

WSPEC

WEST SIDE PUBLIC EDUCATION COALITION

Summary of findings related to proposed school closure and consolidation.

April 20, 2011

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Mission Statement

The West Side Public Education Coalition (WSPEC) is dedicated to ensuring high quality public education opportunities for all students on the west side of Providence regardless of background, economic class, race, or ethnicity. Through an unprecedented collaboration between families, educators, students, community residents, local businesses, and public officials, we advocate for outstanding public schools, effective education policies, and 21st century learning environments. We believe that a commitment to fostering high achieving, innovative, neighborhood schools will guarantee the health and vitality of our community.

Introduction

The West Side Public Education Coalition (WSPEC) has significant concerns regarding the lack of detailed information that has been afforded to the Providence School Board and the community with respect to the school closings and configurations proposed by Mayor Angel Taveras on March 14, 2011. The public and impacted communities have seen no specific data from either the City or the Providence Public School Department detailing the costs and projected savings of this plan. Furthermore, the sparse information that has been provided seems to be inconsistent. Neither the Mayor nor the school department has provided a plan for implementation whereby the profound impact of school closings on children, parents, and communities would be addressed. We have no evidence that the proposal takes into account the projected growth of our community's school age population as documented in the Fanning Howey Facilities Master Plan from 2010. We have been given no detail as to how they intend to renovate these schools to meet the Rhode Island Department of Education's standards and requirements for adequate educational facilities. And, finally, we have witnessed confusing and misleading information about how the community engagement process was to be conducted. The Mayor and School Department's stated process for community engagement has not been followed through and they don't even seem to understand how their efforts have fallen short.

Simply put, we can only conclude that this "solution" has not been fully researched. It seems that the public is expected to have blind faith that the city is exercising its only option. We are concerned that the School Board is being asked to vote on such a drastic, damaging measure with as little information as we have been given. We believe that it would be irresponsible to make such a decision with so little time and so many unknowns.

WSPEC firmly believes that, given the appropriate amount of time to research and evaluate the proposed school closures and consolidations (recommended 12-18 months), a more responsible, fiscally sound, and effective solution could be found. Furthermore, we believe that a process of genuine community engagement - in collaboration with the Providence Public School District (PPSD) and the City - will ensure the long term viability of those solutions due to the very nature of stakeholder involvement.

I. Accelerated Time Frame/Lack of Community Engagement

WSPEC asserts that the process for reviewing the proposed school closures (a process encompassing 34 days from start to finish, March 22 - April 25th) is unrealistic and irresponsible. This drastically accelerated time frame does not leave room for anyone – the city, PPSD, the School Board, parents, teachers, or concerned community members – to effectively evaluate recommendations that would affect the lives of up to 3000 students.

To support this assertion we carefully reviewed *Closing Schools as a Means for Addressing Budgetary Challenges*, a document that was prepared by school district operators with support from the Broad Foundation. The RI State Education Commissioner, Deborah Gist, and PPSD Superintendent, Tom Brady, are both graduates of Broad's Superintendents Academy which trains education administrators to manage urban school districts. While WSPEC does not endorse closing public schools as a means of improving the school system, it is undeniable that the Broad Foundation - a major proponent of school closings around the country - is expert in the process of closing schools. Even by Broad Foundation standards the current school closing process is considered highly questionable. In a section titled "*What major challenges have other districts faced and how have they overcome them?*"¹, the document details the most common and significant challenges faced when closing schools and includes recommendations for how to address them.

Broad Challenge: "Insufficient stakeholder engagement"

*"Community engagement becomes an afterthought. Meetings are held in the spirit of compliance rather than true collaboration. District officials do not engage with local community leaders and organizations"*²

WSPEC would argue that insufficient stakeholder engagement is precisely what has happened throughout this process. Let's look at a timeline of events:

March 14, 2011 – Mayor's office announces the school closure recommendations.

March 22 – March 26 – PPSD holds a series of six community forums that were supposed to:

*"provide the community with an opportunity to ask questions about the recommendations, voice concerns and ask questions about the changes associated with the closures."*³

The flyer announcing the community forums also says:

*"Get **answers** to your questions, and share your thoughts with us, at the following dates and times:"*⁴

During the community forums, PPSD presented *Facilities Master Planning - School Closure Recommendation*⁵ and the attendees were told that they could step up to a microphone and ask questions. Attendees were also told that, for the sake of efficiency, their questions would be answered on the PPSD website. As of Monday, April 11 answers to the community's questions were not posted on the PPSD website. Unfortunately, the community forums sure seem

¹The Broad Education Foundation and school district operators, *Closing Schools as a Means for Addressing Budgetary Challenges*, <http://broadeducation.org/asset/1344-schoolclosureguide.pdf>, 7.

²*Closing Schools as a Means for Addressing Budgetary Challenges*, 7.

³Providence Mayor's Office, *Providence Schools Community Forum Re: School Closures, Reutilization Plan for Other Facilities*, <http://www3.providenceri.com/mayor/providence-schools-community-forum-re-school>, (March 2011).

⁴PPSD, *Community Meetings Flyer*, <http://www.providenceschools.org/media/124670/meetings%20flyer%200311%20engspa.pdf>

⁵PPSD, *Facilities Master Planning - School Closure Recommendation*, [http://www.providenceschools.org/media/125678/fmp%20school%20closure%20recommendation%20d1s%20110322%20\(eng\).pdf](http://www.providenceschools.org/media/125678/fmp%20school%20closure%20recommendation%20d1s%20110322%20(eng).pdf).

like “meetings... held in the spirit of compliance rather than true collaboration”.

Parents, students and concerned community members were told, very clearly, that the questions raised during the community forums would be answered on the PPSD website. Where are these answers? Is it acceptable that 5 of the 6 School Board hearings have been completed without any answers being provided to those that will be most affected by the proposed closings?

Beyond the community questions asked during the forums, WSPEC specifically posted questions on wspec.org and emailed them directly to the Mayor’s office. WSPEC’s questions were posted on wspec.org on Saturday, March 26. Eventually, on Monday, April 11 (the day of the fifth School Board Hearing), we received partial responses to our questions. In reviewing the answers, it is WSPEC’s opinion that, aside from a few specific answers, we were basically provided re-written, narrative versions of the information that was in PPSD’s original power point presentation. WSPEC’s questions, the provided answers, and our responses have been included in Appendix A.

WSPEC submitted detailed questions to the Mayor’s office and PPSD. Why did it take so long - over two weeks - to provide us with partial answers? Why are some of our questions still unanswered? And, most important, why were we provided with NONE of the specific data that we requested?

