

Summary of Private School Survey July 2009

Overview

The survey of parents whose children reside in the Madison Metropolitan School District attendance area and attend a private or parochial school was conducted between December 2008 and February 2009. The source of the parent list included names provided by the private and parochial schools for inclusion in the MMSD student information system and those who apply through the MMSD for a transportation contract to attend the private and parochial school. Two mailings were made, one with the initial survey and a second to households that had not replied after a two week period as a reminder. A total of 1,155 surveys were mailed to households (representing over 1,586 students). There were 418 households who responded representing a 36 percent response rate.

Descriptive Information

A large majority of households responding to the survey reported they attend a small number of Catholic elementary schools and have done so since their children became elementary school aged. Of the reporting households, one in five had children attending Queen of Peace Catholic Elementary School. Other frequently cited schools were St. Dennis Catholic Elementary School (13%), Eagle School (10%), Blessed Sacrament Catholic Elementary School (9%), and Edgewood Campus Catholic School (8%). All other schools represented less than five percent of the household respondents. When asked at what grade level their children began attending a private or parochial school over 60 percent indicated their children began their private or parochial schooling experience in Kindergarten.

When asked if their children had ever attended an MMSD school the parents of students currently attending private or parochial schools who responded to the survey roughly two thirds indicated they had not. Of the one third of respondents who said they attended an MMSD school prior to enrolling in an area private or parochial school over thirty percent reported their children having spent one year or less in the MMSD school and another 20 percent reported spending less than two years in an MMSD school.

Survey Responses

Parents whose children attend private or parochial schools cited two primary reasons for their decision to have their children attend a private or parochial school: environmental concerns and access to a religious education. Curricular program options were cited by several parents as well. The remaining factors were much less important.

	Environment concern	Religious instruction	Curricular program	After school activities	Child's choice	Closer to home	Closer to work	Attend with friends	Closer to daycare
Percentage of Responses	34%	33%	21%	4%	4%	4%	2%	2%	0%
Percentage of Respondents	63%	62%	38%	8%	8%	8%	3%	3%	0%

The following are examples of comments relating to "Environment Concerns:"

- *More order, not 90% of energy spent on 1-2 kids that weren't ready for school at any grade level.*
- *Although there were many supportive teachers and staff, there were also a sufficient number that created a hostile environment (moving kids arbitrarily, referring to certain groups of kids as "slippery" or otherwise questionable it caused my daughter to lose faith in the system.*
- *Public schools cannot handle all the society issues which makes for disruptive behavior in the classroom, which would reduce what our children could learn.*
- *Lack of dress code.*
- *I wanted to send my child to a school where parents tend to be more involved - and in my opinion a much better environment for my child.*
- *Wanted our children to receive a high quality and challenging education in a well disciplined environment. Didn't want them to be "held back" because the teachers had to deal with discipline issues or teach "down" to the class because of slower students. Wanted a loving environment where hugs can be given and received without being called "sexual harassment."*
- *Concern about a disruptive classroom environment that leads to an unproductive learning experience.*
- *Emphasis in the classroom weighed more on discipline than instruction.*
- *My son is a follower and we were concerned about what he was being exposed to.*
- *There is order and accountability in private schools!*
- *Our few limited experiences/exposure to Madison schools is its lack structure and discipline. It appears that the students lack respect for teachers/each other.*
- *The secular progressive agenda was over-whelming. Teachers had too much difficulty handling problem children. It took away from my "normal" child. My second grader was starting to deal with aggressive kids. There is not enough supervision for the kids. The front doors of the school aren't even locked??? I saw small kids wandering the halls all the time. Discipline and structure were non-existent.*
- *School district is too liberal. Worried about sexual teachings too early.*
- *The elementary school was overcrowded and many bullies and mean kids were bussed into this school. The staff had little interest in helping when my child was bullied. My child was relieved to go to a different school.*

The following are examples of comments regarding "Religious Education:"

- *Morals, ethics and religious education are important to us.*
- *Actually all neighborhood friends go to the public schools. We liked the small town/community feel at St. Dennis with only one classroom per grade level "everyone knows everyone." We also like the multiple opportunities for field trips, unique fundraisers that would NEVER be allowed in a public school. We love that they can have Christmas parties, birthday parties and celebrate holidays that are important in our faith that would not have happened in a public school.*
- *Our children attend a Catholic school and our primary reason for sending them is the reinforcement at school of the beliefs we, as parents, instill at home.*
- *We just wanted a faith based curriculum. We wanted our children to be able to say prayer, mention God, etc. We have a school that gives great education plus spirituality that is the best of both worlds.*
- *Level of academic excellence at High Point Christian School. Christ centered education; nurturing environment with teachers who pray for this students. Want to be able to say "Merry Christmas" and/or Happy Easter without fear of protest.*
- *I also attended St. Dennis many years ago, my wife also went to Catholic School. We also like the strong discipline at this school.*
- *The MMSD has to try so hard to please everyone that the kids miss out by not being able to celebrate Halloween or talk about and celebrate Christmas/Hanukah or anything that might not be "politically correct."*
- *Madison Public Schools are shooting for "middle ground" as far as academics and morality are concerned.*

- *Far too liberal (conservatives feel persecuted).*
- *I was concerned about the level of challenge and attention possible at Midvale which would have been our home school. The environment did not seem entirely good.*

Of the roughly one third of parents who indicated the curriculum was a factor in their decision to attend a private or parochial school many often reiterated the religious curriculum as a factor. Over one third of the respondents concerned with curriculum factors mentioned their desire to seek a religious curriculum for their children. When other curricular comments were mentioned they fell into some broad categories including the MMSD having a weak curriculum (17%), concerns with a talented and gifted curriculum (13%), and the availability of Spanish course offerings (10%). All other curriculum comments were made by less than ten percent of the responding parents.

The following comments are examples of the factor associated with "Curricular Programs:"

Weak Curriculum

- *Our oldest is attending La Follette now. Coming from private elementary/middle school we do not feel she has been challenged (academically) as much as students are in private school. Needs more direction/encouragement.*
- *We felt there was too much time spent on behavior management and less time on core subjects. Math program was weak and lags behind other schools. Music and writing were also weak.*
- *The Lakeview School reading/math scores in relation to other public schools was extremely poor. That indicates to us a remedial environment, or an environment where it is difficult for teachers to teach -- rather more time spend disciplining or doing remedial work --- perhaps the basics couldn't be achieved.*
- *Math, science and music. The math program in MMSD is not acceptable to my standard.*
- *This school offers history, grammar, foreign language and a strong science studies at the elementary level. Not as strong as it could be, but a lot stronger than Madison Public elementary.*
- *Blessed Sacrament has a more demanding curriculum with very high standards.*
- *More arts and music, more rigorous curriculum. Students track by ability level and smaller environment.*
- *The entire grade fell behind in math - parents got a letter in 3rd grade telling us all were receiving unsatisfactory grades because standards weren't met by curriculum. He still is behind in math facts from that.*
- *We are unhappy with the middle school (academic grade levels) in our school district (Toki Middle School)*
- *We felt the private school has a more competitive educational environment overall (so the bar is a little higher).*
- *Math primarily. Also reading.*
- *Curriculum is at an advanced level for all grades as a matter of course. Teaching materials are old school but extremely successful.*
- *My child was not being challenged to read or do math concepts to their skill level. She then began to stop her skill level in both areas. Upon switching schools - entering the private she was way below level and had a lot to catch-up. In the MMSD she was in the top groups of her class.*
- *We feel our children receive a better education at their private school. Student who graduate from St. Dennis tend to find public high school very easy. Thus, St. Dennis students are ahead after graduating from 8th grade.*
- *Curriculum/interactions with peers was not challenging.*

