



MINUTES OF THE MEETING
August 29, 2024

COUNCIL ON ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

Chair DiCenso welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education. She declared a quorum present and called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

Present: Mary Barden, Amy Beretta, Colleen Callahan, Karen Davis, Patti DiCenso, Michael Grey, Robert Mitchell

1. ACCEPTANCE OF THE AGENDA

On a motion duly made by Michael Grey and seconded by Colleen Callahan, it was,

VOTED: That the Rhode Island Council on Elementary and Secondary education accepts the agenda for the August 29, 2024, meeting

Vote: 7 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative as follows:

YEAS: Mary Barden, Amy Beretta, Colleen Callahan, Karen Davis, Patti DiCenso, Michael Grey, Robert Mitchell

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

2. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

On a motion duly made by Colleen Callahan and seconded by Michael Grey, it was,

VOTED: That the Rhode Island Council on Elementary and Secondary Education approves the minutes of the July 30, 2024, meeting

Vote: 6 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative as follows:

YEAS: Mary Barden, Colleen Callahan, Karen Davis, Patti DiCenso, Michael Grey, Robert Mitchell

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

RECUSAL: Amy Beretta

3. COMMISSIONER'S REPORT

Commissioner Infante-Green greeted everyone and expressed her joy as the new year commenced. She informed everyone that there would be an update on Providence Public Schools, but she would first provide updates from RIDE. She began by highlighting that attendance remains a top priority for the agency and expressed her intention to build upon the achievements of the previous year. She noted that earlier this month, the agency launched the #AttendanceMattersRI campaign for the upcoming school year. It was reported that, despite ongoing challenges, Rhode Island has made notable progress in reducing chronic absenteeism. She expressed her gratitude to the RIDE data team for their efforts in developing advanced and unique data dashboards, which have enabled schools to identify attendance patterns and implement targeted interventions.

Next, she emphasized that addressing attendance is just the beginning, students also need to be actively engaged and supported. In alignment with this objective, RIDE recently announced \$5 million in funding for instructional coaching in math and English Language Arts, with 1\$ million allocated specifically for professional development. Following a competitive application process, 24 schools and districts have been awarded grants. This funding will support the hiring of 35 instructional coaches.

Next, she discussed the upcoming secondary regulations, which will be implemented for incoming freshmen. These regulations will prioritize work-based learning, ensuring that students graduate with proficiency in financial literacy, civics, computer science, and the arts. She reminded everyone that, prior to these regulations, some students were unable to apply to local colleges due to lack of world language credits, despite no fault of their own. RIDE is now working to open doors for these students and ensure they have access to all the resources necessary for their success.

She went on to mention that RIDE has also launched the website WELLInitiativeRI.org, a comprehensive resource designed to support educator wellness and foster the development of supportive, collaborative communities. This launch follows a \$3 million WELL Initiative grant program, which funded the creation and expansion of wellness spaces in schools across the state, along

with associated professional development. She added that in the last five years, the RIDE team has worked tirelessly to expand partnerships and secure more than \$50 million in federal funding for on-the-ground efforts around mental health.

Commissioner Infante-Green was also thrilled to announce the expansion of wellness spaces, as well as the development of new and renovated schools. Since 2019, RIDE has either completed or is working towards completing 50 new schools. She highlighted several projects currently under construction across the state and extended her gratitude to the council for their support in advancing these efforts.

Lastly, she mentioned that additional events are being held to assist families with filing out free and reduced-price meal applications. RIDE has been organizing numerous events at family-friendly locations, with dates and times posted on the RIDE website and social media channels. She emphasized that students are more likely to succeed academically and beyond when they have access to consistent, nutritious meals and encouraged all families to submit a Meal Benefit Application.

4. OPEN FORUM

No individuals addressed the Council, and 5 written statements were submitted.

5. DISCUSSION ITEMS

On a motion duly made by Michael Grey and seconded by Colleen Callahan, it was,

VOTED: That the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education Approves to continue Discussion Items 5a. through 5c. on the agenda at a future meeting of the Council.

Vote: 7 members voted in the affirmative,
0 member voted in the negative

YEAS: Mary Barden, Amy Beretta, Colleen Callahan, Karen Davis, Patti DiCenso, Michael Grey, Robert Mitchell

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

5d. Commissioner's Report and Recommendation on the Turnaround Status of the Providence Public School District pursuant to RI General Laws § 16-7.1-5.1 and the Regulations Governing Intervention and Support for Failing Schools, 200-RICR-20-05-06.

Commissioner Infante-Green began by announcing that RIDE would be presenting the findings from two independent third-party assessments, which evaluated the Providence Public Schools progress during the intervention and assessed the capacity and readiness of local authorities for a potential transition back to local control. Drawing from her own experience, she emphasized the transformative power of high-quality education, highlighting its ability to open doors and create life-changing opportunities. She called the Council's attention to the broken chairs in the Hope High School Auditorium as a symbol of the unfulfilled promises to PPSD. She also reminded the Council of the consequences when state intervention at the high school ended prematurely, leading to a reversal of the progress and improvements that had been made. She further reminded everyone that the intervention took place during a global crisis, yet steady and consistent progress was achieved. Despite the challenges, meaningful improvements have been made. She emphasized that this work must continue as a collaborative effort between RIDE, the city and the school board.