Broad Challenge: “Lack of focus on implementation: the work that needs to happen after school closure decisions are made.”

“Most districts focus all of their energy on the decision-making component of school closures. As a result, there is insufficient planning for everything that needs to happen once the decisions are made. The repercussions for this lack of resourcing can be significant”⁶

Given the rapidity of the evaluation process, it is unlikely that the Mayor’s office or PPSD have had time to effectively plan an implementation strategy for handling the ~3000 students that will be impacted by the closing/repurposing of schools. Any implementation planning that has taken place has certainly not been communicated in a public and transparent fashion.

How is it possible to determine whether or not the proposed school closings are best serving students without seeing a detailed breakdown of the implementation plan? Since any implementation will result in additional costs, how can the city accurately assess cost savings without having a detailed plan in place? If a detailed implementation strategy exists, why hasn’t it been shared with the School Board and the public?

Will parents affected by the school closings have the opportunity to register their child/ children for new schools? Has there been any outreach to these affected parents to inform them of the registration process or help them through it? If these closures go

⁶Closing Schools as a Means for Addressing Budgetary Challenges, 8.

through, will the displaced students have been denied any choice of schools that could have existed.

Broad Challenge: “Closing schools on too rapid a timeline”.

“Districts generally begin their budgeting timeline for the next school year in December or January. This timeline often leads to the discovery of budget shortages and therefore a swift recommendation that schools be closed. Some districts feel the responsibility to make “tough decisions” and end up insisting that school closures need to happen in time for the next school year (i.e., on a six-month timeline).”⁷

How does Broad suggest mitigating this risk?

- *“Do not try to close schools on a six-month timeline. Successful implementation of school closures requires a minimum of one year, and ideally 18 months.*
- *Use the urgency generated by the discovery of a budget shortfall to begin a planning process for a comprehensive right-sizing plan to be implemented in the following school year.”⁸*

The insistence that “tough decisions” need to be made in time for the next school year is precisely the challenge we are faced with. The clear lack of transparency, due diligence, and community involvement throughout this entire process is an inevitable byproduct of the five-month time frame given to consider the proposal, vote on the proposal and implement the closures (broken down: 34 days to consider and vote on the proposal, less than four months to implement). Given the right amount of time, applicable data and true community engagement, solutions can be crafted that are both fiscally responsible and suitable for our students.

II. Negative Impact on Students

There is a significant body of research dating back decades finding that school transitions, such as the transition precipitated by the proposed closings, correspond with a measurable drop in student academic achievement, loss of self-esteem, and increase in drop-out rates⁹. Studies consistently conclude that these negative effects are particularly acute for African American, Hispanic, and low socio-economic status students indicating that, since most of the proposed schools for closure fit into that demographic, this plan targets the most vulnerable population of our community and thereby puts them at the highest risk of failure.

Have the Mayor’s office and school department provided adequate detail as to how they will ensure an effective transition for these very high risk students?

⁷*Closing Schools as a Means for Addressing Budgetary Challenges*, 8.

⁸*Closing Schools as a Means for Addressing Budgetary Challenges*, 8.

⁹ Robert D. Felner, Judith Primavera and Ana M. Cauce, *The impact of school transitions: A focus for preventive efforts*, <http://www.springerlink.com/content/j15025434p447r64/>

Despite repeatedly posing this question at community forums over three weeks ago; the caregivers, teachers, and community of these students have been given no indication that such a plan exists. Furthermore, the recent resignation of Superintendent Brady will present yet another challenge and destabilizing factor to the entire system, further deepening our concerns that this proposal will, most definitely, result in a major disruption to our already teetering educational infrastructure.

Even more concerning, a 2009 research study of school closings in Chicago¹⁰ found that student learning declines soon after the closings are announced (even before the actual closing happens) and the effect continues to be seen even three years afterwards. By that measure—and we suspect that parents, teachers, and students can attest to this fact—our students are already suffering the effects of these decisions. The damage is already being done.

The Mayor's office has offered the consolation that students being taken out of Bridgham will be placed in higher performing schools. Now, there is the potential that placement in a much higher performing school can, possibly, mitigate the damage. But, it should be made clear that the research has proven that, in the best case scenario—when given time to adapt to the transition—the negative effects of displacement have been merely offset by entering into a significantly higher performing school but it has rarely resulted in an increase in academic achievement¹¹. On the other hand, the Mayor has also clearly stated that there will be no additional costs associated with busing these students beyond their “walkable” mile. Instead, they will be reassigned to other schools in their catchment area. A student who is currently walking to Bridgham middle school falls into the catchment area of other middle schools with academic performance at the same or below the level of Bridgham Middle School. This is only one example of the many inconsistencies embedded in the hastily considered proposal. **Again, have we been given the time to ask the critical questions necessary to confirm that this is the best and only plan for our students?** We can all agree that a school closure should be considered as a final and last resort and only after all other scenarios have been thoroughly ruled out.

Parents of Bridgham's students have expressed their concerns about the fact that the vast majority of these families lack ready transportation. Instead they, like so many in our city, rely on public transportation to transport them beyond the area within walking distance of their home or places of work. When considering the impact of this school closure on our students, it should be recognized that the decision to transplant these students into schools farther from home represents yet another barrier to the active participation of these families in their children's education. Parents can't be involved if they can't get to their child's school. A parent living on Messer Street, just as an example, has a 40 minute commute on the bus, without the addition of traffic or weather conditions, from their home to DeSesto Middle School. Again, there

¹⁰Julia Gwynne, Marisa de la Torre, *When Schools Close: Effects on Displaced Students in Chicago Public Schools*, http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/content/publications.php?pub_id=136

¹¹John Engberg, Dennis Epple, Brian Gill, Holger Sieg, Gema Zamarro, Ron Zimmer, *Closing Schools in a Shrinking District: Does Student Performance Depend on Which Schools are Closed?*, <http://www.sree.org/conferences/2011/program/downloads/abstracts/34.pdf>

is a plethora of research available which clearly and unmistakably correlates demonstrable academic achievement to parental and community involvement. In fact, a recent study at the University of New Hampshire revealed that school spending would need to increase by over \$1,000 per student to achieve the same results gained by strong parental involvement¹². **Are we prepared to compensate, either financially or with supportive services, for the lack of participation of parents and community in the landscape of these students' education?**

