

Statement from Charlie Brooks on Act 127 and FY 2025 School Board Budgeting

My name is Charlie Brooks, and I'm a resident of St. Albans City. I'm a member of the Maple Run Unified School District Board of Directors, but I am speaking here for myself and not on behalf of the board.

Like most school board members, I spent the past few months immersed in budget minutiae, trying to find a way to keep our schools functioning while also seeking to keep property taxes under control. I applaud the intent behind Act 127's weighted pupil count, as equity is essential. I also applaud the foresight exercised when this law was passed that realized the potential spike in property taxes and put a homestead tax cap in place.

The FY25 MRUSD budget keeps per-student spending flat. Despite this, our budget exceeded the 5% cap. We looked at alternatives, but there was no reasonable way to further cut costs.

Bringing our budget down to just a 5% increase on the tax rate, would require cutting \$3.2 million. Personnel costs would bear the brunt of that, meaning potential cuts of 31 to 50 jobs—5 to 8 percent of our district staff.

That's just to reach a 5% tax rate increase. To save one cent more, we would need to cut another \$383,000 out of the budget. That's another 3 to 6 people that land in the unemployment line to save a penny.

We went so far as to look at what would happen if we cut everything needed to reach a flat education tax rate. That would be a reduction of \$5.8 million - between 56 and 90 jobs. A reduction of \$13.5 million would be the flat tax rate after the CLA adjustments - between 130 and 208 jobs in a district of 560 employees.

I voted our budget forward because I cannot look at kids who have already effectively lost 2 years of quality education due to a pandemic and tell them that I value them so little that I would strip bare any resources available to them.

The new weighted pupil count requires something like the 5% cap to be tenable. We need to allow for an adjustment period to maintain our current standards while becoming more efficient for the future. While we should absolutely ensure that nobody is manipulating the system, we also need to make sure that schools are not forced to gut their staff to make up the difference. We need to show our kids that we are willing to go to the mat for them rather than taking a wrecking ball to their education for the sake of political points.

Thank you.