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Coventry School Committee Members
Raymond E. Spear, Committee Chairman
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BOARD OF RECEIVERS
ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

FEB 05 2008

OFFICE OF THE
COMMISSIONER

February 13, 2008

Mr. Peter McWalters, Commissioner
Rhode Island Department of Education
255 Westminster Street
Providence, RI 02903-3400

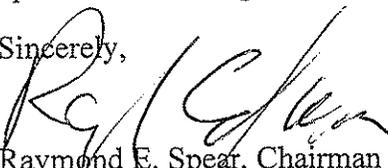
Dear Mr. McWalters:

Superintendent Di Pietro wrote to you on December 27, 2007 to request a waiver of staffing requirements for school library programs at Coventry High School. You have graciously responded with a request for clarification of the requested waiver. I am writing this letter to clarify that request under my signature as required by R.I.G.L. 16-2-21.4.

Specifically, Coventry requests that you waive the requirement that "there shall be two full-time librarians and a full-time clerical assistant in schools with over 1,000 children. There shall be additional clerical assistance for enrollment beyond 1,500 children." If the waiver was to be granted, it would be our intent to retain a full-time librarian and a clerk at the high school. We believe that given the re-design of the instructional day at Coventry High School, the staffing pattern that we propose will meet the educational needs of our students.

Coventry maintains a 6.5-hour school day. Given the new regulation requiring students to have 5.5 hours of direct instruction, when you discount lunch and passing time, there is no longer any time during the school day or the school week for study periods. Study periods were a time when students would request a pass to the library. Since students were unescorted to the library, librarians were needed to supervise and support the students. With the elimination of study periods, Coventry has re-designed and re-defined access to the school library. While the high school library is opened early in the morning and remains open well beyond the end of the school day, students are now brought to the library with their classmates under the supervision of their classroom teacher. Coventry High School library maintains a computer laboratory, a reading room, a study section, as well as its extensive book and media collection. The library is accessed virtually every hour of the day. However, under this new model, most often there are one or two classroom teachers with two librarians and a full-time clerk. We believe that with the required need for the classroom teacher to escort and supervise the students during their time in the library, the requirement for there to be two librarians is both redundant and cost-prohibitive.

I respectfully request your consent for a waiver on this specific regulation so that Coventry Schools can optimize its staffing to the needs of students.

Sincerely,

Raymond E. Spear, Chairman
Coventry School Committee

"Working Together To Improve Our Schools"

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Coventry Public Schools

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BOARD OF REGENTS FOR
ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

March 18, 2008

MAR 21

OFFICE OF THE
COMMISSIONER

Mr. Peter McWalters, Commissioner
Rhode Island Department of Education
255 Westminister Street
Providence, Rhode Island 02903-3400

RE: BEP Librarian and Clerical Assistant Waiver

Dear Commissioner McWalters:

As per your letter of March 7, 2008 to Raymond E. Spear, Chairman of the Coventry School Committee, I am writing to assure the Rhode Island Department of Education that if the waiver is granted to the BEP requirement that there be two librarians at a high school with more than one thousand students enrolled, Coventry will maintain not less than 1.0 FTE librarians on staff at Coventry High School; and, all students will continue to have access to the media center and its staff, the computer lab, the reading room, the study area, and the book and media collection; and, all students will continue to get appropriate academic support from the staff in the media center.

I can assure the Commissioner and the Rhode Island Department of Education of meeting these expectations due to the fact that:

1. Students who access the library do so in context with their class supervised by the classroom teacher and any teacher assistant assigned to that class;
2. The librarian/media specialist does not teach prescribed classes, and therefore the instructional day schedule can stagger the teacher preparation/unassigned time throughout the week to ensure that no class or specified time period is disadvantaged from access to the librarian;
3. The clerical staff assigned to the library can be scheduled so as to create additional, responsive support to teachers, students and classes accessing the library;
4. The computer lab is scheduled throughout the day with appropriate support and supervision as needed;
5. Coventry High School will monitor the needs of the students and staff to ensure that appropriate support is provided.

Thank you for your consideration of this waiver. With the release of the staffing mandate, Coventry can focus on service to students and staff as the core of its decision-making.

Sincerely,

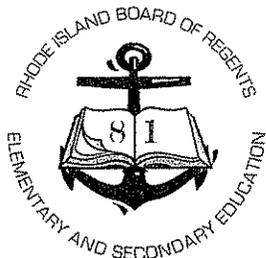


Kenneth R. Di Pietro
Superintendent

KRD:dam

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State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Shepard Building
255 Westminster Street
Providence, Rhode Island 02903-3400

Peter McWalters
Commissioner

March 7, 2008

Mr. Raymond E. Spear, Chairman
Coventry School Committee
c/o Coventry Public Schools
9 Foster Drive
Coventry RI 02816

Dear Mr. Spear:

Thank you for your letter of December 27, 2007 in which you, on behalf of the Coventry school committee, request that I, in accordance with R.I.G.L.16-2-211.4, waive the requirement of Rhode Island School Library Regulations that: "there shall be two full-time librarians and a clerical assistant in schools with over 1,000 children.. There shall be additional clerical assistance for enrollment beyond 1, 500 children." The applicable law states in pertinent part:

R.I.G.L. 16-2-21.4 School budgets – Compliance with certain requirements.

– (a) Notwithstanding any provision of the general or public laws to the contrary, whenever a city, town, or regional school committee determines that its budget is insufficient to comply with the provisions of § 16-2-21, 16-7-23, or 16-7-24, the city, town, or regional school committee shall adhere to the appropriated budget or the provisions of § 16-2-23 in the absence of an appropriated budget. The chairperson of the city, town, or regional school committee, in accordance with the provisions of § 16-2-9, shall be required to petition the commissioner, in writing, to seek alternatives for the district to comply with state regulations and/or provide waivers to state regulations and, in particular, those which are more restrictive than federal regulations that allow the school committee to operate with a balanced budget. Waivers which affect the health and safety of students and staff or which violate the provisions of chapter 24 of this title shall not be granted. The commissioner must consider alternatives for districts to comply with regulations and/or provide waivers to regulations in order that the school committee may operate with a balanced budget within the previously authorized appropriation. In the petition to the commissioner, the school committee shall be required to identify the alternatives to meet regulations and/or identify the waivers it seeks in order to provide the commissioner with the revised budget which allows it to have a balanced budget within the previously authorized appropriation. The commissioner shall respond within fifteen (15) calendar days from the date of the written petition from the school committee. ***

Telephone (401)222-4600 Fax (401)222-6178 TTY 800-745-5555 Voice 800-745-6575

In your request for a waiver, you report that because of the redesign of the high-school schedule the requirement that there be two librarians is "both redundant and cost-prohibitive." In considering requests for waivers, I do not consider the cost to the district nor redundancies in scheduling. My concern is the level of services offered to the students. Therefore, in order to grant this waiver I will need to receive written assurance from your superintendent that were I to grant the waiver:

- All students will continue to have access to the media center and its staff, the computer lab, the reading room, the study area, and the book and media collection, and
- All students will continue to get appropriate academic support from the staff in the media center.

I hereby grant your waiver request, subject to the above condition.

Sincerely



Peter McWalters
Commissioner

PM(FLA)scp

cc: Superintendent Kenneth DiPietro