Talented and Gifted (TAG) curriculum issues

- *Our daughter is in need of a classroom of peers that understand her and work at a gifted level. In moving from out-of-state, Madison public schools just don't offer the challenge/curriculum needed for her to thrive academically.*

- *Weak middle school curriculum at MMSD; concern over loss of TAG resources/choices; disinterested responses from teachers; lack of confidentiality, respect and sensitivity exhibited by some teachers.*
- *The school is for gifted and talented kids and has a very challenging curriculum. Our daughter was bored and into trouble at our school of residence.*
- *My daughters attend/attended Eagle School since Eagle does an excellent job of challenging each student at the proper level on each academic subject.*
- *We've chosen a school for academically advanced students to provide a fuller day leaving less time for our daughter (6th grade) to occupy with social agenda.*
- *My son is very bright and was bored and not being challenged to his abilities. We also felt way too much time was spent on indoctrination of social issues instead of teaching the basics.*
- *Advanced reading.*
- *Talented and Gifted Program and Accelerated Math.*
- *The school we chose, Wingra, is better suited for handling my child's talents and gifts. Despite some exceptional people within the TAG office the overall environment seemed hostile to accelerated or enriched programming.*
- *Gifted programs*
- *Our daughter was not challenged by the curriculum at Van Hise Elementary. We had minimal help from the TAG Coordinator (minimal to non-existent).*
- *After talking to parents and principals, we were told that MMSD has no funding or programs for academically gifted children and that taking above-grade-level classes was not allowed. We chose a private school to keep our students academically challenged.*
- *Gifted program -accelerated, individualized learning, Eagle School*
- *Everyday math! Teachers don't know how to teach math. Lack of TAG support!*
- *We found it very difficult (sometimes impossible) for schools to adapt in ways necessary to accommodate our son's high test scores, e.g. TAG opportunities.*
- *Our son is smart. The TAG program at Van Hise was helpful, but the school's small size provided limited flexibility. Looking at the two teacher options as we contemplated 4th grade, we decided to move him to Eagle.*
- *TAG programming at elementary level was insufficient.*
- *We found insufficient programming and support for gifted and talented children at Lake View Elementary. We skipped our daughter ahead one year while she was there but it still wasn't enough.*
- *Our school (Stephens) lost SAGE; we did not like the student: teacher ratios that resulted. Also lack of TAG program.*
- *The paucity of programming for gifted/talented students led us to Eagle School. Our son was reading at the 12th grade level in Kindergarten, and despite his FABULOUS teacher's terrific efforts, there was simply no way the standard curriculum could keep him stimulated.*
- *Gifted Programming - after visit Leopold and talking with parents and staff, we did not feel comfortable that our daughter would reach her full potential in the MMSD.*
- *Lack of adequate TAG programming/support.*
- *Talented and Gifted Program*

Spanish curriculum

- *Spanish, piano and violin Gr. Pre-k & 1 respective*
- *Spanish- foreign language at elementary level*
- *Spanish, Computer Lab(MAC), Liturgy, Pledge of Alliance, morning prayer, etc.*

- *Spanish, music*
- *Good computer access, Spanish offered and very strong science program at Edgewood. Our local elementary has poor math scores.*
- *Spanish, more art, more music, IB program in the high school, more individual teaching.*
- *Spanish two times a week starting in kindergarten; up-to-date computers and classes; typing in fourth grade*
- *We wanted to add a Spanish program for our some at an early age, also piano and stringed instrument. Madison Country Day offers these*
- *.*
- *Actually when my son started school at Lindbergh there was quite a few who didn't speak English in his K class and because of that English was considered the 2nd language and I was trying to get him to start learning Spanish*
- *.*
- *Spanish, Religion*
- *Our daughter is learning Spanish already in kindergarten and will be taking piano as part of the curriculum next year.*
- *Small class size, Spanish Curriculum from first grade to 8th grade. Concerned over decisions in the school.*

The data were explored to determine whether certain factors were related to other factors. A correlation analysis showed that parents who cited a desire for religious education as a factor for attending a private or parochial school were extremely likely to also have cited environmental concerns as a factor as well ($r=.2001, p < .0001$). Other strong correlations were between closer to home and closer to school, and the child's choice to attend the school and attending with a friend. Both of these relationships are intuitive. All other relationships were only modest to weak.

MMSD Options

Two questions asked respondents if they might be interested in attending MMSD schools under specific circumstances. One question inquired about the parent's interest in enrolling their child in a full-time online school or program if such an option were offered by MMSD. A second question asked if they would attend an MMSD school other than their home attendance area school on a transfer if they could choose that school. Ten percent of the parents responding to the online question indicated they would explore a full-time online program if offered by the MMSD, and another two percent indicated they might consider it. The school choice option was favored by 22 percent of the respondents as an alternative, with another eight percent indicating they might consider a choice transfer if one were made available to them. The most commonly cited schools to which parents would choose a transfer were Shorewood Elementary School, Franklin/Randall Elementary Schools, Hamilton Middle School, and West High School.

General Comments

About one third of the respondents provided general open ended comments at the end of the survey. The most common topics related to academics and the school environment. Religious education, talented and gifted programming, school choice, and behavior were also cited frequently in this portion of the survey. Communication, safety, and school size were less frequently mentioned.

Topic	Percent of Respondents
Academic	14%
Environment	14%
Religious	11%
Talented & Gifted (TAG)	11%
School choice	10%

Topic	Percent of Respondents
Behavior	8%
Communication	7%
Safety	6%
School size	5%