Brian Darrow went on to highlight that both reviews show signs of progress for the district. While there is still work to be done to reach ambitious goals, it's important to acknowledge progress when it happens. He expressed gratitude to every educator, administrator, staff member, family, and community member for their collective efforts, time, and dedication to improving the lives of students. He provided an overview of the presentation, which will include a brief recap of the statute and regulations, key finding from independent reports, and time set aside for discussion and questions. He also outlined the timeline for regulation development and implementation, spanning from September 2023 to August 2024. He noted that before any order under the Crowley Act concludes, the Commissioner must submit a report and recommendation to the Council, based on analysis of progress and capacity. This analysis will determine whether the LEA has made sufficient progress, according to predefined academic and other progress measures in the turnaround plan, and whether the LEA, school board, and municipal entity have the capacity and readiness to sustain progress if the LEA is returned to local control. He explained that, in line with state law and regulations, the Commissioner's recommendation to the Council will align with one of the following: renewal of the existing turnaround plan, creation of a new turnaround plan, or exiting turnaround status and beginning the return to local control. RIDE engaged two highly qualified organizations to conduct expert, third-party independent evaluations of progress and capacity to inform the Commissioner's recommendation on PPSD's intervention status. He thoroughly explained the key questions and findings from both Harvard's Graduate School of Education's Center for Education Policy Research and SchoolWorks, focusing on LEA progress, LEA capacity, school board capacity, and municipal capacity. Finally, he provided a brief recap of the recommendation options and key considerations.

6. Action Items

6a. Commissioner's Report and Recommendation on the Turnaround Status of the Providence Public School District pursuant to RI General Laws § 16-7.1-5.1 and the Regulations Governing Intervention and Support for Failing Schools, 200-RICR-20-05-6. Per 200-RICR-20-05-6, the Commissioner's recommendation shall align to one of the following three options:

- 1. Renew the existing turnaround plan, with potential amendments informed by the above analysis;**
- 2. Create a new turnaround plan; or;**
- 3. Exit the LEA from turnaround status and return control over the LEA to the LEA's respective local school committee or board.**

RECOMMENDATION: THAT, the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education approves the Commissioner's recommendation to renew the state intervention in the Providence Public School District pursuant to RI General Laws § 16-7.1-5.1 and the Regulations Governing Intervention and Support for Failing Schools, 200-RICR-20-05-6, subject to the following conditions:

- That the state intervention and PPSD's Turnaround Action Plan be extended for three (3) years, through October 15th, 2027;**
- That the Commissioner and PPSD Superintendent be authorized to amend the existing Turnaround Action Plan during this extension; and,**
- That the Commissioner perform all legally-mandated reviews and recommendations during this extended period and at any point may, at the Commissioner's discretion, recommend to the Council that PPSD exits turnaround status and returns to local control.**

On a motion duly made by Michael Grey and seconded by Amy Beretta, it was,

VOTED: That the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education approves the Commissioner's recommendation.

Discussion

Member Callahan made a motion to amend the recommendation which was seconded by Member Barden. After discussion, motions were withdrawn.

On a motion duly made by Amy Beretta and seconded by Karen Davis, it was,

VOTED: THAT, the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education approves the Commissioner’s recommendation to renew the state intervention in the Providence Public School District pursuant to RI General Laws § 16-7.1-5.1 and the Regulations Governing Intervention and Support for Failing Schools, 200-RICR-20-05-6, subject to the following conditions:

- **That the state intervention and PPSD’s Turnaround Action Plan be extended for three (3) years, through October 15th, 2027;**
- **That the Commissioner and PPSD Superintendent be authorized to amend the existing Turnaround Action Plan during this extension; and,**
- **That the Commissioner perform all legally-mandated reviews and recommendations during this extended period and at any point may, at the Commissioner’s discretion, recommend to the Council that PPSD exits turnaround status and returns to local control.**

Vote: 7 members voted in the affirmative,

0 member voted in the negative

YEAS: Mary Barden, Amy Beretta, Colleen Callahan, Karen Davis,
Patti DiCenso, Michael Grey, Robert Mitchell

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

9. ADJOURNMENT:

On a motion duly made by Amy Beretta and seconded by Michael Grey it was,

VOTED: That the meeting of the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education adjourns

Vote: 7 members voted in the affirmative,

0 member voted in the negative

YEAS: Mary Barden, Amy Beretta, Colleen Callahan, Karen Davis,
Patti DiCenso, Michael Grey, Robert Mitchell

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

The meeting was adjourned at 6:32 p.m.