

Burrillville School Department

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RECEIVED

Commissioner Peter McWalters
Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
255 Westminster Street
Providence, RI 02903-3400

March 12, 2008

Dear Commissioner McWalters,

I am writing at the direction of the Burrillville School Committee and in my capacity as Superintendent of Schools, to respectfully request a waiver of the "Regulations Governing the Length of the School Day", specifically the regulations as they apply to high schools in sections 2.1 through 2.3. The regulations require 330 minutes of instruction on a daily basis, at the high school level.

In order to implement these regulations last year, it was necessary for the Burrillville School Department to hire five additional teachers, to reduce study halls and provide increased instructional time equivalent to the required 330 minutes for all of our high school students. The additional staff members were hired at a cost of approximately \$240,000. Unfortunately, the Burrillville schools are facing some extraordinary budget challenges as we try to develop the Fiscal 2009 budget, and we do not feel that we will be able to fund some of these additional positions for a second year.

Burrillville is one of the few communities in the State that last year experienced an increase in enrollment. Last year's net increase was approximately 89 new students, and caused us to hire additional staff, particularly at the elementary level, to accommodate this influx. We are anticipating a similar increase for next year.

The only Catholic K-8 school in the community (Father Holland) has lost its affiliation with the Greater Woonsocket Catholic Regional Schools, and may be closing its doors in June. Should that happen, the Burrillville schools could receive an additional 100 students over and above any new students moving into the district. Those students represent a potential cost impact of \$350,000 - \$500,000.

A legislative change last year concerning the ability of vocational/technical/charter schools to charge the full Special Education rate for students with IEP's, could cause Burrillville to be responsible to Beacon Charter School and the Woonsocket Area Career and Technical Center for an additional \$216,000 in tuition to those two schools.

A Commissioner's decision regarding the residency of a student in DCYF custody has now made us responsible for a \$45,000 annual tuition to a school in Vermont, for a student whose family has never lived in Burrillville.

Burrillville has been in negotiations with the Burrillville Teachers Association for the last seventeen months, attempting to reach agreement on a new teachers' contract. The previous contract expired in August of 2007. The potential cost of a successor agreement could be in the \$370,000 - \$600,000 range.

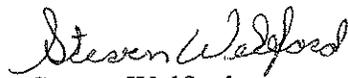
This year's local contribution to the school budget may be less than last year, due to the opening of the community's new library. This library project has been in process for approximately four years, well before the inception of the State's Tax Cap legislation.

When taken together, these financial issues represent additional potential cost impacts on the Burrillville Schools budget of as much as \$1,500,000. If the community were able to meet its full commitment to the school budget under this year's allowable levy increase, the schools would still only see an increase in funding of approximately \$750,000. That contribution seems very unlikely at this time. With a total budget of twenty-eight million dollars, I am sure you can see the devastating impact these new costs, coupled with the uncertainty of State funding for education will have on our ability to even approximate the educational services we currently provide our students next year.

The Burrillville School Committee and administration understand and support the State's High School reform efforts. While the benefits to students are unquestionable, we no longer have the ability to sustain the cost of these efforts. We will be hard-pressed to fund the needed number of elementary classroom and secondary level core subject area teachers to accommodate the enrollments we expect next year. The District will be undergoing significant cuts in services and programs, because of the variety and scope of the unanticipated financial challenges facing our system. We have already been forced to serve lay-off notices to 78 of 209 teachers. Our primary goal is to try and maintain our basic educational program and provide whatever additional courses and programs we can afford. While it is the sincere desire of the Burrillville School Committee and administration to meet both the spirit and letter of the regulations governing the length of the school day, forces well beyond the control of the Burrillville School Committee make it impossible to do so.

We appreciate any assistance that your office and the Board of Regents may provide in meeting the educational needs of our students in these extraordinarily difficult financial times.

Respectfully,


Steven Welford
Superintendent of Schools

Cc: Judge Robert Flanders, Chair, Board of Regents
Ray Trinque, Chair, Burrillville School Committee



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

Peter McWalters
Commissioner

May 19, 2008

Mr. Steven Welford
Superintendent of Schools
Burrillville School Department
2300 Bronco Highway
Harrisville, RI 02830

Dear Superintendent Welford:

Thank you for your letter of March 12, 2008 in which you request, "a waiver of the 'Regulations Governing the Length of the School Day', specifically the regulations as they apply to high schools in sections 2.1 through 2.3. The regulations require 330 minutes of instruction on a daily basis, at the high school level." You base this request on fiscal exigency without showing what alternatives, including revisiting collective bargaining agreements, you have examined before you reached the conclusion that the only viable alternative to handle this fiscal exigency is to entirely deny to the high school students in your community the benefit of the amount of instruction that the Board of Regents has decided is necessary to ensure that these students receive a quality education as required by R.I.G.L.16-7-15. I would not lightly grant such waiver.

It should be clear that the granting of a waiver based solely on the suggestion of local fiscal exigency would tend to make compliance with State and federal laws something less than mandatory. It would also amount to the adoption of a policy direction that would tend to increase inequities across Rhode Island's system of public education.

I wish to be helpful to you in the fiscal exigency which your community faces. Please provide me with a list of potential waivers which might save money, but which do not impinge on essential academic programs needed to provide students with a quality education. If no such waivers exist please document what steps you have taken which have forced you this conclusion. Your request for a variance to the Length of School Day Regulations is therefore, at this time, denied.

A member of my staff will be in touch with you to further discuss this matter. I deeply appreciate your efforts, and the efforts of the Burrillville school committee, to cope with the difficult financial situation now confronting all levels of Rhode Island government.

Sincerely,

Peter McWalters
Commissioner

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