



**State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations**  
**BOARD OF REGENTS FOR ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION**  
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January 22, 2009

Dear Chairman Costantino and Members of the House Finance Committee:

In these times, when we face budget shortfalls and see more looming ahead, we must make tough choices among competing priorities. The proposed articles before the Finance Committee are generally not choices that the Regents would support in a perfect world. But we do believe that the local school districts can manage to implement these provisions without doing harm to students, which is our fundamental principle and priority.

We must think of the proposals before you within a context of overall budget savings and of local control of resources. Whereas the Regents support professional development for educators, we do believe that districts can absorb the cost of a reduction in professional-development aid because of the overall savings that districts have experienced and will experience through statewide efficiencies.

We believe that there are savings that our cities and towns can achieve through partnerships and other efficiencies that must be explored and put into practice. Over the past two years, we have succeeded in establishing the first statewide purchasing contracts for school supplies, through an RFP we have implemented the first statewide school-lunch contract, we have developed and implemented the Uniform Chart of Accounts for accurate and thorough reporting on school finances. Our recently adopted School Construction Standards have led to economies for local districts as well as to better, safer, and more energy-efficient school design.

As you know, we have also done the initial spadework toward the creation of a statewide health contract that would encompass all school districts and that could lead, we believe, to significant savings. An article that you will consider at a future hearing would mandate district participation in this statewide program, thereby bringing about savings for all

An article before you today concerns the Regents' proposal for a statewide contract for transportation of students with special needs and out of district transportation, but eventually for all students. The article would require all districts to participate in this program (unless the district runs its own system). Again, this would lead to savings across the state.

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We would anticipate similar potential savings if districts could offer professional development through the five statewide collaboratives that are already well established by state statute. When districts work in partnership and relegate administrative tasks to other organizations, they can achieve cost efficiencies and can devote time and resources to instruction.

Though the Regents support statewide efficiencies, we also support legislation to give districts greater opportunities to determine the allocation of local funds. For that reason, we support lifting the mandate on schoolbus monitors, which would allow districts to make determinations at the community level as to which bus routes require monitors to ensure student safety.

When times are tough, we are forced into hard thinking and into cost-cutting, which can leave us in a good posture for the future. There isn't a day that goes by during which someone doesn't come up to me with a suggestion or an idea: Why do we have 36 school districts? Can't we consolidate? We need to think through these ideas and implement whatever seems practical and possible. The proposals before the Finance Committee today represent a good first step toward better statewide efficiencies that will save money for taxpayers and do no harm to public education.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Robert G. Flanders, Jr." in a cursive style.

Robert G. Flanders, Jr., Esq.  
Chairman, Board of Regents