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## Staffing changes at Chief Charlo Elementary

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lynn rittenhouse <rittenhouse.lc@gmail.com>

Mon, Mar 10, 2025 at 5:50 PM

To: javgeris@mcpsmt.org, ldavey@mcpsmt.org, kgammill@mcpsmt.org, chayes@mcpsmt.org, kmercer@mcpsmt.org, woldperson@mcpsmt.org, awake@mcpsmt.org, awalker-andrews@mcpsmt.org, jwalsh@mcpsmt.org, mwhicher@mcpsmt.org, kwitt@mcpsmt.org, "publiccomment@mcpsmt.org" <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

To all MCPS Board of trustees-

I am writing in reference to the recent announcement of multiple teacher displacements at Chief Charlo elementary school. I am the Grandmother of two students at Chief Charlo and a mother to one of the teachers. To my understanding, this action is in accordance with the superintendent's plan for "right sizing." My question is just who are these changes "right" for?

First of all, last August 14-19 families were informed their kindergartners would be moved to Russell elementary school as Chief Charlo had gone down to two kindergarten classes and there was not enough room for those children. Who was that "right" for? According to the Montana OPI standards kindergarten classes should have "no more than 20 students." So an entire classroom of children were displaced, 14-19 families had to deal with their child going to a school out of their neighborhood, many which already had older children at Chief Charlo elementary, and MCPS had to bus these children to Russell elementary. Would it not have been simpler just to add back a third kindergarten class and have one teacher move schools instead of inconveniencing 14-19 children? (The previous school year Chief Charlo had four kindergarten classes.)

And now, due to this displacement of those 14-19 children, Chief Charlo has cut one first grade class. Why aren't those children at Russell elementary coming back to their neighborhood school, as I'm sure most families would prefer? This would prevent the displacement of the first grade teacher, and then the other teacher that she will displace and so on and so on. Who is this "right" for?

Then there's the cut of a third grade teacher. By making this cut the two third grade classes next year will each have 33 students. Again, per the Montana OPI standards, third grade classes should have no more than 28 students... and to add five students or more is considered excessive. I understand that the added number of students will warrant the assistance of a para in each classroom. But is this really "good" for the teachers or students? I volunteer in the classrooms and can tell you they are physically full right now with ~25 students each. If you add eight more students to each class, how can you be assured the students are getting the individual attention they need and deserve? And this is not factoring in the number of students with IEP's in place. According to the current numbers, there will be 18 students in third grade next year with IEP's. So each class will have nine students with IEP's who require significant time and attention. Is it "right" that the teacher and para are stressed by the additional numbers and needs of the students and that all of the students will suffer the consequences of this overcrowded classroom?

This may well be a financial issue, but I have to wonder considering the taxpayers of Missoula have passed operations levies over the past 17 years. And currently Missoula students are testing very well compared to other students across the state. Why are we willing to jeopardize this standing by crowding classrooms? I cannot see the "good" in any of the recent changes. It seems to me, someone with a medical background who learned to always follow the evidence-based guidelines, that MCPS should be following the Montana OPI standards as well. Classes should not start above the written standard level so that children moving into our community will be able to go to the school in their neighborhood. Displacing families and displacing teachers does not sound like a good practice when it may be avoided.

I ask that you all consider everyone involved in these decisions and remember the words of the superintendent last fall, "to foster open dialogue, empathy, and coming together with a common heart for our students" and our teachers.

Thank you for your time and consideration-  
Lynn Rittenhouse Farmer

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## Increase in classroom sizes at Chief Charlo Elementary

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Heather Holmes <heatherlaprath@gmail.com>

Mon, Mar 10, 2025 at 7:29 PM

To: "publiccomment@mcpsmt.org" <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

To whom it may concern,

I strongly oppose increasing classroom sizes at Chief Charlo Elementary, especially if they are above state standards. We are so fortunate to have a wonderful school district and it would be appalling if we were not even within the state standards for class sizes. The State of Montana's standards for education are not that great, at MCPS we have always and can continue to always do better. I understand that budgetary constraints exist. However, increasing class sizes would have the largest effect on every single student and teacher. Please consider the evidence and opinions of parents when making this decision.

Research consistently demonstrates that smaller class sizes have a profound and lasting impact on student achievement, social-emotional development, and overall educational outcomes. It is essential that we prioritize this evidence-based strategy to ensure that all students have the opportunity to succeed.

