proposed budget due to dramatic decreases in tax levy from other local entities (i.e. Madison College).

MMSD STUDENT SENATE

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References

Rothstein, R. (2004). *Class and schools: Using social, economic, and educational reform to close the Black-white achievement gap*. New York, NY: Teachers College, Columbia University.

Appendix

Preliminary Survey of Students

1. What does the school district need to prioritize in the budget?

What needs, if any, do students have that aren't being met? What is important to you?

2. Where is the school district wasting resources?

What areas of spending, if any, should be used for other priorities?

3. Which school do you attend?

4. What grade are you in?

5. What is your email address?

If you would like to be kept up-to-date on the budget and Student Senate, please provide your email address.

*The raw data from this survey with names and emails redacted is available upon request.

Student Fee Elimination – Cost Estimate

Elementary Fee Increase

\$5.00 consumable materials

\$5.00

Middle/High School Fee Increase

\$5.00 consumable materials

\$5.00 activity fee

\$5.00 textbook fee

\$15.00

MMSD STUDENT SENATE

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Calculation

5,947 non-FRLP Elementary Students x \$5.00 = \$29,735

6,618 non-FRLP Middle/High Students x \$15.00 = \$99,270

Total = \$129,005

Lunch Cost Comparison

	Elementary	Middle	High	Adult
Madison	2.50	2.90	2.90+	Elem 3.45, M/H 3.70+
McFarland	2.60	2.75	2.95	3.75
Middleton	2.45	2.75	3.05	3.75
Monona Grove	2.30	2.45	2.70	3.35
Oregon	2.35	2.55	2.75+	3.55
Sun Prairie	2.15	2.40	2.50	3.20
Stoughton	2.10	2.25	2.30	3.00
Waunakee	2.50	2.75	2.75	3.50
Verona	2.05	2.10	2.20	2.85
Average	2.33	2.54	2.68	3.41

Lunch Increase – Impact on Students and Families

\$.10 x (approx. 180 days) x 2 students

\$36.00

3 students

\$54.00

4 students

\$72.00

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Fee Increase - Impact on Students and Families

\$10 (avg/student) x	2 students	3 students	4 students
	\$20.00	\$30.00	\$40.00