

Building on Hope

One-Year Report on the Providence Public Schools' Transformation



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RIDE

Rhode Island
Department
of Education

Providence
Schools

Building on Hope

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Dear Providence Community,

On behalf of the teams at the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) and Providence Public School District (PPSD), we express our profound gratitude for the community's faith and partnership in our work to serve the students and families of Providence.

Over the past year, we have collectively refused to accept the decades of low expectations for our students, and instead set forth a vision of excellence we know our students can achieve. We have made a concerted effort to make changes that both respond directly to community demand and are grounded in what we know will improve student outcomes. This report outlines much of that work.

We know that investments in curriculum, technology, professional staff, and facilities are critical building blocks to lasting change. But the catalyst for that change is constantly raising

expectations for all who have a stake in the Providence schools. Our students can do much more. Our teachers can do much more. Our school leaders can do much more. Together, we all can – and must – do more to deliver on the promise to our community and our students.

From the day we began this work – November 1, 2019 – we have challenged ourselves, our teams, and our city and state to do more for our kids,

We have made a concerted effort to make changes that both respond directly to community demand and are grounded in what we know will improve student outcomes.





Throughout this challenging year, our heroes have been the Providence students, their families, our teachers, teacher assistants, and all our supporters in the community.

so that they can succeed and we can offer an example for the entire nation to follow. We look forward to a continued collaboration as PPSD transforms into a model urban school district with high expectations for all, modern school buildings, classrooms equipped with world-class learning tools, well-prepared teachers, and families fully engaged in their children's learning.

Throughout this challenging year, our heroes have been the Providence students, their families, our teachers, teacher assistants, and all our supporters in the community. The community's role, including the dedicated work of the Parent Advisory Council (PAC) and our Community Design Team (CDT) members, has been and will remain essential to getting this work off the ground and building momentum.

In 2020, we have proven that we can do anything by working together. We look forward to doing even more in the years to come.

With utmost respect,

Angélica Infante-Green
Commissioner of Education

Harrison Peters
Superintendent

Responding to the Community & Delivering for Students

It has been a little over one year since RIDE, with the support of Governor Gina Raimondo and Providence Mayor Jorge Elorza, took unprecedented action by assuming the management of PPSD. Taking on all the challenges of the broken system in Providence was a major undertaking on its own, but COVID-19's rapid emergence made the last nine months historically challenging. We produced this report to capture how much of the groundwork has been done and how much work is already planned for the coming year. As we make changes, it is critical that we lay a strong foundation so that these changes are long lasting.

The Johns Hopkins report demanded a drastic response. In June 2019, a team of local and national education experts, led by the Johns Hopkins Institute for Education Policy, issued an [in-depth report on the state of Providence's public schools](#). The report concluded that top-to-bottom, PPSD was a broken system, desperately in need of dramatic, across-the-board reform. Its major findings cut to the heart of the matter: low expectations were pervasive in the city's schools; the system was failing students, families, and the community; and there was a powerful desire for immediate, positive, and long-lasting change.

This stark reality was reflected in student performance results. Based on 2019 state assessments, only 12 percent of Providence students were performing at or above grade level in Math and 17 percent in English Language Arts (ELA). This meant that 88 percent of students were below grade level in Math and 83 percent in ELA, or that roughly one out of every six students was able to



FROM THE JOHNS HOPKINS REPORT

“There is an exceptionally low bar for instruction and low expectations for students. Very little visible student learning was going on in the majority of classrooms and schools we visited – most especially in the middle and high schools. Multiple stakeholders emphasized that the state, district, and business community have very low expectations for student learning. Many district team members and community partners broke down in tears when describing this reality, which classroom observations verified.”

read or do math on grade level. Heartbreakingly, these numbers were even worse for differently abled students and multilingual learners (MLLs). Only 2 percent of differently abled students were proficient in Math and 4 percent in ELA. Among MLLs, just 4 percent were proficient in Math and only 5 percent in ELA. In some schools, performance results were so low they could not be publicly reported. High school performance results told a similar story of students fundamentally not being prepared for college and careers after they graduated high school.

One year later, the transformation of PPSD is well underway. While it will take time to reverse decades of neglect and failure to serve the students and community, we made great strides this first year in building a solid foundation

From unifying PPSD with top-notch Math and ELA curriculum options, to increasing professional development, to improving support for MLLs, we are setting high expectations and transforming the learning environment in PPSD.



for lasting change. We have made a series of substantive, foundational changes that will improve teaching and learning in all our schools.

Education Commissioner Infante-Green and the RIDE staff engaged in extensive community engagement activities to dive below the surface of the report's findings and prepare to take action. After a series of public forums and a rising tide of community demand to raise expectations and enact real change, the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education voted unanimously to grant RIDE the authority to intervene in the management of the Providence schools, starting on November 1, 2019. Further [financial analysis by EY](#) added more detail on how the budgetary priorities of PPSD were out of step with the needs of the community and how layers of bureaucracy were stifling teacher and student success.

From unifying PPSD with top-notch Math and ELA curriculum options, to increasing professional development, to improving support for MLLs, we are setting high expectations and transforming the learning environment in PPSD. We worked with more than 100 teachers to help select the curriculum options, demonstrating the deep and ongoing commitment to work with educators every step of the way. More changes are on the way, including major investments in building new learning spaces and reimagining older buildings – work that we are doing in collaboration with the City of Providence.

We continue to put families and the community at the center of all we do.

From the first day of our work in Providence, we invited the community to help us shape the transformation plan. “Turning Hope Into Results” is our Turnaround Action Plan (TAP), guiding our efforts on a daily basis – and community voice is at the heart of it. Meanwhile, we continue to make changes to strengthen connections between schools and the families they serve, including requiring parent-teacher conferences across the district.

We are persevering through a global pandemic. When COVID-19 hit our schools (less than one month after Superintendent Peters

assumed his role), we made sure each student had the tools and connectivity they needed to keep learning. We are working tirelessly to ensure our students can learn safely in their classrooms – the best place for them – and we are improving distance learning for students who rely on it. We are committed to continuous improvement, and we are learning every day how to do it better.

The report begins with a timeline of actions taken over the year, an overview of how we began to fundamentally change the district’s organization to be more responsive to the needs of schools and students, and the story of how PPSD responded to the COVID-19 pandemic. Following that, we have

MAJOR THEME FROM SUMMER 2019	YEAR 1 GOAL FOR TRANSFORMING PPSD
1 Low level of academic instruction and expectations	Excellence in Academic Instruction and High Expectations for All Students Will Be the Norm
2 Parents feel powerless	Parents and Families Will Be Supported, Empowered, and Engaged
3 Teachers and staff are demoralized and disenfranchised	Teachers and Staff Will Be Engaged, Energized, Motivated, and Invested in Student Learning
4 Principals and school leaders have no authority	Principals and School Leaders Will Be Autonomous and Empowered to Lead
5 Schools are crumbling across the city	School Buildings Will Be Modernized and Updated
6 Poor school culture and safety concerns	All Schools Will Be Safe, Modern, and Have a Respectful and Positive School Culture
7 System governance gets in the way of student outcomes	Our Central Office Will Be Effective, Efficient, and Responsive

organized our work into seven sections that align with the major themes of the 2019 Johns Hopkins report and subsequent community engagement sessions.

Transforming those findings into goals, each section contains a list of major actions taken to make progress toward that goal.

Each goal details the significant actions we have taken over the last year towards meeting it. Our aim is to capture the breadth and depth of our work, both to share with our community and to give

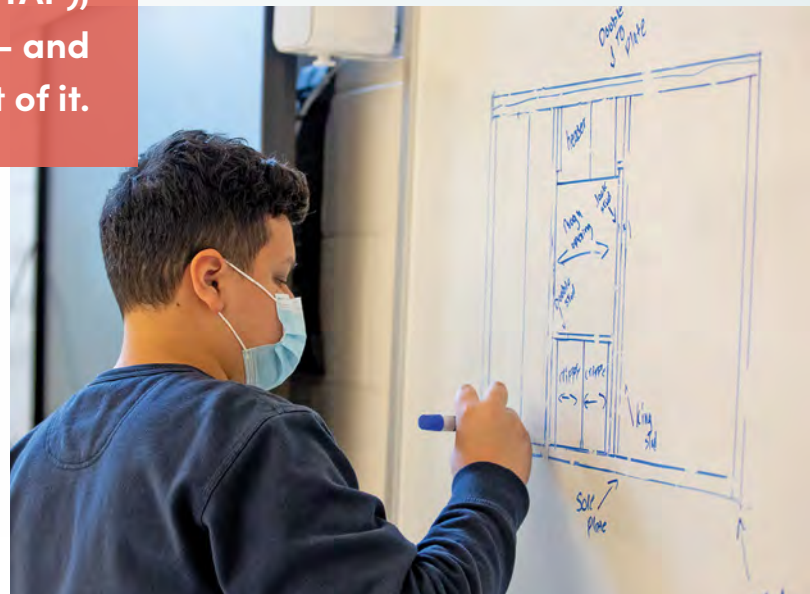
From the first day of our work in Providence, we invited the community to help us shape the transformation plan. “Turning Hope Into Results” is our Turnaround Action Plan (TAP), guiding our efforts on a daily basis – and community voice is at the heart of it.

others who may embark on such an undertaking a starting place for their efforts. Each goal also contains an “Inside Story,” which describes the roots and impact of one major initiative, such as how PPSD launched its effort to implement consistent, high-quality curriculum across the entire district.

We are moving forward. Each section also includes a preview of key upcoming initiatives that will propel change in the coming years. These touch on nearly every aspect of teaching and learning in the district, including a range of activities related to reimagining high school; the new requirement for regular parent-teacher conferences; a strengthened and aligned capital improvement

plan; ongoing work to realign the budget process and move resources closer to the student level; and publicly reporting on all our work to achieve the goals of the TAP.

Our next major goal is to complete a new employment agreement with our teachers, one that will be a catalyst for lasting change. The new contract will be thoroughly student-centered, treat educators like true professionals, empower school leaders to make changes that help students, and give the district tools to recruit the best teachers possible, including more teachers of color. While we remain at the negotiating table with union leaders, *tweaking the status quo is not an option.*



While we have gotten off to a strong start, we know that we have just begun our long journey together. We invite the community to remain engaged with us as we pursue the ambitious goals of the TAP over the coming years. ★

Delivering for Students and the Community

To fix a broken system, you have to start from within. For PPSD, that also meant starting at the top, by fundamentally transforming its Central Office into one that supports schools and the students they serve. Critics of the Central Office in the Johns Hopkins report and community forums kept using the same word: disconnected.

New mandates and requirements were disconnected from principals who already felt unsupported, overwhelmed, and burdened with mandates. Instructional strategies set at the Central Office were disconnected from approaches to support educators with implementation.

Over the course of the past year, both Commissioner Infante-Green and Superintendent Peters made several moves to revamp the Central Office at the heart of a “New PPSD,” one that could lead and support the city schools to become the high-performing system its students and families deserve.

Communications and supports were disconnected from the lived realities of students and families. And all of the various efforts handed down from Central Office? They were routinely disconnected from one another.

A modern, engaged Central Office that puts students and families first, holds schools accountable for high standards, and provides schools with needed support, is the heart and soul of every high-performing school system. Over the course of the past year, both Commissioner Infante-Green and Superintendent Peters made several moves to revamp the Central Office at the heart of a “New PPSD,” one that could lead and support the city schools to become the high-performing system its students and families deserve.



BUILDING THE TURNAROUND TEAM, PRIORITIZING FAMILIES AND EQUITY

In January 2020, after a comprehensive national search, Commissioner Infante-Green introduced Harrison Peters to serve as Providence's State Turnaround Superintendent. With Superintendent Peters, Providence found a leader with significant experience in turning around urban school systems. Previously, as Deputy Superintendent-Chief of Schools for Hillsborough County Schools in Florida, Peters was responsible for the day-to-day operations of the district's 250 schools that served approximately 220,000 students.

Transforming PPSD, however, is not a job for just one or two individuals; it requires a whole-team approach. With Superintendent Peters, Commissioner Infante-Green also announced new senior roles that would put the community and equity at the front and center of transformation efforts: Nick Figueroa as Chief of Family and Community Engagement and Dr. Barbara Mullen as Chief Equity Officer.

As part of the new organizational chart, students and families are at the top – reinforcing that the district serves them above all else. Through the elevated Office of Family and Community Engagement, PPSD sought to fundamentally reshape how PPSD interacted and provided services to families across the system. This team shifted its approach to be more of a rapid response and support team that immediately addressed issues families experienced with improved overall customer service.

These new leaders were in addition to the team that Commissioner Infante-Green had already started building, which had included a new PPSD Chief of Staff and Chief Operating Officer. These team members focused on revamping PPSD's internal operating and financial systems, based on key findings from a [financial analysis conducted by Ernst & Young](#) (EY). This analysis painted a picture of a district where the status quo had kept investments and systems from directly addressing student needs – a critical failing. In response, the district's antiquated human resources office, was quickly reorganized and oriented on student outcomes, among other actions.

From his first day in late February 2020, Superintendent Peters officially started engaging with educators, leaders, student, and families, while constantly gathering feedback to transform PPSD into a school system that serves them and the entire community.

Even before Peters joined the team, PPSD was able to successfully and smoothly open the 2019-20 school year, thanks in large part to the steadfast and experienced leadership of Interim Superintendents Dr. Frances Gallo and Dorothy Smith.

TRANSFORMING INTO A NEW PPSD (DURING A CRISIS)

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into a school system that serves them and the entire community.

Less than one month into the job, the COVID-19 pandemic hit Rhode Island, resulting in a rapid shift to virtual learning. Despite these major challenges, Superintendent Peters maintained his focus on turnaround efforts. In the spring of 2020, he managed to visit every school in a three-week period, collaborate and meet with school-based and Central Office staff, and conduct a careful study of the district.

Meanwhile, as part of the Commissioner's and Superintendent's joint commitment to community involvement in improving PPSD schools, RIDE and



the district completed work on the [TAP](#), developing goals and initiatives through an extensive, community-driven process. This process was led by the 45 dedicated members of the CDT, who continued to work virtually through the COVID-19 pandemic.

Based on the comprehensive feedback from schools and the community, Superintendent Peters

identified three specific challenges that would need to be addressed if PPSD was to transform into a system that could successfully implement its new turnaround action plan:

- 1) The work of district offices needed to align with the shared goals of the district.** The district lacked a clearly articulated theory of action for improving student outcomes. Initiatives had been proposed, staff added to the payroll, and business done without clear connection to achieving larger goals.
- 2) The organization needed to prioritize school support over all other demands.** The bottom line was that the Central Office was simply not designed around the needs of schools and students. School leaders, educators, and students were not receiving the supports they desperately needed and craved. At the core, schools and their communities were not set up for success.

These changes, built upon the steps Commissioner Infante-Green had already made, set the district up to implement the TAP, and also netted nearly \$1 million in annual savings, primarily through a consolidation of more than 20 staff positions.

- 3) The district needed to replace outdated, resource-heavy approaches to operations to be more efficient, effective, and responsive in serving students and families.** As noted in the EY financial analysis, Central Office costs had grown faster than school budgets.

While the district had increased in size, it was not reviewing functional areas to ensure they remained necessary and in keeping with best practices. The city's and state's taxpayers could not afford to subsidize outdated staffing

The new structure and reorganization of effort have enabled the district to add significant talent to lead the district over the coming years.

arrangements and resource-heavy operations, which inherently sacrificed student supports and outcomes.

MAKING AN IMMEDIATE IMPACT

In response to these challenges, Superintendent Peters proposed and implemented a new organizational model for the Central Office that followed a coherent and strong theory of action. These changes, built upon the steps Commissioner Infante-Green had already made, set the district up to implement the [TAP](#), and also netted nearly \$1 million in annual savings, primarily through a consolidation of more than 20 staff positions. While reducing staffing is always difficult, the district had a clear mandate to prioritize the success of students and ensure financial sustainability. The new structure and reorganization of effort have enabled the district to add significant talent to lead the district over the coming years.

The new changes to PPSD's organizational structure included:

- 1) **Building network offices designed to support school leaders and schools.** Realistically, PPSD could not ask school leaders to assume greater accountability over day-to-day operations in their buildings if they were not provided the necessary supports to succeed. PPSD schools



are now organized into two networks (one for elementary and one for secondary schools), each led by a network superintendent who has greater oversight and responsibility for innovation than the previous zone executive director position.

Each of these networks include dedicated instructional, data, and evaluation supports, thereby moving these traditional Central Office functions closer to the school level where they can build stronger working relationships, have greater accessibility, and ultimately be more effective and responsive. The reorganization also included network-specific supports around climate and culture, attendance, and family support services.

2) Increasing staff capacity to better serve MLLs.

The district committed to further bolstering supports for MLLs as have been outlined in the district's agreement with the U.S. Department of Justice. These supports are also aligned to the network model of school oversight and support. As part of these new resources, PPSD elevated oversight of MLLs within its organizational chart by creating the new Executive Director of Multilingual Learners role. Additionally, PPSD added a position focused exclusively on supporting MLLs district-wide, including leading the expansion of high-quality bilingual/dual language programs and improving engagement with families of MLLs.

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3) Reforming and streamlining how services are operationalized in several key areas of operations, including:

- **Student Affairs Office (SAO).** PPSD has restructured the SAO to bring the work closer to school leaders and schools. Student safety and disciplinary concerns frequently came up as an issue in the Johns Hopkins report. Specifically, in regard to SAO, the report noted that students were passed from one school to another, and, as a result, some schools were labeled as “dumping grounds.”

To improve support, the SAO has been relocated to the network to better align with the new model for school support.

