To: Members, Board of Directors
Through: Stephen Murley, Superintendent
From: Amy Kortemeyer, Assistant Superintendent
Date: September 12th, 2016
Subject: WRAM Testimonials

**Alexander Elementary**

Dear Members of the ICCSD Board of Education,

I would like to offer sincere appreciation for the use of the WRAM process regarding teacher staffing this year. We have lower class sizes in every single grade, except 5th grade this year and it is making a huge difference in the building climate immediately. This difference is notable in the hallways, classrooms, specials, recesses and lunchrooms. Although many of our students encounter significant barriers to learning, our teachers are better able to build relationships with and connect with each of our students, implement instructional routines within our instructional minute guidelines, explicitly teach routines and procedures, and safely and quietly move throughout our building in a respectful manner with a smaller class size. This is making a difference in the morale of our staff, our families, and our students and we thank you for this.

*Chris Gibson, Principal*

Dear Members of the ICCSD Board of Education,

I write with sincere appreciation for the visible changes in our school climate and culture that are the direct result of the Weighted Resource Allocation Model. Alexander was able to add teachers in first, third, and fourth grades this year due to the adoption of this model. With reasonable class sizes in these grades, our teachers have been able to launch instruction in routines and procedures with minimal disruptions. Our physical classroom spaces are not nearly as crowded, and teachers are better able to manage student behavior in the hall. Teachers now have closer physical proximity to students in all settings; the classroom, the halls, and the common areas. Our specialists have commented on the smaller class sizes, noting that transitions are smoother and students are more in learning mode. Teachers are better able to address the needs of students with significant barriers to learning, including implementing and monitoring behavior plans, and starting this week, academic interventions.

We thank you for your ongoing commitment to our school, students, families, and staff and hope for full adherence to WRAM class size caps in all grades next year.

*Beth Madden, Instructional Design Strategist*

Dear Members of the ICCSD Board of Education,

My name is Maddie Sadecky and I am a 4th grade teacher at Alexander Elementary. I have been directly and positively impacted by the new WRAM model that was implemented for this school year. Last year, I had 28 4th graders, each with significant needs. I care deeply for each of my students and I found myself often frustrated with not being able to give each one what they needed or deserved on a daily basis. My time was often spent focusing on behavior or redirection rather than instruction. It was exhausting and wasn’t fair to anyone. I left last year with some anxiety about how I would approach the following
school year with the same number of students and likely the same difficulties, if not more. Then I got the news that we would be able to add another section. I was instantly more excited to come back to school, knowing that my students who need a lot of attention would receive it, while others who need a challenge would get that too, because I have less students in my room to look after. There are still difficulties and challenges, but I am so thankful for this new model because our students will be able to receive more of the attention and instruction that they so desperately need and deserve. So thank you to the board and the Iowa City Schools for allowing it to happen!

Maddie Sadecky, 4th Grade Teacher

Dear Members of the ICCSD Board of Education,

The WRAM has impacted my classroom significantly this year, even with only being 8 days into the school year. Last year, it was extremely difficult to get a chance to have a personal conversation with each one of my students on a daily basis, because of the number of students in my room. For many of my students, this was a necessity in order to have a successful day. Not only has it allowed me to have a personal conversation with every student this year, but it also allows me to get around and help the students with their academic needs. Both years I have had students with numerous barriers to learning, but the biggest difference this year is being able to get around to each student to help them because of the lower class size. It has truly made a significant difference in my classroom, and I’m excited to see the progress ALL my students can make this year due to the impact.