Academic comments

- *I have heard from neighborhood friends that their children do not have spelling tests. They also say they can not "show" their children how to multiply to solve a math problem. The teachers want the children to figure out math problems on their own without help.*
- *It is my opinion and belief that my child is receiving a higher quality of education provided by her private school. She has friends in our neighborhood who attend a Madison school, and the children never have homework, and are always interested in learning.*
- *Sibling attended La Follette High. A/P classes offer best academic option for a student moving from the academic level of grade school (private) to public high school. Example most St. Dennis Spanish students enter Spanish II in public high school.*
- *Our daughter was attending 6th grade at Whitehorse and often came home crying because of mean students, rude behavior, foul language and disrespect for the teachers. As parents, we felt very uncomfortable with the atmosphere at Whitehorse. It always seemed very loud and chaotic. In a nutshell, it just didn't seem like a positive learning environment. She was getting straight A's, never had any homework and wasn't being challenged academically. At ALCS, her grades have taken a hit because the curriculum is more challenging. In fact, we've discovered that both of our children are a full grade behind at ALCS because of the MPS curriculum. In general, at the MPS there is a lack of respect for authority and no accountability by the students for their actions. Personal responsibility doesn't exist, and isn't being taught. It's not just MPS but society in general. ALCS offers better academics and a better education. Our kids are learning how to be good citizens as well as students.*
- *As the son of parents who were both public school teachers in Michigan, I did not hesitate to send my own daughter, to Madison Public Schools. In fact, Madison's reputation for having a fine public school system is one of the reasons for moving here in the late 1990's. At that time I had the option of also sending her to Westside Christian School as well, but choose to give MMSD a chance. For three years she attend Glen Stephens Elementary. The kindergarten and first grade experiences provided an adequate educational base, although it was evident that the curriculum was not challenging. Fortunately, I was able to supplement her school lessons with more challenging examples at home. It wasn't until she attended second grade that I truly became dissatisfied with Madison schools for a variety of reasons that I am happy to share with you. During registration, I always like to meet the new teacher and introduce myself. The year her teacher was not available. Despite numerous attempts to contact the teacher to get a supply list and find out where to meet on the first day of school, I received no responses. The day before school started, I finally learned from the front office that her teacher was scheduled to be on maternity leave, but they could not provide me with the name of the substitute or tell me where we needed to go to line up. On the first day of school, while other teachers were outside introducing themselves and showing the kids where to line up, Our daughter's teacher was nowhere to be found. After ten minutes and several inquiries to other teachers regarding the whereabouts of the substitute, a few of us parents were able to get into the school and found the classroom. Shortly afterward their teacher show up at the room and told us we needed to be outside. After another parent explained that we were only there because there was no one outside providing direction for this class, she told us to head out and she would be out shortly. She came up just as the bell was ringing and other classes were proceeding in. Needless to say, this did not start us off on the right foot. The rest of the semester was very trying. It was obvious that our daughter was not being challenged by the class work. She would come home on Mondays with the entire week of math assignments and would complete the whole worksheet in less than ten minutes. She would tell us about the classroom being "very loud and confusing" and sometimes hard to do assignments because of "boys that didn't follow the class rules but the teacher didn't make them." The lack of order in the classroom became an issue which I brought up at the first Parent Teacher conference. The teacher said it was because she had some "mainstreamed students" that required additional attention so sometimes she didn't have time to monitor the behavior of the other children. She went on to tell me that my daughter had a problem with being impatient. This was surprising to me since no other teacher had ever observed that kind of behavior. When I asked her to provide an example she stated that our daughter would finish her class work before most of the other kids, but would have to wait to have it checked and she would grow impatient while she was helping others. She was not allowed to go on until the work was checked over and yet she was waiting for the teacher to explain the concepts again to other students. I asked if she could just check our daughter's work so she could move on, but the teacher stated "It doesn't work like that and your daughter will just need to learn patience." She seemed very unwilling to help the situation. There were other incidents like this that, while minor, made the first semester frustrating. And I know not to judge a school simply due to the actions of one teacher. However, already dissatisfied with the lack of challenging curriculum and the confusing experience I began considering other options. Other events that happened that same year at the school board and district levels helped me decide that perhaps the priorities of MMSD were not the best option for my family. These included: 1) The same week that Madison news stations were reporting a rise in Chicago based gang activity in the Madison Junior Highs, the Board was feverishly debating junk food and voting to ban vending machines from the schools. This really shows misplaced priorities. 2) Then came the news about a teacher at one of the middle schools who gave a mandatory writing assignment to the students to "write a letter of protest against the war*

in Iraq to a public official and demand an immediate withdrawal of US troops." Parents of the students were required to provide envelopes and postage, regardless if they agreed with this opinion. When the grandmother of a student whose parents were both proudly serving in the military objected to the use of public schools to promote a politically slanted agenda, her alternative suggestion of allowing students to write letters of encouragement to soldiers overseas was rejected. The Board backed the decision of the teacher to give a failing grade to any student who did not fulfill the assignment. If the purpose of the assignment was to write a letter the content should not have been dictated. 3) In December of that year, the 2nd and 3rd graders at Glenn Stephens were presented with overviews of different religious festivals from around the world. I discovered this when I found a small piece of paper in my daughters backpack saying "(Daughter's name) Ramadan Thoughts." Having taught classes on comparative religions myself, I was concerned about the content of what was being taught. I contacted the teacher who explained that this program was to expose children to major religious festivals from a cultural point of view. She explained that in addition to Ramadan, they were going to talk about others such as Diwali, Winter Solstice, and Kwanzaa. When I asked if they were going to talk about Christmas she said they were going to talk only about the Hispanic cultural traditions of "Feliz Navidad." When I pointed out that this was not providing "equal time" to Christianity, she explained that "children get enough exposure to that outside of school already." As with the example above, these kinds of decisions seem to be a bit inequitable. In addition to these examples there are many others I could cite about the MMSD spending taxpayer money in wasteful ways: on new buildings when some are not near capacity; on programs designed to promote social engineering rather than provide basic education; on continuing to promote failed reading and ESL programs which need to be revised; on taxi cabs for students that habitually miss the bus; and so many others. Is it any wonder that the Madison Schools fail the "No Child Left Behind" testing? It is not due to the fact that the test was "unfair because it was in English" as Mr. Rainwater tried to excuse. It is because MMSD is failing to spend the money on the basics and on programs with proven results. A call to civil disobedience to overturn NCLB as Mr. Rainwater advocated is not the answer. Responsibility and accountability are the answer. This can be done while still "teaching to the whole child" as he suggests. Westside Christian School does "teach to the whole child," providing art, music, and physical education classes that are much more structured than those we encountered at Glenn Stephens. Guest speakers and field trips are more frequent. Science and Art Fairs are held on alternating years. Our daughter has been able to participate in extracurricular music programs including strings, piano and band and sports programs (volleyball team, basketball team, cheerleading, track) much earlier than she could have in the MMSD programs. Her math and English skills were assessed when she started and she was able to move to the next higher level in each so she stays challenged and interested. (And she still maintains A's). Students are expected to be respectful to their teachers and their peers and they are held accountable for their actions -- as are the parents. There is cultural as well as socio-economic diversity within the student body with no repercussions or need of special programs to provide acceptance or inclusion to promote a safe learning environment. Most importantly, the average Westside student has consistently scored higher in standardized testing over the past several years than the average MMSD student. The most incredible thing is that all of this is accomplished at a much lower rate of spending per pupil. I understand that Madison prides itself on its self-proclaimed "social progressiveness" and that the school board policies tend to reflect the opinions of the vocal majority of the city. However, with the economy the way it is, continuing with programs that are not cost effective seems to be one of the reasons for people looking elsewhere for educational alternatives. In fact, I know of two families that followed our move from Glenn Stephens to Westside the year after we switched. Again, having parents who were public school teachers, I understand that the vast majority of Madison school teachers are very passionate about their jobs and devoted to their students. Unfortunately, I just feel that MMSD has declined in quality since 1998. Every responsible parent wants the best education for this child. Therefore it was a sad, but not difficult decision to pull my daughter from the district and send her to private school. Before I was a parent, I gladly gave my taxes to support public education. I continue to gladly do so today because I feel education, more than entitlement programs, are the way to progress society. MMSD is welcome to my property taxes to educate the children of this city as the duly elected members of the school board deem necessary. However, unless massive changes are made back to the true focus of public education in the city, I will continue to willingly pay additional fee each year to send my own daughter to a school that provides high quality educational opportunities in a safe learning environment. Thank you for this opportunity to present my reasoning. I wish you success in your tenure as Superintendent.

- My oldest child has been in Madison Public Schools, he is now in high school, he is a very bright kid but he is not a self-starter and has fallen between the cracks in the public schools, there are too many distractions in the classrooms and not enough support. Teachers cannot effectively teach because they have so many behavior problems to try to deal with but cannot due to fear of lawsuits and IEP's. I have 3 younger children in private school who are leaps and bounds ahead of their brother all because I could not afford private school when my oldest was little. I had my oldest in a virtual school recently and he did a thousand times better. It is definitely an option I would consider again.
- Our son attended Shorewood in '99 for 1/2 year. The math program was weak so we left.
- Incoming freshman at Edgewood, coming from private schools, by and large are better prepared than kids coming from public schools. From our observations and comments from parents of public high school students - it appears as though academic standards and expectations are higher at Edgewood and Blessed Sacrament. I attended public junior high and high school in Milwaukee graduating in 1976. It was an incredibly frustrating experience due to all the interruptions of disruptive students. I have seen Madison schools reaching in the same direction and I wanted better for my kids.
- And we are sad we waited that long to change. I was on a huge public school proponent and was saddened by the poor education we received with MMSD.
- There are parts of Eagle (class size, for example) that are difficult to replicate in the public schools. Some things can be replicated with success in the public schools, in my opinion. Eagle uses instructional material that is very engaging. The school also has high teacher expectations. There were 2 teachers at Van Hise who my children experienced that were incompetent, yet they remained employed. Although costly, foreign language should be required as soon as possible in elementary school.

