

October 28, 2021

Dear Hartford School Board of Directors and Superintendent Debalsi,

You have heard from many employees about the unrest at the elementary schools. I know there is some degree of unrest in other schools as well, but this year has hit the elementary schools like no other. As the president of the Hartford Education Association, I wanted to sum up some of the conversations and suggestions we have made to Mr. Debalsi over the last week or so. I appreciate how open he was to meeting with members of the staff and thank him for his time. To keep this as simple as possible, here are some of the stressors:

- **Larger class sizes at DBS than in the other two elementary schools.** This places an extraordinary amount of stress and pressure on classroom teachers, creates more planning, clerical and management work, and compounds behavior problems when there's a higher number of students. Students across the district are not receiving an equitable education from one building to the next. I've attached data for you to view at the end of this letter. It's irresponsible to let this continue.
- A **new ELA curriculum** was chosen, purchased and implemented without the support of the advisory committee created to explore curriculum options. In addition, elementary teachers and principals voiced concerns that the timing for this was wrong and that it should be postponed.
- **Student behaviors are more aggressive and violent than ever before** and with larger class sizes (at DBS) and no general education paraeducators to support these numbers, students and staff are getting hurt. At DBS alone, there have been over 200 major support forms filled out for physical aggression since August. Staff members and students have been hit, kicked, pushed, bit, head-butted and spit on.
- The **lack of substitutes** and unfilled staff positions coupled with strict COVID protocol has created a system where we do not have enough staff to cover for the people who are absent. Each absence leaves a hole for another staff person to fill, adding to the lack of safety, stress and sense of craziness that we are experiencing. Teachers are **giving up lunch times and prep times** to cover for colleagues, and teachers are teaching out of their areas of expertise. As an example of how bad it is, DBS had 11 staff members absent today and one substitute. People are afraid to call in sick because it is putting more pressure on colleagues.
- In some buildings, **parents and students are being irresponsible with quarantine rules**, further spreading COVID and forcing multiple quarantines within single classrooms. In other cases, parents are keeping their students home longer than necessary by not getting their children tested after 7 days, instead opting to keep them home for 14 and contributing to even wider gaps in learning.
- Staff members with young children are **depleting their sick time** while in quarantine, and staying home while waiting for negative test results.

The Hartford Education Association and the Hartford School District need to work together to make things better so we can retain our amazing staff. Here are some suggestions.

- **Immediately STOP all EL Education implementation and professional development for this year** and consider this year a "pilot year" where teachers can try out lessons when they can. Instead, use whatever contract time the district has left with EL Education staff to train Hartford School District

teacher leaders. These teachers can be compensated for the extra time they spend getting to know the program, and their experience can be used for many years to train new teachers when they begin employment with the district.

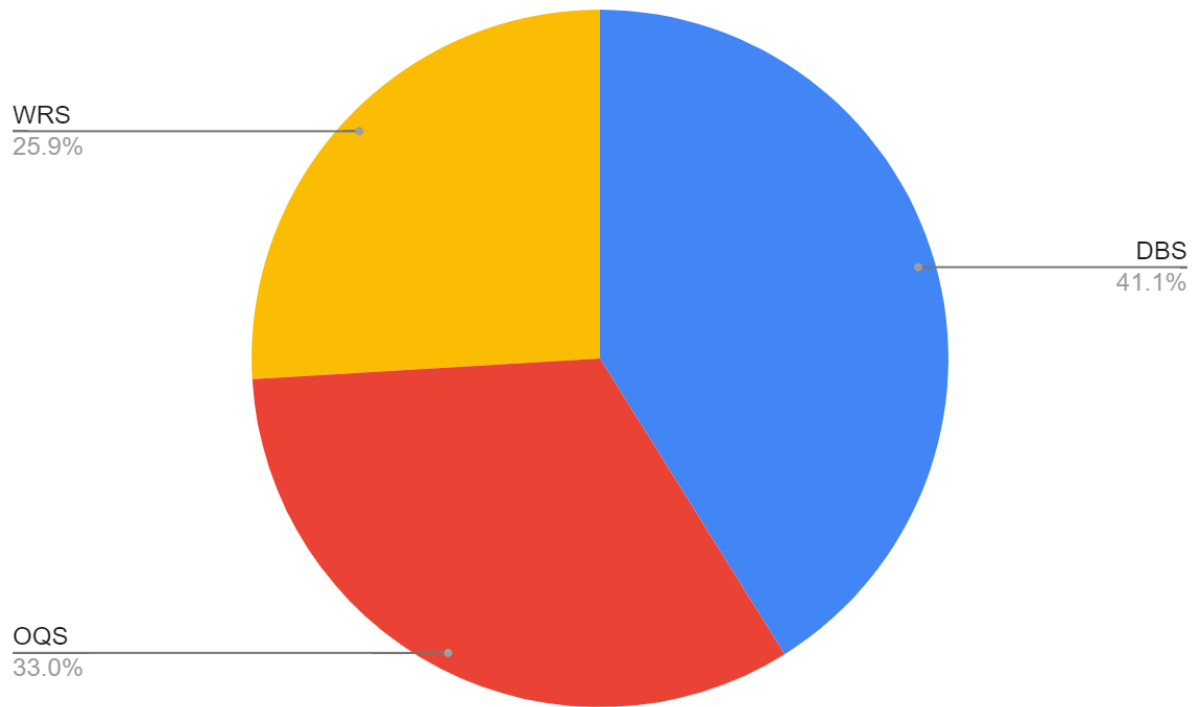
- **Allow elementary teachers the professional courtesy and trust to know what is best for our students right now.** In the future, consider that elementary teachers have had more new programs than any other level, yet our test scores remain some of the highest.
- **Find a way to provide elementary teachers with more time** so we are able to respond to student work, plan lessons, analyze data, make behavior plans, organize classrooms and create the environments where students thrive. Elementary teachers have more unique subjects to prepare lessons for than middle and high school teachers and considerably less time to prepare. Consider shortening the school day or implementing a weekly early release. Now, more than ever before, we need time.
- **Make a plan for hiring more substitutes** or make a plan to cancel school for grade bands when there isn't enough coverage for school to operate safely.
- **Compensate teachers who cover for other staff members.** Our own work and responsibilities are being pushed further and further outside the work day.
- **Renegotiate the use of COVID days and sick time so some of the days are excused.**
- **Make a financial commitment to hire general education paraeducators** to support teachers and students in grades K-2 where students need more support with supervision, bathrooming, personal care, organization and behavior. It should be standard practice that a classroom with 18 or more students for safety alone.
- **Commit to ensuring that class sizes are equitable in each elementary building,** and consider hiring an assistant principal or Dean of Students at Dothan Brook School.
- **Stop filling our PD time with training for this year.**
- **Make changes to the master calendar for next year** to better reflect the needs of the elementary schools. We have lots of suggestions on how to do this and would like to work with you on this.

