



November 20, 2016

Dear Fellow East Siders:

I hope you are getting ready for an enjoyable Thanksgiving. This week's letter discusses the proposed expansion of the Achievement First mayoral academy and the future prospects for an infrastructure bond.

In 2012, the State granted a charter to the Achievement First mayoral academy to open two elementary schools which, when fully enrolled, will contain 456 students each. The schools created new opportunities for the students who attend it, while reducing resources available to the students who remain in the Providence Public Schools. While it is true that the School Department can realize financial savings from the resulting decline in enrollment, those savings are modest compared to the lost revenues resulting from the State's "money follows the child" funding formula. In 2012, the City Council's Education Committee prepared a [Report](#) estimating that the Providence Public Schools would sustain a net loss of \$8.7 million when the new schools were fully enrolled. The school has now presented an application to the State Board of Education to expand by an additional 2,200 students, to a new enrollment of 3,112. The Internal Auditor prepared an [Analysis](#) of the proposal, concluding that it would result in a net loss of an additional \$28.5 million to \$29.5 million if approved and fully implemented. Councilman Principe and I presented these findings to the Board of Education on November 16, and also asked the Board to make public the economic impact study it is required to perform under State law. At the meeting, the Commissioner announced that neither the Board nor the public would see the study until after the window for public comment closed, and that the study also would include a tabulation of the benefits that would accrue to the City from the superior education the new school would provide to the additional students who could attend after the expansion. This lack of transparency is a problem, because the Commissioner's analysis will use a new methodology without providing anyone else an opportunity to review and critique it. Based on the Commissioner's preliminary description, for example, it appears he will be assigning a higher value to the dollars spent on Achievement First's program (in terms of indirect effects), without performing a similar analysis of how the loss of \$28.5 million will reduce opportunities for the students who remain in the Providence Public Schools. The following night, I attended a meeting of Nathan Bishop parents with Superintendent Maher, who described how the School Department has absorbed substantial reductions in federal Title I funds, and the additional losses from the full Achievement First proposal would be devastating. I plan to prepare additional materials to submit to the Board of Education on this issue.

On Election Day, Providence voters approved an infrastructure bond by a 86%-14% margin. Unfortunately, most of the 38,324 Providence residents who voted to approve will be disappointed to learn their vote was invalid, because the City Council majority passed a bond ordinance which contained an unusual requirement of a second approval vote, which the same majority refused to provide. These members withheld their approval because they wanted individual control over bond expenditures in their wards, a hyper-political arrangement that produced numerous abuses in the Cianci era. By placing a "zombie bond" on the ballot, these Council members misled the voters and embarrassed the City across the State. With that said, the voters' overwhelming approval sends a clear message that the majority's antics are frustrating the will of the people. I believe it is possible for the City Council to enact a new infrastructure bond ordinance for the voters to consider as soon as early next year, but that will depend upon how soon my colleagues abandon their misbegotten quest for personal control over the City's money. To help this effort, I encourage you to call the Mayor's office at 421-2489, and leave him a message that you want him to take a firm stand against the City Council majority, and urge him to go directly to the people of the City of Providence to join in him pressuring the City Council members who are playing politics with the City's future. With your help, we will convince the City Council majority to act in service of the people of the City, rather than in service of their own "old school" political agendas.

Sincerely,