- *West is an excellent high school (if you take the right classes). But the elementary schools in Madison are a joke and middle school does not have any academic content at all.*
- *I see now MMSD need as stronger, more comprehensive areas of study/learning curriculum (I hesitate to use this word, as its very misunderstood) there is not enough learning happening in the area of academics in the E.S. levels, and we're losing it in our Middle Schools. Please maintain the Excellence of Academics in our High School - we need to continue to Compete in the world!*
- *Dear Mr. Nerad, I'm thrilled you and your team are taking the time to solicit parent feedback. I wish you and Ms. Wolf the best of luck in re-directing the Madison school and TAG programs. Our daughter needs a school that Madison elementary schools can't at this point provide. That's OK for us, because we are lucky to have EAGLE School which is a gem. Not all gifted kids know about it or can afford to attend. That being said, we would love to attend Madison Public High School when the time comes. As a Harvard College alumni interviewer, I am very concerned with the systematic decline of West High School. The elimination of AP courses is a huge disadvantage to the mightier students who need to take these courses for college applications. Its unrealistic and unfair to think West students should travel to Memorial to take the classes they need. We have world class scientists and educators come to the UW. Madison needs to take seriously the education of their children who often are in need of the challenging classes and teachers that places like West are disbanding. The ability of UW to recruit world class people is a strategic asset. Who is going to move their bright kids to a school system that does not allow them to reach their potential?? Recognizing that my personal and extra-curricular activities skew toward supporting our most talent children. I recognize you have many competing constituencies to balance. I'm hopeful that your administration can rebuild the competitiveness of our high schools in placing students at the best U.S. colleges. Given that there has been a significant rise in foreign national/applications/acceptances at our best universities, has increased pressure and qualifications bar for U.S. high school students. It's fair to say that Madison Public high schools are generally not reaching the potential that I personally a Harvard College Interviewer would like to see. There is no reason they can't, if you and the rest of the school administration choose to build National Class Public High Schools. Should you ever wish to discuss this more, I would be glad to. Best of luck and thank you for soliciting comments.*
- *Now that we've been in the new private school we've realized that the rigor of academic teaching is much better than what we had at Crestwood. While there were elements of satisfaction while at Crestwood (especially in K-2 and music/art) the 3-5 grade experience for my daughter was horrible (especially in hind-sight now) where she's struggled to catch-up to her peers in 6th grade. She lacked teaching of organizational skills, studying habits, book reports, states capitals, etc. (BASICS). Her grades at Crestwood were "great" so we did not know better. We regret having not made the move sooner.*
- *I attended St. Dennis as a child then Madison La Follette High School, so I have personal experience with both private and public education. There seems to be a higher expectation of academic performance and effort in a private school, since they are smaller, the child is not overlooked in the crowd. We chose Madison Country Day School so our child would be in an environment where every teacher is passionate about their work, every subject is taught in the most effective method, and the close community would foster a love of learning and exploration into adulthood. We chose this private school for what it offered, not necessarily for what MMSD couldn't or didn't offer.*
- *Our daughter (attended K-5 @ Kennedy) is a student who tends to do only what is expected of her academically. At Eagle School she is forced to work at a higher level just to keep up with the rest of her class. While her school's population is much less diverse (a definite negative) there are also far fewer discipline issues among her classmates (a definite positive). We have been involved public school parents and believe in the role of public schools, but feel our daughter's personality would be best served at Eagle for her middle school years. We expect to re-enroll her in a MMSD high school at grade 9.*
- *Wingra has a strong program all around. 1) Team taught, mixed age classrooms; 2) Integrated curriculum; 3) Focus on whole child social and academic growth; 4) Small size 5-14 yr olds together; 5) Loving atmosphere; 6) Students are taught to take charge of their own learning; 7) No grades - internal motivation to learn; Strong all-school traditions.*

Environment comments

- *The overcrowding and un-desirable environment of Leopold, as well as bad recollections of Madison schools from the 1960s (Hawthorne elementary), in contrast to the high caliber, strict, challenging but very encouraging environment of private school.*
- *A safe environment is paramount. Strong leadership from the Principal down to the teachers is next in line. My child was threatened with being stabbed, was chased down by three other children who's intention was to beat him up (those three were put up to it)*
- *We have moved out of Madison now, but as an educator's daughter, I want my child to be in a focused learning environment. I remember things like getting picked on at lunch and recess and the teacher spending all her time with the kid who wouldn't listen.*
- *We never even considered a private school for our children before we were exposed to MMSD Middle Schools. MMSD middle schools are disgraceful. You need to get the schools under control. Hopefully our HS options will be better in 2 years! (I doubt it, however.) I've seen a number of large fights outside of your HS (Lafollette). The violence is outrageous.*

- *We liked the MCDS community and classroom culture of character, respect for teachers & peers, personal responsibility, love for learning and community service. Public schools seem to tolerate so much terrible behavior.*
- *I want my child in a safe environment in an atmosphere of discipline, love and respect. I am not at all convinced he would get that at an MMSD School.*
- *Elvehjem Elementary would have been the MMSD elementary school our kids would attend, and we've heard nothing but good things; we probably would have been happy sending them there. However, I'm not sure there is any middle school w/in MMSD to which I would've been comfortable sending my kids. Also, since the beginning of this school year, 2 or 3 1st graders have transferred to St. Dennis from LVM, so I wonder about that. Having worked as a police officer for the City of Madison for 7+ years I was amazed at the # of calls we received to the elementary schools for behavior issues (in addition to middle and high school.) I knew COPS officers who taught safety curriculum @ the 4th-5th grade level in both MMSD schools and private schools, and noted huge differences in classroom/campus behavior. All said the teachers were outstanding but it was obvious that other environmental factors played a role in level of student respect of each other and adults. We wish to send our kids to a school with families that share the same beliefs on respect, attitude and behavior. Having said that, we had had a good experience with a foster son who went through Sennett and La Follette. However, the thought of sending our kids to one of the MMSD high schools concerns me. I'm not sure that any of the private options are any better w/regards to (-)s such as drugs/alcohol, but I think personal safety would be better. Also, I would prefer a smaller school.*
- *We feel strongly that a child's long term success stems from a strong educational foundation. These goals are achieved by providing students with challenging curriculum. However, we believe that additionally you must train children to respect those in authority, to be disciplined in their actions, and to understand the value of education. Unfortunately, public schools have tied the hands of their teachers and administration so that the students can basically do what they please. Our college age daughter spent several weeks observing students in an East side elementary as part of her curriculum. She observed students who were "out of control." This is not a strong learning environment. When you remove moral values, this is the result. That is why we send our children to a private school.*
- *We started Kindergarten at Leopold, but withdrew for 2nd semester. The issues we had were behavioral. Our son is a bright, well-behaved child, but extremely influenced by his environment. When he saw that misbehavior was the best way to get attention, we started having issues. The other problem was not having different levels of instruction. He was bored with what they were doing, but pretended he could not do more in order to fit in. Pre-screening could be done in kindergarten to determine what level children are at right always and could eliminate some possible behavior issues. While not all bright kids will fit into 'gifted' category, they would benefit from being pushed more.*
- *Most everything is on the front. Ultimately we had a horrible experience. Our son is very intelligent but also incredibly sensitive. We felt that people were not listening to us or him and were just looking to "fix the child," not the environment. At Blessed Sacrament, the environment is consistent, clean, orderly and the expectations for all of the children is the same. A much better environment for our son. We hope to move him back into the public schools in 6th grade if he has firm footing and feels secure.*
- *Integration lowers the education level in the classroom due to home problems, language issues and lower social standards. This is not fair to the average middle-income child who is sent to school to learn. Suggestion: 1) Allow neighborhood schools where children can walk to and from school (NO forced Busing); 2) Require parents to be responsible for the child's education and participate in the classroom; 3) Do not lower education standards for children w/discipline, drug, language problems; 4) Do not offer 4 year old kindergarten. Parents should be responsible for 4 yr old education programs - not the city, State Government!*
- *My daughter did go to Falk for Kindergarten, where her brother had gone 3 years before. There had been a spot for her in K at Queen of Peace, but we really wanted her to be able to be in (teacher name) K class (plus, Falk had full day K, QP had only 1/2 day). Her class was more than 50% "special needs" students - emotional, behavioral, etc. The teachers and T.A. spent a large portion of their time and energy everyday dealing with these students. It was not the greatest year (2 examples: 1) one classmate "friend" would call our house late at night - sometimes as late as midnight. We could always hear a houseful of adults in the background. Sometimes she asked for my daughter, sometimes she said nothing. Caller ID showed the caller. We stopped answering and turn the ringer off; 2) one day after school my daughter asked if I knew that "fxxk" was a real word. I told her I did but it was a very nasty word that neither adults nor children should use and she should not use/repeat it again. She said that 2 of her classmates used it all the time.) I don't have anything against any special needs children, mainstreamed or not, nor do I believe any child has any less of a right to a quality education than another. However, when emotional and behavioral issues dominate the instruction time, it interferes with the education that (most of) the children are there for. We were very fortunate that Q.P still had an opening for our daughter for first grade. FYI our son was on a waiting list at QP but an opening never happened for him - he went all the way through Falk & Toki and is now at JMM and did not have the issues we had with our daughter's year. She will, by the way, be attending JMM year after next.*
- *We are still strong supporters of public school education. Our son graduated from Madison East in 2008 and did have some positive relationships with teachers and administrators but was also intimidated at times by the aggressive and disinterest/disruptive students in the building. He resented having his classes disrupted by these students.*