We need to work together extra hard right now to keep the staff we have and to attract more. At the current level of morale, we have a lot of work to do. Please let me know if I can be of any help. I'm happy to come to any board meetings you think it would be helpful to attend.

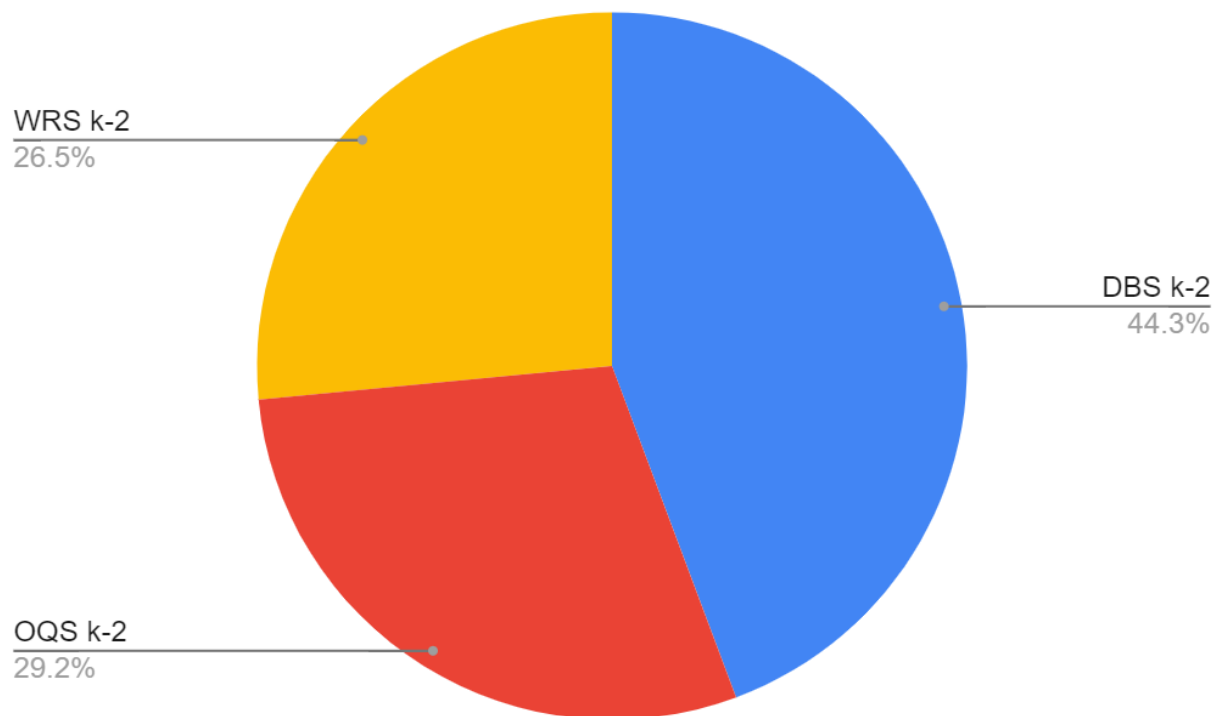
Sincerely,

Nichole Vielleux
HEA President

(Class size data to follow)