### **Academic Benefits of Smaller Class Sizes**

Studies have shown that smaller class sizes lead to significant improvements in student performance, particularly in the early grades. The most well-known and influential study on this topic is the Tennessee STAR (Student-Teacher Achievement Ratio) project, which tracked over 6,000 students from kindergarten through third grade. The results indicated that students in smaller classes (13–17 students) outperformed their peers in larger classes (22–26 students) in reading and math, with gains that persisted into later grades. Long-term follow-ups revealed that these students were more likely to graduate from high school, attend college, and demonstrate higher overall achievement.

Furthermore, research from the National Education Policy Center (NEPC) supports these findings, showing that students in smaller classes experience increased individualized attention, better engagement, and higher levels of academic performance. Teachers are able to provide more targeted instruction, identify and address learning gaps more effectively, and adjust teaching strategies to meet the diverse needs of their students.

### **Social and Behavioral Advantages**

In addition to academic improvements, smaller class sizes foster stronger relationships between teachers and students, leading to better classroom management and increased student engagement. A study by Finn, Pannozzo, and Achilles (2003) demonstrated that students in smaller classes exhibited fewer behavioral issues, greater motivation, and higher levels of participation. Reduced class sizes create a more intimate learning environment where students feel seen and heard, which strengthens their sense of belonging and self-confidence.

### **Equity and Long-Term Impact**

The benefits of smaller class sizes are especially pronounced for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Research indicates that low-income and minority students experience the greatest academic gains when placed in smaller classes, helping to close achievement gaps and promote educational equity. A meta-analysis by the Brookings Institution highlighted that students in smaller classes were more likely to demonstrate higher test scores and improved graduation rates, contributing to long-term socioeconomic mobility.

### **Conclusion**

Investing in smaller class sizes is not only supported by decades of research, but it also aligns with our shared commitment to fostering equitable and high-quality education for all students. By reducing class sizes, we empower teachers to engage more effectively with their students, create supportive learning environments, and address individual learning needs more comprehensively. I urge you to prioritize and support policies that maintain and reduce classroom sizes at the elementary level, as the long-term benefits for students and our educational system are substantial and well-documented.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter. I am confident that by working together, we can provide our students with the best possible foundation for academic and personal success.

Sincerely,

Heather Holmes  
406-945-3262

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**"right sizing" is not ok**

Ani Eastwood <anieastwoodfineart@yahoo.com>

Tue, Mar 11, 2025 at 8:21 AM

Reply-To: Ani Eastwood <anieastwoodfineart@yahoo.com>

To: "publiccomment@mcpsmt.org" <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

Hello I would like to state I do not agree with the recent district proposition to reduce teaching staff and have too many children per classroom. Public education in Montana already suffers from issues of not offering important electives, such as art. 30+ classroom sizes will greatly diminish the teacher's ability to attend to the needs of especially young children.

Classroom size needs to stay at the following: no more than 20 students per kindergarten, 1 and 2 and no more than 28 students in 3 and 4.

I currently have 2 children enrolled in school. Ages 6 and 8 (kindergaren and 1st grade). The quality of their education and also the employment of the current educators matters to me. The concept of multigrade classrooms will function toward to lowest age's needs, thus leaving the gifted or older children lacking proper support.

Instructional aids are also essential for many students. My son needs additional reading help, speech therapy and consideration or he will fall behind his class. Without this additional support system, many children will not succeed.

I do not support "right sizing"

**Ani Eastwood**

**Artists of Montana Giclee**

Office Address:

910 Brooks, Rose Park Center, Lower Level

Mailing address: P.O Box 3924, Missoula MT 59806

406-273-8489

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**Re: "right sizing" is not ok**

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**Ani Eastwood** <anieastwoodfineart@yahoo.com>

Tue, Mar 11, 2025 at 8:33 AM

Reply-To: Ani Eastwood <anieastwoodfineart@yahoo.com>

To: "publiccomment@mcpsmt.org" <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

Hello,

This second message is specifically regarding my daughter's kindergarten teacher at Chief Charlo: Mrs Trowbridge.

Mrs Trowbridge has consistently gone above and beyond with her young students. She keeps organization and a high level education in her classroom which in my opinion seems almost impossible with this age of children. She consistently does extra kind things going out of her way with the children, such as writing them nice thankyou notes and helping create art space in her classroom or thinking up new creative projects. She is a important asset to Chief Charlo elementary and should be able to rely on job security. The fact that good teachers are under consideration for being cut from our school system is not the right decision moving forward. Please look at other alternatives for budget cuts.