- **Human Resources.** The Human Resources (HR) office at PPSD had used antiquated, paper-based systems and had often been viewed as an impediment to successful school staffing, rather than a support. As one stakeholder noted in the Johns Hopkins report, “Human Resources is larger than ever, but nothing has actually changed for schools.” Many of the HR functions were outdated and not specifically in service of schools. PPSD streamlined HR, reducing head count while reallocating staff to better support schools. In particular, three staffing and recruitment positions were created for the



first time, and these staff members are now assigned and accountable to a cohort of schools – one for elementary, one for middle, and one for high – to provide a single point of support for recruitment and staffing needs.



intervention, this responsibility and capacity had primarily resided with the City of Providence. While the city still owns the buildings, the district is stepping up its efforts to work with city leaders. In its reorganization, PPSD added the expertise and capacity needed to both better manage its custodial

In its reorganization, PPSD added the expertise and capacity needed to both better manage its custodial services contract and ensure the district's capital plan and investments meet the needs of city schools and students.

- **Finance and Budget.** Clarity on the district's finances has been a major issue for years, and the EY report gave PPSD leaders a wealth of information to make better decisions. New leadership has since identified a number of ways the Finance and Budget division could be reorganized to better support schools and phase out outdated district functions. For example, payroll was reorganized to reduce the number of staff members focused on processing paper timesheets and increase a focus on building systems to automate and monitor weekly payroll. Additionally, positions were reallocated to create network budget coordinators that, similar to HR, are assigned and accountable to meeting school needs related to budget and finance.
- **School Facilities.** In most school systems, the school district is responsible for overseeing its school facilities. However, prior to the state

services contract and ensure the district's capital plan and investments meet the needs of city schools and students.

- **Central Supply and Administration.** The district maintained a significantly sized central supply/warehouse staff, and yet school leaders and schools rarely saw these individuals or understood their role. Moreover, the practices of how supplies and resources were allocated across districts were outdated. The district significantly reduced staff in this area to generate savings that helped it shield schools and classrooms from budget cuts triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic.

MEET THE NEW TEAM



Chief of Family and Community Engagement (Nick Figueroa)

Nick sets the strategic vision for internal and external engagement as a key lever for students' success in Providence. He is a leader, spokesperson, and resident expert on effective engagement of key stakeholders, including families, partner organizations, and community members at large. He and his team developed the short- and long-term engagement vision for PPSD and work to establish a culture of high expectations and shared responsibility for equitable access for meaningful partnerships.



Chief of Equity, Culture, and Student Supports (Barbara Mullen)

Barbara oversees the district's special education services and works on all issues related to diversity, equity, and the development and sustenance of a vibrant, inclusive, and diverse community of students and staff. She also oversees the development, measurement, and reporting of district-wide progress related to diversity, school climate, and community, and she provides direct leadership and support for initiatives for underrepresented and vulnerable populations within the district.



Network Superintendent of Elementary (Susan Chin)

Susan leads the district's elementary school reform strategy and is building a new district model of school support through the creation of a new elementary school network support function. She is responsible for helping principals increase their capacity to improve teaching and learning in their schools by providing coaching and training, as well as through the direction of instructional and operational resources and support provided by their cross-functional Network Team.



Network Superintendent of Secondary (Olayinka Alege)

Olayinka leads the district's secondary school reform strategy and is building a new district model of school support through the creation of a new secondary school network support function. He is responsible for helping principals increase their capacity to improve teaching and learning in their schools by providing coaching and training, as well as through the direction of instructional and operational resources and support provided by their cross-functional Network Team.



Deputy Superintendent of Learning (Kechara Bradford)

Kechara will work to ensure students have access to a high-quality, equitable, and data-driven learning environment that will provide them with the confidence to succeed academically and to continue on to postsecondary education opportunities. This leader will provide vision and leadership for innovation and improvement in standards-aligned instruction and assessments in the district; support educators in cultivating a high level of learning for all students; and ensure that all services are implemented in accordance with federal, state, and local regulations.



Executive Director of Multilingual Learners (Jen Efflandt)

Jen serves in this newly elevated position that oversees the district's implementation of services for MLLs. The position was previously a director level one and has been elevated to prioritize provision of these services.



Secondary Transformation Officer (Kevin Gallick)

Kevin serves as a coach of high school principals, as well as a leader in developing and supporting the implementation of high school transformation strategies.



Executive Director of Elementary Schools (Patricia Royal)

Patricia serves as a coach of elementary principals, as well as a leader in developing and supporting the implementation of the elementary network school support strategy.



Executive Director of Middle Schools (James Boyd)

James serves as a coach of middle school principals, as well as a leader in developing and supporting the implementation of the secondary network school support strategy. ★

PPSD Supports Students Through the COVID-19 Pandemic

SPRINGING INTO ACTION

School turnaround work relies on innovative thinking and a sense of urgency. Those same attributes helped Providence Public Schools serve as a statewide leader in responding to the initial COVID-19 outbreak in March, as well as in bringing students back safely for in-person learning this fall.

In March, when the district had just 24-hours' notice to enact a switch to distance learning due to an uptick in coronavirus cases, the PPSD team quickly moved into action. Behind the scenes, the teaching and learning team had already begun

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mapping out robust online curricula for every grade band in the event that in-person learning was no longer feasible. As a result of this planning, with just one day available before school buildings temporarily shut down, PPSD distributed more than 10,000 Chromebooks to families.

Over the next several weeks, the district adjusted to the “new normal.” Schools set up their own ongoing technology distribution events, increasing the total number of computers distributed to 20,000 in just the first few weeks. PPSD shared maps of open hotspots around the city with families who lacked internet connections at home, connected families with free or low-cost internet access options, and delivered Wi-Fi hotspots to families unable to access other options.

PPSD opened a call center to help families who were struggling with new technology and, to be as responsive to community needs as possible, put bus monitors and crossing guards to work in a newly created customer service initiative, where they proactively reached out to families to offer assistance and information. PPSD also



provided additional professional development to educators on teaching online, using distance learning technology, and practicing self-care. The district held 306 sessions for the application of IT in distance learning classrooms, from beginner through advanced. Nearly 6,000 teachers took advantage of this offering. There were 33 sessions on social-emotional wellness, which were attended by 839 educators.

PLANNING FOR ALL SCENARIOS

As the city schools transitioned from one school year to the next, it was clear that PPSD needed to move from responding and reacting to the COVID-19 crisis to preparing all students to excel

The crisis brought out the best in all involved. Teachers went into the communities to deliver special education packets to students who could not use computers.



The crisis brought out the best in all involved. Teachers went into the communities to deliver special education packets to students who could not use computers. Administrators traveled to the homes of families to help them set up technology. Science teachers sent seed packets home for families to grow their own science experiments. Music teachers used technology to bring soloists together to form online choruses. Career and Technical Education (CTE) teachers used their 3-D printers to make face shields for medical personnel. Schools connected with families in crisis and got them outside resources to help with food, clothing, and shelter. It was an anxious, but ultimately inspiring, moment for the PPSD community.

in the new environment. This began over the summer, as the PPSD team worked with RIDE experts to craft a comprehensive, [70-page plan for managing the reopening of schools](#) that addressed four scenarios: a full reopening, a partial reopening, a

limited reopening, and full distance learning. The incidence of COVID-19 in the community would determine under which of these scenarios district schools would reopen in the fall.

The district solicited community input on a large scale through a widely distributed survey reaching more than 3,000 stakeholders, and PPSD held more than 25 focus groups with students, parents, partners, and community leaders to discuss and clarify priorities. The district also held online community forums to keep families informed, answer questions, and address concerns.

Given the high expectations everyone held for the safe opening of schools, district and school leaders

got right to work preparing school buildings for the fall. With full support from the state, the district made a significant investment in PPE, procuring more than 300,000 masks, 20,000 face shields, 20,000+ bottles of hand sanitizer, and 2,000+ gallons of disinfectant, which were distributed to schools in advance of the start of school.

All classrooms were deep cleaned, and more than 60 extra custodial staff were hired to ensure daily disinfection of all rooms and regular wipe-downs of high-touch surfaces, such as light switches and stair rails, throughout the day. Rooms were rearranged so that all students faced the same

ensure that classrooms had the proper number of air exchanges – whether or not the buildings had HVAC systems. The district installed more than 750 box fans and more than 500 HEPA filters to enact the engineer’s recommendations.

The district also made significant investments to improve student learning experiences. For technology, PPSD purchased more than 12,000 additional Chromebooks, 1,300 Wi-Fi hotspots, and 120 SmartBoards – and the district has ordered

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direction and desks were spaced to maximize their distance from each other. Hallways were outfitted with 6-foot social distancing markers and one-way directional stickers to limit exposure during passing times.

To suppress airborne transmission of the virus, PPSD contracted with a ventilation engineer to

and expects to receive more than 2,000 laptops for teachers and classroom sound amplification systems, to clarify voices while teachers wear masks, by the end of the year. In addition, the district spent \$5 million to provide students with access to high-quality curricular materials in both digital and hard-copy formats, as well as best-in-class online learning tools. To make sure the safety measures and technology led to learning, PPSD added four professional development days at the start of the school year – increasing from one to five – to ensure teachers had necessary training on safety protocols and new district curricula.

In addition to preparing for in-person learning, PPSD also made plans for a strictly distance learning option, based on family and community

choice. Through listening sessions, the district learned that while more than two-thirds of families were comfortable with returning to some form of in-person learning, almost one-third were not ready. Originally, PPSD had planned to offer virtual learning alternatives to the small number of students with medical conditions that made it unsafe to return to a school environment. However, in order to respond to the community, PPSD rethought its plans and built out something more robust – the Virtual Learning Academy (VLA), which all families who signed up by the end of August could utilize.

SAFELY REOPENING AND MAINTAINING HIGH EXPECTATIONS

In the fall, PPSD implemented a staggered reopening over two weeks, first bringing back the youngest learners and students most at risk for learning loss – those with specialized services and targeted MLLs. This also gave school leaders and teachers a chance to get used to the new procedures before bringing in other grades. Elementary students stayed in stable groups and ate in their classrooms to minimize movement throughout the school.

At the secondary level, the district followed an alternating schedule. Every school was split into two groups – an A group and a B group – that would alternate days between in-person and distance learning. This strategy, designed to mitigate virus transmission in an indoor environment, reduced a building’s daily student population by 50 percent.

Understanding the importance of social-emotional learning (SEL), PPSD also focused on student needs



PRINCIPLES IN ACTION

In its planning and implementation of reopening, PPSD kept five key principles at the forefront:

- 1. Put safety and wellness first.** Leaders make decisions that put the mental, emotional, and physical health and safety of students, staff, and community first.
- 2. Be equitable.** PPSD provides access to high-quality programming for all students and when needed, prioritizes students who have been most impacted by educational inequities and COVID-19, including the youngest learners, MLLs, and students who are differently abled.
- 3. Strive for excellence.** PPSD is focused on long-term student success, not just survival. Leaders continuously assess and improve what they do and take advantage of opportunities created by the new context.
- 4. Be flexible, transparent, and responsive.** The district engages community members with transparent communication and honors their voices by making tangible changes. The district keeps plans simple, so leaders can adjust course as circumstances change.
- 5. In-person learning matters.** Research is clear that students do much better academically and emotionally by learning in the classroom with their peers. To the greatest extent possible, PPSD provides predominantly in-person learning.

in this area. To deal with the trauma caused by the COVID-19 pandemic for students and what we are calling the “new normal,” the district created a set of lessons for schools to support student SEL well-being.

Once the school year was underway, PPSD executed the plan developed over the summer, while remaining flexible and pivoting when necessary. When school leaders received feedback from families and teachers about the need to adjust the approach in the VLA, they worked collaboratively with the Providence Teachers Union (PTU) to shift more resources to the VLA and improve the instructional model. When statewide contact tracing was delayed, the district’s Director of Nursing and school-based nurses stepped in to assist in the contact tracing process. When PPSD faced challenges with student attendance, the network team made hundreds of home visits to identify issues and support students’ return to school.

Understanding the importance of social-emotional learning (SEL), PPSD also focused on student needs in this area. To deal with the trauma caused by the COVID-19 pandemic for students and what we are calling the “new normal,” the district created a set of lessons for schools to support student SEL well-being.

Through the collective efforts of its teachers, school leaders, and other staff members, Providence is one of the few large urban school districts to

bring back the vast majority of its students safely in person. While the district must deal with the daily effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of incident response and quarantining, safety protocols and mitigation strategies have worked, as there has been no evidence of extensive in-school transmission of COVID-19.

Beyond ensuring a safe return, PPSD has also shown a commitment to high expectations and achievement by doubling down on investments in curriculum and teacher professional development,



while also providing families with both in-person and virtual learning options. While the virus still influences planning, RIDE and PPSD leaders remain highly confident that they can keep students learning safely and make progress on their larger commitment to fulfill the promise of the TAP. ★

PVD Year 1 Report

Progress Towards Achieving Our Goals



A Report of Actions Taken to Improve Educational Outcomes

Over the course of the last year, RIDE and PPSD have planned strategically *and* acted ambitiously to fix a broken system and turn hope into results for the students of Providence. The following is a list of the major highlights and accomplishments from this year. They are organized to align with the seven key themes that emerged from the John Hopkins report and subsequent community forums. While these highlights do not include all of the ongoing operations and support that RIDE and PPSD staff provide on a daily basis, they demonstrate follow-through on the solemn commitment to improve educational outcomes for Providence's students.

Excellence in Academic Instruction and High Expectations for All Students Will Be the Norm

WHERE WE WERE: LOW EXPECTATIONS AND LOW ACHIEVEMENT WERE THE NORM

When the Johns Hopkins report first came out, sobering responses of shock, but not surprise, emerged. Numerous individuals were quick to note that the low expectations identified in the district did not occur overnight, but instead had compounded over time, hurting generations of students. In fact, [a similar report about Providence's schools](#) had been written nearly three decades earlier.

The result of these low expectations were clear – Providence was not only one of the poorest performing school districts in Rhode Island, but was also one of the lowest performing school districts across the nation. Johns Hopkins researchers analyzed test score data for students in Providence and two comparison districts, Newark, N.J. and

Worcester, Mass., and found the academic outcomes for Providence students lagged significantly. When compared to the other two districts, “the proficiency rates of PPSD students started low and declined in middle and high school. Students in Providence achieved proficiency at very low rates, and 8th grade performance had consistently been lower than other grades over time.” In other words, student performance actually *decreased* the longer students were in city schools.

The Johns Hopkins report repeatedly pointed to low student expectations, the lack of a uniform curriculum across the district, and the low level of academic instruction as impediments to student achievement. These unacceptably poor outcomes pointed to systemic failure and clearly demonstrated the need for a radical turnaround of an acutely broken education system.

Year 1: Strengthening the Foundation

Through the TAP, RIDE and PPSD have committed to a systemic, data-driven reform effort that will close equity gaps, increase academic success for all students, and recruit and retain a talented educator workforce. A critical priority has been the immediate selection and implementation of high-quality English as a second language (ELA)

and math curricula that dovetail with competent professional development opportunities for educators. RIDE has further committed to the development of a blueprint to better serve MLL students, provide for high-quality learning opportunities for these learners, and provide ESL certification training for teachers.

Setting high expectations for all PPSD students and educators

1) On November 1, 2019, the state intervention in Providence began and Commissioner Infante-Green immediately realigned the district's administrative structure. She released a new organizational chart that kept the students and families of Providence at the top of the chart, emphasizing the Commissioner's message: kids first. The organizational realignment maximized resources and drove support more directly to schools. In the first few months of the intervention she and Interim Superintendent Fran Gallo conducted a deep review of district practices and made immediate changes, such as changing school leadership and Central Office personnel, to prioritize serving students.



FROM THE JOHNS HOPKINS REPORT

“Student engagement was wanting. In only two classrooms did instruction focus on students’ doing the majority of the work, and in many cases, students appear eager to participate but were not giving meaningful chances to do so.”

“We observed no classroom in which there was a genuine ‘productive struggle,’ in which students are called upon to grapple with, and persist through, challenging skills or concepts.”

- 2) Soon after his hiring, Superintendent Peters released a 10-page Entry Plan in March 2020, which called attention to the district's low proficiency, crumbling buildings, and the feeling of “despair,” setting high expectations for district transformation. “Education made all the difference in my life, and I know it can make the same difference for students of Providence,” Peters wrote. “We have an incredibly unique opportunity, with leadership from the state and city aligned with us, and I do not intend to squander this rare moment.” Superintendent Peters’ Entry Plan highlighted initiatives intended to “Hit the Ground Learning,” setting a foundation for success as well as advancing specific turnaround initiatives, like continuing Providence’s Central Office reorganization, undertaking school-specific performance reviews of each school, and reducing teacher vacancies for the 2020–2021 school year.
- 3) These high expectations were further solidified cemented as clear goals in PPSD’s TAP. As part of the Commissioner’s commitment to including the community in improving PPSD’s schools, the TAP was created through an extensive community-driven transformation process that included several Town Hall meetings and the dedicated work of the 45 members (from 222 applicants) serving on three CDTs. Each CDT member volunteered at least 40 hours of his or her time to this valuable work. The TAP provides a five-year roadmap to improving Providence schools. Based in the values of Students First, Equity and Access, Results, and Transparency, the TAP details 43 measurable five-year outcomes and 40 concrete initiatives (the majority of which come directly from CDT

recommendations). All of the outcomes and initiatives are aligned to three pillars consistent with the Commissioner's vision: Engaged Communities, Excellence in Learning, and World-Class Talent, along with the foundational principle of Effective District Systems.

- 4) PPSD convened and repurposed pre-existing "Equity Committee" meetings to support defining PPSD's definition of equity and ensuring equity is integrated throughout PPSD's infrastructure, including the Parent Advisory Council and Community Advisory Boards. This structure was also repurposed to further articulate a central theme anchored in TNTP's [Opportunity Myth report](#). This report suggests that low income students, MLLs, and students of color are often presented with below-grade-level work, and teachers hold low expectations for their achievement. The equity committee was reconvened in an effort to calibrate around PPSD's working definition of "equity" to ensure that it was anchored to the idea that PPSD must create the conditions for each student to have access to high quality, grade-level, aligned curriculum.