- *My husband was a MMSD student through 12th grade. He regrets the education he rec'd and is disgusted w/what's happening in his schools today. My parents pulled me from public school after bullying issues arose, no academic challenge and encouragement by school staff that I would hate my parents in middle school. I am a graduate of Edgewood High.*
- *My daughters went to public schools in Rice Lake before we move here. I am a public school teacher and have always been a strong supporter of public education. I was not impressed with what I saw at Jefferson. Too many red flags. I also toured John Muir. I had a much better impression of that school's overall atmosphere.*
- *Comments from MMSD teachers: 1) on a child pushing and hitting another child: "Oh let them be, they'll work it out. The child hurt was unable to respond to negotiate the situation. 2) on seeing a 4-year old unassisted: Oh, don't teach him that, if he already knows that, he'll just be bored in school. 3) on class size: My class had doubled in size since I started, there's no way I can spend time with every kid. The ones who have meltdown end up with getting attention. From a parent: we spent an hour and half on homework last night - we spend at least an hour most nights and she is in 2nd grade - we don't have time for anything else.*
- *I have two students at La Follette (9th & 12th graders. St. Dennis has a mix of people of different cultures, ethnic backgrounds and religions. Yet I've never heard my kids say anything negative about these differences until they get to high school. Once they get to high school they see the fights and negative language - culture shock. Then they want to steer clear of the very groups they had no problem with prior to high school. This is disappointing. Respect, spirituality, community service, teamwork are all as valuable as academics. These are tools people use, in the work world to be successful.*

Religious comments

- *The MMSD is so concerned about catering to the vocal minority and being inclusive and politically correct that there is no moral compass and even less any mechanism for that direction to be expressed by administration and staff.*
- *Our primary reason for not choosing MMSD was that we wanted a Catholic education. Another perceived disadvantage however, was the overcrowding at Leopold, our local school and the uncertainty about future action for that problem.*
- *Expulsion of problem students; metal detectors; ending the anti-Christian atmosphere, other religions seem to be more acceptable?? And limited mainstreaming.*
- *1. Parents are actively involved at our school 2. Taking God out of school DID NOT WORK.*
- *We seriously looked into our neighborhood MMSD grade school - three different times for financial reasons -- however chose in the end to find a way to pay the tuition for a Christian education and what seems to be stricter discipline (granted only three visits but it was initial impression).*
- *We, as parents, also wanted to find an environment where the majority of students and parents valued the same educational values as we. We looked for a very high achieving school academically, but also a school where the church is your school family and vice versa. The ability to study, play and worship together on weekdays and weekends intertwines our lives and makes us all stronger.*
- *The Madison Public Schools have taken political correctness to such an extreme level that I do not feel comfortable entrusting my children to them. Christians are not given the same respect and appreciation as those in the minority. When children go on field trips and are taught about "mother earth" as if she is a God, that's out of line. When they teach sex ed using protection as the answer rather than opting to stay pure, I'm not comfortable. When an elementary school boy shows his private parts to a second grader on the playground, yet is not reprimanded, that's unacceptable. I've heard stories such as these for years now. I'm just thankful that we have the option of having our children attend a school with morals in line with our own. If we could not afford it, we would move to an outlying community rather than send our kids to MMSD. It's really sad how our schools have deteriorated because not only did I attend public school, but my father was a public school teacher in Madison for over 30 yrs. He agrees that the school system has lost its way in its attempt to cater to the minority and be politically correct. Very sad.*
- *I wouldn't consider sending my children to a Madison public school because having a religious aspect is important to me. Quite frankly, I don't support the notion of not celebrating holidays so as not to offend someone else. I also worry about the atmosphere in public schools concerning safety and bullying. Unfortunately, Madison Public Schools have never been and never will be an option.*
- *Thank you for seeking input from the parents within the school district with your recent survey. You are to be commended for making this effort, though I have little confidence that sharing my views will result in any substantive changes at MMSD. I apologize in advance for my cynicism and frustration on this topic, but since you asked: I do not send my kids to public school because I think the public school system in general is more interested in social engineering than in educating children. For example, an examination of the MMSD Equity Policy reveals an educational philosophy rooted in political correctness emphasizing "inclusion," "cultural diversity" and "social responsibility" (see liberal activism), and "eliminating gaps in access to academic achievement due to current or historic inequities." Historic inequities? Really? If you think you have to have one, shouldn't the goal of an "equity policy" be to treat people equally rather than fostering a culture of victim hood? -- Safety: I don't*

think my daughters would be safe in MMSD as I have read about rapes in the stairwell, violent assaults in the girls bathrooms, gang violence, drugs and even parents and adult siblings entering the school to assault certain students; Academics - the kids in our school routinely test 2 years ahead of the public schools academically and average over 80% in college placement and Values: MMSD's evidence based requirement (see evolution theory, taught as fact) is in direct conflict with our religious beliefs of faith-based Intelligent Design. I realize that most teachers are dedicated professionals who are trying to do the best job they can with limited resources, educating kids from vastly different social and economic circumstances. They are also required to provide services to students that private schools are not, so admittedly a direct comparison is probably not fair. Yet, our public schools are reflections of the community they serve and as a social and economic conservative living in Madison, I am realistic about my expectations, Thank you for seeking input, it's nice, at least, being asked.