**Ani Eastwood**  
**Artists of Montana Giclee**

Office Address:

910 Brooks, Rose Park Center, Lower Level

Mailing address: P.O Box 3924, Missoula MT 59806

406-273-8489

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**Comment re Staffing Cuts**

1 message

**Annie Harris** <nicklaiharris@gmail.com>

Tue, Mar 11, 2025 at 10:52 AM

To: "publiccomment@mcpsmt.org" &lt;publiccomment@mcpsmt.org&gt;, "mhill@mcpsmt.org" &lt;mhill@mcpsmt.org&gt;, "woldperson@mcpsmt.org" &lt;woldperson@mcpsmt.org&gt;

Dear Superintendent Hill and Trustees,

I am the parent of a fourth grade student at Chief Charlo and a sixth grade student at Meadow Hill. I have been active on the Chief Charlo PTO board for several years. I am writing to you today in support of the Chief Charlo staff and to ask the District to reconsider any proposed staffing reductions for elementary schools that would create classroom sizes over the limits set forth by OPI guidelines and Montana administrative regulations, or that would prevent families from attending their neighborhood school.

The dedicated and talented educators at Chief Charlo are still working through the issues created by the staffing cuts implemented last year. Chief Charlo classrooms were consolidated from four to two kindergarten classes, and from four to three 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade classes, displacing multiple incoming kindergarten families and creating larger class sizes for the remaining students. It is my understanding that the District intends to reduce the Chief Charlo teaching staff further, resulting in even more students per classroom -- particularly, according to current enrollment, approximately 33 students per third grade classroom for 2025-26. This exceeds state guidelines/regulations by at least 5 students per class. Frankly, this proposition is completely appalling and would do a huge disservice to every affected student and teacher.

Montana administrative regulations set forth a maximum of 28 students per classroom for third grade. Even when that limit is hit, the effects are felt by everyone as teachers and resources are stretched thin. The new proposal would increase current class sizes by 8-10 students each. The negative impacts to students' quality of education in this event would be numerous. The classrooms at Chief Charlo are not physically spacious enough to accommodate such large groups. They were designed for an appropriate-sized group of students in line with state guidelines. More importantly, it is unreasonable to expect even the very best classroom teacher to capably address the individual learning needs of more than 30 children, even with paraprofessional assistance. Kids will fall through the cracks at a crucial time in their development. They will absolutely fall below standards. Teachers will burn out and we will lose qualified and caring professionals. Some families may look toward private school options or homeschooling if their kids are not receiving the personal attention needed to effectively learn, which negatively impacts public school funding. Simply put, our kids deserve to learn in a safe environment that isn't overcrowded and allows them each to realize their full potential, and our teachers deserve to have an appropriate workload where they can effectively perform their jobs and not be constantly overwhelmed.

Respectfully, the OPI guidelines and regulatory limits exist for well thought-out reasons. I understand the regulations contain a loophole allowing for extra "overload" of up to 6 students. Common sense would suggest that loophole was intended to address extenuating circumstances and allow for situations where new students come in throughout the school year, not to encourage a regular practice of overloading our classrooms from the outset. If classroom sizes are already pushed to the legal limit, new students will have to attend schools outside of their zone. Chief Charlo is a neighborhood school with a close-knit community and it's important for all students to

be part of that community. Last year's cut already displaced multiple families that should have attended Chief Charlo and this proposal would just continue that pattern to the detriment of everyone.

I understand that budget cuts are an unfortunate reality of public school districts and that tough decisions take place every year. I don't envy your position in having to make these decisions. However, I urge this administration and board to carefully prioritize the needs of our students and valued educators and to please reconsider its approach to any proposed staffing cuts.

Thank you for your time,

Annie Harris

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**Letter on Behalf of Chief Charlo Elementary School Staff**

1 message

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**Caitlin Nogle** <caitlinnicoleg@gmail.com>

Tue, Mar 11, 2025 at 11:35 AM

To: "publiccomment@mcpsmt.org" <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>

Hello,

I am forwarding a letter on behalf of the Chief Charlo Elementary staff stating concerns with staffing and class sizes for the upcoming school year. We would like the letter to be read during the public comment portion of today's board meeting if possible. If it can be stated that this is from the Chief Charlo Elementary staff that would be greatly appreciated. Thank you for your time.

Best,

Caitlin Nogle

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 **Chief Charlo Staff School Board Letter.pdf**  
1479K

Dear Members of the Missoula County Public Schools School Board,

We, the staff of Chief Charlo Elementary, are writing to ensure the school board is aware of the administration's new policy of "right sizing" classrooms throughout the elementary schools at MCPS and the long lasting effects it will have on our school. We want to express our deep concerns regarding the reduction of tenured teachers for the 2025-2026 school year and its resulting impact on our class sizes. Specifically, we are troubled by the prospect of having approximately thirty-three students per classroom in the upcoming third-grade cohort, as this poses several challenges for our students, teachers, and school environment as a whole.

