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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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June 26, 2007

SUSAN A. GENDRON
COMMISSIONER

Mary Jo O'Connor
Superintendent
Portland Public Schools
196 Allen Avenue
Portland, ME 04103

Dear Superintendent O'Connor:

At the meeting on June 12, 2007, attended by Portland school officials, two architects from WBRC Architects and Engineers, and two members of the Major Capital School Facilities Team, a number of options were reviewed relating to a school construction project resulting from the Nathan Clifford School application and subsequent placement on the approved projects list. The Department followed that meeting with a careful review of the New vs. Renovation Study and an analysis of various options to address the Nathan Clifford School needs.

In its discussion of the options open to Portland, the School Facilities Team considered the possible renovation of the Nathan Clifford School. Based upon the findings of the New vs. Renovation Study, the School Facilities Team finds that it cannot support a renovation of the school. The decision to oppose that option is based upon the architects' recommendations and the findings of the study including the size of the site, the inability to meet current codes in the multistory building, and the \$3.2 million estimated added cost of renovation over new construction. There are continuing great concerns for the safety of children in the Nathan Clifford School, and I encourage Portland to establish a specific direction and goal as quickly as possible.

The time frame for development of a concept for the Clifford School is now critical. The waiver granted to Portland by the State Board of Education extends the deadline for concept approval to March, 2008. The waiver granted to Portland by the State Board of Education extends the deadline for concept approval to March, 2008. This means that the concept plan needs to go before the Board's Construction Committee prior to the Board's March meeting which is scheduled for March 12, 2008.

The deadline is not an arbitrary one, but rather, is tied to the bonding schedule now in place. Continuing delay in the development of a concept for Clifford threatens Portland's ability to obtain bonding for the Clifford School in the current construction cycle. With capital construction funds so limited and so many schools in need of projects, the Department of Education must assure full utilization of all available bonding capacity and opportunities.