



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.

Over the past three years, I have been working with Councilwoman Matos to address the “welcome to Providence” tax penalty, through which buyers of some homes assessed at the “non-resident” owner rate are required to pay this higher rate for up to a year even if they qualify for the lower resident homeowner rate. Last Spring, the Tax Assessor indicated that he needed more time to have the capability to adjust tax rates at the time a home is purchased, rather than waiting for the annual billing cycle. We recently have learned that the Assessor is within a few weeks of making the system “live,” so that tax classifications can be made effective concurrent with the closing, provided that home buyers submit the proper forms at that time. The Ways and Means Committee will revisit in the coming weeks so that we can put our best foot forward to people seeking to move into our City.

Sincerely,

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