- Although MMSD tries to do a good job at helping everyone out, we have protected everyone to a fault; where we can't embrace simple holidays and traditions anymore (All uniqueness is gone). People get so worked up about the 10 Commandments, but then call them the "10 suggestions," b/c certain things like stealing, murder are just wrong and the public schools have lost sight of that. I feel for the kids who will never learn about Christmas, Kwanza, Valentines Day or any other Holiday? That has been lost in the system. Please get it back on track!
- We want our children to have a strong sense of right, wrong and moral values that don't seem to exist so much in our society anymore. Some day they won't have mom and dad around to make sure they stick to those morals so with the help of our schools of choice, those values will be second nature to our children.
- Thanks for taking the time to send this survey. Our main reason is Religious Education. Talking about high school, we were concerned about the number of students (Memorial High School) is too crowded. Also we heard about gang problems there. Thank you
- We choose faith. The Madison schools have turned into a very generic environment. Thanks for asking. But, there really is nothing you could to get us to change school, except maybe offer a more religious environment and curriculum.
- Ease up on the liberal ideas to make the environment better for all. If you are going to allow gay/lesbian clubs in the high schools than also allow Christian/Jewish/etc. Clubs. Change the school district boundaries to make more sense from a distance.

Talented & Gifted (TAG) comments

- I would like to see higher standards for all students. Celebration of academic rigor and challenge in middle school.
- I transferred my daughter because of the low academic standards and behavior problems in the middle school and I did not see it getting any better at East High School. The behavior problems need to be better controlled and the needs of the high achieving
- You must be willing to acknowledge both a child's gifts and his deficiencies and be willing to provide programming for BOTH. Otherwise a kid may programming for neither, because they cancel each other out. Or he gets labeled as a naughty kid and blamed.
- Classes should be streamed to allow equal opportunity to gifted as well as special needs kids. We can't throw the potential for excellence away lightly.
- I want my child to be in an environment among peers whose families value education. I am not confident that public schools put any resources into educating the bright and talented students. There does not seem to be any great path in these kids with programs that are advanced. Why doesn't Madison have charter schools like Verona does??? Or how about a school voucher program?
- When our oldest daughter was ready for K we visited our local school on "community day." We were the only visitors all day. That in itself was sad. We spoke with other parents and they identified a problem with lots of busy type work. That was another problem for us. Most important, however, we expected that our kids would be TAGS type kids (as they turned out to be) and we were concerned that they not be burned out with dull, repetitious tasks and that they not turn into behavior cases due to boredom and lack of challenge. We therefore thought that a multi-age classroom would give them the opportunity to excel without drawing attention to the fact that they were opportunity to excel without drawing attention to the fact that they were operating above grade level. In fact, that worked well -- our oldest is now a college freshman, was excited to get to H.S. (she and her sister both went to La Follette) and not turned out like their public school peers. So, we are satisfied by our choice and our son is following the same path.
- It is very obvious that MMSD does not want to support excelerated curricula or Talented and Gifted programs when you look at the ratio of T and G personnel to students as compared to Middleton or Verona etc.
- 1-8 Oldest attended grades 1-8 and will continue. Child who transferred to Eagle attended K-4 and will go to West High School. We attempted to get TAG programming for our daughter but with little success. Our daughter was becoming a

distraction in the MMSD classroom as she socialized and got silly. She loves the challenging curriculum at Eagle and be valued for her intellect. If it's helpful to know, she was evaluated by a social psychologist and scored a 139 IQ.

- *K-5 at Thoreau. MMSD has been less than willing to accommodate for bright learners? The mantra is that "they'll get what they need." (TAG support staff member name) was the only educator in the district who listened and assisted us! Middle school programming lacks rigor and teaches to the middle. High school has moved the same way - few AP options and 9-10 requirements regardless of ability or need. Now - discrimination against Edgewood families and busing this year - unbelievable!*
- *I would have loved to have my two daughters attend our neighborhood elementary school with the neighborhood children. However, both girls were reading at 3rd -4th grade level at the start of kindergarten. I visited the school and attended some evening meetings held by the district TAG coordinator. I was disappointed by the lack of resources available for TAG programming. My older daughter does attend high school in the district. At that level they are a sufficient number of advanced courses and AP course to challenge her, although she would like to see more options in the English Dept. Right now it is our plan to have our younger daughter attend public high school also.*
- *MMSD is full of students with needs similar to our son's, and it is frustrating to see the lack of meaningful support for the population. Simply skipping a grade(or grades) is not a tenable solution, as it doesn't take into account the child's social/emotional development. If budgetary concerns were no object, a magnet school for G-T kids would be a fantastic solution. But working with our current situation, adding a G-T resource room that is truly "resourced" would help, as would adding a foreign language component to the elementary curriculum. Such a component would benefit all children, G-T or otherwise. We would love to be able to support our public schools with more than just our tax dollars, and it was a very difficult decision to remove our children from our local school (Crestwood). But the risk was just too great that their love of learning would wither on the vine if they sat in classrooms that didn't provide the challenge they crave and need in order to reach their full potential. MMSD does a marvelous job meeting the needs of ED/BD children, non-English speaking children, children with learning disabilities and we would never argue that the needs of G-T children should be met at their expense. However, it is our hope that MMSD will find a way to give equal consideration to children who, often because of their "success" in school, are overlooked and underserved. Thanks very much for the opportunity to share our thoughts and experiences with you; I appreciate your effort to gather feedback and identify areas for improvement.*
- *We would love to see a CHARTER school for gifted learners similar to the ones in the Appleton school district. ALL students should be encouraged to perform to their maximum potential. We are lucky to be able to afford the tuition for private school at this time, but then are many families with extremely gifted children that can't and I wish the MMSD would be able to better accommodate them.*
- *I cried when I received this letter. Thank you!! My husband and I chose for him to telecommute from Madison because of the school district's reputation. That was 10 years ago. I have a teaching certificate (K-12) in speech/language pathology and work in public schools in Albuquerque where the instruction is poor (low property taxes) and there isn't any busing. By 1st grade, we were dissatisfied with our daughters education here in Madison. She moved to Chavez when it opened and had such poor instruction (with the exception of 4th grade) that we questioned our commitment to the public education system on a yearly basis. She was learning so little - poor curriculum especially in math and poor instruction - that she was becoming increasingly frustrated and less engaged as each year went by. Unless a parent knew the right people to talk to and knew how to be a squeaky wheel, it was impossible to get TAG resource support. Her experience at Toki was even worse - poor instruction and a dangerous environment. We were still so committed to public education, however, that it wasn't until our son in 3rd grade was losing his interest in learning and our daughter began to bloom as an artist - due to her time spent sketching in slow-moving, boring classes - that it was time to join the bright flight. It was time to give our sons (one daughter wanted to stay with her friends) what they deserved - a challenging and safe educational environment where the emotional and social needs of gifted students are understood. Our sons have flourished. The old "repeat it eight times in different ways" is mind-numbing to gifted kids. They need to be given greater depth of material; be allowed to work at a quicker pace, and have their creative side fed to succeed. We mourned our departure from the public schools. We believe in them and what they should be to kids of all ability levels. I was very involved in the classroom and lead MSCR after school clubs for years. I cried when we decided that the boys had to leave. Memorial has been good for my daughter so far so we intend to send our sons there when they enter high school. Please keep up the quality of the high schools and offer even more AP and Honors courses. Please re-introduce a TAG program that gives our bright students the challenge they deserve. A Charter School similar to Eagle would be wonderful. Charter Schools, in general would be wonderful. The bright flight here in Madison is significant. Curriculum, instruction and school population all need to be addressed. Thank you for the opportunity to provide input. Good luck with your attempt to improve the public schools. We wish you every success, and would love to go back if we thought the school could give our kids what they needed like the names of other parents who still have kids at Chavez who are discouraged and are considering private education. The exodus will continue unless something changes.*
- *Our son's kindergarten teacher made it very clear that attention to a gifted child's needs for enhanced or more advanced curriculum was not her priority. She resented him because we dared to ask. The principal supported her. The attitude in general was anti-TAG. We went to Eagle where he found challenging curriculum and support for his learning style.*

School choice comments

- *If you want to make your schools work better you have to make the teachers more responsible at their job. They will do that, when they see that their job may be eliminated. If you will start a program by giving the right to a student to use the amount of*

money (\$13,000. A school year per student) to a school of his choice, private or public school of another district, the public schools are going to look at what are they doing wrong, and not ask for tax increases. Try and do what is being done in Europe. Do not let the teachers union ruin our kids future.