Improving outcomes for multilingual learners

- 5) In August 2018, PPSD entered into an agreement with the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) to improve services for MLLs. The district has been working towards meeting all the terms of the settlement agreement since 2018. This past year, PPSD worked in consultation with DOJ to create and deliver 22 professional development sessions in every district school. These sessions were attended by core content

teachers of MLLs and centered on sheltered content instruction strategies, or strategies that teachers can use to make rigorous grade level content accessible to multilingual learners at varying levels of English proficiency. PPSD will continue to work in consultation with the DOJ to create and deliver 18 additional professional development sessions in every district school on sheltered content instruction strategies to support multilingual learner instruction and access to core curriculum.

- 6) PPSD has implemented the same high quality English Language Development curriculum across all secondary schools, so that MLLs will not lose important learning if they change schools within the city. The curriculum works well in both an in-person and a virtual setting, so that all students stay current in their lessons, regardless of their learning mode during the pandemic.
- 7) PPSD has significantly increased the number of students who are in integrated classroom settings. Research shows that MLLs in ESL programs do better when they are given ample opportunities to integrate with English fluent peers. This past school year, PPSD added over 100 integrated classrooms at the elementary level. MLLs who have been in a sheltered program for two years are now integrated with general education peers, instead of being in a sheltered MLL-only classroom setting.
- 8) Due to popular demand, PPSD expanded dual language Spanish strands in four schools this year (Fortes, Lima, Lauro, Spaziano). Currently, over 1,200 students are enrolled in a bilingual or dual language program. PPSD will continue to

expand dual language Spanish programs in the upcoming year, including growing Leviton from elementary to secondary grades.

- 9) PPSD has seen an influx of secondary MLL students who enroll with limited or no formal prior education. To better support and serve students with interrupted formal education, the district expanded newcomer program seats at the secondary level from 130 in the 2019–2020 school year to 208 in the 2020–2021 school year.
- 10) One of the DOJ findings was that most schools in the district had over 10 percent of MLLs who were waived by their parents to opt out of receiving MLL services. PPSD has worked to reduce the number of MLL waivers from 10 percent in 2018–2019, to 5 percent in 2019–2020, to 1 percent this school year. This means that more MLLs are receiving the support they need to advance in English language and content proficiency.
- 11) PPSD has partnered with the Policy Lab at Brown University to assist in a cohort analysis of our MLL programs. This analysis is part of the DOJ settlement and will help the district determine whether English learners are overcoming language barriers and participating meaningfully and equally in educational programs.

Improving outcomes for differently abled students

- 12) PPSD internally reorganized the specialized services division to better align six manager roles with the new network structure and move supports for differently abled students closer to schools.

- 13) PPSD developed and delivered a new suite of five professional learning sessions focused on instructional coherence, high expectations, and inclusive practices, including *Standards Based IEP* and *Collaborative Problem Solving for Co-Teachers, CRT and the G's (Cognitive Processes) and Specially Designed Instruction and Supporting Students with IEPs*. These professional learning opportunities were delivered during the first week of PD to over 2000 PPSD educators (both differently-abled focused and general education educators, and included school support personnel and building leaders). In participant feedback, 80 percent of teachers rated sessions as highly effective and expressed the need for coaching support around the sessions' key concepts.
- 14) PPSD launched a request for proposals for a Special Education Program Review to delve deeper into programmatic effectiveness (dovetailing off recommendations from the EY financial analysis) and obtain current data to guide development of actions to improve service delivery and overall compliance support for the district.
- 15) Feedback from a family survey revealed that over 60 percent of families of students who are differently abled found that the IEP process was difficult to navigate and they were unsure of who at PPSD to contact if they had a specific need. Based on this feedback, PPSD launched the creation of standard operating guidelines to increase district effectiveness, community outreach, and family engagement for differently abled students. This tool will provide access, equity, and quality implementation of

specialized services to boost compliance and support high expectations for differently abled students.

- 16) PPSD repurposed the translator/interpreter role to include family liaison responsibilities. These include the management of social media accounts, Let's Talk (customer service) inquiries, and the coordination of the revamped Special Education Local Advisory Council. This role is responsible for providing real-time interpretation at IEP meetings, connecting directly to families who call the special education office, translating key documents, and collaborating with the Family and Community Engagement (FACE) and communication teams on districtwide strategy on internal and external communication and engagement.

Implementing high-quality and culturally responsive curriculum

- 17) A significant finding from the Johns Hopkins report was the lack of quality, coherent curriculum across the district, including sometimes even differing curriculum across grades, even sometimes within the same school. This lack of a quality, coherent curriculum significantly hurt student learning, especially as students moved between schools. PPSD engaged more than 100 teachers to develop and select a unified, cohesive approach to curriculum and professional learning. Representative teams of teachers were brought together from each elementary school and middle school, respectively, to review ELA and math curriculum choices and provide input on the programs they believed best suited the needs of their students.

- 18) Based on this teacher input, PPSD ultimately invested \$6.5 million to purchase new, highly rated curriculum materials, related professional development, and digital tools for the implementation of nationally rated English Language Arts (ELA) and math curricula across all elementary and middle schools. These curricula included:

- ELA: American Reading Company for ELA in grades K-5, and ELA and social studies for grades 6-8. American Reading Company was selected because its materials are available in Spanish.
- Math: Great Minds/Eureka Math in grades K-5 and Illustrative Math in grades 6-8.

These curricula will enable all students, whether in a traditional classroom or virtual setting, to stay current in their lessons and meet their academic goals. *See the inside story for more information.*

- 19) Elementary and middle school leaders, teacher leaders, and teachers are receiving ongoing professional learning throughout the school year in the ELA/social studies and math curricula that have been implemented in all elementary and middle schools across the district. This professional learning began in the spring of 2020, continued in the summer, and is still implemented each month, where these educators are provided with whole and small group instruction, as well as one-to-one support.
- 20) Professional learning for the American Reading Company (ARC) has included a multi-faceted approach, with supports and professional

learning occurring across the school and Central Office levels. The professional learning for ARC began in the spring of 2020 with six consensus-building sessions for all school leaders, reading coaches, and ELA and social studies teacher leaders, to secure buy-in for the new curriculum. Training continued with professional learning for educators throughout the summer, and will continue throughout the 2020-2021 school year. This professional learning includes dedicated ARC coaches assigned to each school who work with the school's leadership to design the professional learning that addresses the schools coaching needs and support. Professional learning is also provided to PPSD's reading coaches and school instructional supports, as well as to the school and district leadership teams.

- 21) RIDE and PPSD bought multicultural libraries for all classrooms in the district, to better reflect the diversity of the student population and the City of Providence as a whole.
- 22) Similar to the process that PPSD undertook for elementary and middle school, PPSD has initiated a process of reviewing and ensuring the consistent use of high-quality curriculum in high school. PPSD has initiated an RFP process and plans for engaging teachers and leaders in the implementation of new core curriculum. This curriculum selection will be a multi-step process that will be guided by RIDE's "Selecting and Implementing a High-Quality Curriculum in RI" and "Additional Review Tools to Support the Selection of a High-Quality Curriculum in RI." Review teams will be engaged in the plan for implementation through review,

selection, and consensus-building sessions of professional learning. In partnership with teachers and school leaders, PPSD will identify and prepare to roll-out new quality curriculum in high schools with a focus on English, math, social studies, and science. Roll-out will include extensive professional learning opportunities for teachers and leaders in spring 2021.

- 23) The Office of Equity and Diversity launched a series of professional development opportunities for teachers and building leaders to apply the Culturally Responsive Teaching Framework to their instructional practice, in tandem with the implementation of the new K-8 curriculum. Each community-of-practice session consists of teachers unpacking their curricular guides in alignment with the framework's key criteria: Awareness, Community Building, Building the Learning Capacity to Carry the Cognitive Load, and Assessment.
- 24) For the first time, PPSD procured culturally responsive Pre-K literacy materials. This new curriculum will be partnered with culturally responsive early childhood education professional development. This material is supported by the Pre-K Expansion and Comprehensive Literacy development grant. The culturally responsive early childhood literacy materials include Pre-K libraries from the ARC resources, and will include early childhood education and culturally responsive teaching professional learning sessions in the spring at five Pre-K sites across PPSD.
- 25) PPSD K-8 ELA/social studies curricular resource requires school leaders to develop an avid

and vibrant reading culture that shows all students (and staff) that schools are reading communities. All school leaders were given the task of establishing strategies to achieve this goal. These leaders meet regularly with the coach of the curricular resource to review and share these strategies, which include Drop Everything And Read (DEAR) sessions for students, staff, and school leaders; virtual book clubs; and photos of students, faculty, and parents with their favorite books. Attention is given to including diverse and multicultural texts. Previously, students would not read entire texts, only excerpts posted on a digital system.

Providing high-quality academic experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic

26) With guidance from RIDE and the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH), PPSD safely returned students to all its schools in person under a partial reopening plan and for the first time, set up a separate Virtual Learning Academy (VLA) for more than 6,000 students (approximately one quarter of the district's total), providing families a choice between in-person student attendance or virtual student participation. This dual approach enabled PPSD to best serve its most at-risk students and ensure quality instruction across both in-person and virtual platforms, all while still prioritizing the school community's health and safety.

27) Following the launch of this brand-new VLA, RIDE and PPSD have strengthened the model by hiring a world-class leadership team, partnering with expert providers of professional development for virtual instruction,

building a dedicated call center for VLA family engagement, reducing elementary roster sizes, conducting extensive proactive family outreach (a survey, 4000+ calls, and hundreds of home visits), procuring gold-standard asynchronous curricular materials (e.g., iReady), and determining methods for assessing all students enrolled in the VLA.

28) In response to COVID-19-drive transition to distance learning and the back-to-school re-opening, RIDE and PPSD worked with outside experts to develop a week's worth of lessons based on social and emotional development. These lessons were anchored in social-emotional learning (SEL) and culturally responsive teaching (CRT) frameworks identified in Superintendent Peters' Entry Plan. There were lessons for each grade span that addressed SEL competencies and common core learning standards, while utilizing high quality instructional practices and CRT criteria facilitator moves. They included strategies, such as community building, discourse, and restorative practices. The lessons were accessed and implemented by over 1,200 teachers in PPSD. Feedback included, "these lessons are a great way to begin to embed SEL and CRT into our daily practice," and "I appreciate that these lessons are already designed and ready to use so we can focus on building relationships on day one."

29) PPSD launched the innovative Accelerate early-college program, which enabled high school seniors to enroll in college courses and earn up to 27 credits from Rhode Island College and the Community College of Rhode Island.

Accelerate was designed and implemented in under a month based on the RIDE commitment to providing eligible seniors with an enhanced senior year experience, despite the challenges presented by COVID-19. This pioneering program supports eligible seniors through a full-time cohort model, with personalized support including an early alert system to help students “stay on path” throughout the year, as well as student access to laptop, wi-fi access points, and textbooks (as needed). Student eligibility for this program was set based on the following criteria: 410/410 PSAT scores + 2.8 high school GPA + 90 percent attendance, and/or successful completion of PrepareRI Readiness Project ELA or math summer program, and/or successful completion of PrepareRI Internship Program or Boot Camp. Unfortunately, only a small number of PPSD students met these qualifications. As the Johns Hopkins report noted, the longer students had stayed in the system, the more they fell behind. In the end, around one-third of rising seniors qualified, and 75 students participated in the launch of the program.

Reimagining high-school to prepare students for college and career success

30) PPSD and RIDE began to develop a high school-specific, multi-year strategy that will fundamentally redesign high schools in Providence. This strategy will increase and improve quality pathway options that prepare students for college and the workforce. To develop this strategy, RIDE partnered with Springpoint and EY-Parthenon, two nationally recognized firms, to conduct an in-depth analysis of all PPSD high schools.

31) Springpoint provided a qualitative analysis of all schools, based on comprehensive school visits, and EY-Parthenon provided a detailed quantitative analysis about graduating students’ college readiness. The effort was funded by the Barr Foundation through collaboration with the Rhode Island Fund for Public Education. PPSD and RIDE held recurring work sessions for Springpoint and EY-Parthenon to meet RIDE and PPSD senior staff to share findings and discuss potential solutions. Evaluators continue reaching out to stakeholders – including school leaders, students, parents, and community groups – to share findings that will guide development of specific actions to benefit Providence’s high school students.

32) A new network structure was identified to reshape how PPSD high schools were staffed and supported. The new Secondary Network is designed to provide a useful and supportive connection from Central Office to each school. The network will focus on developing school capacity via a three-pronged approach by supporting school leaders to: 1) become strong instructional leaders, thereby ensuring that every school has an instructional lead with authority and responsibility to drive instruction for a set caseload of teachers; 2) develop and sustain leadership teams in schools focused on a coherent academic vision for high quality instruction; and, 3) strengthen supports for all students through strategic systems and structures, such as advisory and 9th grade small learning communities.

- 33) The Secondary Network is leading the district's high school reform strategy in partnership with RIDE, and is focused on a theory of action that PPSD should invest in stakeholder engagement and community partnerships as an anchor to drive continuous improvement. Four high schools (Hope High School, Mt. Pleasant, Jorge Alvarez, Juanita Sanchez) have been identified as in need for school redesign due to being persistently identified as a low-performing schools. Efforts will be underway in winter and spring 2021 to redesign these schools by fall 2021 in a way that fundamentally improves outcomes for the schools' students.
- 34) The Barr Foundation additionally supported the national search for the new Secondary Network Superintendent.
- 35) PPSD developed a statewide Early Warning Indicator system that serves as a critical tool in supporting students to stay on track to graduate college ready. The indicator relies on 9th grade attendance and GPA data. The tool was beta-tested, and principals have been engaged in this tool and provided feedback. PPSD intends to leverage the new Freshman On-Track Indicator and data tools to support school leaders to develop systems and structures for collaborative problem solving in 9th grade success teams and via advisory services.
- 36) In an effort to both predict and better prepare high school students for the PSAT and SAT in spring 2020, PPSD expanded its local administration of the SAT Suite of Assessments and its use of the data to intervene for improved performance. In the fall of 2019 the entire SAT suite was administered to grades 9 through 12. The purpose was to familiarize students with the test they are expected to take, as well as provide them, their teachers, schools, and the district with valuable insight into their reading, writing, and math skills. The additional administration produced data that was leveraged utilizing College Board benchmarks and sub-scores, and through their partnership with Khan Academy, which provides individualized, targeted student practice recommendations.
- 37) In January 2020, as part of this revised assessment plan, Khan Academy SAT practice tests were completed by students for schools to observe how much students had grown from their initial fall testing and to gauge their level compared to the cut-scores for accountability which would have taken place just two months later (the state administration of the PSAT and SAT were cancelled in spring 2020 due to COVID-19).
- 38) Seven PPSD high schools were selected to participate in the XQ+RI challenge (out of 20 schools total statewide). The XQ+RI Challenge was a first of its kind statewide challenge to redesign high schools to prepare students for the jobs of the future. XQ is a national organization recognized as a leader in rethinking the high school experience so that every student graduates ready to succeed in life. While XQ has conducted nation-wide competitions before, the XQ+RI was XQ's first statewide specific initiative.
- 39) RIDE piloted two youth apprenticeship programs to offer innovative pathways for students to directly prepare for and initiate

careers while still in high school. Both programs have a heavy emphasis on serving students from PPSD.

- 40) PPSD high school seniors participated in the PrepareRI Youth Apprenticeship Program (PRIYA). PRIYA provides students the opportunity to earn pay by working part-time in a specific career pathway while still enrolled in high school. Students work part-time, take classes that directly relate to their employment experience, and work closely with their employer and CCRI to coordinate the beginning of a career path.
- 41) Almost 40 percent of PPSD high schools are signed up to participate in Propel America, a national nonprofit that connects young adults with job-training organizations and community colleges to pursue a career and higher education within one year of high school graduation.
- 42) A cross-divisional team was formed to address both the regulatory and academic aspects of the Performance-based Diploma Assessment portion of the graduation requirements. Within the last year, the groundwork that was laid during two summer sessions with teacher representatives from high schools was expanded upon, resulting in the creation of consistent rubrics for scoring the project, a guidance document, and a course guide that serves as essentially the curriculum for the course itself. Despite the pandemic, teachers currently administering the course have been trained, there is a collective space for them to receive and share resources, and a feedback

loop has been created to share the strengths and struggles of the new course for future revision.

Holding all schools accountable for improving performance outcomes

- 43) The district has begun school-specific school improvement conversations with school leaders for schools identified for improvement, as well as schools identified for redesign. School leaders have been tasked with identifying innovations and improvements that will significantly improve student outcomes. In terms of school redesign, the district is set to hold a number of public conversations around how to dramatically redesign the high schools and middle schools targeted for turnaround.
- 44) Every elementary school conducted a deep-dive analysis into student achievement and engagement data. As part of the analysis process, the Elementary Network worked with the school-based leadership teams to identify an instructional priority and a school culture priority for the current school year. These priorities guide and focus the school improvement efforts, including allocation of resources and design of staff professional development activities. Schools monitor student achievement and engagement data through strategies including classroom learning walks and formative assessments data. School leadership teams regularly review this data at professional learning sessions and leadership team meetings, as well as after each academic quarter.

45) Before the beginning of the 2020–2–21 school year, PPSD closed Evolutions High School, a low-enrollment, low-performing, 1-star school. Evolutions High School’s approximately 270 students were incorporated into the larger Mt. Pleasant High School, where the smaller school was co-located. This closure was part of a larger Central Office effort to create efficiencies, and no teachers were laid off as a result of the school closure.