### **Student Needs**

The student body at Chief Charlo Elementary includes a high number of students who require additional support due to behavioral challenges, individualized education plans (IEPs), and 504 plans. Many of these students need close, individualized attention to succeed academically and socially, which becomes increasingly difficult when class sizes are as large as projected. Larger class sizes lead to fewer opportunities for personalized instruction, and teachers are unable to meet the diverse range of needs within their classrooms effectively. The reduction in staffing directly threatens our ability to provide an equitable and supportive learning environment for all students.

### **Physical Constraints and Classroom Space**

We are also facing physical limitations in terms of classroom space. Our classrooms were designed for a more manageable number of students, and trying to fit thirty-three students into one room creates logistical challenges that interfere with the learning process. Crowded classrooms often exacerbate student behaviors and create a less conducive learning environment. Moreover, with limited space, both the safety and comfort of students are compromised, which can lead to increased anxiety, disruptions, and disengagement.

### **Negative Impact on Educational Outcomes**

Research consistently shows that smaller class sizes in elementary grades are directly correlated with improved student achievement. With fewer students, teachers can offer more targeted instruction and provide timely interventions for struggling learners. In contrast, larger class sizes have been shown to negatively impact student outcomes, particularly for those students who need additional support. As educators, we are committed to providing high-quality education to all students, but with a classroom size of thirty-three students, we are deeply concerned that our ability to meet the needs of our students will be significantly hindered.

### **Montana OPI Guidelines and National Comparisons**

According to the Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI), the recommended maximum class size for elementary grades, specifically third grade is no more than twenty eight students per teacher. In the OPI document referencing class size, it states, "an overload of five students per classroom is considered excessive." Nationally, the average class size in elementary schools tends to range between 20-23 students per class. The current projected third-grade class sizes at Chief Charlo Elementary would far exceed these guidelines, leading to a suboptimal learning environment for both students and teachers. At Chief Charlo, we do not see our students as a number. The administration is exploiting an OPI loophole and ignoring the recommended

elementary class size target and making a new baseline. It should be noted that this is not specific to Chief Charlo and is happening across elementary schools throughout the district. The disparity between these recommendations and our current situation further underscores the urgent need for reconsideration of teacher allocation.

**District-Wide Class Size Cap and Neighborhood Schools**

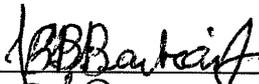
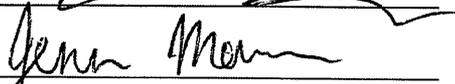
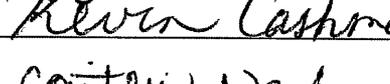
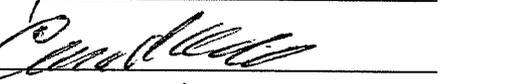
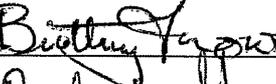
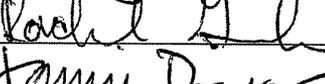
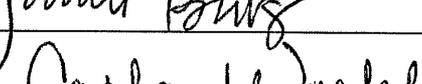
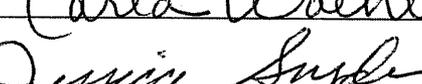
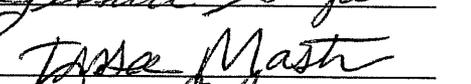
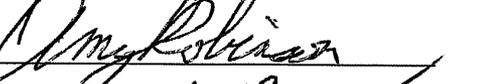
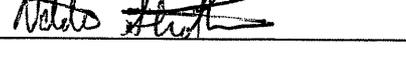
We urge the district to adopt a district-wide classroom size cap for elementary schools that aligns with OPI's guidelines. This cap would ensure that all schools, including Chief Charlo Elementary, maintain manageable class sizes that allow for effective teaching and learning. It is equally important that students attend their neighborhood schools rather than being leveled to other schools across the district. The practice of leveling disrupts classroom size balances and complicates the allocation of resources and staffing. By moving students out of their neighborhood schools, not only are classroom sizes in other schools affected, but it also undermines resource planning, including the distribution of teachers, support staff, and educational tools. Specifically, returning leveled kindergarten students to Chief Charlo for the 2025-2026 school year would enable us to maintain three first grade classrooms instead of two, helping keep class sizes in line with the OPI recommendations and promoting a more stable and equitable learning environment.

We respectfully urge the Missoula County Public Schools School Board to reconsider the decision to reduce staffing for the 2025-2026 school year. We believe it is crucial to prioritize the educational well-being of our students by maintaining class sizes that allow for effective instruction, meaningful teacher-student interactions, and a safe, supportive environment for all.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to engaging in further discussions to ensure the best possible outcomes for our students.

