



Angélica Infante-Green
Commissioner

State of Rhode Island
DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION
Shepard Building
255 Westminister Street
Providence, Rhode Island 02903-3400

February 18, 2025

Re: Next Steps for the PPSD Intervention

Dear Mayor Smiley, Council President Miller, and Superintendent Montañez:

The objective of this letter is to outline next steps for the Providence Public School District (PPSD) intervention and to communicate the path toward local control that, if met, could lead to an earlier return of PPSD to local control on June 30, 2026.

We have just installed a new Providence School Board that will help lead and support the transition to local control. This provides us an opportunity to realign and refocus our collective efforts to keep Providence Public Schools moving forward. Recently, I joined Governor Dan McKee to speak directly to our community about our hopes for the new Board and their focus on a path toward return to local control. Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) and PPSD leadership are eager to partner with this new School Board to facilitate a strategic and thoughtful return to local control so that when the return does happen, the City, and the School Board, can ensure State intervention is never again needed. Our priority is to sustain and build on the progress achieved over the last few years with the support of the State.

The Rhode Island Council on Elementary and Secondary Education voted unanimously in favor of my recommendation as Commissioner to extend PPSD's Turnaround status and the Turnaround Action Plan (TAP) for up to three years at their August 29, 2024, meeting. During the public hearing, members of the Council expressed their concerns that while progress in PPSD was evident, there were clear areas of uncertainty in the preparedness and capacity of local stakeholders. A Commissioner recommendation to the Council that PPSD exits Turnaround status and returns to local control is subject to a majority vote by the Council, pursuant to the *Regulations Governing the Intervention and Support for Failing Schools* (200-RICR-20-05-6). I do believe we should accelerate discussions of a return of PPSD to local control, but we need to do so in a responsible and strategic manner. The City's recently released community survey also indicates that there is broad support for a planned out transition process.

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As I have previously shared, all stakeholders have work to do and must commit to doing our part to ensure a successful transition that supports the long-term success of our children. It is a serious concern to me that the City has proposed a return for June 2025 but has yet, to this date, to develop and publish a transition plan upon which the community has had ample time to review, vet, and provide feedback to consider. Moreover, [RIDE continues to communicate the need to fully produce a series of deliverables](#) that must be completed to facilitate a return to local control, and many of those deliverables are not yet done.

Given this, it is not feasible to return PPSD to local control by June 30, 2025. However, it is possible and responsible to return PPSD to local control on or around June 30, 2026, **if** the City meets a series of benchmarks and deliverables that will put it on a path toward a successful return. We have seen examples—locally and nationally—of organizations improving with state assistance and intervention only to take steps back upon return to local control because appropriate return conditions were not established. We have a responsibility and obligation to set the conditions for successful return to local control that preserves progress and continues to build on the established foundation, and I am eager to work with the new Providence School Board to set us on this path.

I expect that the Collaborative Stakeholder Working Group, which includes leadership from RIDE, PPSD, School Board, Mayor's Office, and City Council will work to continue to address conditions related to: Governance, Finances, Facilities, State Legislation, and a comprehensive, detailed transition plan that affords opportunities for a robust community engagement and feedback cycle.

I have organized specific actions to help guide the City over the next 18 months so that their work with the School Board, RIDE, and PPSD is productive and impactful toward the goal of successfully returning PPSD to local control. I am committed to ensuring high levels of communication between senior RIDE officials, School Board, and City of Providence officials so all stakeholders have consistent feedback on status. I have also asked Drew Echelson, Deputy Commissioner for System Transformation, to convene the Collaborative Stakeholder Working Group so that we have a formal structure alongside the new Providence School Board and City and State leaders to ensure appropriate progress toward these benchmarks in service of a successful and earlier return to local control.

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Governance

1. In partnership with RIDE, the City needs to take leadership of developing and empowering a strong Providence School Board who is an effective and productive governance partner with the Superintendent and PPSD leadership:
 - The Providence School Board needs to take a vote to commit two years of training and support by a Students Outcomes Focused Governance (SOFG) coach and will follow through on all aspects of a SOFG work plan the Board finalizes.
 - The Providence School Board needs to engage with their community—including the Parent Advisory Council (PAC) and the District-Wide Advisory Council (DWAC) to learn more about the vision and values of the community. The Board will also learn more about the development of and consider the Turnaround Action Plan (TAP) in order to adopt a set of Board goals and guardrails that match their learning from the community and the work that has been started.
 - By fall 2025, the Providence School Board needs to consistently spend 50% or more of their meeting time discussing and monitoring progress toward their goals in partnership with the Superintendent and the Superintendent's team.