46) In addition to holding the district-operated schools accountable for improving

performance, RIDE and PPSD also ensured accountability for rigorous performance expectations for its in-district charter schools. As a result of this rigorous accountability, the Academy for Career Exploration – a PPSD district-charter high school – voluntarily turned in its charter and closed at the end of the 2019–2020 school year. RIDE and PPSD supported the parents and community of this school to enroll these students in new schools for the upcoming year.

Inside Story: Getting on the Same Page

One of the most glaring findings from the Johns Hopkins report on the Providence Public Schools was the troubling reality that there was no uniform curriculum for K–8 classrooms. Across the district, many different curricula were being used

The curricula provide PPSD educators a high-quality instructional anchor that aligns with both Rhode Island’s nationally benchmarked standards and the Commissioner’s vision for academic excellence and world-class schools. It is important to note that teachers from across the district were highly engaged in identifying options and choosing ARC and Eureka 5!

in schools and across grades. In conversations with reviewers and RIDE staff, PPSD teachers talked about the hodgepodge of learning packages being used across the district.

The fact was that Providence teachers were not given the necessary resources to do their jobs and had to supplement the best they could. In one school where there were no textbooks; students relied on workbooks for learning. Further, data showed that many students attended several schools before they left elementary school, and the changes in curriculum further disrupted the learning process. Providence students deserved better, and Commissioner Infante–Green committed to ensuring all PPSD students had an aligned, equitable education.

Leveraging a wide-ranging assessment and armed with unacceptable student performance data, Commissioner Infante–Green made an early

decision to examine the PPSD budget and prioritize “what is really important.” At the top of the list was an immediate investment in high-quality sets of curriculum for math and ELA.

After surveying the national field for the “best in class” and convening more than 100 educators to review and select uniform curriculum, the district reallocated \$4 million in existing funds to purchase the American Reading Company (ARC) Curriculum for use in Grades 1-8 throughout PPSD. A similar strategic decision was made to purchase the Eureka 5! K-5 math curriculum for the entire district soon after.

Since their adoption, the curricula have allowed PPSD educators to provide a high-quality, transparent, and equitable approach to classroom instruction in every PPSD classroom. This is a major initial step forward in the long journey of transformation. Through these learning platforms, comparable data are now available to teachers and families, and online assessment tools allow educators to quickly identify students who are struggling and need additional academic support.

ARC also has had an impact on honoring diversity in the classroom. Reading materials offered through ARC’s multicultural library allow students to engage in culturally responsive literacy activities where students can see themselves in the stories they are reading.



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A further advantage of ARC is the accompanying teacher professional development, which helps teachers build additional skills with the ARC’s state-of-the-art data tools. In addition to working well in the classroom, both

ARC and Eureka 5! can be implemented online, so elementary students enrolled in the VLA have aligned instruction with their peers in the physical classroom setting. In the case of ARC, middle school students alternating between distance learning and in-person learning have consistent instruction regardless of their location.

The uniform curriculum provides consistency in learning to PPSD's mobile student population so that if students transfer from one school to another, they remain on track with their learning and their data travels with them.

ARC also has had an impact on honoring diversity in the classroom. Reading materials offered through ARC's multicultural library allow students to engage in culturally responsive literacy activities where students can see themselves in the stories they are reading.

As the implementation of ARC and Eureka 5! progresses throughout the school year, leadership will continue to assess the effectiveness of these innovative learning tools. The adoption of these high-quality, culturally responsive curricula is one major building block in the effort to enact transformational change in PPSD. Getting teachers and students on the same page is building real momentum at the classroom level.

MOVING FORWARD: BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

Building on the momentum of the first year of a multi-year transformation process, RIDE is expanding reform initiatives to provide all students in Pre-K through 12 with a well-rounded education experience coupled with important academic and social-emotional supports. There will be greater attention focused on the high school experience, and PPSD will better serve the needs of other specific learning groups, including the expansion of Pre-K throughout the district. The district will prioritize better access to bilingual learning and more opportunities to increase SEL competence among students and educators.

Major initiatives on the way include:

- 1) PPSD is building a multi-level data dashboard system to enhance data-driven decisions and improvement strategies at the classroom, school, and district levels. The dashboards will display data from the various evidence-based curricular resources as well as assessment results in one location. This will create the basis for robust continuous improvement conversations for every classroom and school around data tied to our five-year outcomes commitments detailed in the TAP.
- 2) By capitalizing on state and local funding, PPSD has six high-quality RI Pre-K classrooms this year. Two of the six classrooms are dual-language classrooms. With





COMMUNITY VOICES

“With the support from Providence Schools, the educators at E-Cubed Academy have become visionary catalysts, laboring tirelessly to create an innovative educational environment that includes student and parent voice, enhanced educational and internship opportunities and embracing collaboration in redesigning the high school experience for all diverse learners.”

– Deloris Mitchell, Teacher at E-Cubed Academy and member of RIDE’s Educators of Color Committee

additional state support, PPSD will release a plan to add additional high-quality Pre-K seats for Providence families. High-quality early childhood education is essential for setting our children up for lifelong success. Dozens of studies emphasize the importance of Pre-K experiences that prepare children for learning in literacy and math. Children who participate in Pre-K are better prepared for kindergarten and lifelong success.

3) In collaboration with the Rhode Island Foundation, RIDE and PPSD will expand access to bilingual and dual-language learning programs, including into the secondary level where those experiences do not exist in PPSD.

- 4) Because ninth-grade success is a pivotal predictor of overall long-term success for students, PPSD has launched a number of initiatives to support this group of students. High schools will launch ninth-grade academies, which will focus on ensuring students successfully transition to and succeed in high school, with dedicated staff members who collaborate on ninth-grade students’ academic and social-emotional needs.
- 5) PPSD will pilot small-group, relationship-based tutoring for ninth-grade students as part of the school day (rather than after-school, which limits access for students). Similar tutoring approaches have delivered remarkable results for students. For example, ninth-grade Algebra I students in Chicago Public Schools who received tutoring not only achieved proficiency in Algebra at higher rates, they were also more likely to pass their other classes and to attend school more regularly.
- 6) A panel of ninth-grade design ambassadors will provide a direct student voice and advise the Superintendent on designing their future high school experiences. This is a critical effort to ensure that student voice is captured in developing the excellent, academic experiences that will prepare themselves for college and career success. ★

Goal #2

Parents and Families Will Be Supported, Empowered, and Engaged

WHERE WE WERE: LACK OF ENGAGEMENT LEFT FAMILIES POWERLESS AND DEMORALIZED

During the countless hours of community testimony following the release of the John Hopkins report, parent after parent painfully detailed and expressed how they felt demoralized and marginalized by Providence's school system. Rather than being engaged in a school system meant to serve them and their students, parents communicated that they felt "shut out of their children's education."

This testimony was consistent with the findings from the John Hopkins report. The Central Office and schools often lacked consistent, authentic communication that supported families. Family

engagement activities, including parent-teacher conferences, were haphazard throughout the district, with no uniform process for family and community outreach. The report found the lack of programs and initiatives that connected parents and families to the schools particularly troubling.



FROM THE JOHNS HOPKINS REPORT

"The lack of parent input was striking on its own, but the widespread acceptance of this marginalization was of particular note."

Year 1: Strengthening the Foundation

A central goal in Providence's TAP is that in every school, students, families, and community members feel respected, supported, and engaged. From day one, RIDE leadership has been committed to a process that reconnects families and the community to PPSD schools with consistent, informative, and culturally relevant engagement practices. In early 2020, the Family and Community Engagement office was expanded and elevated to a cabinet-level position within the PPSD

administration. The newly appointed Chief is diligently working to create policies that will enforce a prompt 24/7 customer service structure and transparent engagement structures.

Activating the community to develop the TAP

- 1) After a summer of intensive community engagement sessions, Commissioner Infante-Green delivered on her commitment to

involve the community as partners in shaping the direction of the Providence’s long-term transformation. During the engagement, community members shared with Commissioner Infante-Green that historically they had not had a seat at the decision-making table, nor had their voices been acknowledged or respected. Through the CDT, Commissioner Infante-Green sought a community-driven approach to creating a TAP. The CDT was organized into three sub-teams, aligned with the key pillars of *Excellence in Learning, Engaged Communities, and World-Class Talent*.

- 2) In fall 2020, RIDE launched a competitive application process to recruit community members to participate as part of the CDT. RIDE received a total of 222 applications from community members for 45 CDT spots. Using a clear rubric, six community volunteers worked alongside six RIDE staff members to evaluate applications based on community involvement and relevant professional and personal experiences.
- 3) The final CDT consisted of 45 educators, students, parents, and members of community advocacy groups who volunteered more than 40 hours of collaboration time to their work. The three-month development process involved using an equity-based, design-thinking framework to examine a range of key data, identify and prioritize specific problems in the district, consider the root cause analysis of the critical problems, brainstorm solutions, and workshop those solutions with the broader Providence community.

- 4) The CDT publicly showcased its recommendations at a “Community Design Day” on March 7, 2020. Hosted at Providence’s Asa Messer Elementary School, this Community Design Day was attended by hundreds of community members, including students and families and members of the media seeking to learn about the work and offer feedback to consider before finalizing the proposals. Additionally, design team members disseminated a survey to community members to gather feedback on their recommendations, and the CDT presented these findings to the Commissioner and Superintendent.
- 5) RIDE and PPSD leadership leveraged recommendations from the CDT to form the core of PPSD’s TAP. Ultimately, over 75 percent of the TAP’s initiatives (26 out of the 40) were driven by the design team work. CDT members have continued to be engaged in first-year conversations, served as partners in the TAP rollout, and will participate in quarterly updates.

Engaging families and the community, and using their feedback to implement policy

- 6) PPSD focused on enhancing engagement with parents by reinvigorating its existing Parent Advisory Council (PAC). PPSD expanded recruitment efforts to include more representation from schools and prioritize diversity among the PAC members. PPSD increased the number of members and schools represented by 65 percent, from 20 schools/parents in the 2019–2020 school year to 33 in the 2020–2021 school year. PAC meetings

include space for families to hear directly from the Commissioner and Superintendent regarding updates about Providence's schools, as well as for these leaders to hear direct concerns from PAC members. A renewed effort is underway to better inform and support PPSD's parent leaders with ways in which to collaborate with school leaders. Additionally, PPSD has reinforced the orientation process for new members with assistance around engaging parents and principals at their schools. Overall PAC attendance has improved, and there is greater interest in the PAC's work throughout PPSD's larger school community.

- 7) Every year, RIDE administers SurveyWorks, Rhode Island's school culture and climate survey, to all public schools in the state. RIDE asks students, educators, and families about their experiences in education to gain valuable feedback for districts and schools on what is working and what needs to improve. Providence has the unique opportunity to add additional questions to SurveyWorks. This year, PPSD ensured these additional questions were aligned to the issues that are most important to families, students, and teachers. Over 13,000 students, educators, and families responded to the survey.
- 8) RIDE and PPSD are developing a Parent Bill of Rights, in collaboration with the PAC and the Rhode Island Center for Justice, to empower families to be effective advocates for their child's interests. The initiative will serve as a template that can be replicated across the state.

- 9) In a partnership with PPSD and RIDE, Rhode Island Public Transit Authority (RIPTA) is using federal funding to provide additional bus passes to high school students based on where they live. Previously, students needed to live two miles or more from their school to qualify for bus passes. However, parents and students have long sought to cut that distance to one mile away from their school. Responding to family feedback, which was even stronger during the COVID-19 public pandemic, Commissioner Infante-Green and Superintendent Peters worked with RIPTA to expand eligibility for bus passes to anyone who lives more than one mile away. As a result, more than 1,700 PPSD students can now use bus passes. In so doing, PPSD expanded access to no-cost transportation to its students, which is improving attendance and allowing students to take advantage of extracurricular activities, after-school sports, and more.
- 10) To prepare for reopening schools this fall, the district solicited community input on a large scale through a widely distributed survey reaching over 3,000 stakeholders. PPSD also held over 25 smaller focus groups with students, parents, partners, and community leaders to more clearly define priorities. PPSD also held community forums – online, rather than in person – to keep families informed and answer the many questions and concerns of the community during this time of uncertainty.
- 11) PPSD has also engaged and supported CABs to be part of school-level improvement. Approximately 60 members – including students, community members, and parents –

support school improvement across the 15 PPSD schools that were designated as in need of Comprehensive Support and Improvement due to low performance. CABs support principals and network staff to design school improvement plans that support improving student outcomes, as well as provide feedback on how federal school improvement dollars will be used to fund interventions within the school improvement plan. To build CAB members' capacity, PPSD developed and delivered a Collaboration for Equity learning series for CAB members to clarify their roles, leverage their collective expertise, and define decision-making rights for equitable outcomes. Over 50 percent of CAB members participated in this professional development across two sessions.

12) The John Hopkins Report pointed to challenges that community partners had experienced when engaging with and supporting PPSD. Changing this dynamic is critical to activating and engaging community partners to help PPSD reach the ambitious goals in the TAP. PPSD has worked to reimagine what it means to have mutually beneficial relationships with its community-based organization by focusing on student-centered initiatives that are data-driven and rigorous. This shift will enhance existing partnerships and set the stage for new partnerships that will provide multidimensional experiences for PPSD's students based on needs. Examples of reimagined partnerships in action include:

- Books Are Wings provided books to elementary school students at meal sites in the spring.

- With the funding support of 21st Century Community Learning Centers and local businesses, New Urban Arts provided art kits to high school students at Central and Classical throughout the spring and summer of 2020.
- City Year quickly pivoted its program delivery model by calling students and sending motivational videos to their students and partner teachers.
- Seven organizations provided Summer Learning Programming for students in grades Pre-K to 12, with 65 percent of program participants attending at least 2/3 of scheduled program days.
- Inspiring Minds trained and placed 100 volunteers in PPSD elementary schools to support students one-on-one.

Enhancing ongoing communication with families

13) PPSD has invigorated ongoing parent engagement through the restructuring of the FACE, including the hiring of a new Chief and putting structures in place that bring parents into the decision-making process through the PAC and CABs. This restructuring was in response to direct feedback from families and members of the community regarding their struggles in having their voices heard. PPSD's previous office configuration was not conducive to working with multiple families simultaneously. Bringing family voice to the forefront meant a realignment of operations. Centralizing the FACE team gave PPSD the ability to better

engage families in real time. The office also added two interpreters to assist with calls, walk-ins, and school-based programming.

14) PPSD reimagined its Parent Academy workshops as online, rather than in-person, events in order to engage families during the COVID-19 pandemic. PPSD's goal is to provide parents with an academy that prepares them with the necessary tools to support their students' education and student advocacy. One hundred and fifty-eight (158) parents participated in the parent academy program in the fall 2020. This new online delivery has helped to increase parent participation. Topics draw from families' needs that are unique to distance learning, such as technology support and navigating participation in the VLA. Workshops also showcase the latest improvements related to the TAP, such as the ELA and math curriculum. Lastly, the district continues to offer workshops on such perennial favorites as understanding Individual Education Programs (IEPs) and 504 plans for students with disabilities, as well as preparing for college.

15) PPSD increased customer service in all public-facing offices by developing new customer service standards to ensure all staff are more responsive to families. This customer service training is part of a deliberative culture shift to make PPSD a more welcoming and empathetic environment. As part of the standards' roll-out, the district is conducting a year-long training cycle for 200+ family-facing staff on high-quality customer service. Staff at both Central Office and at schools are receiving training on the customer service practices. This

training focuses on putting families first and being responsive to their needs in a way that is genuine and results oriented. PPSD views this as a top priority, as the district is here to serve the community in the most meaningful and positive way possible. The standards are built on five elements: Courtesy and Respect; Communication and Accessibility; Professional, Cultural, and Linguistic Responsiveness; Environment of Belonging; and Awareness and Continuous Improvement.

16) PPSD trained new building leaders, teachers, and Central Office staff in the use of KiNVO, a two-way texting software that allows the district, schools, and educators to connect directly with families in their preferred language. PPSD has strategically used this communication tool during the COVID-19 pandemic; response rates (where families text back) doubled from March to November 2020. PPSD is continuing to build staff capacity to strategically utilize KiNVO for direct text messaging and two-way communication with families, as well as to integrate KiNVO in general strategic communication and family outreach planning.

17) Superintendent Peters created a series of videos for families to explain aspects of the district's reopening plan. These videos addressed multiple components of the district's reopening plan, such as ventilation in schools. These videos, shared via social media, gave families much-needed guidance in preparation for a safe and healthy beginning of the school year.

- 18) PPSD made 4000+ proactive phone calls from Central Office to families to support the VLA and made 450+ home visits to support students with low attendance. PPSD took this proactive approach to ensure that all families understood the process for enrolling students in the VLA. From an equity perspective, PPSD needed to make sure that students had the necessary technology to access the VLA. To decrease the number of absent students, PPSD and RIDE staff conducted personal home visits, following proper COVID-19 safety protocols. These visits persuaded many students to return to school.
- 19) PPSD repurposed one staff role to serve as a family liaison specifically for families of differently abled students. The objective of this new position is to enhance direct communication and supports for families of differently abled students. The new staff member created a dedicated KiNVO list to communicate directly with these families. This was a critical step in specializing communication, since reopening guidance for families of differently abled students was often very specific and aligned to specific topics, such as how to give consent for evaluation, virtual IEP meetings, Parent Academy, and a family survey around specialized services.
- 20) In addition to creating the new family liaison role, PPSD has plans to relaunch its Special Education Local Advisory Council (SELAC), anchored in PPSD's new supportive approach. In the past, the SELAC relied on one-way communication to connect with families and did not adequately leverage the valuable expertise of our existing parent base.
- 21) In order to support our multilingual families during parent-teacher conferences, PPSD piloted an immediate, over-the-phone interpretation service (which could cover 350 languages) in the fall of 2019. The pilot was so successful that the district doubled its initial \$15,000 investment to \$30,000. When the pandemic hit, the need for real-time, multilingual communication channels skyrocketed. Once again, the district grew its annual investment in the service to \$50,000 for the 2020-2021 school year
- 22) The district has made a significant investment increase in translation services. PPSD is now working off of the state MPA to provide translation of school-related documents in all the district's major languages.
- 23) Elementary and middle school ELA curricular resources include a family engagement connection, providing ongoing updates to parents who provide information about their children's achievement levels, power goals, and the current skills that they're working on to meet their goals. Guidance to parents is provided in terms of how they can be a part of supporting these skills. Parents are also provided with access to the electronic libraries that their children are using, so they can engage in family reading opportunities.