Sincerely,

The Staff of Chief Charlo Elementary

Printed Name: <u>Juliana Barbican</u>	Signature: <u></u>
Printed Name: <u>Elizabeth Drecktrah</u>	Signature: <u></u>
Printed Name: <u>Bethanu Nagel</u>	Signature: <u></u>
Printed Name: <u>Leah Patterson</u>	Signature: <u></u>
Printed Name: <u>Sanja Wolsky</u>	Signature: <u></u>
Printed Name: <u>Morgan Monteiro</u>	Signature: <u></u>
Printed Name: <u>Jenn Maurer</u>	Signature: <u></u>
Printed Name: <u>Shaleen Sullivan</u>	Signature: <u></u>
Printed Name: <u>Sydney N. Stauffer</u>	Signature: <u></u>
Printed Name: <u>Kevin Cashman</u>	Signature: <u></u>
Printed Name: <u>Caitlin Nogle</u>	Signature: <u></u>
Printed Name: <u>Cari Fulbright</u>	Signature: <u></u>
Printed Name: <u>April Miller</u>	Signature: <u></u>
Printed Name: <u>Cannon Benson</u>	Signature: <u></u>
Printed Name: <u>Brittney Troubridge</u>	Signature: <u></u>
Printed Name: <u>Rachel Gearheart</u>	Signature: <u></u>
Printed Name: <u>Jamie Burgess</u>	Signature: <u></u>
Printed Name: <u>Carla Woehler</u>	Signature: <u></u>
Printed Name: <u>Jessica Snyder</u>	Signature: <u></u>
Printed Name: <u>Tessa Masters</u>	Signature: <u></u>
Printed Name: <u>Amy Robinson</u>	Signature: <u></u>
Printed Name: <u>Michael Rieley</u>	Signature: <u></u>
Printed Name: <u>Natalie Strothman</u>	Signature: <u></u>



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## Reduction of Teachers

1 message

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Jessica Moraca <jmoraca0520@gmail.com>

Tue, Mar 11, 2025 at 11:06 AM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

To Whom It May Concern

I am writing this in reference to the current reduction of staff planned for the upcoming 25-26 school year at Chief Charlo Elementary School. While I am certain reductions are planned for other schools, I am concerned about the home school of my current 3rd grade student. This school also happens to be the school I am currently employed with.

The concerns I will list are my concerns as a parent. The choice to decrease staff and increase class size, at the 3rd grade level seems at a glance to be a good option but is this the best option for our teachers and students? What message are we sending, not only to educators, but to our children as well? There has been such an emphasis placed on test scores at a national level, scores which do nothing to indicate the levels at which children are learning. The people who can actually tell you this information, are the educators. Now I ask you, how can we increase the work load on an already overburdened group of people and expect them to catch kids on the brink of falling through the cracks? Those kids that don't fall on the bottom of your "test scores". Those kids that aren't excelling. But those that are somewhere in the middle? Those kids like my own, who struggle a bit but who are not learning disabled in a way that qualifies him for assistance in school. We have done our part as parents to get him the help he needs outside of the school environment. But we also have to rely on the involvement of his learning environment to help him navigate his work load at school. But if that teacher is managing the behaviors of students in their classroom or has an extra 5 students in an already overloaded class, tell me how my child's education is important to you? And to many children just like him? We talk at length about students in need who do not have home involvement, who are challenged by resources, finances, kids who struggle with a diagnosis that limits their learning abilities, among other roadblocks. But let us not forget about the group of kids who don't fit that mold. Who excel in some areas, but fall short in others. Those kids on the edge that need a little extra support in the classroom. That support is harder to come by with a teacher that has a classroom beyond the RECOMMENDED numbers. Numbers that the state has decided as maximum numbers where children can still receive adequate instruction. I would say we are already falling short on this. Already classrooms are overburdened with too many students, too many behavioral issues, and too much time spent on things other than instruction.

I find the inequities in how you are both leveling students and moving teachers. Perhaps you believe that all teaching is created equal but I would beg to differ. It matters what grade level someone is teaching or has taught when the choice to have movement within any given school. I'd venture to say that the level of patience and understanding of each grade level is different and requires different skill sets. We are treating teachers as though they are expendable, and at the same time preaching that school matters to our kids. Make it make sense!! Explain why one school can have 3 teachers in a grade level with 21 students per class, but another school is going to cut that same grade level teacher and add students to each class to make class sizes close to or over 30 students? Your processes are not making sense to the general public, let alone to those deeply and immediately impacted by all these decisions.

