

Portsmouth School Committee

The Portsmouth School Committee respectfully asks our legislators to support the following issues during the 2022 Legislative Session:

1. Expand the Open Meetings Act to permit in-person, virtual, and hybrid meeting options for the public

We urge our legislators to pass legislation permitting in-person, virtual, and hybrid meeting options for the public.

2. State Aid Funding Formula: COVID-19 Distorting State Aid due to Under Reported Number of Free and Reduced Lunch Students

The number of students who qualify for free or reduced price lunch under the National School Lunch Program is a significant factor in the calculation of State Aid under the State Aid Funding Formula. Due to the impacts from COVID-19, districts did not participate in the National School Lunch Program in fiscal 2021 or fiscal 2022. Districts provided food service to students under the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) or Seamless Summer Option (SSO). Under both of these programs, breakfast and lunch was free to all students and Free/Reduced Price Lunch applications were not required or collected. In fact, RIDE advised districts that they were not allowed to collect Free/Reduced Price Lunch applications during this time period since they were not operating food service programs under the National School Lunch Program. Therefore, the students identified as Free/Reduced Lunch by districts are primarily students identified in the Electronic Direct Certification (eDC) files provided by DHS/RIDE on a periodic basis. This underrepresents the true number of students that would normally qualify for Free/Reduced Lunch by excluding any students that would normally qualify through the regular application process.

The significantly understated number of students who would normally qualify for Free/Reduced Lunch, but who are not being counted due to the absence of applications, is having a highly negative impact on the calculation of State Aid when determining the State Share Ratio and Student Success Factor. We request that the State address this issue by either holding districts harmless from this impact. Failure to address this issue would result in significant financial harm to school districts and result in substantial reductions to educational programs for students.

Additionally, as the cost of educating students with disabilities continues to increase even for the most well managed school budget, we encourage you to support an increase in the high-cost special education categorical fund included in the funding formula aid.

3. Unfunded Mandates

The General Assembly should ensure that districts are equipped with the money and resources to support educational initiatives that result from legislation related to PK-12 schools. A recent example from the last legislative session would be Senate Bill 86-A/House Bill 5083-A requiring that feminine hygiene products be provided in all public schools. While this is a worthy initiative it will cost the Portsmouth School District approximately \$7,800 to implement this in our schools at a time when we are getting ready to completely renovate student bathrooms over the next few years.

4. Special Education

Examine and change the statutory requirements for LEAs to contribute special education per pupil amounts to DCYF for students placed in residential settings and the overall formula used to identify LEA per pupil spending amounts for students with IEPs placed in residential settings. We request that the State address the current statute for this area in its entirety, including the formula for determining per pupil expenditures in this area.

5. Statewide Transportation: Examine the Effectiveness of Statewide Transportation for Students who Attend School Outside of Their Residence LEA

Statewide transportation was legislatively enacted to provide fiscal efficiencies for student transportation outside of LEA's. The system, while purportedly offering efficiencies has failed year over year to accomplish this, particularly as it relates to cost. It is not cost effective and it is not efficient. We request that the State address this issue by studying the effectiveness of statewide transportation to identify cost effective solutions for LEAs as it relates to transportation.