Furthermore, the decision to disband these schools--these learning communities--and disperse their residents into other finely balanced environments has ramifications that will be echoed for years to come. Students who are already at risk of being failed by our educational system may have created invaluable bonds to teachers or administrators that have provided stability where there would otherwise be none. Indeed, we've heard at community forums and public hearings, over and over again, how many of these students feel as though their teachers and fellow students are like their family. Breaking up these support networks jeopardizes more than just emotional bonds. Students who have lost connections to educational role models through a transfer to another school are at a much higher risk of becoming disengaged. This can cause a major disruption in their efforts to become academically successful. In addition, the schools receiving this influx of new students often have difficulty absorbing the students into their already finely tuned environments¹³. **Does PPSD plan to provide additional resources, support, and adequate preparation time so that receiving schools will not have difficulty integrating the new students?**

Student mobility has the strongest effect on graduation rates. Research consistently links student mobility to an increased likelihood of dropping out. In a research study tracking students from eighth to twelfth grade, "*students who changed schools even one time were more than twice as likely as stable students to not graduate from high school, while students who changed schools two or more times were more than four times as likely as stable students to have obtained a GED*"¹⁴. Consider the perspective of a student who was transferred to Bridgham Middle School just last year after his or her neighborhood school, Perry Middle School, had been closed by the city. Or, take into account the plight of the many children who were displaced by the closing of West Broadway Elementary School for minor code violations in 2007. Our school district has already put many of these students at double the risk of failure. **Can we, in good conscience, make a decision that will, yet again, double the odds that these students will not graduate? Are we certain that we have the resources available to assist those students and their families in overcoming the overwhelming hurdles we are creating for them?**

Even without considering the mountains of research available which warns against the perils of

¹²Andrew J. Houtenville, Karen Smith Conway, *Parental Effort, School Resources, and Student Achievement*, http://www.unh.edu/news/docs/Conway_May08.pdf

¹³Gail L. Sunderman, Alexander Payne, *Does Closing Schools Cause Educational Harm? A Review of the Research*, <https://eed.alaska.gov/stim/pdf/DoesClosingSchoolsCauseEducationalHarm.pdf>

¹⁴Gail L. Sunderman, Alexander Payne, *Does Closing Schools Cause Educational Harm? A Review of the Research*, <https://eed.alaska.gov/stim/pdf/DoesClosingSchoolsCauseEducationalHarm.pdf>

school closures, we must ask the difficult, but necessary, questions. **Are we, as a community, making this decision based on what best serves our students? Have we thoroughly evaluated any and all other possible solutions that do not require such upheaval or have such detrimental ramifications?** Make no mistake, these closures, should they be allowed to progress, will have a negative effect on each and every one of these students—on that there is no debate. **Are we absolutely sure that this is the responsible decision for our children?** There is nothing, absolutely nothing, more critical.

III. Projected Cost Savings/Inconsistencies

“School officials estimate that 40-70 teacher positions will be eliminated as a result of school closures. Savings from eliminated positions are expected to ~\$8 million.”¹⁵

“The recommended school closures will trim more than \$12 million dollars from the school budget, which faces a \$28 million deficit next year. The projected savings is \$8 million in teacher positions and \$4 million is in facilities costs and the cost of support personnel.”¹⁶

“School closures recommended by PPSD will save more than \$10 million dollars.”¹⁷

“As city officials prepare to release a list of four to six schools for possible closure this year, it appears that two closures from last year are generating relatively little savings. Providence school officials voted to close Feinstein High School and Perry Middle school last year in a move aimed at saving nearly \$20 million over five years. So far, Mayor Angel Taveras says the city has realized just \$300,000 in actual savings from shuttering the two facilities.”¹⁸

Just one year ago, during a previous round of recommended school closures, The Fanning Howey report estimated that closing 7 facilities would yield \$2.3M in savings.¹⁹ The PPSD is now suggesting that closing 4 facilities will yield savings of \$4 million dollars. How are they able to project such large savings on just 4 facilities?

According to the School Closure Powerpoint presentation ~85% (\$10.2M) of their projected \$12M in savings is personnel²⁰ which leaves ~15% (\$1.8M) representing facilities. These numbers do not align with the above projections.

Despite repeated requests for a detailed breakdown of projected cost savings, no further details have been provided by PPSD. When asked, we are consistently told “...*the projected savings*”

¹⁵PPSD, *Providence Schools Closure Announcement press release*, <http://www.providenceschools.org/media/124664/press%20release%20-%20school%20closure%20announcement%2031411.pdf>, (March 14, 2011), 3.

¹⁶PPSD, *Frequently Asked Questions*, <http://www.providenceschools.org/fiscal-remedies/frequently-asked-questions>, (April 12, 2011)

¹⁷PPSD, *Providence Schools Recommendations for School Closings: What You Need to Know*, <http://www.providenceschools.org/media/125696/faq%20schoolclosings%20eng.pdf>, 1.

¹⁸WRNI Education Blog, *Providence School Closure Savings Fall Short*, <http://wrnieducationblog.wordpress.com/2011/03/07/providence-school-closure-savings-fall-short/>, (March 7, 2011).

¹⁹Fanning Howey, *Facilities Master Plan- Providence Public School District Final Recommendations*, (February 2010), 29.

²⁰PPSD, *Facilities Master Planning - School Closure Recommendation*, 3.

is \$8 million in teacher positions and \$4 million is in facilities costs and the cost of support personnel". Since cost savings is the number one justification behind the current proposal, it is only appropriate that the School Board, parents, and concerned community members are provided with disaggregated cost savings for all of the individual schools recommended for closure and consolidation.

Facilities Savings: PPSD plans to close Flynn, Windmill, Asa Messer and Asa Messer Annex. Let's look at these as a kind of case study approach to the projected savings. The total projected 2011-2012 operating budgets (personnel and facilities) for these 4 schools according to the *Providence Public Schools 2010-2011 Budget* is \$11.475M.²¹

Whatever facilities savings they are projecting in the case of these 4 schools, one has to subtract the following:

- moving costs (conservatively ~\$50K per school, including moving costs at other schools where populations are being moved, ie. Bridgham to DelSesto, DelSesto to Bridgham)
- maintenance costs on closed facilities (closing, moth-balling, basic maintenance, utilities, insurance, etc.)
- improvements needed to make existing facilities adequate for additional incoming elementary school students (in the case of Bridgham being repurposed as an elementary school, we have heard that at minimum this would be ~\$1.5M)

Depending on which facilities savings projection you start with, one could end up with either a net loss, or very little in facilities savings.

