

Board of Education
Fayette County Public Schools
450 Park Place
Lexington, KY 40511

April 23, 2024

Dear Fayette County School Board Members,

I am writing to resubmit my appeal of Cassidy Elementary SBDM council's Feb. decision to cut art classes for the 2024-2025 school year, a decision which was first made public in Cassidy Principal Jill Hill's *April Newsletter* under the headline "2024-2025 Programming." My son, [REDACTED] is a first grader at Cassidy and his dream is to become an artist. The art classes at Cassidy have enriched him deeply, and he comes home from school proud to open his red folder and show me the artworks he's brought home. I ask that the Board review our appeal of the Cassidy SBDM council's decision to cut art classes based on the following evidence that it 1) lacks educational merit, 2) is inconsistent with District goals, 3) violates District policy, 4) did not follow correct procedure in *SBDM Handbook*, 5) was erroneously framed in publications to families as "programming" when it was in actuality staffing, and 6) does not meet the District's standards of transparency in communications.

Background. I appealed the SBDM council decision in a letter dated March 21, asking them to reconsider their decision to cut arts classes. The SBDM council voted on March 25th not to reconsider their decision. Next, in a letter dated March 28, I appealed with Superintendent Liggins, who denied our appeal on April 12. I made a further appeal in writing on April 17 to Superintendent Liggins and to Tyler Murphy, stating that per section **02.42411 "Appeal of Decisions"** (SBDM) of Fayette County Public Online Manual, which stipulates that "if the Superintendent has not been able to resolve satisfactorily the concern, a further appeal may be made in writing to the Board."

- 1) Regarding the lack of educational merit of the SBDM council's decision to cut art classes:
There have been numerous studies that show that K-12 students who take arts are more successful, more likely to graduate high school, and score higher on national assessment tests than their peers with no arts education. The fact that this Board has voted to make "an additional \$1.4 million investment in the visual and performing arts in the last budget cycle to support this programming across the district" (Tyler Murphy) is itself a testament to the educational merit of the arts in our schools.
- 2) Cassidy SBDM council's decision to cut art classes is inconsistent with District goals because the Board voted to make this "1.4 million investment in the visual and performing arts ... to support [arts] programming across the district" (Tyler Murphy). Why would Cassidy not be able to share in that goal of making the arts accessible to all its students? Principal Hill references an "alternative plan to incorporate art into the curriculum," but in the March 25 SBDM council meeting she proposed that the supplementary art would take place *after* school and would not be available to all students. Principal Hill confirmed that no provisions would be made for bussing students in who are unable to afford to stay after school. This would eliminate fair teaching as a large population of Cassidy students would not be able to attend an after-school art supplementary program due to their transportation status. Why should an arts education at Cassidy Elementary be only for the few, not *all* the students?

- 3) Cassidy's SBDM council decision to cut art classes is inconsistent with District policy. The general public is now aware of Fayette County School District's recent policy to move foreign languages from elementary to middle schools through the World Language grant. The Lexington *Herald-Leader* published an article February 14th in which Board member Amanda Ferguson is quoted as saying, "The move would facilitate language acquisition through middle and high school instead of providing somewhat random weekly exposure of foreign language for elementary students." Cassidy, unlike most other elementary schools in the District, has inexplicably decided to keep its Spanish classes at the expense of art classes, and this is inconsistent with District goals and policy. The Feb. 26 Cassidy SBDM council meeting minutes (sec. D) reflect their discussion of the district's world language decision while also stating that it is no longer "financially viable" to have six special area teachers. Why did Cassidy SBDM council not follow the district's decision to move foreign language teachers to middle school?
- 4) The February 26th SBDM council Minutes reflect there was no majority consensus in the decision to cut arts specials. The *SBDM Handbook* stipulates that when consensus cannot be reached, the SBDM council shall get more information about an issue by doing "further investigation of an educational process and report its findings back to council," "determine if what is being proposed has been done in other schools," and "bring the debate to the attention of the faculty and parent groups for their consideration and input" (*SBDM Handbook* 52). None of these measures to get more information were taken, and the SBDM council voted on this issue twice in February 26th meeting to eliminate the art classes. The council refused to consider the input of the parents in attendance at the March 25th SBDM meeting or seek additional parent input which was suggested.
- 5) In Principal Hill's *April Newsletter*, she entitles her announcement of the SBDM council decision to cut arts classes: "**2024-2025 Programming**" and in the first sentence states: "During our March SBDM meeting our council was faced with a difficult decision regarding our school programming." By erroneously framing this item as a "programming" (instead of staffing) decision in Cassidy's primary method of communication, *April Newsletter*, and stating repeatedly that the council's decision was regarding "school programming," this therefore falls within the jurisdiction of the Board of Education, which is the authority on programming in Fayette County schools.
- 6) Each email we receive from our schools is prefaced with "in an effort to maintain open lines between home and school." We maintain that the Cassidy SBDM council has not been adhering to the District's standards of open communication. The information about the SBDM council's cutting of art classes has been ineffectually communicated with the public. The only notification Principal Hill made was on the second page of an attached link on Class Dogjo *after* "Lost and Found" section, effectively "burying the lede." If the school Board believes in transparency, we ask that you hold the Cassidy SBDM council to the standards of transparency that you believe in.

I ask that each of you, for one moment, recall your own experience as an elementary school student with art. Think back to what you felt in first grade when you were focused on cutting with Fisker's scissors across construction paper, or the delight you felt with your paintbrush in mixing yellow and blue paints to the delight of finding green. Our children learn so much by playing with,

experimenting with, and creating art. It is the class my son [REDACTED] and hundreds of other children at Cassidy count on as an essential part of their education. Art is part of the deepest expressions of themselves and how they see the world. Now, what does it look like when hundreds of children come home next year to their parents and open their backpacks with an empty space where their playful, bold, colorful art should be?

It is within this Board's authority to **reverse the council action** that violates any of the District's review standards as outlined above. This Board has a chance to right a wrong, and I urge you to act on that.

Sincerely,

J. Ansel Elkins, James Revell Carr, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
Lexington, KY 40502