

# Portsmouth School Committee - Legislative Priorities 2023

The Portsmouth School Committee respectfully asks our legislators to support the following issues during the 2023 Legislative Session:

## 1. State Funding Formula and Financial Concerns

### a) High-Cost Special Education

The cost of educating students with disabilities continues to increase even for the most well-managed school budget. For example, the 2023-24 cost of out-of-district tuition for Portsmouth is estimated to be over one million dollars. Portsmouth typically receives around \$100,000 from the high-cost special education categorical fund to help offset these costs. In Massachusetts, districts are responsible for a fixed amount. Then costs above that amount for high-cost special education are covered by the state.

We ask our State legislators to support an increase in the high-cost special education categorical fund included in the funding formula aid.

### b) Statewide Transportation

Statewide transportation costs for Portsmouth alone will be over \$600,000 in FY 2023.

The legislature enacted the “Statewide Transportation for students who Attend School Outside of Their Residence LEA” to provide fiscal efficiencies for student transportation outside of district. 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.

### c) Allocating State Funds for Education/Funding Formula Revisions

If any changes are made to the funding formula we request that the State at least hold districts harmless for FY24. Districts are still recovering from the financial impacts of the pandemic. Unanticipated cuts in state aid will result in significant financial harm to school districts and substantial reductions to educational programs for students.

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## 2. ESSA (Every Student Succeeds Act) Determination Process

When students are under the care of the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) and placed in a residential setting, that triggers what is known as an ESSA determination call to decide if the student should remain in their current district or transfer to the district of that residential setting. Districts have very little say in a final ESSA determination by DCYF.

When students reside in Portsmouth, we are responsible for paying for the out-of-district tuition they require. However, we have had situations where Portsmouth has had to continue to pay for the cost of an out-of-district placement EVEN AFTER the student no longer resides in Portsmouth. These decisions impact our already constrained school department budget.

We ask our state delegation to push for a review of the ESSA Determination Process with a particular focus on giving the districts more of a voice in how students are educated and clarifying the funding responsibilities based on residence.

## 3. Age-Appropriate Career Development for a Green Economy

We request that our State legislators keep us informed about any legislation focused on age-appropriate career development for a green economy and how that can be best utilized by Portsmouth students.

## 4. School Waste Recycling and Waste Removal

The School Waste Recycling and Waste Removal Law (SB 104 and H5328) went into effect on Jan. 1st, 2022. The law requires schools to divert food waste from the landfill and requires school food service providers to donate any unserved, non-perishable, or otherwise unspoiled food to local food banks. While it is well-intended, it is an unfunded mandate as the state provided no additional funding to schools to comply.

(Source: <https://ecori.org/recycling-program-aims-to-reduce-food-waste-in-r-i-schools/>).

We would support additional funding to fully implement the law and in particular educate students and provide additional support for our AG Innovation Farm in their sustainability and composting efforts.

## 5. High-Speed Internet for Aquidneck Island

Last year, the RI legislature established a Broadband Advisory Council, intended to develop a strategic plan (to be released spring 2023) for addressing broadband issues across the state. Access to high quality, affordable broadband continues to be an important concern for the Portsmouth community, which is "underserved" with regard to broadband, according to federal standards cited in a January, 2022 report from Connect Greater Newport\*. Many families in the Portsmouth school community cannot

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reliably access high quality broadband at a reasonable rate, something that has become increasingly important to distance learning and other aspects of education.

We recognize that at present there is not much our state delegation can do while we await the report, but given the importance of this issue to Aquidneck island communities, we would urge our delegation to make access to high quality broadband a priority in their efforts to help Portsmouth families.

Connect Greater Newport Report:

[https://www.connectgreaternewport.com/files/ugd/e410a7\\_17946dd9b0fa45529d803fb474047f7c.pdf](https://www.connectgreaternewport.com/files/ugd/e410a7_17946dd9b0fa45529d803fb474047f7c.pdf)