Personnel Savings: PPSD plans to eliminate 40-70 teaching positions. At what level/pay grade are these positions? Are there other non-teaching or "support personnel" positions being eliminated? If these are not teaching positions, then it is likely that they are union jobs which cannot simply be eliminated, merely transferred somewhere else. If we multiply those teaching positions by an average teacher salary of \$68K (we realize that some of these would be higher paying senior or administrative positions while others may be lower paying) but for the sake of argument let's start with an average:

40 positions at \$68K is \$2.72M

70 positions at \$68K is \$4.76M

In either case, the numbers for facilities and personnel are nowhere near the projected \$12 million. This would not be surprising given the body of evidence that indicates that districts rarely realize their projected savings. After a series of Seattle Public School closures a University of Washington study concluded:

²¹PPSD, *Providence School Department 2010-2011 Proposed Budget Executive Summary, 5 year comparison by Department 2011-2012 Projected Local Budget*,

“Those districts that had calculated actual cost savings concluded that fewer dollars had actually been saved than had been expected, and 67 percent of those districts concluded that they had saved no money, or that actual costs exceeded the in-building cost savings.”

If the details of the PPSD’s estimate are based on different criteria, or take into account other reductions in personnel, or are factoring in cost avoidances, then it is imperative we all know those details. Of particular concern to the community is the possibility that the PPSD and City may be negotiating the lease or sale of some of these facilities to other organizations such as charter schools without the community’s knowledge or input. Both the community and numerous other groups (Providence Preservation Society, National Trust for Historic Preservation, even Fanning Howey to some extent) see the value and unique quality of our historic school buildings. Historic neighborhood schools are anchors of the community as well arguably better built structures than most modern school facilities. If this is indeed the case, we fear that PPSD sees this inherent value as an opportunity to make money, and in turn, force students in the community to make do with a less adequate facility. The PPSD must provide detailed, disaggregated cost savings for the individual schools recommended for closure and consolidation. In all, there are 11 schools mentioned in the school closure/reutilization plan that will be effected in some way by these proposals.

Other costs:

All of these estimated cost savings are based on no children leaving the district as a result of the school closings. For example, a post-closure study of the Seattle Public Schools showed that almost 21 percent of the total 743 students affected by school closures left that district. Studies based on several California school districts reveal similar findings:

“Closure of neighborhood schools can result in substantial losses of public school students.... districts contemplating closures must first calculate the potential consequences... one district postponed closures after determining that losing just 100 students and the state funding associated with their enrollment would completely offset savings made by closing a school.”²²

As a baseline, we suggest the school board take just 10% of the affected student population and multiply that by the per pupil funding the district receives. Look at the 1 year figure, then the projected 5 year figure.

As University of Washington researchers concluded:

“Closure is a simple solution to the problem of excess space. But at the same time, closure is most assuredly a source of other problems, problems far more intricate and complex and much more difficult and costly to solve.”²³

Add to all of this the likely decline in surrounding property taxes, loss of community support for public education, potential costs under state and federal mandates following decreasing

²²Susan Moffat, Dr. Kathryn Tovo, Larry Amaro, Sally D. Brackett, Chad Williams, *Supplemental Report for AISD Facility Master Plan*, <http://www.scribd.com/doc/51748488/Supplemental-Report-for-AISD-Facility-Master-Plan>, (March 23, 2011), 1.

²³Richard L. Andrews et al., *The Environmental Impact of School Closures*, www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/recordDetail?accno=ED112521, (August 23, 1974).

academic performance, and additional unanticipated costs related to school closures. These are all significant financial factors that must be carefully weighed against projected savings.

IV. Facilities Concerns

The recommendations before the school board suggest that following the closures of Asa Messer and Asa Messer Annex, the Bridgham Middle School be repurposed as an elementary school. How was the decision to repurpose Bridgham MS made when the school did not even undergo a feasibility study when the District prepared its Stage I and Stage II applications to RIDE? We hear from the administration and PPSD that:

“Bridgham can better support an elementary or K-8 program (with comparatively low-cost improvements) than it can support a middle school program.”²⁴

Who made that determination? Assuming that the facility was not even considered worthy of study, how did the District suddenly decide it could use this facility? Was an architect or consultant with K-12 experience hired to assist the District in examining the educational adequacy of this facility as an elementary school? Where is this assessment?

In the PPSD response to WSPEC’s list of questions, we were told that:

“The Building has undergone several studies by several architects and educational planners. The Fanning Howey study spoke of the building’s potential use as a K-8 school.”²⁵

We have read the Fanning Howey report and can find no mention of this. Nor have we seen any recent studies by architects or educational planners that have mentioned this.

The 2010 Facilities Master Plan rates the Bridgham Middle School facility as “poor” with regards to educational adequacy and goes on to conclude that this facility should be closed. Why is it that a school that was deemed educationally inadequate and recommended for closure just last year in the PPSD’s own Facilities Master Plan, is now suddenly being considered a suitable elementary school for our children? PPSD suggests that they will be doing considerable renovations. Some of the items they list, however, do not in any way change the educational adequacy of the building:

“Renovations include new playground equipment, planting new trees, new entry doors, cleaning graffiti from library windows, patching the roof and ceilings, modifying bathrooms, installing drinking fountains, painting, fire code modifications, and cleaning the building.”²⁶

²⁴*Frequently Asked Questions*, <http://www.providenceschools.org/fiscal-remedies/frequently-asked-questions>

²⁵*Frequently Asked Questions*, <http://www.providenceschools.org/fiscal-remedies/frequently-asked-questions>

²⁶*Frequently Asked Questions*, <http://www.providenceschools.org/fiscal-remedies/frequently-asked-questions>

Others, such as removing interior partition walls to eliminate windowless classrooms may be misguided if no studies have been done to determine best uses of daylighting, access to views, etc. Even more concerning was the following statement:

“Still needed is work to improve the building’s exterior doors and windows - work that can be planned for once the economy is in better shape.”²⁷

We recently contacted RIDE about our concerns and apparently raised a number of eyebrows there about this whole process. We look forward to meeting with them this week.

Also concerning is that it seems the School Board already voted (at the Asa Messer hearing/ costs associated w/modular bldgs) to approve the 1.5 million necessary for their proposed improvements to Bridgham, that have yet to be approved.

“After improvements were made during School Year 2010-11 and after improvements are made during the 2011 summer (to include removing the partitions that create interior and window-less classrooms) the educational adequacy rating for the building as an elementary school will be dramatically higher and likely be in the “fair” to “good” range.”