Inside Story: Putting Families at the Center

Research is clear: when parents are engaged in their children’s education and welcomed into the school building, their children are better positioned to succeed both academically and socially. A heartbreaking finding in the Johns Hopkins report is that many parents of Providence students felt “shut out of their children’s education.”

During the community forums that followed the report, family members echoed again and again that (1) families felt powerless and isolated; (2) historically, engagement had not led to action; (3) both reasonable and divergent opinions often had not been recognized; and (4) community partnerships were not universally accessible across the system.

Once the state intervention began, RIDE and PPSD made a firm commitment to implement transparent, consistent, and culturally relevant family and community engagement initiatives that would respond to the unique needs of students and families, district wide.

The failure to prioritize the family voice was 100 percent unacceptable to Commissioner Infante-Green, who had made “Engaged Communities” one of the three pillars of success that guide the PPSD TAP. Once the state intervention began, RIDE and PPSD made a firm commitment to implement

transparent, consistent, and culturally relevant family and community engagement initiatives that would respond to the unique needs of students and families, district wide.

The first step in the development of a robust community engagement function was the expansion of PPSD’s FACE office. Prior to the state intervention, FACE consisted of a director and four family engagement specialists spread across the system. To build out this function, Superintendent Peters hired Nick Figueroa as the new Chief and added the position to the cabinet level.

Upon taking the reins at FACE, the new Chief set about creating a more robust team, first by adding two interpreters and then adding a Student Records and Volunteer Manager, while expanding the responsibility of the Customer Service Manager to serve as the point person for the “Let’s Talk” family engagement tool.

Beyond adding to the team, Figueroa brought his dedication to direct community engagement, helping all PPSD staff members feel more accountable to the district’s families. The FACE office is leading efforts to expand parent representation on the PAC, and it conducted a series of focus groups over the summer to get meaningful feedback from families and community partners. Plans are underway to create a Parent Ambassador position for each school, which will be tasked with strengthening the ability to share and exchange information, resolve family inquiries and concerns, and respond directly to feedback.

One of the early returns on the bolstered PAC effort was direct parent input to the PPSD supplemental questions included in SurveyWorks. The PAC also met with principals in early 2020 to begin strengthening relationships between school leaders and parents, connections that have proved valuable during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The customer experience solution platform *Let's Talk* was selected for PPSD to build and strengthen the communication between family and schools securely through phone, email, and direct message – with the bold goal of a one-day business turnaround for all queries.

Next up in PPSD's effort to connect with families is the implementation of an online customer experience that is making it easier for families to engage with school and district leaders on important topics related to their child's education. The customer experience solution platform *Let's Talk* was selected for PPSD to build and strengthen the communication between family and schools securely through phone, email, and direct message – with the bold goal of a one-day business turnaround for all queries. These initiatives are elevating PPSD community engagement to a previously unheard-of standard of excellence.

Let's Talk is automated, easy to use, and highly efficient. Once an inquiry is made, it is quickly assigned to the appropriate staff member for speedy resolution. All inquiries are tracked on a dashboard to ensure a resolution, and families have an opportunity to rate the service provided.

PPSD staff are being trained on *Let's Talk*, which will improve connections and close the gap between school and families, leading to long-term gains for students.

In addition, the district has created customer service standards designed to provide better service for all of our families, with a focused goal of improving connections, closing the gap between school and families, and supporting long-term success for all students.



MOVING FORWARD: BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

A successful school transformation process is impossible without the dedicated support of and collaboration with families and community leaders. Throughout the TAP process, parents will be uplifted through structures that empower them to have a powerful voice as the best advocate for their child. Through continued engagement, PPSD will build meaningful home-school connections between families and educators. New partnerships with community-based organizations will elevate student and community voices in a meaningful way.

Major initiatives on the way include:

- 1) Parent-teacher conferences are critical opportunities for families to connect with their children's teachers and their school communities. Conference-based dialogue not only gives parents the tools they need to better support learning, it gives teachers greater insight into their students' lives and motivations. To keep the focus on greater responsiveness to families, all Providence teachers will now participate in parent-teacher conferences this fall, even if those conferences are held after regular business hours. Previously, teacher participation in after-hours conferences was optional. In another adaptation to the national health situation, parent-teacher conferences will be offered online rather than in person. Real-time language interpretation services will be available to non-English speakers. The Providence Teachers Union (PTU) had previously pointed to the collective bargaining agreement as evidence for the practice that parent-teacher conferences were not required. However, after engaging the PTU on this issue, PPSD leadership determined that, in the best interests of students and families, parent-teacher conferences would be required going forward.
- 2) PPSD is launching the "Let's Talk" online platform to make it easy for families to pose questions and receive responses within one business day. The program will allow PPSD to receive feedback through multiple entry points that include the PPSD's website, email, phone calls, and social media. Once feedback is received, the platform creates a dialogue that is assigned to a specific staff member for

resolution. The system will allow this dialogue to be tracked, keeping a consistent log of responses provided and informing PPSD with actionable customer-service data, such as how long it takes to respond after the initial contact is made. At the end of the process, the individual who initiated the dialogue will be able to rate PPSD on the quality of customer service received. PPSD is providing professional learning to its staff on the program to ensure it is effectively implemented.



COMMUNITY VOICES

"The PAC allows parents to interact directly with Commissioner Infante-Green and Turnaround Superintendent Peters on a monthly basis, including time to hear updates on Turnaround initiatives, and to highlight any specific concerns from their own unique communities. The PAC provides parents the dedicated space they deserve to come together to share ideas and suggestions for best family engagement practices at the school and district level."

– Melissa Hughes (PAC Parent)

- 3) RIDE and PPSD will continue to increase SurveyWorks participation among Providence stakeholders and families, in particular, as the primary tool of measurement for the success of PPSD's engagement efforts. The district will

utilize multiple channels of communication to build awareness about the survey and increase participation. Tactics include Spanish-language radio interviews, multiple weekly recordings, personal calls to families reinforcing how SurveyWorks will provide PPSD with valuable, actionable feedback from families, collaborating with PPSD community partners and local businesses to promote SurveyWorks, and directly assisting families with accessing and navigating the survey.

- 4) PPSD is working to create a Student Advisory Council that will work with the Superintendent to provide feedback around potential policy changes that affect students. The Student Advisory Council will also present students with experiential leadership learning opportunities that will develop them as future leaders. Just as importantly, it will give students a seat at the table with the PPSD Superintendent where they will be able to express their needs related to academics and districtwide policy.
- 5) PPSD will be establishing a Districtwide Advisory Council that will meet directly with the Superintendent to provide feedback regarding the district's progress on TAP initiatives. Each grade level will have a parent representative, along with parents of MLLs and differently abled students.
- 6) PPSD is planning a Parent Ambassador program that will place a parent ambassador at each school. This robust program will provide direct parent support and leadership training, enabling ambassadors to be deeply engaged with their school and school community. These ambassadors will serve in a liaison role

between parents, their school, and Central Office, enabling a quicker, more effective flow of information and resources to and within the school community.

- 7) The district is currently exploring adding a Parent University to the Parent Academy program to provide families with greater tools to participate in their child's educational journey. The concept would allow families to participate in ESL, financial literacy, and ARC training, as well as other areas that would benefit the family as a whole. PPSD is also exploring forming a relationship with a higher education institution to provide college credit for parents who wish to participate.
- 8) PPSD currently maintains over 100 partnerships with community partners. In order to have more meaningful partnerships for students and schools, PPSD will conduct a comprehensive review on the effectiveness of these relationships. Moving forward, PPSD wants to ensure that all partnerships align to the TAP pillars and initiatives, which are centered around boosting student outcomes. Streamlining this process will ultimately improve student learning and leadership development.
- 9) PPSD will continue to provide customer service training through ongoing courses for staff during the next school year. PPSD will take feedback from this first round of trainings and will look at end-of-year-data to modify and improve the new round of training. This effort will continue to be supported by our customer service standards that put students and families first. ★

Teachers and Staff Will Be Engaged, Energized, Motivated, and Invested in Student Learning

WHERE WE WERE: TEACHERS WERE UNSUPPORTED AND UNMOTIVATED

Transforming Providence into the school system its students and families deserve requires empowering and supporting world-class teachers who are actively engaging all of their students, all of the time. However, the Johns Hopkins report painted a picture where hard working Providence teachers, who desperately wanted to see that vision become a reality for their students, instead felt demoralized, powerless, and overwhelmed by a system designed to do anything but support them. The Johns Hopkins researchers noted the high levels of teacher absenteeism, the chronic shortage of substitute teachers, and shortages of important positions in most schools.

In the Johns Hopkins report and community forums, teachers often cited inadequate professional development opportunities as a barrier to success. Professional learning opportunities were scarce across PPSD, with only one day of professional learning built into the collective bargaining agreement (CBA). Many teachers expressed frustration with the lack of funding and opportunities for professional development. The most devoted of teachers would often rely on supportive colleagues for mentorship and support, “usually after hours for the sake of the children.”

The John Hopkins report pointed to multiple levels of the school system negatively impacting educators of color in particular, including district hiring practices, inadequate talent pipelines, and a lack of support or even outright hostility from fellow teachers and administrators. While research indicates educators of color positively affect both white and students of color alike, a significant disconnect existed in Providence. While 90 percent of all students were people of color, only 20 percent of teachers were.

Underlying all of the above, multiple individuals in the Johns Hopkins report consistently and widely regarded the teachers’ CBA as major impediment to change and innovation within Providence’s broken system, especially as it pertains to the hiring process and the lack of professional development opportunities.



FROM THE JOHNS HOPKINS REPORT

“Many people noted that the collective bargaining agreement presents a systemic barrier to good teaching in two primary ways: limiting professional development and severely constraining the hiring and removal of teachers.”

Year 1: Strengthening the Foundation

Commissioner Infante-Green and Superintendent Peters believe that a highly effective teacher is the most important component to student achievement. This drove the prioritization of key educator workforce initiatives in Year 1 of the TAP, including expanded professional development opportunities, implementation of a nationwide teacher recruitment campaign, and earmarking resources for teacher ESL certification programs. Teacher wellness and self-care were addressed through a partnership with Pure Edge, a respected wellness community that tailored their in-person offerings for a virtual setting during the pandemic.

Revamping PPSD's Human Resources office

- 1) The Johns Hopkins report specifically cited challenges with the level of support PPSD's Office of Human Resources (HR) provided to schools. One administrator noted: "Human Resources is larger than ever, but nothing has actually changed for schools." The perception was that HR had historically gotten in the way of, rather than supported, effective school staffing. When RIDE first assumed control of PPSD, restructuring the HR office was a top priority for Commissioner Infante-Green. The Chief of Human Resources position was eliminated, and the new PPSD Chief Operating Officer was given direct responsibility for the function. This ensured HR was part of a cohesive agency-wide focus on increasing overall effectiveness across all Central Office operational services. With this focus in mind, HR began to shift from outdated, sometimes paper-based, processes to a more effective approach grounded in the latest best practices.
- 2) As part of continued Central Office reorganization, PPSD further streamlined the Office of Human Resources by reducing head count, while reallocating staff to better support schools. Previously, staff functions in HR were aligned to support employee groups, not schools. For example, one staff member focused on recruiting and staffing teachers districtwide, while another focused on teacher assistants. This resulted in a principal having to engage multiple HR team members to satisfy their staffing needs. Now, as part of the new network-based approach, three staffing and recruitment officers are assigned and accountable to a cohort of schools – one each for elementary, middle, and high schools – to provide a single, streamlined point of support for recruitment and staffing needs. This approach has increased effectiveness and responsiveness to school leaders. HR team members, along with Central Office staff, participated in customer service training to enhance the support they provide to schools, staff, and job applicants.
- 3) RIDE and PPSD engaged with TNTP to conduct a deep dive into understanding PPSD's human capital challenges and practices described in the Johns Hopkins report. The work with TNTP highlighted several key challenges with PPSD's human capital approach, including how delays in the hiring process, such as the

posting of positions externally until late May, greatly limited the pool of available candidates and contributed to persistent vacancies.

TNTP's analysis also revealed how a limited pool of candidates has hobbled efforts to diversify the workforce. The recommendations TNTP provided to address these issues have influenced the revamped HR office's approach to staffing and hiring practices.

- 4) PPSD also formed a research practice partnership with the Annenberg Institute at Brown University to build PPSD's human capital capacity, study PPSD's educator pipeline, and develop research-based strategies that will increase the diversity of the teacher applicant pool. This partnership has since led to a cross-divisional team taking a deeper dive into PPSD applicant and employee data, the development of a dashboard with actionable data for HR, and the identification of supplemental metrics associated with the TAP's World-Class Talent pillar.

Streamlining and improving PPSD's hiring practices

- 5) The Johns Hopkins report cited a number of challenges resulting from PPSD's hiring process, including delays in hiring teachers, a large number of vacancies at the start of each school year, and a lack of diversity among the teaching workforce. Ineffective hiring policies disproportionately affected educators of color. To begin to address these challenges, PPSD proposed a radically different hiring timeline and process. This included moving up the external hiring process by nearly two months, from late May to the end of March after an

internal hiring fair, when the talent pool is the most robust, and when highly sought after, effective, and diverse educators are available.

- 6) In addition, PPSD also proposed significantly limiting the use of "one-year positions" in the hiring process. In prior years, any new position that was posted for the first time after the internal hiring fair in March would be time-bound and guaranteed for only one school year. After the completion of that year, teachers would be forced to reapply for their position. This practice was put in place to guarantee that internal candidates, thanks to their seniority, would get the first chance to apply for any new permanent position as part of an internal candidate-only hiring round. The lack of job stability as a result of this practice dissuaded quality external candidates from applying for PPSD positions. PPSD proposed waiting until the end of the 2019-2020 school year to determine whether any newly posted position would be designated as a one-year position.
- 7) PPSD leadership engaged the Providence Teachers Union (PTU) to review proposed changes to address challenges regarding PPSD's hiring practices over multiple sessions as part of a "Criterion Based Hiring" committee. This contractually defined process included equal representation from PPSD and the PTU to define the PPSD hiring process. In the past, this has led to a 20+ page criterion-based hiring process manual, on top of the already pre-existing CBA. The PTU would not agree with the proposed changes. Per the CBA, a neutral third party was identified to review both sides and make a final ruling. This neutral third party

broke the stalemate and agreed with PPSD's proposed hiring changes.

- 8) As a result of these changes and additional recruitment efforts listed below, and despite the recruitment challenges posed by the health and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, PPSD was able to significantly reduce the number of classroom vacancies by the first day of the school year, from 102 in 2019–2020 to only 22 in 2020–2021, a 78 percent reduction, with plans to continue this downward trend. In addition, PPSD greatly reduced the number of one-year positions by 42 percent, from 106 in 2019–2020 to only 61 in 2020–21, providing more stability to new PPSD educators.
- 9) As a result of these changes and recruitment efforts, PPSD also made significant strides in increasing the diversity of new educator hires for the 2020–2021 school year. For this school year, 26 percent of new hires identified as an educator of color, compared to just 17 percent in 2019–2020 and 11 percent in 2018–2019. While one out of every four new hires being an educator of color is definite progress, significant strides still need to be made in eliminating the hiring barriers that disproportionately impact educators of color to meet the TAP's ambitious goal of 33 percent educators of color in PPSD's overall workforce by the 2024–2025 school year.

Recruiting and improving PPSD's educator workforce

- 10) To improve the quality and diversity of PPSD teachers, RIDE launched a national teacher recruitment campaign to attract high-quality teachers to Providence. More than 160,000

people saw the campaign's core video at least once. More than 9,000 eventually visited the special landing page for PPSD teacher recruitment, leading to nearly 800 live leads for PPSD recruiters. This led to over 600 teacher referrals to PPSD. PPSD supported its fellow Rhode Island districts, providing additional referrals PPSD received along to other districts based on the specifics of the referral.

- 11) RIDE developed a series of incentives and certification changes to increase PPSD and other districts' abilities to recruit and retain high-quality teachers. For example, RIDE worked with Rhode Island Housing to market its [Spring7500](#) program to Rhode Island teachers. This program provides a \$7,500 down payment assistance loan to eligible first-time homebuyers in Rhode Island, and is an appealing incentive to keep talented professionals in the state. RIDE also partnered with the Commerce Corporation to expand the Wavemaker Fellowship to new teachers in the STEM (science, technology, engineering, math) fields. These financial incentives will also be helpful for PPSD to recruit and retain a diverse educator workforce.
- 12) In addition, RIDE enacted certification regulation changes making it less burdensome and more attractive for teachers in Connecticut, Massachusetts, and other states to teach in Rhode Island, if the teacher has full certification from one of those states. These certification changes will align with the larger goal of broadening certification pathways, allowing for greater flexibility in becoming RI certified, especially in shortage areas. The changes are

informed directly from feedback from educators and school system leaders, as well as research from surrounding states in expanding certificate areas.

