

February 16, 2021

Ms. Christine Lopes Metcalfe  
Dr. Joseph DaSilva  
Rhode Island Department of Education  
255 Westminster Street  
Providence RI 02903

Dear Ms. Lopes Metcalfe & Dr. DaSilva,

We, the undersigned citizens of South Kingstown, are writing to express serious concerns regarding our school district's recently submitted Stage 2 facility application. The application represents serious risks to the health and safety of our children and will make significant changes to the landscape of our town. We are concerned that the risks inherent in this plan are too great to devote such a large investment without community support. We hope that you will consider these issues as you assess the application. The application has several deficiencies:

- **Lack of Community Engagement:** The application cites "visioning sessions" as the fulfillment of the RIDE requirement for community engagement. In reality, three small sessions were all held in May 2020, unbeknownst to the general public and even some School Committee members. Attendees were a small handpicked group that included select school committee members, school administrators, teachers, 4 parents, and 2 students. Numerous residents have contacted the local governing bodies at every stage of this process expressing concerns and raising valid questions that are ignored, superficially explained away, or dismissed.
- **Adverse Educational, Social, Environmental, or Economic Impact upon the Community:**
  - There are known environmental concerns with the proposed building site. In the current Curtis Corner Middle School building, water seeps up from the ground into the building, causing mold issues. Also of note, the South Kingstown Police Station which was built in 1998 adjacent to the Curtis Corner location, has had basement floods requiring expensive mitigation. Additionally, the ledge has dictated the location of fields, the width of the road, and the ability to expand parking on the upper acreage.
  - The application provides a project plan that abandons the in-town high school which allows many students to walk to school and to after-school jobs. Additionally, students frequent nearby businesses and restaurants. Career and technical education internships are plentiful in our town and are walkable from the current high school location. All of these would require transportation from the proposed new site location, highlighting economic inequity among students.
  - Some physical education classes take place at local businesses that are within walking distance from the current high school, such as Rock Spot Climbing and Old Mountain Lanes. This will no longer be an option. Adjacent to the current high school is South Kingstown's oldest park (1938), Old Mountain Field, with 60 acres including baseball and softball fields, tennis courts, a skate park, and walking trails. This unique in-town location, with plenty of street and on-site parking, is enjoyed by the entire community, many of whom walk to watch high school games. Old Mountain Field also serves as a connector to the YMCA, Broad Rock Middle School, and the South Kingstown Recreation Center.
- **The Risk of Value Engineering:** In order to guarantee the project stays under budget, the proposal requires any cost overruns (at any of the 6 school buildings) to result in further reductions in scope to the Curtis Corner site. RGB architect Dave DeQuattro publicly stated that RGB backed into the \$85 million dollar cost. Construction costs have escalated during COVID. These rising costs and an inadequate cost overrun allowance place the entire project and the community at risk. An example, in order to fully renovate the existing bathrooms, they recently opted to remove the chemistry labs and CTE space. These projects are now proposed to be funded by reinvesting the PayGo disbursement. This change exemplifies the risks

involved in a project that has backed into the funds available. The application does not provide a priority list of which projects would be removed first as costs rise, so we are left with the impression that the district is not cognizant of these risks to the project.

