

**City of Woonsocket**

EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

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*Robert J. Gerardi, Jr., Ph.D.*  
*Superintendent*

RELAY RHODE ISLAND

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Web site: <http://woonsocketschools.com>

July 16, 2009

Deborah A. Gist  
Commissioner of Education  
Rhode Island Department of Education  
255 Westminster Street  
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Commissioner Gist:

On May 20, 2009, before we held our special open School Committee meeting, the School Committee held a Joint City Council preliminary budget hearing at which the Mayor, Staff, full Council, and public were in attendance at City Hall. The Mayor and Council made suggestions for recommended cuts which the School Committee addressed at its scheduled meeting later that evening. At this meeting held at the Woonsocket Area Career Technical Center, the School Committee approved first passage of their FY10 budget after serious deliberation and cost cutting efforts. On May 21, 2009, at a special School Committee meeting, the School Committee approved the second passage of our FY10 budget, and on the following day the approved FY10 budget was sent to the Mayor.

On June 22, 2009, the Woonsocket City Council approved the FY10 Municipal Budget. That budget level funded the Woonsocket Education Department which is approximately \$6,900,000 less than the School Committee approved budget for FY10. As a result of the City Council's actions, the School Committee must now comply with RI GL 16-2-21 (3) (b) which states "... the School Committee shall, within 30 days after appropriation is made, amend its estimates and recommendations so that expenses are no greater than the total of all revenue appropriated by the state or town or provided for public schools under the care, control, and management of the School Committee."

The Woonsocket Education Department finds itself in a precarious position because the aforementioned law requires us to reduce our budget while other underfunded state education laws, Board of Regents regulations, RIDE regulations and guidance, and contractual obligations are at odds with each other. In layman's terms, many laws require us to spend a certain amount of money in an effort to provide a basic education while many other laws require us to stay within a tax cap and provide a balanced budget.

The Woonsocket School Committee has now acknowledged at many open meetings that we are already operating a school district below the current Board of Regents Basic Education Program (BEP) in the specifically identified area of library staffing. The only other expenses that we can cut that are currently above the BEP are in the areas of athletics and student activities (BEP, p. 223). During the last year budget cutting process, the School Committee questioned that these activities have become a state expectation in every other district and has been hesitant to cut them. However, in these dire financial times and under these legal constraints, the Woonsocket Education Department has voted at the regularly scheduled meeting on July 15, 2009, to act on the following waiver requests and reduce

student activities to the BEP unlike any other district in the state unless you override our decision to do so. The elimination of these activities could put our NEASC accreditation in jeopardy. This historical evidence was provided to set the context from which the following requests are being made.

The Woonsocket Education Department does not believe that we can cut below the BEP and adequately operate the school department within the approved FY10 municipal budget while remaining in compliance with underfunded state education laws, Board of Regents regulations, RIDE regulations and guidance, and contractual obligations. Consequently, we are requesting waivers from the state as identified by R.I.G.L. 16-2-21.4. We are hereby formally requesting the following waivers:

- 1) A waiver of the New LEP Regulations requiring a district our size to have three full-time employees including; a) a full-time LEP Administrator, b) a full-time parent Liaison, and c) a full-time teacher devoted to native language testing.

We realize that the tasks these positions would fulfill must continue to be provided; however, we have a Literacy Director who could take on the additional duties as the LEP Administrator and we would like to combine the duties of the parent liaison and native language tester into one full time position instead of two thus saving one full time teacher salary and benefits

- 2) A waiver of the BEP requirement for the staffing of the school library at the secondary level (BEP, p. 201) where it states that there shall be two full-time librarians and a full-time clerical assistant in schools with over 1000 children. There shall be additional clerical assistance for enrollment beyond 1500 children.

Woonsocket High School has an enrollment of over 1500 students and has been operating for some time with 1.5 Librarians and no clerical staff. This year we are proposing to operate with one full-time librarian and one .5 librarian/.5 PBGR Coordinator.

- 3) A waiver of the new K-12 Literacy Policy's requirement for a student reading between 1 and 3 years below grade level to have a Personalized Literacy Plan (PLP). This could save us the cost of two full-time reading specialists.

Finally, it is our understanding that it was the former Commissioner's decision not to entertain fees for student participation in extra-curricular activities, student transportation, and/or parking as is commonplace in our sister state of Massachusetts. We are not aware of any state laws or regulations banning this practice and would like an expedited advisory opinion on the school department's right to charge fees for extra-curricular activities, student transportation and/or parking.

Please understand that the Woonsocket School Committee does not believe that these proposals are in the best interest of advancing the course of education in Woonsocket, but endorses these proposals for the purposes of complying with fiscal requirements simultaneously with existing state education laws and regulations. In addition, we would ask that you notify us if you or your staff has any suggestions for cost saving ideas that can be implemented immediately.