Let's take a moment to discuss the financial side. I'm sure words like "budget" are being thrown into the mix of all this. I ask you, will my taxes go down since you'll be cutting teachers? I can do math and one would think if teachers are being pink slipped then your budget has just gone down. You don't move money for paying teachers to account for increases in food or transportation. Not even for taxes or utilities. I'm well aware these budgets are separate. You are effectively taking tax monies and not giving we tax payers what we are paying for. That is an equitable and safe learning environment for kids.

In closing I am doubling down on my opinion that while MCPS does so many things right, the choices on the table now need to show your commitment to what you preach to these kids every day. That their education matters. That the quality of the educators matters. That with all the other things going on in the world, school is what they can count on. I hope that you will give ample thought to what I know is a sensitive and emotionally heated debate. This parent wants her child to get the most out of his education as he can. I'm doing my part to ensure that, now you make sure you do yours.

Thank you for your time

Jessica Moraca

Sent from my iPhone

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## Chief Charlo Teacher Displacements

1 message

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**Becky** <rainbowbrite0829@gmail.com>

Tue, Mar 11, 2025 at 11:13 AM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

My name is Rebecca Hellebust, and I have spent twenty-four years as a pre-k teacher, with the last seven years at Missoula County Public Schools. I began my role as an Early Kindergarten teacher at Jefferson in 2018, stepping into a brand new program that faced extreme budget constraints. The classroom lacked even basic furniture, so I had to search through district storage to find items for my classroom and set up centers without any materials provided by the district. Fortunately, I had resources that I purchased out of pocket over my many years of teaching. Although being a pre-k teacher in this district has been challenging, I made it work.

Last year, the district eliminated the Early Kindergarten program and replaced it with the Early Literacy Program. I was fortunate to secure the Early Literacy position at Chief Charlo for the 2024-2025 school year. However, this year, the principal called me into the office and informed me that I would be displaced and I could choose a job from the displacement pool. I felt shocked and hurt. I have dedicated my entire career to teaching preschool, with only two years of experience in kindergarten. I earned my master's in early childhood education, yet I now face being forced out of my position due to staff cuts at Chief Charlo and pushed into a role that doesn't suit my expertise.

Why am I, an early childhood teacher for the past 24 years, facing displacement and having to choose a position in which I have no experience? Just because my license states I can teach K-8 doesn't mean I can jump into any position. I provide more value to the district as an early literacy teacher.

Not only are classrooms and teachers being eliminated, but the district is also losing educators who specialize in the age group they teach. This decision does not serve the best interests of the school or the district.

I excel at what I do, and pre-k is where I truly belong.

Becky Hellebust  
Early Literacy Teacher  
Chief Charlo Elementary School

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## School Board Meeting Public Comment

1 message

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**Jessica Lowry Vizzutti** <jessica.vizzutti@gmail.com>  
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Tue, Mar 11, 2025 at 3:58 PM

My name is Jessica Vizzutti and I wanted to say thank you for moving forward with creating phone free learning environments for students in Missoula. I hope you move forward with a full day ban at all levels. When Greely High School in Maine implemented a strict smartphone-free policy, students began talking to each other more, eating lunch together, and reporting stronger friendships. These are the social interactions we should be encouraging, and the simplest way to make that happen is to remove phones completely from the school day. If we allow phones in the hallways, we create an enforcement nightmare where teachers must constantly police students about when and where they can use their devices. A simple, clear rule—no phones at all during the day—makes enforcement easier for staff and expectations clearer for students.

Thank you for supporting our teachers and students.

Jessica Vizzutti

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## Phones in Schools

1 message

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**Jennifer Prinzing** <jenn.prinzing@gmail.com>

Tue, Mar 11, 2025 at 4:24 PM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Hello, Missoula School Board -

I'm not able to make the board meeting tonight, but I wanted to express my support for completely eliminating phone use at every level in MCPS.

Smartphones are addictive—even for grownups!—and short bursts of phone access between classes reinforce that compulsive addiction. **Schools that eliminate all phone access see a decrease in smartphone dependency, improving students' focus, mental health, and overall well-being.** We should do everything in our power to help our students and staff have the best school experience they can.