And, from the city’s response to our questions re: educational adequacy of Bridgham, it seems they have already taken measures to make the school more “suitable” for K-8, prior to even announcing their proposal to do so.

V. Negative Impact on West Side Community

At a School Board meeting held in February 2010, it was recommended that a task force be created to help support and improve West Side neighborhood schools, and to actively engage communities and stakeholders in the process. Several West Side community organizations, including WSPEC, the West Broadway Neighborhood Association (WBNA), and a group of parents with pre-school age children called New Moms and Dads for Schools (NoMaDS), responded enthusiastically to the Superintendent’s call for collaboration. They began working with the school department to develop a series of meetings that would feature school tours and engage neighbors to participate in shaping the direction of their public schools. The series explored elementary and middle school options in the closely linked neighborhoods of Federal Hill and the West End, and was specifically designed to solicit community recommendations on programming and grade configuration in several neighborhood public schools. Also included were tours of West Broadway Elementary School, Asa Messer Elementary School, Carl Lauro Elementary School, and Bridgham Middle School.

This series of community meetings proved to be an incredibly fruitful process. From these discussions, the need to focus on West Side neighborhood schools as a whole, rather than

²⁷*Frequently Asked Questions*, <http://www.providenceschools.org/fiscal-remedies/frequently-asked-questions>

school by school, was stressed. What the community resoundingly agreed upon was this: neighborhood schools are the centers of our community; thriving schools stabilize and strengthen communities; neighborhood schools should be viewed as community resources. On June 16, 2010 representatives from the community met with Superintendent Brady and Chief Operating Officer Carlton Jones to propose a new, community-based vision for elementary and middle schools on the West Side:

"Using public schools as hubs, community schools knit together inventive, enduring relationships among educators, families, volunteers and community partners. Health and social service agencies, family support groups, youth development organizations, institutions of higher education, community organizations, businesses, and civic and faith-based groups all play a part. By sharing expertise and resources, schools and communities act in concert to transform traditional schools into permanent partnerships for excellence. Schools value the resources and involvement of community partners, and communities understand that strong schools are at the heart of strong neighborhoods. In an increasingly complex and demanding educational climate, schools are not left to work alone."²⁸

Unfortunately, the current school closure proposal severely threatens our ability to build West Side community schools. In fact, at the time of the announcement of the proposed closures, WSPEC's energies were being spent building a broader community base in order to better achieve that vision of a truly representative community school. **How can we encourage community engagement and parental involvement when our children will be sent to schools outside of our neighborhood? How will we engage local businesses and community organizations in schools that are not part of the West Side? How will it be possible to improve schooling in our neighborhood, in a holistic fashion, when we don't have a middle school?**

Although building and sustaining community schools is a daunting task, WSPEC believes that the West Side community is uniquely positioned to tackle the challenge. For almost 30 years, members of our community have been working hard to make our neighborhood a better place for everyone to live and work. In the past 15 years, the West Broadway Neighborhood Association has brought in \$15 million dollars in the form of streetscapes, tree plantings, playgrounds, and building renovations. In fact, these improvements to our neighborhood have attracted attention: the West Side has been recognized in the NY Times, This Old House, and as recently as last month, RI Monthly selected the neighborhood as a great place to live. "True, the schools have issues," they noted, "but there is a great sense of community among those who live here." These words merely touch on the major hurdle our neighborhood has been facing for years. Quality public education is what stands in the way of continued revitalization in Providence's West Side.

Frankly, the primary reason why this West Side revitalization has taken so long is high turnover. Each time residents with young children begin to consider school options, those who have the option make the choice to move away. This time around, in the midst of a true neighborhood "baby boom", parents want to stay. They have been pro-actively working together to build high quality community schools. The proposed school closure and consolidation plan, should it be allowed to progress, would stifle the motivation of parents and

²⁸Coalition for Community Schools, *Making The Difference: Research and Practice in Community Schools*, (May 2003), 2.

community members to participate in West Side school reform. After years of volunteering their time and energy, these community members would face the harsh reality of seeing all their hard work and successful collaboration with the school department thrown by the wayside in favor of a hastily-considered plan which disenfranchises students, parents, teachers, and community members alike.

Beyond the obvious negative impact on West Side students and schools, school closings could have a significant negative financial impact for the whole city of Providence. Without quality elementary and middle schools in quality facilities, families with school-age children are likely to make the choice, once again, to move away. A mass exodus from these wards would hurt Providence's new school funding formula, have severe impact on property value, and, ultimately, hurt the city's tax base. Such a turnaround would halt the momentum of this revitalization and, furthermore, turn it toward decline. The consequences of which our city's budget is in no position to withstand. **What is the long-term strategy of taking a neighborhood on the rise - indeed, with the highest potential for growth in all of Providence - and making choices which encourage a downward spiral of real estate values and property tax potential? Does the Mayor have a vision for how to entice families to make the choice to stay in Providence, rather than seek out an alternative solution for their children's educational needs? If not, is there a plan in place that will allow the city to compensate for further declining tax revenue?**

It is understood that we are in the midst of unprecedented upheaval caused by a challenging economic climate. However, it seems short-sighted to make hasty choices, based solely on immediate cost savings, when the long-term consequences are so disruptive to the health and vitality of our entire city. WSPEC asserts that there are ways to overcome such fiscal challenges without sacrificing that which is at the foundation of our society: public education. Given a time frame of 18 months, we could continue our collaboration with the school department and Mayor's office to address the closing and consolidation plan with an approach which has already been proposed to and accepted by the community. We can carefully assess implementation strategies and begin the transition in a way that better serves our students and their families. **What is the cost of keeping our schools operational for one more academic year? What are the savings for one year under the proposed plan? Are we prepared to incur the long term costs of a struggling community if we enact a plan that is not backed by their support and implemented too quickly and without careful thought?**

The West Side is poised to be a partner in effecting real change. We have the creativity, the passion, and the resources to help the Providence School Department and the City realize its vision of 21st century urban education. We, along with our business and community partners, are prepared to mobilize, to get our hands dirty, and to sacrifice for the greater good of our community's school age children. This document, we hope, is evidence of that commitment and a starting point for a productive and collaborative path ahead.

APPENDIX A

Questions posed to the PPSD and the City, the answers we received (red italics), and our responses to those answers (blue italics)

Are you willing to share ALL of the information that was used to make these closing decisions with the community?