- 13) The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly increased the need for substitute teachers, both to cover staff absences resulting from quarantines or increased attention to staying home when symptoms arise, as well as because it is more difficult to have substitutes work across multiple schools. To address this challenge, PPSD began recruiting for substitutes in early July in partnership with SkillsRI. This partnership, in addition to changes in substitute compensation in the form of bonuses and an increased daily rate, enabled the district to hire 60+ substitutes.
- 14) RIDE supports a special legislative task force, led by Representative Karen Alzate, that is focused on increasing the number of Rhode Island educators of color. The objective of the commission is to identify relevant research and successful practices to enhance educator of color recruitment and retention throughout the state. The commission will identify and establish public, private, and philanthropic partnerships and identify a process to prepare, support, and encourage school leadership to increase retention of educators of color. The commission met twice in spring 2020 prior to COVID-19, and RIDE will continue to support this commission when it resumes in 2021.
- 15) PPSD increased the number of MLL coaches from 25 in the 2019-2020 school year to 29 this school year, so that every elementary and middle school will have a dedicated, full time MLL coach. These coaches provide job-

embedded professional development and support to all teachers of MLLs. This includes ESL and bilingual/dual language teachers, as well as core content teachers who have MLLs in their classrooms.

Consistently engaging and hearing directly from educators

- 16) Commissioner Infante-Green launched coffee hours at every school within PPSD as an opportunity to provide a more intimate opportunity for teachers to share their perspectives and ideas on what's working well and what needs to be improved to make transformational changes. These coffee hours served a key role in helping the Commissioner and Superintendent identify nationally rated ELA and math curricula. The coffee hour started as in-person meetings before school started, and continued virtually throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 17) To ensure that PPSD's educators directly had a voice and contributed to the development of PPSD's TAP, multiple members of the CDT were PPSD educators or staff. In addition, RIDE specifically reserved three CDT member spots – one per sub-committee – for representation from the PTU, ensuring that the teachers union, both through its individual educators and as an organization, had clear representation in the development of the TAP.
- 18) Superintendent Peters has made it a priority to engage and hear directly from educators from the beginning of his term. As part of his entry plan, he formed numerous teacher feedback groups to learn about their experiences working

in the district and gain insight into their work. He also met with teachers throughout the summer to gauge their concerns related to reopening, and held a teacher-specific town hall on the district reopening plan, which included Rhode Island Governor Gina Raimondo and the Commissioner. Superintendent Peters will continue to hear directly from educators during weekly feedback sessions with different schools.

19) In November of 2019, Commissioner Infante-Green convened educators of color from throughout Rhode Island for a series of ongoing conversations to discuss how best to diversify the workforce. The conversations centered on existing barriers into the profession; recruitment strategies; the working environment as it pertains to the treatment of educators, families, and staff; and ongoing support to ensure that all stakeholders can work, grow, and succeed in Rhode Island schools. Many educators highlighted a lack of compassion and understanding of the trauma educators of color face as a result of systematic oppression, as well as a lack of mentors and allies within their own schools. The significant majority of these educators were from Providence and other urban core districts.

20) These conversations led to the creation of the RIDE Educators of Color Committee. The goal of this committee is to offer clear guidance and create policies and procedures that promote empowerment and the retention of current and future educators of color. This includes ensuring equal representation at every level and valuing communities of color and what they have to offer.

21) The Johns Hopkins report stated that “PPSD has an exceptionally low level of academic instruction, including a lack of quality curriculum and alignment both within schools and across the district.” PPSD set as a priority the selection of a high-quality ELA and math curriculum. PPSD engaged more than 100 teachers to develop and select a unified, cohesive approach to curriculum and professional learning. Representative teams of teachers were brought together from each elementary and middle school to review ELA and math curriculum choices and provide input on the programs they believed would best suit the needs of the students. The teacher voice was essential to the final decision on the selected curriculum.

22) As part of her commitment to engage educators, Commissioner Infante-Green also initiated Educators in Action meetings. Each month, the Commissioner meets with a statewide group of educators to provide a direct opportunity for them to share current challenges and highlight what is going well within their school community. A significant portion of the educators participating in this group were from PPSD. These meetings also enable educators to share best practices, engage in common issues they are facing, and serve as a sounding board for the Commissioner and RIDE on potential policy ideas, especially around questions of school climate and culture.

Significantly increasing professional learning for PPSD’s educators

23) In the Johns Hopkins report, teachers noted repeatedly that a lack of professional development was a key factor to their inability

to improve their teaching practice. To address this issue immediately, PPSD significantly increased professional learning from providing one orientation day prior to the start of school, filled mainly with administrative and general activities, to five *professional* days prior to the start of school and five more *professional learning* days embedded throughout the school year.

24) During this school year, PPSD has already offered over 750 professional development sessions for all staff, including administrators, teachers, teacher assistants, childcare workers, and clerical staff – compared to 218 sessions offered by this time last year. These learning sessions spanned across all aspects of PPSD’s TAP, including support for the implementation of the ELA and math curriculum for teachers and teacher assistants, sheltered content instruction sessions to support MLLs for all staff, and school-based weekly professional learning community sessions. As part of districtwide culture change, PPSD has focused on embedding professional learning with each initiative and strategy implemented.

25) PPSD’s Office of Equity, Culture, and Student Supports launched rich professional development in diversity and culturally responsive and sustaining practices. This 40-minute, self-paced session includes key learning around the culturally responsive teaching framework adapted for all PPSD staff, PPSD’s equity definition and priorities, PPSD’s social-emotional learning vision, and PPSD’s customer service standards. PPSD also provided this professional learning directly to

PPSD’s new teachers as part of the new teacher onboarding process.

26) The Office of Equity and Diversity hosted a summer virtual learning day centered on the intersections of instruction, culture, and social justice. More than 800 PPSD educators, students, and community members attended. Over 70 percent of attendees said they found the sessions “extremely impactful to their daily practice.”

27) PPSD’s Central Office received key feedback from educators and building leaders regarding the misalignment of historic professional learning opportunities and their actual needs, as well as the lack of sustained impact from previous professional learning opportunities. To rectify this misalignment, PPSD developed a high-quality rubric to vet professional learning offerings and measure impact and alignment with turnaround initiatives. This tool was developed based in part on teacher feedback around professional development impact and quality. Key indicators in the rubric that principals and network leaders can now use as they develop professional learning experiences include alignment to the TAP and internal coherence; collaborative learning, research and data-driven content, professional learning design: content and knowledge.

28) PPSD designed a culturally responsive professional development series for special education teachers and related service providers. For the first time ever, PPSD held a specialized services and instruction (SIS) start-of-year kick off to engage special education teachers, related service providers, teacher

assistants, and early childhood educators in a shared vision for the start of the school year. This session onboarded SIS staff to the TAP and their role in collaborating on change in the district.

Providing teachers with additional supports to set them up for success

- 29) RIDE, in collaboration with PPSD and postsecondary education institutions, announced a partnership to significantly increase the number of teachers trained to serve MLLs. Through this partnership, Providence teachers will be eligible for [reimbursement up to \\$3,200 in educational expenses](#) for enrolling in an ESL certification or master's degree program in the 2020-2021 school year. This initiative, which is supporting 115 participants, will aid in the district's efforts to comply with a recent agreement with the U.S. DOJ. The agreement makes clear that Providence must increase its number of ESL-certified teachers. Leaders from Rhode Island College, the Rhode Island School for Progressive Education, Roger Williams University, and the University of Rhode Island have all committed to ensure enough seat capacity for Providence teachers enrolling in ESL certification programs. The district is working with higher education providers to develop a longer-term partnership to support teachers in obtaining their certifications.
- 30) To address stress among educators during the pandemic, PPSD has prioritized conversations on educator wellness and self-care. Support has included training teachers through a partnership with Pure Edge, as well as other

tools teachers can use in physical and virtual classrooms with their students. The partnership with Pure Edge provided 14 dedicated sessions for PPSD, initially focused on in-person professional development and expanded virtually statewide as a result of COVID-19.

- 31) RIDE announced full funding of 261 teacher projects totaling \$131,648 in November 2019, through the online crowdfunding website [DonorsChoose.org](#), made possible through the generosity of the Partnership for Rhode Island and Theresia Gouw, a board member of the Corporation of Brown University and DonorsChoose.org. Over \$80,000 of the dollars raised directly supported PPSD educators.
- 32) Partnering with the Michael and Susan Dell Foundation and InnovateEDU, PPSD piloted its locally developed Learner Profile platform. With input from teachers and students, this platform was modified throughout the year and is ready to be piloted at all elementary schools. In a time when there are multiple educational technology products and apps in use in our schools, the Learner Profile platform is a resource to provide teachers, students, and families the same access to their student's data. Specific benefits for educators include a fuller picture of the whole student and an accurate snapshot of where that student is with their learning; timely and actionable data to respond to individual needs; and a location to store goal-setting information so students can practice goal setting and self-monitoring (learning, language, SEL, college/career, personal, transitional, etc.).

33) Moving forward, PPSD will be engaging teachers in “classroom connections” across the district, where they and their students are able

to meet with other classrooms in that grade and discuss and engage in content they are studying.

Inside Story: Supporting World-Class Talent

A corps of highly qualified, motivated teachers is pivotal to success for students in every school in every zip code. For students in Providence, it is even more critical. Yet, as the Johns Hopkins report noted, teacher support and preparation were letting educators and students down. Once the intervention began, RIDE and PPSD leaders approached the challenge from two directions: boosting the skills of those teachers who worked hard to educate their students and recruiting new talent into the district.

Once the intervention began, RIDE and PPSD leaders approached the challenge from two directions: boosting the skills of those teachers who worked hard to educate their students and recruiting new talent into the district.

In 2018, PPSD reached an agreement with the U.S. Department of Justice to address its lack of teachers qualified in ESL instruction. About one third of PPSD’s 24,000 students were English learners, while only 21 percent of the district’s teachers were ESL certified. As the intervention began, RIDE was committed to find a way to close this gap significantly.

In January of 2020, Commissioner Infante-Green announced a plan to reimburse Providence teachers up to \$3,200 to become certified in ESL. The initiative was supported by the district’s budget and philanthropic support. A partnership with four local higher education institutions – Rhode Island College, Rhode Island School of Progressive Education, Roger Williams University, and the University of Rhode Island – provide much-needed capacity, so that more teachers could be in the ESL-certification pipeline.

To date, more than 100 teachers are participating in the program, boosting the ability of the district to meet the needs of students and improve the skills of the entire teaching community. The effort is going a long way to making ESL certifications the norm across the district.

Improving the skills of current teachers was not enough, of course. As the intervention began, it was clear that existing recruitment and retention practices were not meeting the demand of PPSD, and the educator workforce did not reflect the diversity of Providence. Work began immediately to turn that situation around.

Through generous philanthropic support, RIDE was able to work with a top-notch local marketing firm to develop a national campaign to recruit world class educators to teach in Providence. An

initial campaign, which included a state-of-the-art promotional video that would feature groups of students and teachers, was set to launch in early spring 2020 – that was until the COVID-19 pandemic made the concept impractical and out of date.

Forced to regroup, the RIDE team reconvened with the marketing firm to create a fresh campaign that addressed the new reality. “Almost Impossible,” the upbeat teacher recruitment video that emerged, highlights PPSD’s success in moving quickly to distance learning once COVID-19 hit. The social media engine spread the message far and wide, targeting a diverse audience of teachers looking for challenging opportunities.

More than 160,000 people saw the video at least once. More than 9,000 eventually visited the special landing page for potential PPSD teachers, leading to nearly 800 live leads for PPSD recruiters. Thanks to the campaign and other efforts by the district, vacancies at PPSD at the start of the school year were cut from around 90 last year to roughly 30 – a remarkable success on its own, but even more notable given the ongoing public health crisis.

An important side benefit of the campaign was its popularity among current teachers and the community, since it focused on the remarkable efforts of PPSD teachers and students to make school happen during the pandemic. In the face of COVID-19, it showed that resilience and innovation are prevalent in Providence public schools.

MOVING FORWARD: BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

RIDE and PPSD are committed to creating an equitable and diverse workforce that complements the culturally rich PPSD student body. They are making significant investments in equity and professional development throughout the district to ensure all PPSD students attend a school staffed by highly effective teachers who reflect student diversity and are committed to student growth and achievement.

Major initiatives on the way include:

- 1) Extensive negotiation efforts for reaching a transformative collective bargaining agreement with the PTU continue. As it was widely pointed out in the Johns Hopkins report, reaching a new CBA is a keystone for long-term change in PPSD. PPSD and RIDE have met with the PTU two times most weeks to negotiate a CBA with the goal of reaching an agreement that treats educators as full professionals, increases access to professional development and advancement opportunities, and eliminates ineffective hiring processes that have served as barriers to new quality educators (disproportionately educators of color) joining PPSD’s ranks and providing an excellent education to students. Since RIDE and PPSD’s first substantive session with the PTU



on May 14, 2020, RIDE and PPSD leadership have met with the teachers union 38 times, and have spent about 260 hours meeting with them to discuss RIDE's and PPSD's positions and strategy at the table, and drafting proposals and counter proposals

2) The RIDE and PPSD negotiating team presented a new draft CBA earlier this year and outlined how its provisions aligned with the findings of the Johns Hopkins report. Among the issues the CBA must address include:

- **Delayed hiring timeline:** The current CBA includes a transfer process that delays postings for external candidates by more than three weeks. Given that the talent pool is most diverse early in the hiring season and that "prime hiring" season occurs from late winter to the end of school, a three-week delay greatly hurts the district's ability to compete for top talent.
- **Seniority-based consolidations:** The current CBA requires that when schools consolidate positions (e.g., reduce from three math positions to two) the least senior teacher is displaced. Given that teachers of color tend to be less senior, consolidations disproportionately hurt teachers of color.
- **Seniority-based layoffs:** Similar to consolidations, the current CBA requires that teachers are laid off in inverse seniority order in their area of certification. While layoffs have not occurred in recent years, teachers of color would be disproportionately impacted if they were to occur.

- **One-year positions:** Positions posted after a certain date (last year, the last day of school) are posted as "one-year only" positions, which deters qualified applicants from applying.

- **Forced placements:** The current contract requires PPSD to force-place displaced teachers who do not obtain a position during the hiring process, even if they do not apply for any positions or are underperforming.

3) Committed to addressing each level of racism (internalized, interpersonal, institutional, and systemic) within the Rhode Island education system, the RIDE Educators of Color Committee has created five subcommittees that will be responsible for upholding our mission, vision, and core values in public and private education throughout the state. The five subcommittees will focus on the following:

- Hiring and retention support system for educators of color
- Race and culturally responsive professional development and trainings
- Statewide Accountability Review Board
- Race and Cultural Oversight Committee
- Embedding restorative practices to shift statewide climate and culture

The RIDE Educators of Color Committee is committed to identifying and developing solutions for equity gaps and working towards ensuring that Rhode Island educators and students, particularly those of color and their families, have equal access to a safe,

supportive, inclusive, and culturally sensitive learning environment that provides rigorous and relevant educational, real-world experiences, which will in turn strengthen relationships and partnerships between all Rhode Island stakeholders.

- 4) Throughout the school year, PPSD's network organization is prioritizing teacher and leader training through ongoing professional learning, facilitation of professional learning communities, and daily on-the-ground coaching and support.
- 5) As part of the overall effort to improve diversity and equity across the district, RIDE and PPSD will make new investments aimed to attract, retain, and support teachers of color. A critical strategy is developing pipelines for teacher assistants to become teachers. In addition, PPSD is providing small-group guidance and support for emergency certified teachers (primarily early-career educators) on preparing and taking the Praxis exam to advance their educator certification. PPSD believes this is a high-leverage strategy because educators of color are disproportionately represented among emergency certification holders.
- 6) High-quality curriculum resources have been implemented in ELA and math across all elementary and middle schools. Research says that students must have access to on-grade-level instruction in order for them to have the likelihood of demonstrating mastery on grade-level standards. The work continues to ensure all high schools have high-quality curriculum resources in the year to come.

- 7) PPSD plans to pilot a student feedback survey that will provide educators with input they can use to improve their practice. Through this effort, the district aims to elevate student voices while providing teachers with actionable feedback. ★



COMMUNITY VOICES FROM PPSD PARENTS

"My daughter's teacher is fantastic. She engages the students, she allows participation, she disciplines, and she speaks to the parents."

– Kimberly Dwyer

"I just want to praise her teacher, who is doing an amazing job in a hard time. She's attentive to each student even in the difficult environment of the virtual classroom and is so patient and kind with them."

– Leela Corman

"I think my son's teacher has shown a high level of commitment to making this set-up work for everyone. She has good command of the virtual classroom and uses technology effectively."

– Kim Morneau

Goal #4

Principals and School Leaders Will Be Autonomous and Empowered to Lead

WHERE WE WERE: SCHOOL LEADERS COULD NOT RUN THEIR SCHOOLS

For years, principals have had little authority in making the personnel decisions they feel will best serve their students, predominantly citing rigid hiring processes driven by the collective bargaining agreement. In the Johns Hopkins report, principals consistently noted the results that stemmed from their inability to remove the weakest teachers and hire the most qualified staff to meet their schools' and students' specific needs.

In one extreme case, a principal told of the difficulties in removing a teacher who had inappropriate physical contact with children. The principal was eventually successful in putting the teacher on administrative leave, however that teacher was "still on the roster and [was] still being paid." Principals also pointed to the requirement to conduct multiple, prolonged, internal hiring rounds, including with displaced teachers, prior to being able to consider any external candidates. They

described how this prevents them from finding the strongest teachers for their school. One principal called this process "a limbo of churn every year."

Principals also pointed to a lack of support and professional development from PPSD's Central Office, which had either failed to remove low-performing principals or had shuffled them to other schools and roles, perpetuating failure. Archaic and dysfunctional hiring practices and a lack of school leader support left school leaders feeling like they couldn't run their school and, ultimately, demoralized and powerless.