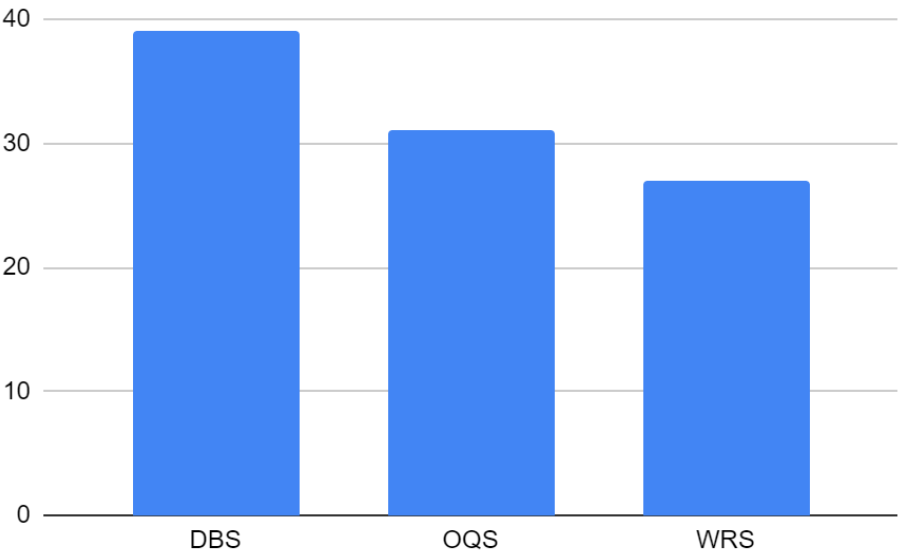


Pre-K through Grade 5 Comparison



K through 2 comparison

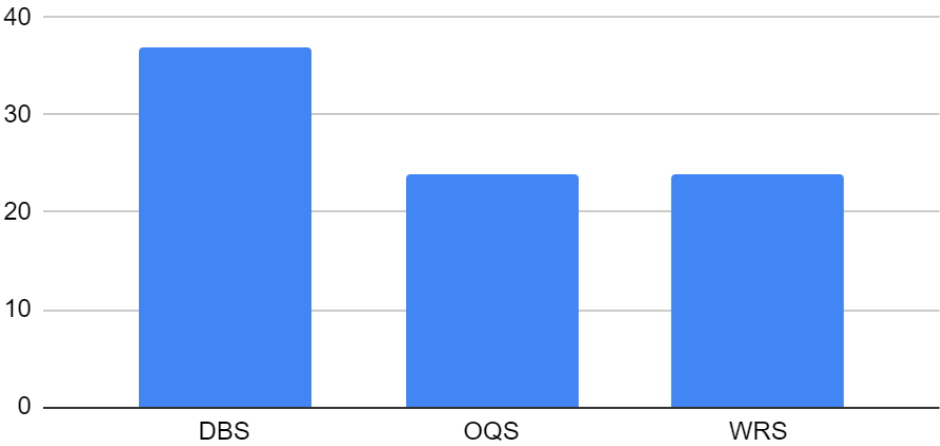
DBS	39
OQS	31
WRS	27



Kindergarten Students (each school has 2 Kindergarten Teachers)

First Grade	
DBS	37
OQS	24
WRS	24

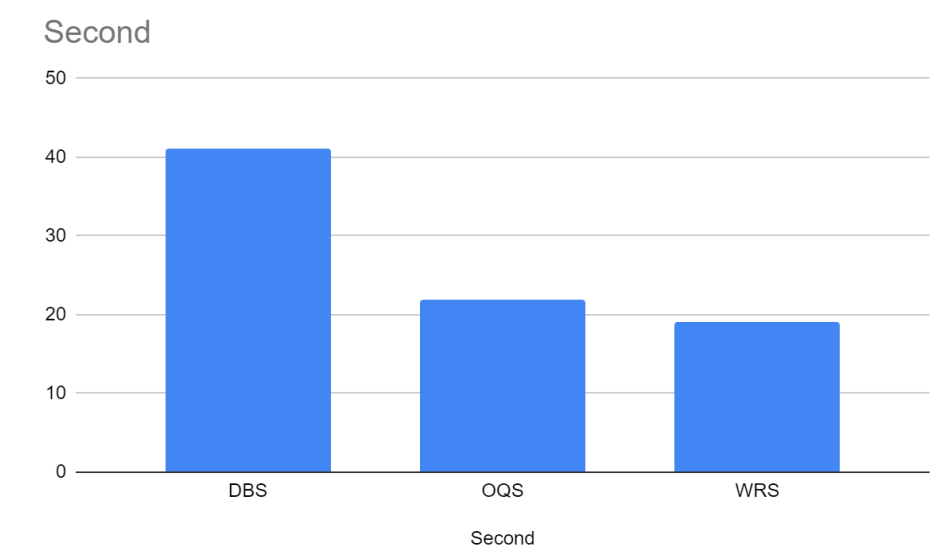
First Grade



First Grade

First Grade Students (each school has 2 First Grade Teachers)

Second	
DBS	41
OQS	22
WRS	19



2nd Grade Students (each school has 2 second grade teachers)