The 2010 Fanning-Howey Report, that the City of Providence and the Providence School Department commissioned, highlighted 4 major themes from its study: schools as anchors of community, enrollment of students at school from neighborhood, walkers versus bus riders to school, and the high cost of transportation. Would you agree that those are still important themes or goals of the PPSD and community? What effect do you think that closing neighborhood schools and busing additional students will have on these issues?

These are still important themes and goals, and School Board policy is to implement 80% neighborhood school attendance at the elementary school level. In this fiscal crisis, however, closing some schools is necessary. The combination of factors considered for school closings per School Board policy leads to some schools that have a high rate of neighborhood attendance being recommended for closure due to a preponderance of other factors including:

- *Physical plant conditions*
- *Feasibility of student relocation*
- *Unmet building capacity*
- *Community use*
- *Record of student achievement*
- *Educational adequacy*
- *Geographic concentration*

We will not be increasing bussing as a result of the closure.

We have in our school buildings excess space which will allow us to manage the closures without significantly increasing class size. Many students also will be moved to schools that are closer to where they live. Students being relocated from closed schools would be moved into higher performing schools. In the case of Asa Messer, where early progress in bolstering achievement is seen, every effort is being made to keep that learning community intact.

Can you quantify "Many students also will be moved to schools that are closer to where they live." Can you provide specific examples of students being moved into higher performing schools? According to our findings, a student who is currently walking to Bridgham middle school falls into the catchment area of other middle schools with academic performance at the same or below the level of Bridgham Middle School.

The 2010 Facilities Master Plan rates the Bridgham Middle School facility as "poor" with regards to educational adequacy. Indeed, if a score of 60 or above is an indication of "good" educational adequacy, then Bridgham's score of 38 is shockingly inadequate. The Master Plan goes on to conclude that the Bridgham Middle School facility should be closed. Why is it that a school that was deemed educationally inadequate and recommended for closure, by your own commissioned report, is now being considered a suitable elementary school for our children?

Educational adequacy is based on the program the building is trying to support. Bridgham can better support an elementary or K-8 program (with comparatively low-cost improvements) than it can to support a middle school

program. Therefore, the educational adequacy rating of "poor" was based on the condition of the building during School Year 2009-10 and its ability to serve as a middle school. After improvements were made during School Year 2010-11 and after improvements are made during the 2011 summer (to include removing the partitions that create interior and window-less classrooms) the educational adequacy rating for the building as an elementary school will be dramatically higher and likely be in the "fair" to "good" range. Still needed is work to improve the building's exterior doors and windows - work that can be planned for once the economy is in better shape.

Who determined that Bridgham can better support a K-8 program? Was a feasibility study done by RIDE? Were architects who specialize in K-12 hired to study the feasibility of an elementary school in this facility? No mention is made in the Fanning Howey report of this configuration. No details have been submitted to RIDE. Furthermore, did the School Board unknowingly vote to approve capital expenditures meant for this K-8 reconfiguration of Bridgham at its 3.28.11 regular meeting? Only one board member asked COO Carlton Jones for details of these expenditures. Mr. Jones said that he did not have them with him.

That same report also recommends that the West Broadway facility on Bainbridge be modernized. Why are recommendations such as these suddenly off the table?

If the answer is because of the "Category 5" financial crisis we are in the midst of, then how can you ensure that any proposed renovations you are suggesting, such as the "repurposing" of the Bridgham facility, will be adequate? Where is that money coming from and how much? Aren't we then throwing money at a school facility that was deemed educationally inadequate rather than investing that money in a facility that was recommended for modernization?

The funds to re-purpose Bridgham would come from relatively small amount of capital funds currently available. The cost of improvements would not be financed from local funds. At one point there was a recommendation to modernize Bridgham as well. Educational adequacy is based on the program the building is trying to support. Bridgham can better support an elementary or K-8 program (with comparatively low-cost improvements) than it can support a middle school program. Costs to remove interior partitions to improve lighting, improve ventilation, paint, update bathrooms, etc. are far less than the cost to renovate other buildings in the area.

Why use any amount of capital funds for a renovation when RIDE will offset up to 85% of those costs with housing aid reimbursements? Why spend \$1.5M to clean up and repurpose an inadequate facility when PPSD could do a \$10M renovation for the same amount of money (\$1.5M out of pocket)? The answer here is key. What it looks like on the surface is that PPSD wants to do very minor renovations to Bridgham with it's own capital reserves so that the project does not come under the scrutiny of RIDE. No application for reimbursement means no oversight by the state. Once the project lands on RIDE's desk, it then needs to comply with many of their more stringent school construction regulations including NECHP. If the community at that point raises further issues with the building then RIDE is going to be more likely to insist that those issues are addressed where applicable (windows/views, MERV 13 air filtration, traffic safety, etc.). In other words, if you do things through proper channels and follow best practices, they take longer and cost more money. If you do it under the radar, you can do it quickly and avoid a RIDE/community headache.

Costs to remove interior partitions to improve lighting, improve ventilation, paint, update bathrooms, etc. are far less than the cost to renovate other buildings in the area.

Please provide us with the line by line cost analyses for each of these buildings and each separate use.

If the Bridgham Middle School facility is to be "repurposed" as an elementary school, can you detail for us the proposed renovations? Do you have a projected cost for these renovations?

Renovations include new playground equipment, planting new trees, new entry doors, cleaning graffiti from library windows, patching the roof and ceilings, modifying bathrooms, installing drinking fountains, painting, fire code

modifications, and cleaning the building. Many of these will be completed this summer. Some, such as new entry doors and extensive painting, may be deferred until 2012.

This should be a line by line cost analysis of the renovation. The community has a right to know exactly what is being done to this facility and when? Many parents are scared to send their young children into this facility in the fall of 2011. Indeed, even the current middle school students expressed their concern over younger children being housed in Bridgham. According to RIDE, PPSD did submit the announced plans for closure back in February within the required 6 month window, but have not submitted any proposed renovations or repurposing plans. One has to wonder if they ever will.

How was the decision to 'repurpose' Bridgham MS as an elementary school made, when the school did not even undergo a feasibility study when the district prepared its Stage I and II applications to RIDE? Assuming that the facility was not even considered worthy of study, how did the district decide to use the facility? Was an architect or consultant hired to assist the district in examining the educational adequacy of this decision?

The building has undergone several studies by several architects and educational planners. The Fanning Howey study spoke of the building's potential use as a K-8 school. The Stage I and Stage II submissions to RIDE do not mention Bridgham because the fate of the building was not certain at that time.

