

February 20, 2020

Board of Education
545 West Dayton Street, Room 110
Madison, WI 53703
board@madison.k12.wi.us

Board of Education Members,

Following your decision to select Dr. Matthew Gutiérrez as the next Superintendent of the Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD), we want to present the concerns of the Black community directly to each of you.

1. The differences between Madison and Seguin in both size and diversity causes us to question whether Dr. Gutiérrez is satisfactorily prepared for the issues facing the Madison District specifically labor relations, community relations and organizational leadership.

The Seguin District serves 7,467 students in 13 schools: 1 early childhood center, 8 elementary, 3 middle, and 1 high school. There is one learning center and one alternative high school in the District. The racial/ethnic enrollment is 5% black, <1% Asian, 71% Latinx, 23% white, and 1% 2 or more races.

The Madison School District serves over 27,000 students in 48 schools: 32 elementary, 11 middle, 4 comprehensive high schools, and one alternative high school. The racial/ethnic enrollment is 18% black, 9% Asian, 21% Latinx, 43% white, and 9% 2 or more races.

In comparing the aforementioned, MMSD serves three times more than the number of students and schools than in Seguin. We have four times the number of elementary schools, almost 4 times the number of middle schools and high schools. There is absolutely no evidence exhibited in his resume or experience that demonstrates he is capable of performing well with little to no background in transforming school districts of this magnitude.

Dr. Gutiérrez's background and experience do not satisfy the Black community's expectation to address the scope of issues facing the Madison District's challenge for improved educational outcomes for all students. There is a significant lack of confidence demonstrated by the Black community in his answers to our questions in the meeting held prior to his public meeting. His answers articulated a lack of familiarity with our issues and he showed neither an understanding nor past experience in addressing the widest Black/White achievement gap in the United States. That gap contributes to the highest percent of incarcerated Black citizens in the U.S. – which is deleterious to the entire State of Wisconsin.

Dr. Gutiérrez did not discuss how he will effectively "scale up" his management of a district that is 4 times his current district and one that is significantly more complex. When specifically asked about workforce challenges, he again, failed to provide any strategic examples of recruiting African Americans. As such, we were totally, unimpressed.

2. The process concluding with your appointment was flawed, incomplete, lacked substantive input from the Black Community, and the decision did not adequately represent the Black community.

We are dissatisfied with the process and how the input of the Black Community was minimized, if considered at all. The Board interviewed seven candidates and brought forth three finalists, two of which we find would not be voted as Superintendent. One for allegations of discrimination, misuse of funds and conflict of interest. The

other for a separation agreement with the former District including a non-disclosure clause saying neither party could discuss the reasons for the separation.

According to the District's timeline, background checks were conducted in November 2019. The Board should have known these issues existed and made a decision on advancing candidates therein. We believe Dr. George Eric Thomas was the more superior candidate. While the Board selected the three finalists, it is our position that Dr. Thomas' vision was inspirational, his achievements in improving schools were outstanding, and his experience in a large educational environment was exceptional and needed in the Madison District.

Given the differences between Madison and Seguin, we expected a greater and broader background of experience, skills and abilities that would move the Madison District further in cultural competency, social justice, and academic outcomes for black students. Dr. Gutiérrez is woefully lacking in all of these categories.

3. The Texas Performance Summary Ratings Report for the Seguin School District identifies how well students in this district are doing compared to their peers across the state. The 2018 ratings suggested a worrisome sign: A larger number of schools in this (we would prefer to say, his school district) district are rated below average in school quality. The data shows Below average: District: 60%, State avg: 40%. Average: District: 20%, State avg: 31%. Above average: District: 20%, State avg: 29%. As such, the Seguin School District is significantly underperforming.

The Madison District is facing the greatest academic achievement gap in its history. We cannot afford to lose any ground addressing this issue. The reported results for the Seguin District are not encouraging, do not promote confidence, and raises serious questions about Dr. Gutiérrez's ability to meet the needs of black or any of the students in the Madison District.

It is our understanding that Dr. Gutiérrez will conduct community tours in April as he prepares to begin employment on June 1, 2020. As part of this process, we plan to hold one or more meetings with him to address issues contained in this letter, present action plans for future engagement by the Black community, and to better understand his goals and objectives in meeting the Black community's concerns. We are also interested in Dr. Gutiérrez identifying how he plans to address the District's Goal of achieving Black Excellence.

Please let me know the contact person to facilitate Dr. Gutiérrez's visit and schedule during the April visit. We look forward to the conversation and plans to achieve academic success for the future of black students in the Madison District.

Sincerely,

Pastor Allen
Teresa Sanders
Yolanda Shelton Morris
Dr. Ruben Anthony

Pastor Baring
Vanessa McDowell
Ray Allen
Kirbie Mack

Pastor Gee
Carola Gaines
Dr. John Odom
Kaleem Caire

Greg Jones
gcjones15@att.net
608/274-3997
cc: mgutierrez@seguin.k12.tx.us

Dear Community Leaders,

Thank you for your letter, as it reflects what is very unique to our community, and that is your undeniable passion for education.

We recognize that hiring a superintendent is one of the most important decisions a school board will ever make. As a board that is elected for the people by the people, we also recognize that considering the voice of our community and representing their values in every decision we make is our most important responsibility.

We believe our strength as a community and as a school district resides in our diversity, and as a school board we are proud and honored to faithfully represent that diversity.

Diversity, community and opportunity for voices to be heard were all undeniably at the heart of our recruiting and hiring process for the new superintendent. It was the many voices of our community that wrote our leadership profile, a guidance document that would tell the story of who the board would select as the next leader of the Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD).

Dr. Matthew Guteirrez was selected as a result of the most transparent and community involved hiring process ever undertaken by MMSD. Even though our community approach will serve as a model for hiring our leaders in the future, it will always be the board who will fulfil its duty, as elected officials, to exercise its ultimate responsibility for making the final decision.

The board is confident in its decision, and along with our community is excited to support Dr. Gutierrez, as he begins to help write the next chapter of the MMSD story. We hope that through a focus on what matters to us most, our students, that the next chapter will be one of unity, written by many authors in the spirit of solidarity.

As is with most larger districts, we are replete with distancing mechanisms and labels that serve to divide us. This is not a time of division, particularly when considering that MMSD is making history in hiring the first superintendent of color as its leader.

Our students depend on us. The time is now, for us to join together, unified for students, and set aside those mechanisms that divide us for those that bring us together as a community.

It is through a unified approach of keeping students at the center of everything we do, we will be able to ensure that every school in our district is a place where all students thrive.

We look forward to working with you and our entire school community during the transition of Dr. Gutierrez.

Thank You,

Gloria Reyes, President
Madison Board of Education