- Verona Charter School is our ideal choice for schools due to programs available. We are moving to Middleton School District for our oldest son's H.S. education. Do not want to send our son to La Follette, which is our high school.
- I would like to see (child's name) get into Spring Harbor for grades 7 & 8. I think that the classes need to be evaluated for size, second language and behavioral issues.
- Leopold has too many safety concerns. I attempted an internal transfer and was denied.
- I think the Madison School District should stop social engineering at the expense of my neighborhood and its children. I feel children should go to neighborhood schools. It encourages parents to take ownership in the school. Sending my children to schools which I don't have emotional involvement just discourages active participation in that school.
- Transfer decisions seem somewhat random. Last year, one of our neighbors was released to the Verona district, one was allowed to transfer to Shorewood, yet we were denied transfer to Thoreau. All children in question were entering Kindergarten.
- Have you ever surveyed exiting High School seniors for suggestions on the high school they'd prefer?
- Thank you for taking the time for our input. I hope our legislators pass a school voucher program. A school voucher program would hopefully cause a paradigm shift in our school district to focus on academics and standards! (Not pay raises - free healthcare) The WES is too powerful -- need to focus on what benefits the students not teacher protection (pay raises/free healthcare/free dental - put the student first! Reduce teacher benefit packages put the money in public education not the teachers wallet! I cannot believe the incredible benefit packages provided to Madison public school teachers it is incredible especially in our current economic situation - reduce the free ride (health care that will save millions!!! Put kids first - no more tax increases - reduce benefits.

Behavior comments

- Several physical assaults in 6th and 7th at Toki ended any shaky sense of personal safety he may have had with the very few defenders he previously had. Academics were not as challenging as he needed, but daily harassment by others. Quit excusing outrageous and "pile on" behavior in "some groups" of kids. Increase the benefits the caring peers receive from reaching out and assisting and defending (with friendship and acceptance) the marginalized children.
- Would not send children to MMSD K-8 Schools. My daughter was at Frank Allis for Kindergarten, and I was very disappointed with the behavioral problems that she learned from other students. It seemed to us that the lower income the child came from, the more (?) Son is now enrolled at La Follette. LaFollette is a good school and my son is very happy there. You can thank their principal for that!!
- Our oldest now attends West High. Overall public schools need more structured discipline in the classrooms in order to represent the real world experiences when kids grow and join the work forces in their communities. Teaching respect, ethics and contributing to the social good must begin at an early age. Hopefully by the time kids grow to their teen years. They have a good send of citizenship, moral character, and respect for each other. I also know teachers need parental assistance at home, as they cannot do it by themselves. If these issues do not change, then it is just a continuous cycle from classroom - to homes - to the streets.
- He had a great Kindergarten experience. Also our 2nd son got some very good speech therapy (pre-school age) from the teacher at Franklin. It's just that one bad classroom and chaos was too much to repeat for an entire 2nd year. Kids don't get "do-over's."
- Disruptive students in school is my #1 concern; 2) Forced busing of students to schools outside of their immediate neighborhoods. Makes absolutely no sense; and 3) Safety of students at MMSD is becoming more of a problem.
- Superintendent Nerad, thank you for asking my family about the choice we have made regarding our son attending a private school. I have been waiting for an appropriate opportunity to share this. First, it is important to recognize the excellence of your staff: teaching assistants, teachers and administrators. They have demonstrated their knowledge of the curriculum as well as their ability to show concern and kindness of the heart. They were never a cause or concern that led to the decision to turn to a private school. The curriculum is also excellent; it is something that we have traded for what the private school offers. My child wants a calmer learning environment than what the Madison public schools can offer. He was intimidated by the overcrowding and he became increasingly frustrated with the non-compliant, bullying, rude and violent student behaviors. The following are some of the examples: 1. Each time my student rode a bus, his person or personal property was "abused." 2. Passing time in the halls, with its overcrowding, provided opportunity for students to open his backpack and steal items. This happened frequently enough that he bought little locks for it. 3. Class-time was lost due to inappropriate student behaviors. 4. In one Phy-ed class, some boys would intentionally knock down the pins in my son's lane, time-after-time. Because my son was intimidated by them; he wouldn't say anything to the staff. These students would sabotage activities so that no one

enjoyed doing it. 5. My son was beaten-up by 4 students in a boy's bathroom. He was given an out-of-school suspension, because he was there... In the bathroom. As the victim of violent student behavior, he was treated the same as the perpetrators, due to district policy. 6. Five neighborhood girls were bullying my son and his friend at school. The boys would ignore the girls' behaviors. When these girls became frustrated, they wrote-up something to make it look like it was a "copy and paste" dialogue from the instant messaging of a popular internet game. The content was written in such a way as to infer that the boys were in a homosexual relationship. The girls were intent on bullying them and publicizing this contrived story. The consequence was a talk on "don't do that again." Meanwhile, the other boy's mother and I were left with the torn shreds of a friendship. My interpretation of the situation was that the girls weren't given an appropriate consequence for their behaviors because they were seen as nice girls. Initially, we asked and petitioned the school for a transfer to another Madison public school. It was denied. My hypothesis was that he needed to stay at the school in order to help balance the race ratio. The decision to attend a private school was not based upon a few examples listed above. It was the yearly compilation of the many events over time that brought us to this point.

- He was at Chavez. Teachers in MMSD were great but large class and inability to deal effectively with trouble makers held class hostage. This was a problem with every teacher we met in the 4 years of MMSD attendance, so not just the individual teacher's problem. Numerous disabled children in class was also very distracting with their aides, animals, hair-pulling, etc.
- My husband and I both graduated from Madison Public Schools and find that the schools have declined considerably. My husband coaches (a sports team) at a Madison school and nearly quit coaching this year due to the atrocious behavior of the children. It's time things were addressed directly and expediently. Teaching clearly about right and wrong, acceptable and unacceptable behavior, respect for authority and property, caring for others, etc., are all foundations to strength in education. You can choose to act and improve it or ignore it and continue to witness decline.
- I do not have a problem with MMSD. My older child does adequate work through MMSD and is very social. She would not do well in a private, smaller setting. My youngest attended Montessori through 1st grade and attended Van Hise for 2nd grade. The large school setting, the bussing and the fact that my daughter was in tears when the discussion came up for returning to Van Hise for 3rd grade, led to an abrupt transfer back to Montessori. My children have two very different personalities. I anticipate that my younger one will return to MMSD for high school when I hope that the maturity level is there to fend off any emotional bullying. Thanks for asking!