Kadie Farber, 4th Grade Teacher

Dear Members of the ICCSD Board of Education,

We have students with many barriers to learning, and smaller classes allow us to reach students individually, or in small groups on a daily basis. Our students need many connections, and “life knowledge” besides strictly academic, and our smaller class sizes have allowed us to have EVERY STUDENT involved in day to day running of the classroom (every student has a weekly job); these jobs provide our kids provide ownership in their classroom, and life skills that they might not get elsewhere. We are able to gather our kids around a chair and read picture books to them; it is more personal than reading to a group of 30 kids using the SMART board to show the illustrations. Again, some of our kids do not experience being read to at home. We are able to use physical activity (yoga) to teach the kids how to calm themselves. We have a gathering place for Morning Meetings, and we are able to use individual greeting activities (rather than large group ones), and the kids get more turns sharing, and having their comments validated. Hallway expectations can be better reinforced as we can monitor shorter lines. Longer lines spanned the length of the hallway, and it was very challenging to reinforce appropriate behaviors. More room for students who feel “territorial” due to various living conditions (living with relatives – families doubled up; large families; families in small apartments/homes). I could go on and on, but honestly the difference in our classroom last year and this year is night vs. day! We are thrilled with the things that we can do and provide for our kids already. If any of the school board members would like to come to our rooms and see Morning Meetings, or anything else, occurring, we would welcome the chance to have them visit! Let us know if we can answer any additional questions, or provide any additional information. Thank you!

Laurie Martin and Tarin Weipert, 3rd Grade Teachers
The lower number of students in the classroom has already made a great impact at Hills Elementary School. Our data from the beginning of the 2015-16 school year showed intense behavior that required CPI (crisis prevention intervention) to intervene to keep students safe. Clearing classrooms (moving the rest of the students out the room while another student was throwing items, flipping desks, hitting, kicking, and screaming) had already occurred several times by this point in the year. Additionally, we were already averaging over two office discipline reports per day for major behavior occurrences. For a school the size of Hills, this is more than double the target of the expected range for behavior intervention. The function of behavior for many students was seeking adult attention and escape of the task at hand. The beginning of the 2016-17 school year paints a different picture. At this point we have had zero CPI occurrences, zero room clearings, and zero office discipline reports. This alone has allowed classroom teachers to build positive relationships with students and families, establish procedures and routines and have uninterrupted time for instruction and student learning. Students are receiving more feedback in frequent manner (Hattie’s research indicates this has a substantial impact on student learning) which not only impacts learning, but it also provides the attention students are needing in a positive and proactive manner to foster learning. Additionally, teachers are better able to determine the student abilities and monitor tasks to scaffold learning and build success.

This has also impacted the ability of support staff to truly support student learning and proactively meet student needs. As the building administrator, I am better able to promptly do the following: address parent questions and concerns; be available to support and address staff questions and needs; be visible by classroom walk-throughs and presence at arrival, lunch and dismissal; participate in an uninterrupted time period in the grade level PLC meetings; work one-on-one with students (and their families) who display some beginning at-risk behaviors (tardy, absences, corrective feedback, etc.); and plan with staff the action steps needed to close the achievement gap. Our school counselor has been able to meet with all new students to Hills to help support the transition, as well as, begin classroom lessons and one-on-one support to students who are in crisis. Our SFA (Student and Family Advocate)/Behavior Interventionist has been able to proactively intervene by assisting in immediate Tier II support for students who are struggling (but now are able to maintain and have successes). Our Title I, IDS (Instructional Design Strategist), and ELL staff have been able to begin to accurately access student needs and plan the appropriate interventions that are needed. This has all occurred because we have been able to focus on student learning and needs without the frequent interruption of behavior crisis in the building.

All staff have had the ability to teach common expectations, procedures and routines to establish a foundation for all students in the learning community. Classroom teachers have had the ability to reach each student due to the smaller class size. Each teacher is working on 5x2’s (5 days in a row of talking with a group of students in the class for 2 minutes – not instructing – talking to get to know the students and fulfilling the need for a connected relationship), contacting each family with positive news within the first 4 weeks of school, and actively engaging students in understanding the goals, actions and mindset needed for success. These action steps can be accomplished within the first
four weeks of school due to a manageable size. Students are receiving the attention they need in the areas of the learning, social skills and behavioral choices.

