Band families:

As you may know, our district receives inadequate funding from our state. We make up the difference with local levies, bonds, and our community’s generous donations. State funding depends on the actual count of students in the building, and it makes up the majority of staff costs. This means that when enrollment drops, we do not receive adequate funding to simply drop class size and retain staff; we need to re-budget and potentially cut staff and programs. Our PTA, board, and district are partnering with others around the state to seek legislative changes to the funding model that would help us maintain our staff and programs despite drops in enrollment. Such change is slow.

We expect enrollment to drop in the coming few years. We know this from detailed demographic data and from current enrollment numbers which show markedly fewer students enrolled in 8th than 12th grade (and even few in lower grades). This comes at a time when the district is still trying to recover from the additional expenses of COVID.

One potential solution would be to open enrollment to a certain number of students from off-island. It is worth noting that school districts around us already have this policy. Our district has allowed open enrollment in the past, depending on the crowdedness of the schools. This solution could retain our student population numbers, allowing us to retain our existing staff and programs. In the absence of open enrollment, staff and programmatic cuts are highly likely.

We are especially concerned that such staff and programmatic cuts could impact our band and other fine and performing arts programs. In the absence of adequate funding, district staff will need to make very difficult decisions.

Our school board will be deciding about open enrollment this spring. Our Band Boosters board is strongly supporting open enrollment and the maintenance of current programming. If you would like to share your opinion with our board, you can do so by emailing: board@mercerislandschools.org