FROM THE JOHNS HOPKINS REPORT

"Principals and other school leaders repeatedly reported they are held accountable for results they neither have the resources or authority to influence."

Year 1: Strengthening the Foundation

Great leaders make for great schools, and RIDE and PPSD leaders are committed to ensuring every city school has an empowered and effective leader. In the first year of the TAP, several reforms were

put in place, including the creation of an innovative network structure to provide professional support for principals. Many schools throughout the district began the 2020 school year with new,

highly effective leaders at the helm. The teacher hiring timeline was moved up by a month and a half in preparation for the school year, and teacher vacancies in the district were significantly diminished.

Ensuring each PPSD school had a high-quality school leader

1) To address the issues raised in the Johns Hopkins report, PPSD prioritized putting great leaders in schools, with 13 PPSD schools having new leadership for the 2020–2021 school year, either by recruiting new, high-quality hires or transferring existing effective leaders to low-performing schools. When necessary, the district has made personnel moves in school leadership in response to school performance data and a comprehensive assessment of leadership performance. All new leaders held previous school leadership experience and add diversity of background and experience to the district’s principal corps.

Providing principals with professional learning and tools to succeed

2) Responding to direct feedback that principals needed more support and autonomy to be successful, PPSD launched a network structure designed to support and develop outstanding school leadership. PPSD schools are now organized into one of two networks organized by grade level (elementary and secondary schools). Each network is led by a Network Superintendent and includes staff who provide direct supports and services to school leadership teams. This new structure shifts traditional Central Office functions

closer to schools and students, enabling the network teams to build strong, collaborative relationships with school leaders.

- 3) As part of this new structure, the network established professional learning communities among school leaders and provides coaching from highly skilled former leaders focused on helping principals achieve specific objectives for their schools and targeted individual development goals. This network structure enables principals and assistant principals to engage in professional learning communities on a regular basis, where they are able to collaborate with colleagues, gain ideas, and engage in problems of practice with district leaders.
- 4) Each principal and assistant principal receives on-the-ground, job-embedded coaching support from leaders within the network. In addition, each month, principals participate in four-hour professional learning sessions designed specifically around four key levers of school turnaround: leadership, culture, instructional transformation, and talent development. Experienced school leaders from the network leadership team provide these sessions and ongoing training. This training includes regular school walkthroughs and visits. Survey data is regularly collected and analyzed to assess the feedback received from principals and ensure supports are responsive to their needs.
- 5) Network leadership is receiving extensive coaching and support from an expert national principal leadership coach funded by the Schusterman Foundation. This coach is

providing ongoing support and development aligned with National Model Principal Supervisor Standards. Coaching also supports network leaders in supporting principals in getting what they need, when they need it, so they can lead their schools as instructional leaders focused on standards-based instruction for all students.

- 6) All building administrators participated in a week-long professional development series in August with a focus on teaching, learning, and culture. This School Leadership Academy (SLA) was a summer professional development opportunity for site-based leaders to meet with network leadership and level-set the goals and objectives for PPSD in alignment with the TAP. Time was spent on specific leadership development to prepare leaders with goal setting and the creation of their pre-planning approach for their faculty and staff. The major difference from previous years was the 2020 SLA was grounded in pillars of the network: school leadership, instruction, culture, and talent management. Leaders were provided with key elements of PPSD's school reopening plan, identified actions to date, and engaged in expectations focused on school leadership and key levers of school improvement.
- 7) Principals now lead the professional learning days at their school, providing professional learning trainings based on the specific needs of their faculty, staff, and students. The major difference in the principal-led professional learning days was the additional days created by new PPSD leadership. Moving to five days allowed principals to cover critical topics, such

as COVID-19 safety protocols, alignment of the school's instructional and cultural priorities with the TAP, implementation of the new curriculum, and effective usage of remote learning platforms.

- 8) PPSD has used business intelligence software over the past several years to provide timely access to data to school and district leadership. In the 2020 school year, the district enhanced the data dashboards that were available to inform leader decision making. This was in response to a greater need for data at a standards-level and allowed for the disaggregation of information by subgroups to identify potential disproportionality and gaps in performance. PPSD also developed dashboards to support monthly data reviews for attendance, discipline, and critical incidents.
- 9) The Johns Hopkins report cited a broken hiring process as a constant point of frustration for school leaders. The report cited that the "the multiple rounds that make up the hiring system undermine strong faculty placements" and that "principals usually cannot hire from outside the district until all inside-the-district candidates have been placed." By moving up the hiring timeline, principals were able to hire external candidates beginning in March, rather than May, allowing them to select the best candidate for the position and solidify their staffing for the next school year.
- 10) RIDE also developed a state assessment visualization for all schools in the fall of 2019. This tool enables school leader teams to review Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS) data down to the standard

level to see where students may have strengths and weaknesses in specific skill areas, allowing them to use this data to inform the school's instructional strategies.

- 11) PPSD has developed a Culturally Responsive Leadership professional development series and framework to support ongoing leadership development. Moving forward, PPSD will work with network leadership teams and the leadership development director to codify and scale culturally responsive practices in order to create the conditions for the Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) framework to be implemented successfully.

Strengthening engagement between school and district leadership

- 12) Commissioner Infante-Green conducted ongoing meetings with entire teams of PPSD school leaders, organized by grade-span. These meetings provided her with the opportunity to directly and candidly hear from school leaders about the challenges they faced in their buildings, and the tools and supports they needed to successfully improve student outcomes. This feedback informed RIDE's

approach to transforming PPSD to be more supportive of school leaders, especially when RIDE first assumed control of PPSD.

- 13) Superintendent Peters made it an early priority of his term to engage with principals and receive their feedback. Over the summer, he led a Principal Leadership Series, where he walked principals through his theory of action for school improvement, led sessions on leadership and coaching, and received feedback on district operations and areas for improvement. The Superintendent relies closely on the advice and leadership of the two network superintendents so that he can continue to strengthen engagement between Central Office and principals and provide them with the support they need.
- 14) School leaders from all grade levels have been integral to the negotiations process for the new teacher collective bargaining agreement. RIDE and PPSD involved school leaders in both the initial priority setting and proposal development process, and turns to them on an ongoing basis as subject-matter experts throughout negotiations.

Inside Story: Strengthening School Leadership

Leadership matters. A talented and empowered principal boosts the morale of a school's staff and students, while drawing the best out of the school's teachers and focusing all efforts on delivering success for students. Over the years, PPSD principals have not had the tools they need

to lead effectively, and many felt they were set up for failure.

When speaking to Johns Hopkins reviewers, for example, principals "referenced the collective bargaining agreement as impeding their ability to exercise leadership and oversight in their schools."

The Johns Hopkins report clearly emphasized the need for principal autonomy and suggested the need for targeted professional development programs to ensure effective leadership and increased academic performance for PPSD students.

These findings influenced Commissioner Infante-Green and her team at RIDE to prioritize the development of programs that enhance principal leadership competency and build a pipeline of future leaders – all in support of developing world-class talent.

These findings influenced Commissioner Infante-Green and her team at RIDE to prioritize the development of programs that enhance principal leadership competency and build a pipeline of future leaders – all in support of developing world-class talent. This effort got a big boost in early 2020 when Harrison Peters, an experienced leader in urban school system turnaround efforts, was hired as the Providence Superintendent.

Peters quickly began work on the creation of a leadership network that would embrace a vision of excellence and create a pipeline of competent leaders for years to come. To support this goal, PPSD applied for and was awarded the highly competitive and prestigious Teacher School Leader (TSL) Grant from the U.S. Department of Education. The \$10 million, three-year grant supports strategies to fulfill the promise of “a more diverse, effective educator workforce, which leads to improved educational experiences for students, and therefore, improved student performance.”

These efforts include a robust assistant principal pipeline, a principal residency network, and ongoing professional development for school leaders. The grant also allows the district to look at compensation systems and incentives as they relate to career ladders. Year 1 activities include building a TSL network design that provides direct leader and teacher supports at each individual school daily.



Success of these initiatives will be measured by the percentage of leaders participating in training; closer alignment between teacher evaluation ratings and student performance; increased percentage of school leaders of color; and increased retention of highly effective principals.

A new, dedicated position, Director of Leadership Development, will lead this initiative, supported by a TSL Steering Committee that includes the Chief Operation Officer, Network Superintendent for Elementary Schools, Network Superintendent for Secondary Schools, and Chief of Equity, Culture and Student Supports, among other professionals

who provide on-the-job support and professional development. Leadership development requires a long-term commitment to build a culture and structure to support excellence, and this year has sent PPSD efforts off in the right direction.

MOVING FORWARD: BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

As the CBA negotiations continue, RIDE and PPSD leadership will continue to advocate for greater principal autonomy, including the ability to hire the most qualified, effective teachers for their schools. The district will use funds from a federal grant to create a structure to identify school leaders best positioned to take on greater decision-making power, establish a system of building-level management, and put in place targeted support systems for principals. The network structure will continue to provide the professional learning and supports that principals need to ensure their schools' success.

Major initiatives on the way include:

1) A new PTU contract is being negotiated that will provide school leaders with more authority and autonomy in key areas, such as staffing and budgeting. Under current provisions that have developed over the decades, principals are unable to quickly move ineffective teachers out of the classroom, hire the most qualified candidates for open positions, or intervene to improve the performance of educators who are struggling. They have not even had the ability to guarantee that teachers would attend parent-teacher conferences. By finalizing a new contract, PPSD will bring decision-making power to those closest to students and enable

school leaders to make decisions in the best interests of their school communities.

2) PPSD applied for and received a \$10 million, three-year federal Teacher and School Leader (TSL) Grant to support leadership development. Funded efforts will include creating a robust assistant principal pipeline, a principal residency, ongoing professional development for school leaders, and compensation review systems and incentives as they relate to career ladders.



COMMUNITY VOICES

“The new network support is really pushing principals to strengthen their instructional leadership practices so that we can really develop our teaching staff. This helps us ensure that every teacher has high expectations for every student.”

– Kristin Bagley, Principal (Pleasant View Elementary Schools)

3) Administrators will engage with the network leadership team in a process of “learning walks” focused on gauging how well instructional practices are aligned to their articulated instructional priorities. Learning walks will incorporate observations to identify trends in instructional practices within schools to provide effective feedback that will lead to shifts in instruction that improve student outcomes. ★

School Buildings Will Be Modernized and Updated

WHERE WE WERE: **NEGLECTED SCHOOL BUILDINGS WERE SYMBOL OF FAILURE**

“Casual inattention.” Symbolic of the low expectations that permeated the school system, casual inattention described the expected level of cleanliness (or lack thereof) to which Providence’s facilities were expected to be maintained. According to the professional standards of cleanliness for school buildings, “casual inattention” is only one mere step above “moderate dinginess.”

Decades of neglect had left Providence’s school buildings in a state of structural disrepair. The John Hopkins review team noted visiting buildings with peeling paint and discolored drinking water. Through interviews with PPSD teachers, the John Hopkins review team heard shocking accounts of filth and hazards in school buildings Teachers



FROM THE JOHNS HOPKINS REPORT

“Our team saw the paint on the ceilings on the third floor were falling in sheets. We didn’t see any actually falling off while we were there, but teachers reported that is actually comes down in sheets from time to time.”

shared stories of rodents squirming through classrooms, leaking ceilings disrupting classroom instruction, and the dangerous presence of asbestos in buildings throughout PPSD.

Based on a 2016 facility review analysis, 27 out of PPSD’s 38 school facilities were rated as being in either “poor” or worse condition. Only three school buildings were rated as “good,” While a capital plan was initially in place to address these structural deficiencies, the plan had repairs sometimes taking multiple years to complete at one school. Further, it was clearly noted in interviews across the district that getting repairs done is a “haphazard business” that can often take months.

As a result, these decaying facilities disrupted student learning and contributed to low morale for all – students, educators, and community members alike.



Year 1: Strengthening the Foundation

Every child, educator, and community member deserves a school building that reflects the pride and high expectations that should exist inside the classroom. When the state began its intervention in Providence, both Commissioner Infante-Green and Mayor Elorza knew that a solid plan to upgrade PPSD school facilities was a top, immediate priority. Building off of Mayor Elorza's commitment in 2017 to improve school facilities, RIDE and PPSD administrators went to work, in partnership with the city, to determine how to best approach this costly, but necessary priority, including how to realign the facilities capital plan in place to one that matched the new academic vision for the district.

In August 2020, an updated transformative Capital Improvement Plan was revealed. The new plan provides for \$300 million to transform PPSD buildings into safe, modern learning facilities furnished with the latest in 21st century technologies. The new plan puts student-centric facility improvements front and center, making facility decisions that will lead to improving student outcomes. The plan also includes the best-practice use of swing space to cut construction time at schools from five years to just one.

Good news also came when former Providence Mayor Joseph Paolino Jr. donated the old St. Joseph's Hospital building to the district. After further renovations, this facility will be used for a brand new, state-of-the-art Pre-K – 8 school. The Pre-K – 8 school will be the first of its kind in Providence, and was heavily informed by both

strong community interest in and national research on the strength of a Pre-K – 8 model.

Providence's citizens signaled overwhelming confidence in Providence's revised capital plan. In November 2020, 89 percent of Providence voters overwhelmingly approved a second school facilities bond to finance the revised capital plan.

Reimagining PPSD's school facilities through a new capital plan

1) Commissioner Infante-Green joined Mayor Elorza to announce an amended, \$300-million, five-year, multi-phase School Capital Improvement Plan in August. The new plan now emphasizes and shifts funds to student-centric innovations and new construction, allocating almost two-thirds of total funding for these purposes, compared to only 25 percent in the prior plan. Student-centric innovations include a variety of improvement areas that lead to redesigned learning spaces and create classrooms and schools that are better suited for 21st century learning. Taken together, the revised plan will address much-needed infrastructure repairs and improve student learning environments by addressing the following four key priorities:

- Aligning the school capital plan to the district's new educational strategy under the TAP, including the use of stand-alone Pre-K – 8 facilities.
- Delivering more new facilities and renovations on a shorter timeline.

- Conducting facility renovations and improvements with student learning mind.
 - Maintaining and strengthening plans to address the most urgent safety and facility needs.
- 2) To ensure the new capital plan delivers more new facilities and renovations on a shorter timeline, it now includes the first-time, best-practice use of “swing space.” Closed in 2012, the former Windmill Street School will be rehabilitated and brought back online as PPSD’s swing space. The swing space will enable different schools to temporarily move into Windmill for one year, while renovations are completed at their home school. Having an entire school building empty and utilizing flexible swing space will allow the capital plan projects to be completed much faster, while at the same time ensuring students can continue their education without the disruption caused by prolonged construction. For example, when the Carl Lauro Elementary School undergoes extensive renovation, the Lauro students will attend school temporarily at the Windmill swing space facility and will return to Lauro once that building is ready to be reoccupied. The original repair would have required the Lauro school to be under construction for 27 months – or just over two full school years, with students trying to learn in the building while construction was ongoing. By utilizing the Windmill swing space, the time under construction will be reduced to 15 months – or just one school year plus summers, with students safely learning in Windmill and free from construction disruption. In addition, the Windmill Street swing space facility will be equipped to serve elementary and secondary school students. After serving as swing space, Windmill will be transitioned into a dedicated school facility.
- 3) Former Providence Mayor Paolino generously donated the former St. Joseph’s Hospital building for PPSD to use as a new, state-of-the-art Pre-K – 8 school, following extensive renovations. This facility, located in the heart of the South Providence community, will serve hundreds of neighborhood children. The school’s Pre-K – 8 grade structure will provide a unique learning experience, as students will avoid the transition from elementary school to middle school where many children struggle. The facility will first be used as a transitional education space, and is expected to be a stand-alone school by fall 2024.
- 4) PPSD has already initiated over \$5.15 million in critical capital improvement projects, including a roof replacement at Hope High School, unit heater replacements at Kizirian Elementary School, school security enhancements across the district, and the installation of new rooftop HVAC units at Carl Lauro Elementary School.
- 5) In October 2020, PPSD reconstituted the PPSD School Building Committee, incorporating new district and school leadership, as well as two parent representatives, to oversee implementation of the new capital plan. Required by RIDE’s school construction regulations, and chaired by the Superintendent, the PPSD School Building Committee is tasked with reviewing projects in the capital plan, providing vital feedback, and making recommendations that align projects to the educational goals of the district and the TAP.

6) To move this important work forward, PPSD hired a Senior Manager of Facilities and Capital Planning to oversee the facilities maintenance contract and capital planning process. Prior to the state intervention, the school district was not significantly engaged in school construction decisions and oversight. This added capacity allows PPSD to have a dedicated staff person focused exclusively on school facilities and to ensure the proper alignment with the educational goals and strategies of the district. The Senior Manager coordinates the PPSD School Building Committee and also serves as the district liaison to both the RIDE School Building Authority and the Providence Public Property Department.

Preparing PPSD's facilities for a safe reopening during the COVID-19 pandemic

- 7) As part of the comprehensive response to the COVID-19 pandemic, PPSD engaged in a thorough process to prepare safe facilities for students to learn and staff to work. As part of this effort, PPSD worked with a ventilation engineer to ensure proper air exchanges in buildings with and without existing HVAC systems. This resulted in a school-by-school, classroom-by-classroom approach to ventilation and an investment in over 750+ window fans and 500+ HEPA filters. Additionally, with support from RIDE, the district recently added an additional 1800+ HEPA filters to support building ventilation in cold weather months, when keeping windows open may not be feasible.
- 8) Working with a custodial vendor, PPSD increased custodial staff hours dedicated to

improving cleaning and the level of cleanliness of all school buildings. The district also created a clear process for the deep cleaning of all spaces. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the district's custodial vendor hired additional temporary staff to augment the full-time team to ensure a safe environment for students and staff. This augmented staff capacity has resulted in an approximately 40 percent increase in custodial hours worked since September 2020 (approximately 12,000 additional custodial hours). Working exclusively during school hours, these extra custodians perform on-going disinfection of restrooms and high-touch surfaces.

