For the 2010-2011 school year, the Montclair school district stands to lose more than $5 million in state aid. This means cuts in staff and programs. Across the district 85 people, many of them teaching assistants in the classroom, are slated to lose their jobs.

The Board of Education’s plan is for each school to keep a full-time assistant in each of its kindergartens, a half-time assistant in each of its first grades and two more assistants to use as the principal decides – five in total per school. That means that Edgemont Montessori will see seven teaching assistants cut from our staff.

If you would like to let the superintendent, Dr. Alvarez, or the mayor, Jerry Fried (who serves as the head of the Board of School Estimate), know how you feel about this proposed cut, you can email them at: falvarez@montclair.k12.nj.us and jfried@montclairnjusa.org. The next and final meeting of the Board of School Estimate is this Thursday evening, April 8th, at 7pm, so it is important to send your message before then. If you would like to cut and paste the following message to send, with or without your own changes, please feel free:

Dear Dr. Alvarez and Mayor Fried,

I am writing to ask you to reconsider keeping all of our teaching assistants at Edgemont Montessori school. Without our teaching assistants, our Montessori magnet will be seriously impacted.

You say education looks different at each of Montclair’s elementary schools and that you want to maintain the diversity of our magnet system. At Edgemont our magnet is exemplified by our Montessori-trained teachers, our Montessori materials, and our (often Montessori-trained) teaching assistants who play a vital role in our classrooms.

So completely are our teaching assistants integrated into the flow of our classrooms, that frequently children do not differentiate between their “real” teacher and the assistant.

At Edgemont the teacher does not stand in the front of the room and teach to all the children at once with the assistant doing paperwork in the back. In our classrooms, children work singly, in pairs, or in small groups, as they choose. The teacher AND THE TEACHING ASSISTANT move around the room, checking, helping, guiding each child or group as needed. This not only changes the teacher-student ratio in our classrooms, but provides students with true differentiated instruction, based on their needs and abilities. For a single teacher - even our wonderful Montessori-trained head teachers - to accomplish this in our classrooms of more than 25 children would be more than difficult.

We know very hard choices face you, and we know Edgemont will also have to sacrifice. But if you remove our teaching assistants, you deal a huge blow directly to our magnet identity. Please help us maintain Edgemont as the only public Montessori school in New Jersey.

Respectfully,