Communication comments

- I didn't choose MMSD: I contacted Emerson, Franklin & Nuestro Mundo - they were not helpful to me nor enthusiastic of forthcoming about answering my questions, did not welcome me into the school and would not let me meet or observe teachers. I was really shocked that the schools assumed I would send my 5 yr old into a place I was not familiar or even welcomed. I did not have a good feeling, on the other hand, the private schools I visited had someone designated as "admissions counsel," and were very responsive and welcoming to parents. Thanks for conducting this survey. I appreciate the opportunity to provide some feedback on my experience (and lack thereof) with MMSD.
- In the case of our oldest daughter, she had significant difficulty learning to read. Her 1st grade teacher used an exclusively whole language approach. When we went to the fall conference and met with the teacher and her student teacher, they agreed that our daughter could not read at all. We pointed out that she could not sound out even simple words and we were told she must not have been paying attention the day they explained how to do this (I am not making this up). We ended up pursuing private tutoring 4 days a week after school with a wonderful, retired MMSD teacher. Our daughter was not only behind her peers academically, but was starting to resist going to school. By the end of her 1st grade year with a phonics-based approach, she was reading at a 4th grade level. I spent considerable time reading and learning about reading instruction and while I understand that there is no single best approach, the rigid whole language option available to my daughter does not meet her needs. The case of my middle daughter represented the other end of the spectrum. She was particularly capable and her 1st grade teacher advised that she be placed in 3rd grade SAGE programming instead of the 2nd grade curriculum. This was a good choice because she was happy and excelled in that setting. The problem came at the transition to 4th grade. Despite many efforts to advocate for her not repeating the 3rd grade curriculum, we were unsuccessful. She spent the year reading the identical things she had done successfully the year before (e.g. Reading Charlotte's Web, sending a letter to her grandparents, math progress, etc.) Not only was this a waste of time academically to a large extent, but she also thought there was something wrong with her (why don't they think I learned this?). Finally, I did not feel that the school administration was responsive. My husband and I were willing to defer to the education but felt that there was no reasonable explanation or discussion regarding our concern. In both cases, our concerns were minimized by school staff and we were essentially told to sit back and wait. I have thought a long about the problems that plague the Madison Schools and there are clearly no easy answers. But, ultimately as a parent it is one's responsibility to do what you think is best for your children and it is our opinion that a positive educational experience and a love of learning are the foundations of a full and meaningful life.
- There should be a smoother 'transition process' from private into the public schools, especially at the (just before) high school level. Possible school visits, emails, etc. P.S. Thanks for asking.
- As first timers it was very disappointing that resources were not available to us to understand what attending Madison schools could have meant for our daughter -- in the end, Eastside made us feel welcomed and MMSD reinforced our concern that our daughter would be lost in the mix of a big school with a lot of kids... If someone could have disavowed us of the feeling and, through their actions, demonstrated an interest in having us attend the public schools we may have made a different decision.

- *We have two grads of West High School and a sophomore currently enrolled. We are seriously considering private high school for our middle schooled. We have found West High to be too large to effectively assist our children in navigating and in advocating for them without persistent, strong investigation. I don't like it being that difficult. I don't like when principals and advisors don't return calls or are too busy to thoughtfully assist with problem-solving. I feel that my three children who are currently in or have graduated from West High generally under-achieved while there - not because they are/were poor students but because there was little adult encouragement to push themselves. There is no doubt West has some gifted teachers but there are others who seem less invested in being good adult role models and more interested in being "buddies."*
- *Kennedy. Too much money is spent for inferior education. School board members are not responsive to parent concerns unless it has reached the point of making them look bad in the press. Board members so not return e-mails or phone calls and are frequently rude to guests on the Board floor.*

Safety comments

- *My initial encounter with the MMSD School board in trying to address valid safety concerns with our oldest child was such a disappointment - I don't think that I will ever consider sending my children to a MMSD elementary or middle school.*
- *My child was beaten by a violent, most likely mentally ill child (kicked in back repeatedly - he was wearing army boots), and the teacher did not report it. Also, she was restrained by 3 boys at recess, one who screamed "We want your money."*
- *This is our 3rd child to attend Lakeside Lutheran in 9 years. This is the right choice for us, where we can count on a good education and not have to worry about guns, police in the halls. The faculty is committed to the best education for the kids, when they know personally. We chose to send our 3 children to private grade and high schools. It is right for us and them. Please do not make us also pay for your Public Day Care programs, at some point parents do have to take a responsibility for THEIR children, it is not always someone else's problem.*
- *Although my daughter is only in sixth grade, I am concerned about the experience's I am hearing from other parents with MMSD as they look to transition their kids (8th graders) to either West or Memorial. There seems to be strong peer pressure from kids from Queen of Peace to go to Edgewood. Right now my daughter wants to go to Memorial but the recent lock-down/police incident is disturbing. I also heard from the wife of a Madison police officer saying to her niece, "If your parents weren't sending you to Edgewood, then I would." That is somewhat frightening. My hope is the change in the Superintendent is going to make positive changes, thank you.*
- *I attended Madison Public Schools as a youth, I am concerned with the changes that have occurred in recent years. Issues of overcrowding, violence, drugs, etc., have led us to conclude that Madison Public Schools are not a viable option at the present time.*
- *I think MMSD is excellent and has wonderful schools, but am in the Leopold district and concerned with safety, drugs and other children's behavior.*
- *We are concerned about safety, we feel MMSD teachers are not accountable; we feel the facilities are old; the schools are way too big and thus there is a reduced sense of community and no prayer or religious education offered*
- *Our regular high school is currently Memorial, we are looking to move in the next 2 years (our oldest is in 6th grade), so we can attend Verona or Middleton or even West High Schools. Because Memorial has a reputation of gangs, etc. So I don't want my kids attending, due to safety concerns.*
- *We pulled our daughter out of Madison Schools mid-year. We found overall, the teaching staff were lazy and didn't truly care about the kids. The 3rd grade teacher admitted to me that she had known my daughter was being bullied for 3 months and never let me know. It was only when it got so bad, that I asked the teacher about it and then, she admitted it had been a major problem. All she did was offer to separate our daughter from this group of bullies in class, but it still continued at lunch, recess and music/art.*
- *My sense of trust with MMSD teachers is low enough that I don't really even believe these concerns will be listened to with an open mind. My white friends tell me that teachers interpret their worries about safety as racism. But most of us parents are concerned about safety - not just at school, but also on busses, at bus stops, etc. We are also concerned about low expectations of our kids and about them being perceived in negative ways that don't reflect who they are. Supporting public schools is a value I hold close. I was denied requests for open enrollment. Friends of mine whose daughter was beaten up at a bus stop were also denied a transfer. She later dropped out of school, afraid for her safety. MMSD has got to start admitting its weaknesses and asking for public support.*

School size comments

- *Although the teaching staff is mostly excellent at Leopold and my older children did well there, too many years of overcrowding and the increase in transient low income children negatively affected staff morale. It was not a happy learning environment.*

- *In today's environment with drugs, gangs, etc.; the high schools are too big to be able to deal with those challenges effectively. I did consider sending my child to West which has an excellent curriculum. For my child, smaller is better and the focus on college prep offered @ Edgewood met our own needs better. Madison has a tendency to cater to the "problems" in our community thinking that blending with the rest will help bring up the whole. This has proven to be not true. I did not want my child to be affected by this thinking. Again I know this is not the politically correct this to say, but this is what I think.*
- *While the new school (Olsen) in our neighborhood is beautiful and I've heard both positive and negative about it. I think it is the middle school (Toki) that has several parents very concerned and looking at private options. While our decision to attend a private school was based more on our circumstances of moving so often and wanting a smaller school, we may look at the public school for our two younger children not in school yet. Hopefully there may be a new middle school in our area by then!*
- *The smaller environment, more rigorous academic atmosphere and the Christian instruction make Westside Christian a great choice for our family. Thanks for asking!*
- *We moved here from Charlotte, NC where our children attended a small private school. We like the smaller schools because we feel there is less "peer pressure and playground problems." We also have found there is a lot of parental involvement in a small private school.*
- *If, school district and Teachers Union can't find a way to approve and fund Pre-K program there will be no reason to have Faith that things are going to improve. It is a litmus test. Leopold seems too big for an elementary school.*