

Meeting Street

RI BOARD OF EDUCATION

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OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER

October 30, 2015

Her Excellency Gina M. Raimondo
Governor of Rhode Island
Rhode Island State House
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Re: School Aid Funding Formula

Dear Governor Raimondo:

I am writing to you regarding the review of Rhode Island's education funding formula. I supported the implementation of the present funding formula and was pleased to see it begin to address the significant funding disparities between our urban and suburban students.

I understand that there is a need to relook at formulas and ensure that they continue to accomplish the goals established for them. I have been concerned with the recent criticism of the funding for public schools (charters) and the need to revisit the funding formula to address possible funding inequities. I applaud you for appointing a group to look into this and to make the necessary recommendations that are needed to address any inequities.

There are, however, two points that I am very concerned about that I believe presently fall outside of the purview of the funding formula (and the commission appointed to review it) that continue to be overlooked. The first is school housing aid and the second is Rhode Island's existing transportation policy.

It is widely acknowledged that the school housing formula has never been fair to public school charters. A city or town's reimbursement under school housing aid is determined by the socio-economic factors of that city or town, this makes sense. This is not true for charters; rather an artificial reimbursement rate is established. For example, a public school (non-charter) in Providence that seeks to make physical improvements is eligible to be reimbursed at least 85% of its actual costs by the Rhode Island Department of Education and yet a public school (charter) in Providence serving the same student population and seeking to do the exact same work is only allowed to be reimbursed up to 35%. This is a very real and dramatic issue that public school charters throughout Rhode Island face on a daily basis and non-charter public schools do not. (This is in addition to the yearly maintenance costs that public school charters must pay out of the moneys received pursuant to the funding formula compared to the ability of public schools to rely on their home city to absorb these costs.)

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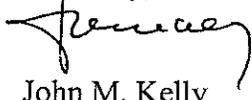
This is harmful to the thousands of children who attend these public schools and undermines the financial stability of our public school charters. All Rhode Island children should receive a quality education in a safe and nurturing environment to support high quality education. For too many public school charters, this is made next to impossible by the existing school housing aid formula.

The second is student transportation. Throughout Rhode Island, cities and towns transport students attending private parochial schools and private independent schools on public school buses at no cost to the parochial or private school or family. This is a longstanding policy and practice in Rhode Island. Unfortunately, public school students traveling to public school charters on these same buses do so at a cost to each public school charter of approximately \$60,000 per bus (based on a recent quote from First Student). It is difficult to fathom why we use public dollars to support religious schools and private schools while denying this same benefit to our public school students attending public school charters.

Public school charters' long-term viability in Rhode Island is directly related to their ability to absorb these incredibly high transportation costs (fees that are established by the local school district) and denying them equal reimbursement under our school housing aid policy. I do not believe that a review of the school funding formula can be complete without taking into account these two other factors and I ask you for your support and leadership in finally addressing these long-standing deficiencies and unfair practices that are hurting all of our public school students.

Please let me know if I can be of any assistance and thank you in advance for your help on this matter.

Sincerely,



John M. Kelly
President

c: Barbara Cottam, Chairwoman, Board of Education
Kevin Gallagher, Deputy Chief of Staf