The final recommendations of the Fanning Howey report make no mention of the building's use as a K-8 school. Have any studies been done besides the DeJong and Fanning Howey studies that we don't know about? If so, by whom, and when? If a study is currently underway by Gilbane, can you tell us the focus of this study? The cost?

The bidding process is the same as the one used for the renovation of the Nathan Bishop building: PPSD/City puts out a bid for an architect and engineering firm to design the school. A firm is selected based on the firm's quoted price and experience with past projects. A neighborhood team is convened to work with school department, administration, and architect to develop the concept of the school based on community needs, proposed school program, RIDE regulations for building design, etc. The architect then designs the building. Next the City asks for bids for a general contractor and selects the most qualified bidder. The public does have access to the bidding process but does not take part in negotiating or contract development.

Why has no neighborhood team been selected to work with the city for this proposed Bridgham renovation? From the city's response, it seems as though the needs of the community and the "concept" of the school have already been determined w/out this neighborhood team.

And, why were we not involved in the now "off the table" plans for the Bainbridge renovation.

How much would the annual operational costs for Bridgham be increased in this scenario from the current ~\$322,000? For a PK-5 configuration? For a PK-8 configuration?

How does the city plan to make the intersection of Route 10, Route 6, and the two major streets of Westminster and Broadway safe for children as young as 5 and 6 years old? How much will this cost?

As with other elementary schools located adjacent to major roads, the City will assign crossing guards to all corners to make sure children are safe. Other traffic calming measures could be considered as well as has been the case in other neighborhoods.

As far as we can tell, at first glance, there are no other elementary schools located at the intersections of roads as major as Westminster/Broadway, and 2 highway off ramps. When would this work be done? At what expense?

How much will you spend on busing current Bridgham Middle School students to the Del Sesto complex?

None. Students assigned to DelSesto would be students who live within 1.4 miles of DelSesto making them ineligible for transportation.

1.4 miles?

Busing represents a significant portion of the overall budget, approximately \$13 million per year (approximately \$7 million for middle and elementary students). Would you be willing to share detailed busing numbers with us on a school by school and neighborhood by neighborhood basis?

How many buses drive on Messer Street daily and to how many schools do they go? How many schools do the neighborhood children currently attend?

Why isn't Carl Lauro, which is one of our neighborhood's largest school facilities, mentioned in your presentation to the community? What capital improvements are planned for Lauro?

Carl Lauro was evaluated. Given the number of students and programs required, relocating Lauro students would have been many times more complicated, potentially more expensive and disruptive. The presentation to the community was specifically focused on schools recommended for closure. Carl Lauro is one of the schools currently with excess capacity. Students from schools currently recommended for closure will be reassigned to Lauro.

Relocating any students is complicated, expensive and disruptive. How can relocating students in a school where over 60% of the students are bused in be many times more complicated, potentially expensive and disruptive than relocating students where over 80% are neighborhood walkers?

Could you tell us what % of Carl Lauro students are bussed in from other districts? Could you tell us the annual cost of this busing?

Could you tell us how much money the city spent on the DeJung report in 2006? And the Fanning Howey report in 2009/10? How have your current recommendations made use of these studies?

The current recommendations have taken recommendations of both the DeJong and Fanning/Howey studies, particularly in the case of the facility condition and capacity information. Each study updates and builds on the prior study. Fanning Howey's contract was for \$160,550. The DeJong contract was for \$445,587 which included the development of Educational Specifications for PK-6, 6-8, and a hybrid K-8 model as well as the analysis of district-wide demographic and attendance data which lead to the establishment of the planning zones.

The City of Providence and the Providence School Department commissioned Fanning Howey to do a comprehensive facilities study/ facilities master plan in 2009/2010. A recent press release from Mayor Tavares states: "*The PPSD and City officials worked with Gilbane and*

Studio JAED to develop a list of proposed schools for closure and reorganization, weighing the following factors: physical plant conditions, feasibility of student relocation, unmet building capacity, community use, record of student achievement, educational adequacy, geographic concentration, cost of transportation." Why is the city now deferring to Gilbane and Studio Jaed, two for-profit companies (construction and architecture, respectively) who stand to benefit financially from their recommendations, rather than referring to the just completed master plan for which tax payers spent millions of dollars?

Gilbane and StudioJAED have always been involved in the DeJong and Fanning/Howey study. More accurately stated, because of the work of DeJong and Fanning/Howey, Gilbane and StudioJAED can continue to work with the City and PPSD on developing our school closure recommendations.

Did Gilbane and Studio JAED do more recent assessments that we don't know about? Again, this is confusing because the last comprehensive assessment, the Fanning Howey Report, which Gilbane and Studio JAED consulted on, did not recommend closing any of the schools currently on the chopping block. Quite the opposite, they recommended closing Bridgham.

What is the bidding process for public school facility renovations and new buildings? Is the bidding process open or by invite only? Does the public have access to the bidding, negotiation and awarding of contract process?

The bidding process is the same as the one used for the renovation of the Nathan Bishop building: PPSD/City puts out a bid for an architect and engineering firm to design the school. A firm is selected based on the firm's quoted price and experience with past projects. A neighborhood team is convened to work with school department, administration, and architect to develop the concept of the school based on community needs, proposed school program, RIDE regulations for building design, etc. The architect then designs the building. Next the City asks for bids for a general contractor and selects the most qualified bidder. The public does have access to the bidding process but does not take part in negotiating or contract development.

It seems that in such a severe financial crisis, where so many city residents and businesses are looking for work, that hiring locally would be the right thing to do and would make sense financially. Providence is the "Creative Capital". Providence is home to the best design school in the world. Why has the city chosen to commission Studio Jaed, an architecture firm from Wilmington Delaware for its school facilities projects?

Out of State firms are used routinely in all cities, states, and municipalities, as long as they comply with all local laws and regulations and are deemed to be qualified for the work to be completed. StudioJAED is an educational specialist architectural firm, one of a small group of firms recognized by the Council of Educational Facilities Planners International. Providence has placed great emphasis on dealing with firms who specialize in education for PPSD projects and has spread work around to them. Also, architectural firms are required to have staff with Registered Educational Facility Planner credentials by the Council of Educational Facility Planners International to prepare reports for RIDE that will lead to approval of capital plans, and there are no firms in RI with the credentials to prepare such studies for a district the size of Providence. DeJong, Fanning Howey, and Studio JAED all have multiple members of their firms with such credentials.