Thank you!  
jenn prinzing

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## "RIGHT SIZING" CHIEF CHARLO PARENT CONCERN

1 message

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**jennifer gil** <jenngil1985@gmail.com>

Tue, Mar 11, 2025 at 4:35 PM

To: "kwitt@mcpsmt.org" <kwitt@mcpsmt.org>, mhill@mcpsmt.org, vmgiammona@mcpsmt.org, tlaboski@mcpsmt.org, javgeris@mcpsmt.org, ldavey@mcpsmt.org, kgammill@mcpsmt.org, chayes@mcpsmt.org, kmercer@mcpsmt.org, woldperson@mcpsmt.org, awake@mcpsmt.org, awalkerandrews@mcpsmt.org, jwalsh@mcpsmt.org, mwhicher@mcpsmt.org  
Cc: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Dear Members of the Board of Trustees,

I hope this letter finds you well. As a concerned parent of two children attending Chief Charlo Elementary School, I am writing to express my strong concern to the proposed cuts to the 3rd-grade teaching staff and other grades. I firmly believe that maintaining—and ideally increasing—the teacher-to-student ratio is crucial for the academic and personal development of our children. Education is a foundational pillar for our children's future, and small class sizes are known to have a significant positive impact on student learning outcomes. With fewer students per teacher, educators can provide more individualized attention, tailor their teaching methods to meet diverse learning needs, and foster a more supportive and engaged classroom environment. Each child deserves the opportunity to thrive academically, and adequate staffing is essential to make this happen.

As your educational strategies evolve, it's imperative that we prioritize resources that directly benefit our students. Reducing the number of teachers will inevitably lead to larger class sizes, which can dilute the quality of instruction and limit the opportunities for meaningful teacher-student interactions. I am deeply concerned that our children will not receive the academic support they need, which may affect their confidence, engagement, and overall educational experience. Furthermore, in 3rd grade, students are at a critical stage in their educational journey. This is the year when they transition from learning to read to reading to learn. A strong support system, including sufficient teachers, is vital for helping them navigate this transition successfully. An optimal teacher-to-student ratio will provide our children with the necessary academic guidance to ensure they master essential skills in literacy, mathematics, and beyond. In conclusion, I urge the board to reconsider any plans to cut teaching staff in the 3rd-grade classrooms. Instead, I highly encourage the pursuit of strategies that enhance our teacher-to-student ratio, as this will have lasting benefits for the academic and personal growth of our children and the entire Chief Charlo community.

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and I hope to see positive steps taken that reflect our commitment to providing the best educational environment for our students.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Bennett

Chief Charlo Parent.

## For school board meeting 3/11/25

1 message

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**Keetje Kuipers** <keetje@gmail.com>

Tue, Mar 11, 2025 at 5:03 PM

To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

This public comment is for the school board meeting on 3/11/25 pertaining to the cell phone policy review:

A full-day ban on cell phones is the new national best practices standard for providing children of all ages with a quality education. Allowing cellphones during passing periods weakens the intent of the in-class ban and gives students just enough time to re-engage with social media, texts, and distractions that follow them into the classroom. Research shows that even brief exposure to a smartphone can disrupt attention for up to 20 minutes after use. If we allow phones in hallways, we are setting students up to walk into class already distracted, disengaged, and less prepared to learn. Additionally, teachers already struggle with phones disrupting instruction. If we only restrict phone use in classrooms but allow it during passing periods, we create an inconsistent policy and an enforcement nightmare where teachers must constantly police students about when and where they can use their devices. A full-day ban simplifies expectations and ensures students understand the rules without confusion, making life easier for teachers and staff. There is no reason to allow cell phones during passing periods for high school students. It's not a good enough policy for kids of any age.

Thank you,

Keetje Kuipers  
Mother of two Missoula public school attendees

Sent from my digital appendage

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## Chief Charlo

1 message

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tarabozo@gmail.com <tarabozo@gmail.com>  
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Tue, Mar 11, 2025 at 5:17 PM

Good evening-

I am writing you this evening regarding some concerning news I just obtained about Chief Charlo staffing and potential future class sizes.

I currently have three children at this school, grades kindergarten, third and fourth. I have a strong understanding of what it takes for children to achieve academic and developmental standards in elementary school. Increasing class sizes and cutting staff does not support the success of our children.

To date, the quality of education my children have received from the staff at Chief Charlo is exceptional. This is largely in part to the experience and commitment being made by the current employees. Making staff cuts and moving teachers to grades where they have no experience is not the solution.

As a parent with many more years in the Missoula Public school district, I hope more options are explored to prevent these staff cuts and class size increases.

Thank you for your time and understanding, I am hopeful my younger children will have the opportunity for an excellent education. Unfortunately I don't believe the case if teachers are cut, moved to grades they aren't experienced in or their class sizes are increased to an unrealistic number that exceeds state limits.

