

THE CITY OF PROVIDENCE
STATE OF RHODE ISLAND AND PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS

RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL

No. 270

EFFECTIVE ~~APPROX~~ May 2, 2011

WHEREAS, The City faces a financial crisis that includes a projected \$110 million structural deficit for the 2011/12 fiscal year; and

WHEREAS, The Mayor has requested that the School Department and the School Board consider a package of school closures and reconfigurations to derive budgetary savings for the 2011/12 fiscal year; and

WHEREAS, The School Board's policy concerning school closure requires public hearings and input from the affected communities; and

WHEREAS, The School Board issued letters to all 1,926 teachers informing them of the possibility of dismissal at the end of this year depending upon the result of possible plans to close schools; and

WHEREAS, The issuance of the dismissal letters has created great concern and uncertainty among teachers; and

WHEREAS, The School Department anticipates rescinding the great majority of the teacher dismissal letters once the decision whether to close schools and, if so, which schools to close is concluded; and

WHEREAS, The goal of a transparent and responsive school closure process on the one hand, and the goal of addressing teacher concerns about their job status on the other hand, are in tension with one another.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, That

1. The Providence City Council is concerned that the proposed closure of four schools and the reconfiguration of two others will disrupt existing cultures and community networks. Children living near the schools currently designated for closure may have new transportation needs after being reassigned to a school farther away. In short, the stated goal of budgetary savings may generate a new set of educational and budgetary costs that could counter the projected savings that motivate the proposed school closure plan.

2. For these reasons, the Providence City Council urges the Providence School Board to deliberate carefully before voting on the Mayor's proposed school closure plan, and as part of its deliberations to consider the following questions:



- a. What financial savings do you project that the Mayor's proposed school closure plan will realize, and what are the clear and understandable data upon which this projection is based? In reaching this figure, do you make sufficient allowances for renovations of repurposed buildings and maintenance of closed buildings, including providing adequate security for closed buildings?
- b. Are you satisfied that this amount of savings cannot be realized elsewhere in the School Department budget in a way that generates less disruption to children and their families? For example, could we find savings by eliminating staff positions that previously were funded with Federal money and have since been converted to local funding?
- c. In calculating financial savings from the proposed closure plan, has the School Department accounted adequately for the change in transportation costs that may result from the closure of four schools and the reconfiguration of two others?
- d. Are you confident that the schools you are moving children into are educationally adequate? If not, do funds exist to bring them to a level of educational adequacy?
- e. Are you confident that a proper place has been found for each child displaced by the proposed closings? Will it be possible for parents, through maps or otherwise, to see how their children will be redistributed?
- f. How will parents be involved in the placement decisions? Is a plan in place to allow parents to request, or if necessary, contest, a placement?
- g. Does the recommended closure plan provide a margin of flexibility beyond the stated capacity studies? For example, will the projected closures and reassignments permit enough space in the remaining buildings to continue important programs that currently exist in schools that are absorbing new students?
- h. Will the influx of students into other buildings force the closure of art or music classrooms, or other special services that are currently offered in those buildings?
- i. Will an influx of students substantially alter best practices, positive school cultures, or utilization of space in the schools that are absorbing them? Is there space in each building to accommodate a strand of children who can move through the building over time to graduate from the school?
- j. Will the new configuration provide some flexibility for anticipated demographic changes over the next few years?
- k. Have other options been considered? For example, would a K-8 configuration in some buildings better suit the children's and neighborhood's needs?
- l. Could a step-wise approach be taken over the next 2 years?
- m. Will the City and/or the School Department retain control over school buildings currently designated for closure to permit re-use in the event of future changes?

- n. Should the neighborhood school policy (through which a certain number of seats are reserved for out-of-neighborhood students) be reviewed in light of changes in the City's demographics, thereby permitting a reduction of transportation costs?
 - o. Are there State housing aid funds available (where the State pays 80% to 85% of construction costs) that could be applied to permit savings of local funds currently anticipated or budgeted for building construction and maintenance?
 - p. Would it be possible to obtain additional funds and/or services from community partners, such as the colleges, universities and hospitals, that could reduce the School Department deficit sufficiently to permit the schools to remain open?
 - q. In making the recommendation to close Windmill School,
 - 1. did the School Department adequately consider the academic gains the school has posted since the publication of the Fanning Howey report?
 - 2. has the School Department looked carefully at the proposed renovation budgets set forth in the DeJong and Fanning Howey studies to confirm that the current proposal is based on a fair assessment of the building's needs?
 - r. Will the student assignment plan that results from the closures ensure the placement of siblings in the same school if the family requests this?
 - s. Will the closure plan cause class size in schools to exceed the current maximum of 26 for elementary schools, and an average of 26 for middle and high schools?
 - t. Do the calculations include the operating cost of maintaining the current buildings designated for closure?
3. While understanding the need to derive budgetary savings, as well as the desirability of resolving the employment status of the City's teachers as soon as possible, the City Council urges the School Board to obtain and present answers to these questions as part of its deliberative process prior to its vote on the proposed school closure plan.


IN CITY COUNCIL

APR 21 2011

READ AND PASSED


PRES.

CLERK

Effective without the
Mayor's Signature


 Anna M. Stetson
 City Clerk