

SAM ZURIER

August 4, 2011

Dear Fellow East Siders:

When our schools re-open this fall, I am hopeful that we can achieve a fresh start after having worked through the difficulties triggered by the City's response to its financial crisis.

In previous letters, I described a practice the School Department adopted last year to shorten the school day once a week for our middle school students (one hour) and high school students (two hours), causing them to lose six and twelve days of school respectively, over the course of a year. During this year's budget hearings, I urged the School Department and urged them to come into compliance with this and other State requirements. Last week, I learned that the issue was still unresolved. In response, the Education Subcommittee of the Finance Committee scheduled a hearing to press this issue. That hearing will take place on **August 23, 2011 at 5:30 p.m. at City Hall**. The hearing also will review other issues related to the re-opening of school this fall, including the assignment plans for children who were in schools closed this Spring, and the "match" process by which teachers from the closed schools were assigned new positions.

After we announced the hearing and the GoLocal blog highlighted the issue (see here: <http://www.golocalprov.com/news/providence-schools-out-of-compliance/>), the Mayor's office announced that our middle and high school students will have full school days next year after all. I would like to thank the Mayor's office and the School Department for agreeing to this change, as well as all of the parents (including the Parent Advisory Council) who advocated for the restoration of a full instructional day to our children. The August 23 hearing will still go forward to address the other issues on the agenda.

The Mayor's office combined its announcement that full school days will be restored with news of a tentative agreement with the Providence Teachers Union. The City Council has not yet received a copy of the new proposed contract to review. When we do, our Internal Auditor will analyze whether it achieves the savings required by the budget. I also will seek feedback from the School Board concerning the education policy aspects of the contract. I am hoping that the public will have time to review the contract and provide their feedback as well.

Over the past few weeks, Susan Lusi has begun her work as Interim Superintendent for the Providence Public Schools. I worked with Superintendent Lusi during 2000-02 when I was on the School Board and she was the Chief of Staff to then-Superintendent Diana Lam. I believe that Sue did an excellent job when she was in Providence before, and I am optimistic that she will work well in her return. As Chief of Staff, Sue worked for a Superintendent who had visionary ideas but had difficulty gaining acceptance for them. Sue worked with many of the stakeholders to help implement a program that was in danger of foundering due to resistance. This will be an important part of Sue's job in the coming months, following the dislocations of the past year. I am especially hopeful that Sue will be able to serve as a bridge between the School Board and the Mayor's office, as both sides have expressed great confidence in her. In this way, she may be exactly the right person to fill this important post at a critical time for our schools.

Sincerely,



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