

January 19, 2010

Dear Colleagues,

I am pleased to report that we have reached an agreement to endorse, with reservations, the Rhode Island Race to the Top Application. Providence joins other large urban districts, including Boston and Philadelphia, to compete for a share of funding that could be as much as \$20-35 million for Providence alone.

To be candid, the dialogue about this did not begin well. The first drafts of the Application were utterly unacceptable. Most significantly, there was no protection for collective bargaining rights, or the grievance and arbitration procedure. And the Application was written without any meaningful input from teachers.

After much negotiation, the Application was substantially revised over the past six days. It is far from perfect, but for Providence, these revisions earned our support. Specifically:

- A side letter requires that any provisions that impact terms of employment – wages, benefits, and working conditions, must be bargained to agreement. The District's plan MUST include this requirement.
- A memorandum of understanding requires that any provisions that violate any terms of our collective bargaining agreement are subject to binding arbitration.

As we all know, the Providence School District is unlike any other Rhode Island district. We are the State's largest urban district. We are a Tier 1 intervention district. Also we are currently in Federal District Court challenging the kind of unilateral actions that the Application, as revised, now prohibits.

While the Application is far from perfect, we are more concerned about the Providence Plan, and how teachers and students will be affected. By endorsing the Application, Providence is better positioned to receive funding in the first round of grants. If we receive a grant, RTTP funds could be used to implement the transformation model and support the five intervention schools recently identified by RIDE, as well as support other initiatives district wide.

The alternative – to obstruct the Application – is unacceptable. Should we face the same issues, without an assurance of negotiation and arbitration, and without a chance for funding? Should we further jeopardize our public support, and our support in the General Assembly?

Clearly, Providence has the most to gain by the Application, and the most to lose if we fail to support it.

This is an unprecedented opportunity to receive funding that the District desperately needs. Our support of the Application strengthens our chance of securing that funding and ensuring that our Union will play a stakeholder's role in determining what will happen in Providence. In uncertain economic times, our Union must have a voice at the table. If the Application is accepted, Providence's funding is contingent on our agreement. Now that the Application contains this assurance, and preserves our collective bargaining rights, it deserves our support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Steven F. Smith". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Steven F. Smith  
President