

Portsmouth School Committee

The Portsmouth School Committee respectfully asks our legislators to support the following issues during the 2020 Legislative Session.

1) *State Education Aid Funding Formula.*

While it is being reported that the school funding formula has been fully implemented, that is only true for school districts that received an increase in aid under the new formula. School Districts, such as Portsmouth, that lost state education aid when the funding formula was implemented in 2012 still have one more year of phase in of additional cuts in aid in FY 21.

We urge the legislature reject any change to the funding formula that merely results in a redistribution of aid from one district to another district. Portsmouth has lost approximately 50% of its state aid over the past 10 years due to the implementation of this current funding formula. **Any future changes to the formula should only result in increases to every district's aid, or at a minimum, hold the districts harmless from further loss.**

Additionally, we encourage you to **support an increase in the high cost special education categorical fund** included in the funding formula aid.

2) *Amend RIGL § 16-38-6 (a), with the following sentence (in bold).*

“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 and 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 the trip.**

The reason for this need change is as follows: On April 10th, former Commission of Education, Ken Wagner, ruled that in accordance with R.I Gen. Laws 16-38-6(a) there are in short 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 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 students. In essence, this means that once in a life-time opportunities for students will be eliminated from public schools in Rhode Island as districts cannot afford the costs of fully funding these enrichment activities. The Portsmouth School Committee passed a resolution supporting this change (see attached).

3) Support all initiatives to prevent drug abuse in our community.

We urge the legislature to support Senator Seveney's previous recommendations for changes to RIGL § 16-21.3. This includes assessing an additional substance abuse prevention assessment deposited in a restricted purpose receipt account. This account shall be known as the high/middle school student assistance fund and the traffic tribunal shall transfer money from the middle/high school student assistance fund to the department of behavioral healthcare, developmental disabilities and hospitals for the administration of the Rhode Island Student Assistance High/Middle School Act.

4) East Main Road Diet.

We urge the legislature to support the road diet on East Main Road to improve the safety of our students. Many of our school buses traverse East Main Road. Every school bus is wider than a single lane currently on East Main Road.