Resolution of the North Smithfield Public School District School Committee

Field Trip Funding Law

On April 10th, former Commissioner of Education, Ken Wagner, ruled that in accordance with R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-38-6(a) there are only three permissible ways to fund school trips:

1) “Districts may budget funds for trips, so long as the trip is part of the instructional program and all students have the same ability to attend;
2) Fundraising for trips is permissible to supplement district budgeted funds, so long as individual students do not have mandated fundraising targets that must be met as a requirement for participation; and,
3) Individuals may be charged fees for a trip, but only for trips that are not organized by the district using district resources including district funded staff time.”

While in accordance with the current law, this ruling will have the unintended consequence of severely reducing, if not eliminating, the types and number of extra-curricular opportunities that can be offered to public school students. In essence, this means that once in a lifetime opportunities for students, such as band and choral trips, foreign travel exchange trips, and other important programs will be eliminated from public schools in Rhode Island as districts cannot afford the costs of fully funding these enrichment activities. As it now stands, instead of providing for more equity, this ruling may have the unintended consequences of driving families away from public schools and undermining a district’s ability to fulfill broadly a component of the RI Basic Education Plan which requires “a school-based program of extra-curricular activities” (see id., 200-RICR § 20-1.3.2(H)).

WHEREAS: The North Smithfield Public Schools District School Committee strongly believes that it is important to enhance students’ social and emotional well-being by encouraging them to make strong connections with faculty and other students at school; and,

WHEREAS: The North Smithfield Public Schools District School Committee recognizes that special activities such as class trips, band and choral trips, and foreign travel exchange trips are often signature moments in a student’s public school experience; and,

WHEREAS: The North Smithfield Public Schools District School Committee fully supports equal opportunity for students to participate via a commitment to provide scholarships and aid so that the financial situation of a student does not present a barrier for that student to fully engage in activities supported by the district; and,
NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED: That the North Smithfield Public Schools District School Committee respectfully requests the Rhode Island General Assembly to amend RIGL § 16-38-6(a). The following sentence (in bold) should be added to the law:

“No public school official or public school employee shall, for any purpose, solicit or exact from any pupil in any public school any contribution or gift of money or any article of value or any pledge to contribute any money or article of value.” This prohibition does not apply to school-sponsored field trips in which parents can be asked for funding as long as the District provides funding to any student whose family cannot afford the cost of curriculum-based trips required by the RI Basic Education Plan (BEP).

RESOLVED: That the North Smithfield Public Schools District School Committee calls on each of our State representatives to support such a legislative change;

RESOLVED: That the North Smithfield Public Schools District School Committee calls on RIASC and other professional organizations to undertake efforts to promote this change during the upcoming legislative session.

RESOLVED: That a copy of this Resolution be forwarded to every Rhode Island municipality, School Committee, State Senator, State Representative, the Rhode Island Association of School Committees, the Rhode Island Association of School Superintendents, Rhode Island Association of School Principals, NEA, AFT, and the Governor.

WHERETO: The following bear witness:

[Signatures]

James J. Lombardi III, Esq., School Committee Chair
Sherry D. McGahan, School Committee Clerk

11-19-19
Passed (Date)