

December 1, 2003

Rhode Island Board of Regents
James A. DiPrete, Chairman

Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
Peter McWalters, Commissioner

Gentleman

My name is William Mudge, and I am an elected member of the North Kingstown School Committee. I am writing to request the opportunity to personally address the Rhode Island Department of Education and the Department Board of Regents, at the appropriate time and place, to discuss and provide input regarding a November 5, 2003 submittal to your office for the approval of a \$24,433,000 (Phase 1) school construction project. I would like to mention that the North Kingstown Town Council did not approve the most recent school committee's construction spending request of \$46,200,000 (enclosed), which did not include \$4.2M of other school projects submitted to your office last November. Furthermore, the Council did not approve the \$24.4M funding application as submitted to your office and has not endorsed or accepted the specific funding of \$7,400,000 for the Davisville Elementary school or \$18,000,000 for upgrades or replacement of the Wickford Middle School.

Unfortunately, members of the Town Council and the School Committee have erroneously formed the opinion that the \$24.4M project submittal to your office is only a planning wedge, and once approved by your office, the \$24.4M can be used to accomplish any project that committee finds appropriate. Of course, after reviewing the important and meaningful guidance, direction and demanding instructions provided in the "Necessity of School Construction (NOSC)" manual, I am of the opposite opinion. Certainly, there is only one intended conclusion and purpose that can be drawn by reading the NOSC manual; that is, DoE is requiring the project applicant to identify, document and present all relative factors, evidence, issues and justification necessary to insure that a construction project submittal passes the test of "need and integrity". Regrettably, a fair and keen examination of North Kingstown's project submittal will fail the test of close scrutiny, which will demand its rejection and shed full light on very, very poor planning process. For one to suggest a NOSC submittal serves only as a mere planning vehicle as opposed to the intended purpose for a district to articulate its specific annual funding requirement to implement a specific construction requirement is a repudiation of DoE's management and authority, while inferring that DoE does not take serious its responsibilities.

Specifically, North Kingstown's proposal is seriously flawed, contains misleading information and fails to encompass a comprehensive system wide evaluation of the district's near and long term elementary and middle school facility requirements. It is obvious, even to the casual observer, that the justification to substantiate this project will fail the test of "need" when closely examined, thoroughly evaluated and measured to the DoE's yardstick of standards specified in "NOSC" manual. The submittal lacks any sense of sound fiscal and educational planning as evidenced in the attended RGB Report that purposes to add

66,600 sq/ft of space to four elementary schools located in the northern end of town, while leaving the youngest of our children in the southern end of town to perpetually endure round trip bus rides up to 2 1/2 hours each day.

In FY02, following the recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools, Dr. James Halley, who had stated that there was adequate space in six schools to house the K-5 population, the former N.K. School Committee voted to reduced the number of elementary schools (K-5) from seven to six schools. In FY03, despite an essentially stable elementary school population, the Fishing Cove building was put “back on line” adding 46,000 sq/ft of “New/Recovered” elementary school space. Now in F/Y03, the North Kingstown School Committee suddenly submits a “Need” for another 60,000 sq/ft of educational space to house a stable K-5 population. A quick analysis of the elementary school population with respect to NOSC ‘s gross per-student sq/ft standards would certainly give rise to the thoroughness, quality and integrity of this submittal.

Full and accurate compliance with the standards, regulations and questions set forth in the NOSC manual is mandatory. I commend those who had the foresight to prepare and approve this manual. In my opinion, it is an excellent vehicle to accurately validate the needs of a school district. However, it is the challenge and responsibility of Doe’s expert management team to thoroughly evaluate the accuracy of a districts submittal and validate the need to expend our taxpayer’s monies wisely and efficiently. To not implement a through evaluation of a construction project request would be a disservice to the community, impact education opportunities, take from children, and reflect poorly on those who are entrusted to manage our education system.

I sincerely regret having to write this letter, however I have been placed in this unenviable position because my fellow school committee colleagues voted to allow the school department administration to submit the \$24.4M funding application to your office, without a committee review or discussion concerning the content of the document. Finally, I would note that the absence and failure to have in place a five-year district educational and facilities plan, updated annually, is an underling cause of this inappropriate submittal.

Respectfully,

William Mudge