- **Substandard Facilities Will Remain:** The proposed plan for the high school will leave much of the existing structure of the original [Curtis Corner Middle School building un-renovated](#). According to the 2017 Jacobs Report, Curtis Corner Middle School had the lowest FCI of our district's eight buildings. The building suffers from water seepage and mold issues. It is unclear if these health and safety concerns will be addressed by the planned scope of work and whether a reduction in scope, resulting from cost overruns, will place our children in further danger. Over \$30 million in identified repairs are not included in this Stage 2 application and will require future funding.
- **Contradictory Resolution to Declining Enrollment:** The application uses capacity calculations scaled to 85% of full capacity (section 2.1). When calculating utilization rates, the Jacobs Report recommends considering 100% of elementary capacity, 85% of middle school capacity, and 75% of high school capacity to account for the difference in how space is used at each level. With these recommendations in mind, the application significantly overestimates utilization at the elementary schools and underestimates utilization at the proposed new high school. The plan keeps all 4 elementary schools open and underutilized, provides unnecessary additions at Broad Rock Middle School, while potentially making the proposed high school at Curtis Corner too small. South Kingstown has experienced 20 years of declining enrollment, a trend that will continue based on birth rate analysis.
- **Destruction of the School Administration Building:** The School Administration building (built in 1990), presently in use and in great condition, will be demolished for a parking lot because there is no other suitable location on the parcel.
- **Absorption of Offline School Building:** The School Committee closed South Road Elementary School for consolidation purposes and redistricted in 2006. The facility was reverted back to the town. Now, it is proposed to be used as the location of the new School Administration Building. Half of the school will be demolished for the replacement of the tennis courts, currently part of the existing Curtis Corner Playfields that are being demolished in order to build the additions onto the Curtis Corner building.
- **Encroaches on Our Community Park:** South Kingstown has a population of 30,000+ and the Curtis Corner Playfields are used by the entire community. Built in two phases between 1997 and 2000, the facility offers multiple sports fields, a playground, a comfort station, five tennis courts, a disc golf course, beautiful stone walls, a bike path, and a hiking trail system.
- **Inadequate Parking Design and Plan:** The proposal for Curtis Corner has faculty and students utilizing every available parking space and [fails to provide any parking](#) for the community who will be using the park.
- **Flawed Traffic Study:** Beta Engineering's traffic impact study was conducted during a time when the University of Rhode Island was not in session (limiting college student traffic) and without regard to future planned developments, including 45 units to the east of Curtis Corner, some of which have since been built.
- **Absence of Identified Operational Savings:** District leadership refuses to take the obvious step of closing an elementary school despite consistent declining enrollment. Given the 3% maintenance mandate and significant debt service payments, the town will be unable to continue to support yearly property tax transfer increases as has become customary to support the school budget. Additionally, the current plan will leave many unfinished capital needs. The lack of operational savings will make it difficult to prioritize both ongoing capital projects and quality educational programming. The tax implications for the community leave our citizens strapped with maximum debt for the next 20 years, leaving little to no room for much-needed improvements to other town assets and a tax burden that will be unbearable for many. In September 2020, the Town Council voted against sending the application to RIDE in part because of a lack of identified operational savings. Four months later, these concerns have still not been addressed.
- **COVID-19:** We are in the middle of a pandemic that is likely to become an endemic disease for decades. Much like post 9/11, we do not know what our schools will need to look like to meet these challenges.
- **Realities vs. Promises:** Suggested changes based on concerns from teachers, parents, students, and community members during Stage 3 are unlikely to be realized given the limitations of the location and the lack of any funding flexibility. Stage 2 locks the community into the abandonment of the high school located at Columbia Street and the discarding of the historically significant and [deed-restricted Hazard School](#), (Oct

[4, 2010 letter to RIDE from RI Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission](#)), no matter what problems are uncovered at the Curtis Corner site.

- **Lack of Unanimous Governing Official Support:** A project with a scope as large as this, which will affect the infrastructure of our town and the education of our current and future students should be met with unanimous support from our governing officials. The school building committee voted 7-4 to pass the project to the school committee. The [school committee voted](#) 3-2-2 to pass the project to the Town Council. Although this is considered a passing motion by Robert's Rules standards, RIDE states a majority of the school committee voting in favor as a requirement (**3 out of 7 members voting yes is not a majority of the school committee.**) The [Town Council voted](#) 4-1 to submit the project to RIDE.
- **Unfunded Athletic Campus:** One of the main selling points to the community for this project has been the campus setting. In addition to the aforementioned concerns about the park, over [\\$1.5 million in necessary field enhancements](#) will remain incomplete without an identified funding source.
- **Additional Construction Costs Ineligible for Reimbursement:** In addition to the ineligible athletic field costs, the plan identifies another \$1.8 million in ineligible costs: sewer connection (RIDE emphasizes proximity to such connections as desirable, yet with the proposed high school site new connections will be required), elementary school FFE, and school administration renovation.

Given the serious and multitude of concerns listed above, we hope you agree that this plan is not in the best interest of the students of the South Kingstown School District and we ask that you reject this application.

We support our schools and agree that much needs to be done to improve our facilities. We believe the most prudent course of action is to reset, engage the community, and build a plan that provides our students with an educational vision for a post-COVID world, while maintaining the financial flexibility we need to thrive as both a town and a district. We hope that we can continue to count on the building authority to support our efforts to craft a viable path forward.

Thank you,

The Citizens of South Kingstown