StudioJAED and Gilbane have worked closely together and produced great results for PPSD and the City. PCTA won an AIA design award for Merit. StudioJAED provides services at economical costs to the city and PPSD on par with local firms. StudioJAED has been selected by other clients in the Providence area based on qualifications. StudioJAED maintains an active presence with Gilbane in the PPSD project field office. StudioJAED hires local sub

consultants (examples – Garafalo and Odeh) or all design projects in PPSD. These local sub consultants have large shares of the projects, sometimes in excess of the share in the project held by StudioJAED.

If you were presented with a working alternative by the West Side community, say an estimate for a renovation project that was comparable to your own, or maybe even less expensive than your proposal, would you be willing to consider such a proposal and make it public such that the community which would be affected by this project could help decide what was best?

Yes.

The 2010 Facilities Master Plan Demographic study shows a significant projected increase in pre-school aged children in Providence for 2012: *“This is interesting demographically since these changes are somewhat different than what is being experienced in the rest of Rhode Island, New England, and the United States.... Providence is the only area to experience an increase in the pre-school cohort.”* The report goes on to say that the Central Planning Area is the only area in the city that is projected to experience an increase in school aged children for 2012. Other parts of the city are projected to remain stable or experience slight decline. Are your proposed cuts, layoffs, and school closings taking into account this data? Given these facts, what is your vision for the West Side of Providence in terms of quality elementary and middle school education?

Yes. Overall, the City is expected to experience a stable population, despite a projected slight growth in the Central planning area. School selection in the City is still controlled choice, therefore we must consider our district-wide capacity relative to our district-wide projected enrollment.

Our concern here is with the pre-school age cohort in light of the proposed closings of elementary schools. Unless this has been looked at closely, we may be in a difficult position 1 to 2 years from now when that cohort reaches kindergarten and the PPSD is forced to either re-open schools at great expense or increase busing throughout the district.

Has the district conducted a demographic study with 5 year projections per neighborhood?
Were the school closing decisions based on this best practice methodology?

Yes - last fall we commissioned NESDEC to provide an updated 10 year enrollment projection. No - we did not get projections by neighborhood, which tend to be unreliable due to the high mobility rate across Providence. Yes - we considered the revised enrollment projections.

But if “School Board policy is to implement 80% neighborhood school attendance at the elementary school level” then PPSD must be looking at neighborhood projections, not just district-wide projected enrollment.

-
- How many elementary age children will the West Side have for the fall of 2011/2012?
- How many middle school age children will the West Side have for fall of 2011/2012?
- What is the projected increase/decrease in the West Side’s elementary and middle school population for 2015/2016?

Providence, because of its small size, has high mobility across the central planning area. In population studies we look at the central planning area, which encompasses multiple neighborhoods. Studies that look at small

geographies have been shown to be unreliable and people frequently move across neighborhoods. School selection in the City is still controlled choice, therefore we must consider our district-wide capacity relative to our district-wide projected enrollment.

What is the estimated life span of each school?

30-40 years.

Will you provide us with a copy of PPSD's most current asset protection plan which includes facility capacity, maintenance expenditures, and enrollment details?

How much will you be asking RIDE for in your 5 year capital improvement plan? For which schools? In the district's master plan, which was submitted to RIDE, there were no other investments planned for our neighborhood (with the exception of an elementary school at the Bainbridge facility). With the Bainbridge facility off the table, what are the planned investments in our neighborhood at the Elementary and Middle School level?

What are the total cost savings you are gaining from your proposed West Side School changes? Will you give us a detailed breakdown of what these savings are?

The Providence School Department budget makes up about half of the City's budget. There is no way to meet our fiscal responsibility without cuts to the School Department, including school closures. However, this does not mean we will let a fiscal crisis compromise or diminish our shared commitment to transform Providence Public Schools.

The recommended school closures will trim more than \$12 million dollars from the school budget, which faces a \$28 million deficit next year. The projected savings is \$8 million in teacher positions and \$4 million in facilities costs and the cost of support personnel.

This is not an answer to "a detailed breakdown" of cost savings. We find this lack of transparency unacceptable and feel that the school board cannot, in good conscience, vote on this proposal until all of these facts have been made available and the school board and community have been given ample time to review the information and respond.

What changes are you making that address what got the PPSD into this fiscal crisis in the first place (a \$40M budget shortfall)? How are you going to ensure that we are not facing a similar crisis next year, or the year after that?

The school budget makes up half of the City Budget. The biggest factor driving our current economic crisis is a drastic reduction in state aid. We are lobbying the State House to fully implement the new school funding formula, which found that Providence was the most under funded district in the state. We have also laid off several administrative positions and will continue to renegotiate union contracts to identify significant cost savings.

Teachers and students will not bear the weight of cuts to City spending alone. The City has undergone layoffs, eliminating 15 positions and leaving more than 20+ other positions unfilled. The Mayor cut his pay by 10%, froze non essential funding, cancelled third party vendor contracts, and renegotiated the labor contract with the City's largest employee union to produce more than \$20 million in savings.

Drastic reductions in state aid were anticipated years ago. On page 20 of the PPSD's 2010-2011 budget this decline was clearly evident beginning in 2002.

Do you intend to do an external forensic audit of Providence Public School spending as a part of this cost savings process?

The Municipal Finances Review Panel was an external group that was not paid for its work. They did an extensive study of PPSD school spending. The full report is available on the City's website.

"The Panel did not conduct a financial or performance audit of the City....Due to the inherent time constraints and urgency of the Panel's charge, the Panel, to a significant extent, relied upon the representations of City management providing financial information."

In reference to possible school closures the panel writes:

"potential costs savings should be realistically estimated. Potential savings exist in staff, utilities, and building maintenance and repairs. Costs to secure and "moth-ball" the properties should be included in the analysis to avoid deterioration and vandalism."

The report then goes on to say:

"The School Department offers school choice, which ultimately increases student transportation costs. The School Department should reassess the school choice option to ensure that the additional transportation costs can be justified because it affords enhanced educational opportunities for students. Insignificant differences in school performance among the City's schools may suggest that the additional transportation costs are unwarranted."

from the **Report of the Municipal Finances Review Panel**

Doesn't early retirement for teachers burden an already underfunded pension system? And in that sense, isn't a short term fix creating a longer term problem further burdening future school age children?

We did not offer an early retirement benefit. Only teachers who are already eligible for retirement (per state standards) were eligible for the incentive. These are teachers who already have enough years of service and meet retirement requirement regulations. This was an effort to reduce the number of teaching positions that needed to be eliminated through attrition. The incentive was paid for by a third party donor, not the taxpayers or through the school budget. 52 teachers and 2 administrators have taken the incentive.