



You will be amazed.

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August 7, 2007

Martin Shultz, Chairman
School District Redistricting Commission
Arizona Department of Education
1535 West Jefferson Street, Bin 2
Phoenix, Arizona 85007

Dear Mr. Shultz,

You have asked for input from the Madison Governing Board on redistricting plans that will be put forward on the November 2008 ballot, specifically on the redistricting plan draft that merges the Madison Elementary District with the Wilson, Balsz and Creighton Elementary Districts and the breakup of Phoenix Union High School District with Camelback High School and North High School being brought into the new proposed unified school district (Central Plan #1, District E). This letter is intended to serve as our formal response to your request.

On June 19, 2007, our governing board met to discuss the plans set forth by the commission. At that meeting, it was unanimous that the Madison Governing Board is not in favor of the draft plan as presented. Moreover, we find that given the charge of the School Redistricting Commission under SB1068 – that existing elementary districts be merged with their current union high school district or that their current high school district be broken apart -- **we cannot support any unification plan that includes the Madison Elementary School District.**

We come to the above conclusion for the following reasons:

- First, the vast majority of students that are promoted from Madison schools do not currently attend either Camelback High School or North High School or ANY Phoenix Union high school. Madison has three middle schools: Meadows, Madison #1 and Park. According to the schools' principals, here is the breakdown for high school attendance of our former students: (All numbers are approximate.)
 - **Meadows:** 67% attend Sunnyslope High School in the Glendale Union High School District; 21% attend private schools, primarily Xavier, Brophy and St. Mary's; 12% attend North or Central High Schools.
 - **Madison #1:** 65% of students attend either Shadow Mountain, Sunnyslope or Arcadia high schools located in the Paradise Valley, Glendale Union and Scottsdale school districts,

- respectively; 20% attend North High School; 15% attend private high schools or other public high schools not in the Madison area.
- **Park:** The only Madison middle school that sends most of its students to Phoenix Union High Schools – 60% to Camelback High, 20% to North; 10% to Central; the remaining 10% to Sunnyslope, private schools and other non-Phoenix Union high schools.

We understand the rationale for unifying existing elementary school districts with their feeder high school districts is that there might be some academic benefit with greater articulation of curriculum and more of a seamless transition from elementary to high school grades. However, this objective clearly would not be realized with the redistricting plan draft affecting Madison since the high schools that would be included in the plan – Camelback High School and North High School – are not currently the primary destination schools for students being promoted from Madison. We understand that the Commission does not have the authority to include a school such as Sunnyslope in the new unified configuration that includes Madison, which might precipitate a different response from our district. Moreover, open enrollment laws will not change, allowing Madison students to choose any school whether in the district or not. Since that is the case, we do not believe it is in our students' best interests to unify as has been suggested since it would appear that our students would continue to choose schools other than North or Camelback.

- Second, we believe strongly that Madison students are served best by an administration, instructional/classified staff, governing board and parents/community members focused first and foremost on primary instruction to students in the elementary grades. It is in these grades that young learners develop the basic skills that will lead to success later in their academic careers and in life. The fact that our entire district community is singularly focused on serving these students means we understand their needs better and can best tailor educational programs to fit those needs. In unified districts, it is our belief that high schools, with their issues of greater discipline challenges, enhanced extracurricular activities, and immense focus on athletic pursuits would dominate the agenda of the K-12 community. While this is something that can be eased somewhat, we do not believe on the whole that this is a good thing for the elementary students in those districts. Thus, we seek to maintain the narrower focus of primary instruction for the students of Madison; it is this focus that has led to our promoted students being ready for challenges in high school and beyond.
- Third, we believe a strong connection between the governance of a school district and the diverse community it serves is critical, particularly in elementary school education. Students are not just attendance numbers, families are not demographic statistics, and teachers and staff are not fungible commodities. Madison currently has seven schools with several specialized programs and academies– each with their own distinct strengths, needs, and communities. It is difficult for Board members to communicate with and understand the communities in Madison's various schools now. Madison has been working hard to improve communication at all levels. We believe unification of a large number of schools (20+) in one district, as proposed, would greatly decrease the connection between the board members (and the administration), and the individual schools and their communities. That would be a major disservice to all the schools, teachers, families, and the kids in all the districts “lumped together”. Unification is a major step in the wrong direction.
- Fourth, we must oppose the draft plan because it will most certainly cause the loss of the Madison Elementary District's character and identity: a tangible and immensely valuable currency built up by more than 117 years of a tradition of excellence. Simply put, Madison is a destination school district. The district's residents have chosen to live in the area because of

the Madison schools. An incredible fact: more than 20% of Madison's enrollment comes from outside of our district – clearly we are doing something right to attract those parents and those students. The Madison name pervades the community and represents not just the schools but the area of the city. The community supports the schools like almost no other: Madison has never failed a budget override or bond measure; parent-teacher organizations and site based councils are as active as any in the state; and school board races are intensely competitive.

Why this great interest? Because so much is at stake. The Madison School District has a tradition of excellence winning state and national awards time and time again. Six out of seven of our schools currently are designated either Excelling or Highly Performing by the Arizona Department of Education. Two years ago, Madison joined Mesa Public Schools as the only two school districts in the Valley to be recognized as “outperforming” school districts based on the demographic makeup of our students by Standard and Poor's. Our teaching staff has won numerous state and national awards and they are supported by the district with cutting edge programs such as teacher mentor programs, professional development and salary and benefits among the best in the Valley.

What is truly remarkable is that Madison continues its standard of excellence even as our demographic makeup becomes more diverse, with more and more students coming to the district with low socioeconomic status that have traditionally been shown to be more challenging to educate. Madison excels with these students. No Child Left Behind may be a federal law around since 2002 but it has been Madison's approach for over a century and the results bear that out. There are no excuses at Madison.

Simply put, the Madison School District is not just “lines on a map” or some arbitrary geographical designation; the District has a unique personality that represents the best of public education in Arizona. Our slogan is “You Will Be Amazed.” when looking at the Madison schools. Certainly it is a marketing program – but it will be successful because it is true. We are sure that the Creighton, Wilson and Balsz school districts can tell similar stories about their schools and justifiably so – they also have much for which to be proud.

We urge the School Redistricting Commission to rethink and revise their draft plans. The objective should be “first, do no harm.” In the draft plan, we are certain Madison would be greatly harmed and that would indeed be a very bad thing for this community and its students.

Sincerely,

Chris Thomas, Governing Board President

Warren Whitney, Governing Board Clerk

Scott Holcomb, Governing Board Member

Pamela Kelly, Governing Board Member

Kendra Tollackson, Governing Board Member