

March 18, 2020

Commissioner Angélica Infante-Green
Rhode Island Department of Education
255 Westminister Street
Providence, RI 02903

VIA EMAIL

Dear Commissioner Infante-Green:

We realize that you and all school districts across the state are grappling with an unprecedented modern crisis with the COVID-19 pandemic and the decision to shut down schools for the immediate future. In that regard, we are writing with a very specific request in response to your mandate that school districts provide you a plan to ensure continuity of learning in the event – now realized – that schools are closed for an extended period of time. Our request is a simple one: If you have not already considered doing so, **we ask that you post on RIDE's website a copy of every school district's plan.**

This act of transparency will serve two very important purposes. First, it will give officials in school districts the opportunity to see what other districts are doing, and allow for the sharing of useful ideas among administrators and teachers. But just as importantly from the community's perspective, this will also give parents and advocates an opportunity to see and compare how this mode of instruction is being offered locally and across the state in order to make sure that the rights of all students are being protected.

Although the initial two-page guidance you sent to school districts on March 12th did not specifically mention this, we know you agree with the need to ensure that vulnerable student populations are taken into consideration in any out-of-school instruction program. For example, your most recent field memo pointed to U.S. DOE guidance about this crisis which explicitly noted that, during school closures, students with disabilities are entitled to the same education as other students and, to the extent feasible, the same provision of special education services that they would otherwise be entitled to.

In addition to those with disabilities, there are at least two other key student populations that you have recognized must be considered and accommodated by school districts in crafting these remote instruction plans: English Language learners and students who may not have access to a computer or Internet service to engage in virtual learning. Based on your comments at today's news conference with the Governor, we know that you will keep these populations in mind when considering the acceptability of school district plans, and we are appreciative of that.

This is a very difficult situation for everybody, and we understand that schools are doing their best to balance community needs with public health concerns. Nonetheless, it remains essential that, in drafting and implementing remote instruction plans, they prioritize supporting their most high-need students and families. This unique crisis cannot be allowed to serve as a basis for widening the gaps that already exist for those students who are most often left behind. **By publicly posting every school district plan in one place, you can help ensure that everybody will be working together to accomplish the important goal of equity in education during this emergency.**

We thank you in advance for considering this request. For ease of communication, any responses can be sent to Steven Brown at the ACLU of Rhode Island and Veronika Kot at R.I. Legal Services and they will be shared with the rest of the signatories.

Sincerely,

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Ramona Santos
Parents Leading for Educational Equity (PLEE)

Zack Mezera, Executive Director
Providence Student Union

Jennifer Wood, Executive Director
Rhode Island Center for Justice

Jane Yedlin, Ed.D.
TESOL Program at RIC College

cc: The Hon. Gina Raimondo