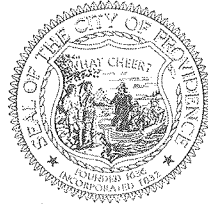


COUNCILMAN
SAMUEL D. ZURIER
55 DORRANCE STREET, SUITE 400
PROVIDENCE, RI 02903
EMAIL: sdz@om-rilaw.com
Office: (401) 861-2900 ext. 105



March 26, 2015

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VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL AND U.S. MAIL
City of Providence, Rhode Island

Honorable Keith Oliveira
Member, Providence School Board
797 Westminster Street
Providence, RI 02903

Re: Neighborhood School Policy

Dear Mr. Oliveira:

Last summer, around a dozen families who moved into my neighborhood contacted me about the opportunity to attend the Nathan Bishop Middle School. All of them lived within a mile of the school. When I contacted the School Department, I learned that it was not possible to ensure them a seat at Nathan Bishop because the seats were all committed as part of the registration process in the Spring. Instead, it would be necessary for them to spend time on a waiting list to determine where seats would become available. All of the families decided to send their children to private school rather than wait through this process. This was a shame, as Bishop has fewer than 40% of its children from the neighborhood.

Based on this information, I began discussions with the School Department this past September. I learned that the turnover in seats at the beginning of the year is a perennial occurrence, and the School Department could, if it chose, retain a few dozen seats at each school and assign them as late as August 1 without any noticeable administrative burden. On this basis, I asked the School Department and the School Board to consider "holding" a limited number of seats at Bishop this year if (as has happened recently) the proportion of neighborhood children fell sufficiently below the 80% threshold specified in the School Assignment Policy.

After much back and forth, the School Board President informed me that he would not agree to such a change this year, as the School Board is set to consider a review of the entire neighborhood school assignment plan next year.

I would appreciate it if the entire School Board would consider this issue. Last year, a dozen families abandoned the public schools because their children were not permitted to attend a neighborhood school that was dramatically undersubscribed with neighborhood children. The reason they were denied this opportunity was because of a registration process that imposes a cutoff date that can be avoided for people moving into the neighborhood if the School Department chose to do so. The School Department routinely accommodates families who change Providence addresses during the course of the year, so I cannot see the difference.

Honorable Keith Oliveira
March 26, 2015
Page Two

I also do not believe that it is necessary for the School Board to defer consideration of this type of incremental improvement pending a review of the entire neighborhood assignment policy. In my work on the City Council, we pass legislation all of the time that makes incremental improvements as we work to find larger solutions to problems. Certainly the School Department tries out a number of programs on a pilot basis before changing entire systems.

For these reasons, I would appreciate your considering the issue of whether the School Department can "hold" a limited number of seats at undersubscribed neighborhood schools until August 1. The seats will be filled by someone, so why not with neighborhood children?

Given the pendency of the school assignment process, I would appreciate your promptest consideration.

Sincerely,



Samuel D. Zurier