Lisa TeBockhorst, Principal

Kirkwood Elementary
Dear Members of the ICCSD Board of Education,
In 3rd grade—without the third section of third grade our typical two classes would have a student count of almost thirty. With the smaller class size I am able to provide more individual communication with families which is very important for our ELL students and for students in poverty. I get to build the relationship in a way that provides a partnership for their child's education and well-being. Smaller classes allows me to work more closely and more often with the students in my classroom. I can give them the attention they need to build skills and knowledge students in middle class families possess and develop outside the classroom. I am able to quickly handle issues that may rise in the classroom because I do not have such large number of students that compete for my attention. I am able to spend more instructional time with ALL my students—I am not spread so thin. Students and teacher can build a better rapport because of the increase in time spent engaged with each other in small group and whole group instruction. My students are much more attentive since it easier to keep all students engaged in the learning process. The classroom is quieter and easier to provide space needed for each child to learn. My students need more attention and time with teacher because of the effects poverty plays in their daily lives—Parents who work two or more jobs, single family homes, families that do not speak English at home. Smaller classes sizes in our high FRL schools is equitable. It helps my students level the playing field with students who not have to deal with the daily inequality of poverty.

Chris Ney, 3rd Grade Teacher

Dear Members of the ICCSD Board of Education,
We have had a very smooth start to the school year. Last year, our classrooms with large numbers also had the largest number of office referrals. With lower class sizes, we have had very few office referrals, thus keeping students in class and engaged in learning. With high concentrations of significant needs, teachers must be able to give students the attention they need in all aspects of their lives, ranging from teaching academics to teaching behavior and providing emotional supports. This can better be accomplished with smaller class sizes. Families have commented on how much easier their children have transitioned, teachers feel they are better able to give each student what they need, and the building climate is very calm. Thank you for recognizing the needs in our building!

Anita Gerling, Principal

Lucas Elementary
The WRAM adjustment has had immediate positive impacts at Lucas. The class size reduction has also garnered much positive feedback from parents and staff. An immediate thought is that our teachers have been able to work on a more individual level with students and increased their ability to reach various subgroups. An example would be our Kindergarten students. We have 19 of 69 students who are/have been tested for ELL services. At least 6 different languages make up the group of 19. Focus on these particular students, while maintaining a high level of instruction to the other students, has been
occurring this year. We are also looking forward to an increased level of collaboration among staff and tighter implementation of strategies to increase levels of student academic, behavior and social success.

Ken Turnis, Principal

Twain Elementary
At Twain we met as a staff and generated several belief statements as a school. These are what drive us and give us purpose. One belief that we come with collaboratively was: “At Twain Elementary School we believe students’ abilities develop over time. We should mindfully respond to these shifts via diverse, flexible groupings based on interests, challenges and strengths.” Another one was “At Twain Elementary School we believe all students should be challenged and empowered through differentiated instruction.” The Weighted Resource Allocation Model allows our beliefs to come to fruition so we can fulfill our mission of helping kids reach their fullest potential because it:
- Created a second 6th grade section (otherwise it would have been a single section with high needs kids over 30).
- Creates smaller class sizes that allow us to keep up with an ever increasing population that need Early Literacy Implementation interventions.
- Allows teachers the ability to break students up into small groups and differentiate instruction.
- Gives us a behavior interventionist to help students behave appropriately in order to learn at high levels.
- Improves our behavior data because we have systems and supports in place and helps teachers be more proactive. Our Behavior Interventionist teaches teachers on how to create discipline systems.
- Frees up the principal to be present at PLC meetings and be in classrooms focusing on instruction, teaching and learning.
- Helps teachers feel supported in the areas of behavior and instruction.

Jeremy Negus, Principal

Wood Elementary
We are extremely grateful for the boards WRAM that allowed us to add additional teachers to decrease class sizes. We can definitely sense a difference from previous years as we enter into the classrooms. The learning environment it much more conducive to student learning this year and great things are happening each day in our classrooms.

Joe Divoky, Principal