2. The City needs to work with the Board to select a President and leadership team who has and can consistently advocate for a student outcomes focused governance model and has:
 - Demonstrated understanding of the distinction between Board work and Superintendent work;
 - Demonstrated ability to maintain the focus of a meeting;
 - Demonstrated ability to remain calm during conflicts or crisis;
 - Demonstrated a student outcomes focus rather than an adult inputs focus;
 - Demonstrated interest in advocating for the resources students deserve and are entitled to under Crowley Act; and
 - Demonstrated interest in partnering with RIDE, PPSD leadership and community to help facilitate return to local control.

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Finances

1. The City needs to fully honor, irrespective of return date, the settlement agreement between City of Providence and PPSD/RIDE including the FY 27 commitment to increase local contribution to PPSD by the same percentage as the total increase of state aid.
2. The City needs to provide further details and make public the minimum local contribution they will intend to provide to PPSD through FY 30 while consistently advocating for local resources consistent with the needs of the school system. The City will make this information available to RIDE and PPSD leadership by the end of September 2025 and schedule meetings to discuss with RIDE and PPSD leadership.
3. The City needs to partner with PPSD to clearly delineate roles and responsibilities for all operational services between City and PPSD and ensure that performance-based contracting for operational and facilities will continue to be effectively maintained.

Facilities

1. The City needs to work to get all school construction projects currently in Phase 2 and Phase 3 **back on track**¹ and ensure they remain on track to completion.

¹ Based on construction schedules provided by the City to RIDE all Phase 2 and Phase 3 projects are delayed by one to two years. This is concerning for many reasons, one of which is that material escalation averages 6% per year (Currie & Brown, 2024), meaning the City of Providence will end up paying more to get less without significant action. Over the last three months the Spaziano Middle School project timeline has slid back from an estimated September 2025 completion to March 2026 completion. The Kizirian and Fogarty projects are higher risk, as any delays will have a ripple effect in swing space availability, which if not immediately corrected, will also delay the Phase 4 projects. For context, 6% of remaining bond funded projects is approximately \$47 million per year. Any cost increases associated with delaying projects are not eligible for reimbursement and will be borne 100% by the City of Providence. Depending on the length of a delay, it could result in removing scope or square footage from the projects, which could have a long lasting impact on students and taxpayers. The City ***must*** prioritize keeping all projects on schedule.

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2. The City needs to make public, in writing, their commitment to achieving the goal to which we've mutually agreed: By 2030 the City will deliver access to new or like new buildings for 100% of PPSD students. Over the next year and beyond, the City will keep themselves on target to deliver on this promise to the children and families of PPSD.
3. The City needs to clearly delineate roles and responsibilities for all operational services between City and PPSD and ensure that performance-based contracting for operational and facilities will be effectively maintained.
4. The City needs to make public its commitment to performance-based outcomes for all PPSD contracts including custodial services for PPSD schools.

State Legislation

1. The City's intergovernmental relations team needs to closely partner with RIDE and PPSD on a legislative agenda to influence amendments to state law to remove legislative barriers to improving outcomes and opportunities for Providence's children.

Transition Plan

1. The Mayor and his team, will partner with City Council, RIDE and PPSD leadership and engage the voices of the community to publish a transition plan that answers all of the following questions among others:
 - What is the Mayor's and School Board's vision for a Pre-K-12 education in PPSD?
 - What is the process the Mayor will use to appoint a PreK-12 education advisor who has the experience and expertise on education policy to help guide the Mayor and the Mayor's team once the transition happens.

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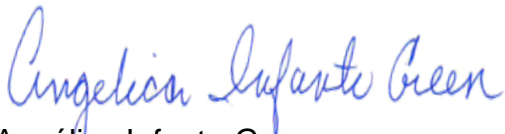
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- How will this individual ensure the Superintendent is receiving support as it relates to any potential City barriers they face?
- How will the Mayor and the Mayor's team prioritize the needs of Multilingual Learners and Differently-Abled students?

As we prepare to enter the next phase of the PPSD intervention, it is my hope that we can continue to come together to put the needs and priorities of our children first. Through our collective commitment and work, I know that we can deliver on the promise of providing all Providence children with an excellent education. I look forward to continuing to collaborate to ensure PPSD continues to make strides.

In partnership,



Angélica Infante-Green
Commissioner of Education

AIG/kr

cc: Patricia DiCenso, Chair, RI Council on Elementary and Secondary Education
Michael Grey, Chair, RI Board of Education
Members, Providence School Board