Please address any responses or questions you may have regarding any of the information above to the Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Robert J. Gerardi, Jr. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

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Dr. Robert J. Gerardi, Jr.  
Woonsocket-Superintendent of Schools

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Marc Dubois, Chairman  
Woonsocket School Committee

Cc: Mayor of Woonsocket  
Members of the Woonsocket City Council  
Members of the Woonsocket School Committee

RJG:dd/kb

***"Empowering all learners to shape and enrich their changing world"***  
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national origin, color or disability in accordance with applicable laws and regulations.

**ADDITIONAL CITS TO FY10 BUDGET**

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**ATHLETICS**

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ALL SPORTS EXCEPT TRACK & FIELD	155,903.00
SUPPLIES	12,750.00
UNIFORMS	9,350.00
	<u>178,003.00</u>

**TEXTBOOKS**

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REGULAR EDUCATION	<u>234,637.00</u>
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**OTHER STUDENT ACTIVITIES**

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**ALL WITH THE EXCEPTION OF \_\_\_\_\_**

CHORAL

ALL CLASS ADVISORS GR 8 THRU 12

RI HONOR SOCIETY

NATIONAL HONOR SOCIETY

BAND

DRAMA

SENIOR HIGH PUBLICATION

VICA

49,461.00

**SATURDAY DETENTION**

2,000.00

**40 FURLOUGH DAYS TEACHERS**

6,084,033.00

**TOTAL REDUCTION TO FY10 BUDGET**

**6,548,134.00**

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July 16, 2009

Woonsocket Teachers' Guild  
One Cumberland Plaza  
Woonsocket, RI 02895

RE: FY10 Budget Concession Request

Dear Mr. DiPardo:

On June 22, 2009, the Woonsocket City Council approved the FY10 Municipal Budget. That budget level funded the Woonsocket Education Department at approximately \$6,900,000 less than we believe is required to provide the Basic Education Program (BEP). As a result of the City Council's actions, the School Committee must now comply with RI GL 16-2-21 (3) (b) which states "... the school committee shall, within thirty (30) days after appropriation is made, amend its estimates and recommendations so that expenses are no greater than the total of all revenue appropriated by the state or town or provided for public schools under the care, control, and management of the school committee."

On July 15, 2009, the School Committee approved an amended budget that will comply with the level funding that was approved by the City Council's FY10 Municipal Budget. The School Committee's amended budget is based on the following two stipulations:

1. Approval of the requested waivers by the R I Commissioner of Education.
2. Approval of a request for the members of the Woonsocket Teachers' Guild to accept forty (40) furlough days (days worked without a per diem payment) during FY10.

This letter will serve as a formal request to the Woonsocket Teachers' Guild for its members to accept a concession, not a negotiation, of 40 furlough days during FY10. Because the School Department budget requires this concession to remain balanced, I am requesting a formal written response after your membership has voted on this.

Sincerely,

Robert J. Gerardi, Ph.D.  
Superintendent of Schools

RJG: dd/kb

cc: The Mayor of Woonsocket  
Members of the Woonsocket City Council  
Members of the Woonsocket School Committee

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July 16, 2009

Honorable Mayor Menard  
City Hall  
169 Main Street  
Woonsocket, RI 02895

RE: FY10 Amended Budget

Dear Mayor Menard:

On June 22, 2009, the Woonsocket City Council approved the FY10 Municipal Budget. That budget level funded the Woonsocket Education Department at approximately \$6,900,000 less than we believe is required to provide the Basic Education Program (BEP). As a result of the City Council's actions, the School Committee must now comply with RI GL 16-2-21 (3) (b) which states "... the School Committee shall, within thirty (30) days after appropriation is made, amend its estimates and recommendations so that expenses are no greater than the total of all revenue appropriated by the state or town or provided for public schools under the care, control, and management of the School Committee."

On July 15, 2009, the School Committee has approved the amended budget, as attached, that will comply with the level funding that was approved by the City Council's FY10 Municipal Budget. The School Committee's amended budget is based on the following two stipulations:

1. Approval of the requested waivers by the R I Commissioner of Education
2. Approval of a request for the members of the Woonsocket Teachers' Guild to accept 40 furlough days (days worked without a per diem payment) during FY10.

If either of these stipulations is not approved, I will contact with your office.

Sincerely,

Robert J. Gerardi, Ph.D.  
Superintendent of Schools

RJG: dd/kb

Attachment

cc: Members of the Woonsocket City Council  
Members of the Woonsocket School Committee  
Richard DiPardo – WTG President

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