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Rep. Jason Rojas  
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Sen. Paul Formica  
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Rep. Christopher Davis  
Ranking Member, Committee on  
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Rep. Toni Walker  
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Sen. Gayle Slossberg  
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Rep. Melissa H. Ziobron  
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Sen. Toni Boucher  
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Sen. John Fonfara  
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Rep. Andy Fleischmann  
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Sen. L. Scott Frantz  
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Rep. Gail Lavielle  
Ranking Member, Education Committee  
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## **RE: School Building Project Priority List Comments and Recommendations**

Dear Members of the School Construction Committee:

At a fiscally challenging time in Connecticut's history, the Office of School Construction Grants and Review within DAS is working to ensure the delivery of safe, secure, healthy and educationally adequate school facilities that are sustainable and fiscally sound. Our goals are to ensure right-sized schools, control costs, evaluate programmatic needs within the project scope, and protect taxpayer investments with industry best practices. To that end, we have revised our internal review standards to better serve our obligation to ensure that school construction is cost effective and is the best method for meeting vital programmatic needs. As you are aware, concerns have been raised about two specific Priority List projects included in the December 15, 2016 report and additional information has emerged which we take seriously. In reviewing this information, I have found cause to question the following two projects. Therefore, I offer the following comments:

### Grant - New Lebanon School

In 2014, the former Commissioner of Education granted New Lebanon "diversity status," in an attempt to resolve enrollment issues among Greenwich's elementary schools. The diversity formula is not a formula that works in every district and does not achieve the necessary results for every community. The diversity designation looks to whether the school is in balance when school opens in the fall. The date is arbitrary. The formula tries to compare the applicant school with other schools of that type in the district. It does not, however, look at overall enrollment numbers in the district – a key factor in this time of declining enrollments. The potential for consolidation is, in fact, a condition for review in determining whether or not programmatic needs can be met in a more reasonable and cost effective manner than construction. Based upon my review of the enrollment changes affecting not only the Grant School, but all of the elementary schools in the district (excluding parochial and other private schools), I recommend removing this project from the list and working with Greenwich and the State Department of Education to determine their actual programmatic needs and to determine more cost effective means to meet those needs.

### Region 12 - Shepaug Valley Regional Agriscience Stem Academy (Vo-Ag) Grant

The district has submitted an application for a new school to support a new Vo-Ag program. When the district submitted this application last year, it was reviewed by DAS/OSCG&R which determined that it was not appropriate to proceed because of multiple issues from square footage to enrollment. The school was not right-sized and shovel-ready within the statutory requirement of 2 years. It was decided to postpone the project. During the past year, the district has reevaluated the project and presented significant cost savings by reducing overall project costs, enrollment, and square footage.

Notwithstanding these revisions, several state offices, including but not limited to, the Office of Policy and Management, the Department of Administrative Services, and the State Department of Education have received letters, phone calls, and emails over the last sixteen months from various concerned citizens of Region 12 over this particular project. The information proffered ranged from disputes about enrollment numbers to legitimate concern from residents that the project is not needed.

We are aware that some residents do support the project; the region voted and those in support of the program prevailed. However, although we were able to reduce new building construction and make use of existing space, the question remains as to whether or not the programmatic needs can be better addressed in existing structures. Moreover although enrollment figures have been reduced to a more practical figure, the new enrollment projections cannot be validated as this is a new program in a time of declining enrollments in many parts of the State. There is particular concern because the district can only account for the number of students that their district would bring and it cannot substantiate the assumptions it has made about what other districts will or will not do. We also continue to have concerns about the square foot costs. I recommend that this project be removed from the Priority List at this time to allow us to more fully explore the possibility of regional alternatives.

Sincerely,



Melody A. Currey  
Commissioner

MAC/EC/dja

cc: Members of the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee  
Members of the Appropriations Committee  
Members of the Education Committee