

## Portsmouth School Committee

The Portsmouth School Committee respectfully asks our legislators to support the following issues during the 2021 Legislative Session.

**1) FUNDINGS: State Education Aid Funding Formula and High-Cost Special Education.**

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, as the cost of educating students with disabilities is continuing increase even for the most well managed school budget, we encourage you to **support an increase in the high-cost special education categorical fund** included in the funding formula aid.

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

Last year, the State legislature was on the verge of passing a bill to deal clarify the funding of field trips. As the pandemic ends these types of activities will be even more important to help students forget connections with their classmates and school and contribute positively to their overall social-emotional well-being. Therefore, we ask you to support amending 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 10<sup>th</sup>, 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 an 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) SPECIAL EDUCATION.**

#### **A. Examine and Change the statutory requirements for LEAs to contribute special education per pupil amounts to DCYF for students placed in residential settings and the overall formula used to identify LEA per pupil spending amounts for students with IEPs placed in residential settings.**

At various times, the DCYF places youth in residential settings. When this occurs, LEAs of residence contribute to the educational costs of the residential placement. For students with disabilities, this can often result paying more than current cost to educate the student. For students who are not eligible for special education the cost that an LEA contributes is the same as that of a student with a disability. We request that the State address the current statute for this area in its entirety, including the formula for determining per pupil expenditures in this area.

#### **B. Examine the Effectiveness of Statewide Transportation for Students who Attend School Outside of Their Residence LEA**

Statewide transportation was legislatively enacted to provide fiscal efficiencies for student transportation outside of LEA's. The system, while purportedly offering efficiencies has failed year over year to accomplish this, particularly as it relates to cost. It is not cost effective and it is not efficient. We request that the State address this issue by studying the effectiveness of statewide transportation to identify cost effective solutions for LEAs as it relates to transportation.

### **4)ROAD SAFETY.**

Together with the Town Council, the School Committee has raised several times concerns with legislators about the safety conditions on East and West Main Roads. Every school bus is wider than a single lane currently on East Main Road. As both of these roads are under the state's jurisdiction, the Town of Portsmouth and the State need them to become a priority for action at the state level. We are also undertaking a transportation study to see how we might alter busing to improve safety and efficiency.

### **5)SUPPORT THE LEGISLATIVE EFFORT TO PAUSE THE EXPANSION OR CREATION OF NEW CHARTER SCHOOLS**

The School Committee urges Portsmouth legislators to support the passage of Senate Bill 13 and the House equivalent which provides for a pause on the creation or expansion of any new charter school until after the 2023-2024 school year.