



September 22, 2013

Dear Fellow East Siders:

On Tuesday night, a group of parents organized a meeting to express concerns about school bus issues. While the parents raised a broad range of issues, many of the comments addressed two areas. First, there was an incident involving a bus that was more than an hour late because the driver did not know the bus route and was asking panicked children for directions. Second, buses across the City have taken longer routes this year, due to consolidations the School Department implemented to achieve budgetary savings. As a result, children are spending more time on the buses, often resulting in late arrivals to school. The School Board President agreed to meet with the bus company and the bus route consultant to address these issues. As part of this discussion, I remembered not only my own difficulties with First Student (the bus company) as a parent, but also the lack of accountability we had with them when I was on the School Board because they were the only qualified vendor. First Student has had this leverage because previous contracts have stipulated that a vendor must garage its buses in Providence to qualify to bid. I have drafted a resolution the City Council will consider at its next meeting that would urge the School Department to dispense with this condition when the school bus contract goes out to bid next year. If there is competition among bidders, there will be a better chance to have the best possible company with a contract that ensures more accountability.

On Wednesday night, the School Department presented a new principal compensation plan which is described in this [Power Point presentation](#). Currently, there are only three salaries available for principals – one for elementary, one for middle school and one for high school. The new program, funded with a grant from the State, will adjust base salary levels according to a range of factors, including enrollment, number of students in poverty, special needs students and the like, and also allow bonuses for exceptional performance. In addition to increasing the fairness of the compensation system, these changes will enhance our schools' ability to retain the best principals who can be tempted to leave for higher compensation offered in other districts. There is no question that the right principal can make a significant difference at any school, and this new commitment to supporting principal quality is promising.

This past Thursday night, the City Council reviewed an ordinance I introduced to protect the public's right participate in Zoning Board hearings. I originally introduced the ordinance in July to ensure the public's right to comment when developers seek continuances. When the matter came before the City Council for a vote this summer, the administration requested that it be postponed for 60 days to allow the Zoning Board an opportunity to develop procedural rules to address this and other issues. On this basis, the City Council postponed consideration of the ordinance. With the 60-day window about to close, the administration requested that the City Council postpone its consideration until the October 17 meeting. I and my colleagues agreed to this change, based on assurances that the new rules would address adequately the public's right to participate.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Samuel D. Zurier'.