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Subject: questions and concerns from 4/24 meeting

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Hello,

I am writing to you to further express my concerns about the plan to consolidate the current Kindergarten into one class for first grade. There are many reasons why this is such an unfortunate decision for the teacher and the students. Teachers at High Bridge are and always have been both the backbone of the school. They are some of the hardest working professionals around. I have no doubt that our teachers can handle a classroom of 24 children, but it is impossible to provide them with the same experience that my older daughter and other High Bridge students have been given over the years; the same impactful experience that I had as a first grader in Mrs. Richardson's classroom.

We find ourselves in a time where students are struggling socially and emotionally more than ever. This in turn is affecting their academic learning. I know all too well that when a child is frustrated, they may develop a dislike for school. I fear that my own Kindergartener that requires additional academic support several days a week, would be overlooked in a class of this size. First graders are at an impressionable age, shaping a child's opinion of school for their future years. A student teacher ratio of 24:1 does not allow the opportunity for our children to get the reassurance, reinforcements, and nurturing they desperately thrive off of at that age. It seems that reinforcements are already stretched thin. What resources will be afforded to this classroom?

Coming off of covid years, teachers are emotionally exhausted. High Bridge teachers work endlessly to ensure our children leave with the quality education High Bridge is known for. I can only predict that having a classroom of 24 first graders will contribute to the teacher burn out that is so real in 2023. My daughter has reported extreme aggressive and disruptive behavioral needs in this class.

I feel it is our job as a community to support our teachers and students now more than ever. The primary classrooms need more support, not less. How many children will the class size need to reach in order to split back to two classes?

High Bridge has impacted my life in so many positive ways that I was adamant to raise my daughters in this district. This school and the people here have provided me with a fortitude of opportunity in my young academic years and transitioning to the start of my professional career as a School Counselor. My older daughter has had the opportunity to make amazing connections with her teachers, even throughout virtual learning. So much so that she chooses a picture of herself and Mrs. Morris to be hanging on her vanity to look at every morning. This is a testament of the impact of a first grade teacher.

I understand that finances are at the route of these difficult decisions. I wholeheartedly feel that saving money this year by combining these classes will cost us so much more in the future. That is why I am writing to you. I want my daughters, and all young Toppers to have the same, if not a better experience as me. Relationships and academic milestones and achievement are made through intimate class sizes, especially in the young primary grades. I urge you to reconsider combining the incoming first grade class.

Thank you for taking the time to read my concerns,

Courtney Duryea