Tara Bozo  
406-531-3505  
Sent from my iPhone

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**Public Comment**

1 message

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**Emily Earl** <eearl@mcpsmt.org>  
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Tue, Mar 11, 2025 at 5:31 PM

Hello, my name is Emily Earl, and I am a 4th Grade teacher at Hawthorne Elementary. I am speaking to you tonight as a voice for teachers, students, and parents across MCPS.

As a whole, we are completely aware and understanding of the financial circumstances MCPS found itself in during the previous school year and in planning for the current year. Myself, along with several of my colleagues were a part of the cuts made, and thankfully, we were able to find a place to land. We also understand that overall the district enrollment is down and legislative funding is still in question, and while filling classrooms to the absolute maximum physical capacity could alleviate some financial strain, the effects could be detrimental to the education students receive, as well as the morale and well-being of the staff.

In recent years, the behaviors exhibited within our public schools have exponentially increased. If plans continue the way they are heading, teachers will be expected to manage not only an excessive number of students in their room, but also an excessive number of behaviors. When teachers have to stop what they're doing, over and over again to manage behaviors, or evacuate a classroom because of a student escalation, how do you think that affects the learning of the rest of the class? As it is now, there's barely enough time to get everything taught between managing behaviors

and proctoring assessments, let alone with 4-5 extra students added to the roster.

In addition to the aspect of behavior management, adding to class sizes will also mean adding to the number of meetings to attend, tests to give and grade, IEP/504 accommodations to be made, and afterschool conferences to have with families. While there is language in our class size policy that allots a part-time para for overflowed classrooms, and we respect and appreciate the work of our district's paras more than they know, simply adding part-time help will not solve this issue, and it does not equate to a state-set classroom size.

Adding more workload to a teacher's overflowing plate of responsibilities will only leave you with higher burnout rates and an unhappy staff and community, in a place that should make us excited to get to come to work everyday. There are so many more things to consider when deciding on class sizes besides the fact that research has yet to show large classes have a negative effect on a student's ability to access an education. Yes, we may be physically able to fit 30+ students into a classroom, but we shouldn't have to. Please consider the students, the staff, and future of this career.

The Missoula community expects and deserves better.

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Thank you!

Emily Earl  
Hawthorne Elementary  
(406) 728-2400 ext. 4286  
earl@mcpsmt.org

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## **Right Sizing**

1 message

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**Valerie Steichen** <valeriemsteichen@gmail.com>  
To: publiccomment@mcpsmt.org

Tue, Mar 11, 2025 at 6:18 PM

Why are you guys calling this right Sizing. There is nothing right about it. You are further harming childrens futures and life outcomes, we are already behind all other developed countries. Why are you taking steps back?! There is no evidence other than it is harmful to have large classrooms. There is no reasoning behind this than to give those up high a pay raise maybe? Shame on you for even considering this and bringing it forward. My child will not be taught by un qualified staff thrown in to make up for the teacher being able to teach the over full class they have. This is not okay I do not support it and I will make my voice heard until it doesn't happen.

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## Chief Charlo Staffing Changes

1 message

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**Lauren Beckwith** <laurenebeckwith@gmail.com>

Tue, Mar 11, 2025 at 7:33 PM

To: "javgeris@mcpsmt.org" <javgeris@mcpsmt.org>, "kwitt@mcpsmt.org" <kwitt@mcpsmt.org>, "ldavey@mcpsmt.org" <ldavey@mcpsmt.org>, "mhill@mcpsmt.org" <mhill@mcpsmt.org>, "kgammill@mcpsmt.org" <kgammill@mcpsmt.org>, "publiccomment@mcpsmt.org" <publiccomment@mcpsmt.org>, "tlaboski@mcpsmt.org" <tlaboski@mcpsmt.org>

To Whom it May Concern,

I've recently been made aware that there will be significant staffing changes at the school where my children attend, Chief Charlo. I have a 3rd grader with Mrs. Robinson and a 4th grader with Mrs. Stauffer and we couldn't be more pleased with their education. Part of the reason they get such good care there is because with current numbers - 25 in my daughter's third grade class and 27 in my son's 4th grade class - they are still able to receive special instruction nearly daily with individualized attention from their teachers. Unfortunately with the proposed changes this will mean there could possibly be up to 33 children in each of the two remaining third grade classes (assuming all current students continue on - I'm in all the second grade classrooms as a sub). Thirty three children, even with the assistance from a part time (or full) para will have a significant impact on every student in those classes. Classroom management becomes nearly impossible, teacher burnout and student distractions all increase. I truly hope you will reconsider this drastic decision, you are risking losing one of the best teachers I have worked with (Mrs. Masters - I have subbed for her this year a few times) and creating an atmosphere that is very unlike the one we have come to know Chief Charlo for. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,  
Lauren Beckwith

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