- 9) To support a safe reentry, PPSD procured substantial amounts of personal protective equipment (PPE) for staff members and students, including: 100,000+ reusable masks and 100,000+ disposable masks; 19,000+ bottles of hand sanitizer; and 2,000+ gallon containers of disinfectant spray. In addition, PPSD installed 750+ window fans and 300+ HEPA filters to increase ventilation within the classrooms.
- 10) As part of the initial response to COVID-19 in spring 2020, from March 17 through June 30, PPSD and its food service vendor distributed over 1.5 million meals to the city's school children at 14 school-based sites during the COVID-19 shutdown. This food distribution initiative included home delivery service to those students and families most in need. Because food insecurity is a major concern of families and because students need the nourishment provided through the school meals program, it was vitally important to provide

meals to children even when the schools were physically closed. At the conclusion of the 2019–20 school year, meal distribution transitioned to the Providence Recreation Department as part of its regular summer meal program.

Improving ongoing upkeep and maintenance of PPSD’s facilities

11) The Association of Physical Plant Administrators (APPA) provide a five-level rating system to help educational facilities evaluate the cleaning quality at their facilities, as well as the appropriate staffing needed to maintain them. Historically, PPSD had contracted with a custodial vendor to maintain the schools at an agreed upon APPA level 3, or “Casual Inattention” level. However, since RIDE assumed control of the district, the custodial vendor has been performing at an APPA level 2, or “Ordinary Tidiness.” This level is reviewed by an independent, third-party evaluator now contracted to review the cleanliness and condition of the school facilities three times per

year. This higher level of cleanliness has led to a better school environment for students and staff, one that is more conducive to teaching and learning.

12) To improve customer service to schools, PPSD has worked with its facilities maintenance vendor to streamline the work order reporting system, so that any staff can identify building issues and have them entered into the work order system and receive follow up emails as the work order progresses to resolution. PPSD has also developed a rotating painting schedule so that all schools receive two full weeks of painting service each school year. In addition, the implementation of the Capital Revolving Fund (see bullet below) will allow PPSD to address more of the high-impact visual enhancement (HIVE) projects that improve the student experience in the schools. PPSD has also initiated painting and plaster repair projects that remediate interior damage caused by past water penetration from failed roofing.

Inside Story: Restoring, Rebuilding, Reimagining

One of the most sobering findings of the Johns Hopkins Report was the unacceptable physical condition of many of PPSD’s school buildings. Reviewers stated, “in all but one of the (elementary) schools, the buildings were in very poor – and in one, absolutely dire condition. In some cases, the facilities clearly disrupted learning.”

During the public forums over the summer 2020, families recounted the troubling stories their children had told them about their decaying school environments. In response, Commissioner Infante-Green recognized the importance of building modern learning environments in a successful turnaround effort and made a commitment to release a plan to upgrade PPSD

school facilities—a plan that prioritized safety and 21st century learning opportunities.

In reviewing the condition of the current school facilities, 27 out of the 38 school buildings in use, or 71 percent, were rated in poor condition.

Only three buildings were rated in good condition. Moreover, building capacity exceeded 100 percent at a time when enrollment was continuing to grow. Any capital plan would have to do more than incorporate new space while making critical renovations; it would also have to innovate to address 21st century learning requirements.

The amended new plan supported by Mayor Elorza and RIDE includes \$160 million in phase-one projects targeted improvements in 26 buildings currently in use. Highlights include a new building on the site of the current Spaziano Elementary Annex in the Laurel Hill area of



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This summer, Commissioner Infante-Green was joined by Mayor Elorza to announce an amended, \$300-million multi-phase School Capital Improvement Plan that would augment Mayor Elorza's 2017 commitment to invest heavily in school infrastructure. This included \$160 million in previously approved funding and an additional \$140 million bond, which Providence voters approved in November 2020.

Providence and a major renovation of the district's flagship for academic achievement, Classical High School. Phase one also detailed the improvement and reopening of the Windmill School to serve as needed swing space, so construction could happen in other buildings during the school year.

With funding approved in the November election, phase two of the plan includes a significant investment in Carl Lauro Elementary that will not only modernize the facility, but add much-needed green space to its campus. Phase two also accounts for renovations in the recently donated building, the former St. Joseph's Hospital, a generous gift of former Providence Mayor

Paolino. The donated building will be reconfigured as transitional space before it is renovated into a much-needed state-of-the-art Pre-K – 8 school facility.

Much of this work is urgently needed, and six critical structural improvement projects are slated to take place during the 2020–2021 school year: Fortes Elementary School, Lima Elementary School, Webster Ave Elementary School, Kizirian Elementary School, Feinstein Elementary at Broad Street, and Roger Williams Middle School.

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A reconceived School Building Committee that includes greater parent involvement convened this fall, and will be overseeing details on all the shared PPSD and city capital projects for the next five years.



MOVING FORWARD: BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

The amended Capital Improvement Plan includes several exciting infrastructure projects that will be undertaken in the coming years, including the long-overdue reconstruction of many of PPSD’s oldest school buildings located in the city’s most historic neighborhoods. Meanwhile, the district will continue to upgrade and expand initiatives that make the schools ever safer from COVID-19.

Major initiatives on the way include:

- 1) Over the next five years, approximately \$300 million in capital improvement and building projects will be completed, significantly modernizing and upgrading Providence’s schools. In November 2020, the voters in Providence approved a bond referendum totaling \$140 million, to be combined with the already existing \$160 million bond approved in 2018, to support PPSD’s five-year capital

plan. The major projects earmarked for these combined funds include: the renovation of the former St. Joseph’s Hospital facility and conversion into a Pre-K – 8 school; the construction of a new school to replace the Spaziano Annex school; and the renovation of the former Windmill Street School.

- 2) The Spaziano Annex building, rated in the [Jacobs Report](#) as one of the state’s worst school facilities, will be demolished and rebuilt to be nearly double its size, going from 17,000 to 30,000 square feet. The new Spaziano Annex and freshly renovated Spaziano building will combine to create a modern, Pre-K – 8 educational campus that will meet the needs of students and families in the Silver Lake neighborhood.
- 3) In the near term, Providence is investing \$12 million in much-needed exterior building repairs to Roger Williams Middle School and Broad Street, Fortes, Lima, Kizirian, and Webster Avenue Elementary Schools. The initial projects at these schools include building envelope repairs to address urgent needs, such as roof replacement and masonry work to eliminate water infiltration. Subsequent projects at these schools will involve additional structural repairs, high-impact visual improvements, and additional student-centric innovations.
- 4) As part of the next stage of PPSD efforts to respond to COVID-19, the district is acquiring and will install more than 1,800 HEPA-filtered air purifiers in school buildings across the district. The deployment of these purifiers in every PPSD classroom will permit the district to

continue to ensure proper ventilation and air circulation to safely provide in-person learning during the winter months, when keeping classroom windows open is a challenge.



COMMUNITY VOICES

“As a mother I feel so grateful to see my son’s school, Harry Kizirian Elementary, doing these type of changes to make the school a better place for students, families, and staff. The school really needed a change for our students...new roof, new playground. Awesome!”

– Carol Duluc (Providence Parent)

- 5) For the first time, Providence is developing a \$1 million Capital Revolving Fund so that more smaller-scale capital projects can be completed in our buildings for the benefit of our students, staff, and families. These projects will be reviewed and approved by the RIDE School Building Authority and will be subject to state reimbursement. The state reimbursement would then be directly deposited into the revolving fund, enabling the district to continuously complete additional projects using these replenished funds. These types of projects selected would be prioritized to reflect investments that save money in the future and that would enhance the student experience in the school. ★

Goal #6

All Schools Will Be Safe, Modern, and Have a Respectful and Positive School Culture

WHERE WE WERE: SCHOOL CULTURE IN PROVIDENCE WAS BROKEN

Bullying and cases of physical violence were commonplace in PPSD middle and high schools. In one elementary school, students complained to Johns Hopkins reviewers about daily bullying and frequent backpack thefts, while an elementary school principal was noted as saying her most important daily task was “ensuring that the students feel safe.”



The Johns Hopkins review team was stunned by the low morale throughout the PPSD community and alarmed about the frequent references to safety concerns by PPSD staff and students. They specifically noted, “there is widespread agreement

that bullying, demeaning and even physical violence are occurring within the school walls at very high levels, particularly at the middle and high school levels.” PPSD staff pointed to inconsistent student discipline measures and the pressure to reduce suspensions as problematic.

The alarmingly high incidences of teacher and student absenteeism that plagued the district for years were attributed in part to poor school culture. Based on 2019 survey results, less than half of Providence’s students had a favorable perception of feeling safe at their school. Direct feedback from students to Commissioner Infante-Green when she first started revealed a disheartening reality: all students wanted was the opportunity and support to thrive, but instead they felt trapped in a system that neither valued nor respected them.



FROM THE JOHNS HOPKINS REPORT

“School culture is broken, and safety is a daily concern for students and teachers. Our review teams encountered many students and teachers who do not feel safe in school.”

Year 1: Strengthening the Foundation

PRIDE and PPSD leadership recognized the need to transform the toxic culture in PPSD schools into a culture that fosters a safe and nurturing learning environment focused on student growth and achievement. Through the TAP, they made a commitment to ensure that “every student in Providence will be enrolled in a school where they feel engaged, secure, and valued. A data-driven process for regularly assessing the social and emotional health and growth of students will be implemented.”

Strengthening each school’s climate and culture

- 1) PPSD significantly expanded its focus on social emotional learning (SEL) as a critical lever to improve each school’s climate and culture. Previously, SEL had been conflated with social-emotional *behavioral* health, and as a consequence, PPSD primarily focused SEL efforts and supports on students with significant behavioral needs. The new leadership team re-configured the district’s thinking from a deficit-based view of student capacity to an affirming and asset-oriented view that supports all students. For example, this SEL mindset now asks, what SEL competencies do students bring into the classroom that educators can build upon? And what areas of growth do students need to be able to develop to further access instruction?
- 2) To inform this shift in strategy, PPSD convened an SEL summer steering committee comprised of teachers, building leaders, clinicians,

students, and family members. This steering committee informed the development of an SEL vision statement that is rooted in equity and social justice.

“We believe academic learning and cognitive growth are inextricably tied to social emotional development and the pursuit of equity, liberation and self-actualization for our students. Our children, families and staff will work together to gain an awareness of self; equipping us with the skills to not only explore the inequities that exist in the world around us, but practice navigating through them with responsible decision making. We believe SEL is not a “curriculum” set apart from core content; it is explicit skills cultivated in order to provide access to rigorous, high quality learning experiences for students. Through ongoing self-reflection and the celebration of our collective experiences, we will all grow as critical thinkers who know our worth and what we need to thrive.”

This new SEL vision was shared as a part of the transition lessons designed for every teacher to deliver. Teachers, building leaders, and network leaders were all trained on the SEL framework and culturally responsive teaching to help them develop and strengthen cross-disciplinary frameworks that create a strong classroom culture and the conditions for high-quality, grade-level aligned instruction.

- 3) To assess SEL within the district, PPSD formed a cross-divisional team in the summer of

- 2020 to begin a process for collecting and tracking social-emotional health and growth data of students. PPSD had already been collecting some social-emotional data through the Behavioral Intervention Monitoring Assessment System (BIMAS). This measure uses educator assessments of social, emotional, and behavioral functioning, and can be used to identify students who may be in need of additional support. The team discussed whether gaps existed in the data and determined that, while the current measure provided important data related to teacher perception of students' social, emotional, and behavioral functioning, it was also important to implement an additional measure that would capture student's self-perception.
- 4) PPSD subsequently adopted a new measure of student social-emotional skills called the Social Emotional Competency Assessment (SECA). The first administration of the measure with students in grades 5-12 was fall 2020. Data from the fall 2020 administration indicate that students identify Self-Management as the SEL competency that is most challenging, while Relationship Skills was easiest to master. The district has put together individual school-level data reports and provided a list of recommended resources to use in the classroom with students. The data will be used to inform classroom, grade-level, and whole-school SEL practices and interventions. A key purpose of administering this measure was also to gauge across school levels how students are coping with stress and managing emotions during these unprecedented times.
 - 5) PPSD built upon this vision and assessment with a series of initiatives to improve SEL within the district. These have included five days of SEL lessons for teachers; adoption of SEL competencies; and the codifying and scaling of classroom-level SEL practices. PPSD also launched an SEL resource site for educators and school leaders. Since SEL had long been conflated with social-emotional behavioral health, PPSD plans to work with schools and the Director of Student Services to form an SEL community of practice to support school-level implementation of SEL, combined with additional SEL coaching and supports.
 - 6) PPSD previously had allocated school-level staffing for school culture through culture coordinator positions at the middle-school level. To better support school culture across the district, PPSD repurposed these positions and activated existing staff, including "culture leaders" at the elementary level, to ensure that every school had a clear point person focused on school climate and culture. PPSD also added supports within the larger network structure centered on implementing PPSD's culture and equity priorities. These added network level supports included the creation of a Culture and Equity Specialist position.
 - 7) PPSD secondary school leaders identified school culture priorities based on individual schools' review and analysis of data related to discipline, attendance, and school culture. As part of a root cause analysis, principals and their school team determined one area they would focus on for the school year and developed "look-fors" to support alignment

and focus from one classroom to the next across their entire campus. Each school also implemented Student Support Plans embedded with goals, resources, and objectives to address school culture and equity concerns.

- 8) The PPSD Secondary School Network launched a series of professional learning experiences, held monthly with school support personnel, focused on collaborative problem solving around addressing school culture needs. The training is rooted in Restorative Justice Practices and Positive Behavior Supports.
- 9) PPSD hired a new Director of Student Support Services to oversee the implementation of social-emotional learning and a multi-tiered system of supports in the district. This position was a repurpose of a previous role to add much-needed capacity to building district coherence and codification around Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) and a district SEL strategy and impact measurement approach.

Providing holistic wrap-around services to support students

- 10) PPSD implemented the School-Based Mental Health Collaborative to ensure that 36 schools have a clinician (social worker or school psychologist) to support site-based social-emotional health, with plans to expand this initiative to all PPSD schools. National research indicates that availability of school-based mental health services can improve student academic achievement. School-based mental health services have also been proven to increase family participation in their children's education and mental health treatment.

Through the School-Based Mental Health Collaborative, PPSD has sought to promote better access to services, including mental health services by pupil service providers and/or community mental health clinical services for children with serious emotional or behavioral issues and their families. This initiative has also improved efficiency and coordination of services among school professionals and community service providers to ensure more students and families consistently participate in support and treatment through linkages with the school's wellness programs.

- 11) The School-Based Mental Health Collaborative has also helped with the early identification of mental health challenges through appropriate screening, assessment, and follow-up; emphasized school attendance and reductions in dropouts (i.e., students not missing school due to appointments, improved functioning to address mental health symptoms that contribute to absences, etc.); and focused efforts to reduce the stigma often associated with mental illness by offering culturally competent professional development and consultation with school staff.
- 12) PPSD secured a \$20,000 training grant from RIDE to provide leadership development to its Specialized Instruction Team. Previously, the district had used focus groups to determine service gaps, in which families specifically asked for more streamlined, clinical support as it relates to behavioral health initiatives. These grant funds are building the necessary capacity to deliver on this request by improving school responsiveness, especially as it relates

to culturally responsive positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) and individualized social-emotional supports. PPSD also secured eight additional counselors to support students and secure clinical support for students without coverage in response to the uptick in social-emotional health concerns due to COVID-19.

13) PPSD piloted the Cross Agency Collaborative Group in partnership with local child, family, and youth support agencies to discuss and implement holistic wraparound supports for students. This group consists of the Department of Children, Youth & Families (DCYF), Family Services, Tides Family Services, and the Rhode Island Parent Information network to collaborate around student support services for the over 13,000 students shared between the agencies.

14) As part of the response to COVID-19, RIDE and PPSD provided technology and internet access to students and families. These efforts included raising over \$400,000 in April 2020, including donations from CVS Health, Cox, Brown University, and private individuals for mobile computers and hotspots through a fundraising challenge issued in partnership with the Rhode Island Foundation. Mobile and internet providers also created local hotspots and provided reduced-cost internet access for families. Thousands of PPSD students gained access to distance learning as a result.

15) Each school has a team that focuses on promoting and integrating school wellness and instruction. PPSD also has a district-wide wellness committee dedicated to analyzing

district wellness and health policy initiatives. In summer 2020, the district-wide wellness committee developed and reviewed a report focused on PPSD students' overall health and wellness. Armed with key findings, PPSD has focused on promoting student access to better nutrition, such as farm-to-table programs and removing vending machines, as well as promoting more outside activity in partnership with Providence's "Take it Outside" program.

Focusing deeply on equity as a driver of improving school climate and culture

16) PPSD launched equity-focused professional development and people development efforts, including professional learning sessions now required for all teachers and staff on the Fundamentals of Diversity, Equity, and Belonging. PPSD also expanded professional development initiatives that addressed culturally responsive teaching. TNTP instructional walkthrough recommendations suggested that the district create supports to build educator capacity in holding high expectations for students, and support them in "carrying the cognitive load" rigor. So far, more than 250 educators have completed the initial *Introduction to Culturally Responsive Teaching* session. This professional learning series will roll out across middle schools in the spring. At the elementary level, culture leaders are holding coaching sessions and community-of-practice sessions facilitated by the Culture and Equity Specialists.

17) PPSD launched a Diversity Equity and Belonging virtual day of learning that engaged over 800 PPSD educators and

consisted of 16 professional development offerings with five community partners. This day of learning included focused discussions on intersectionality, culturally responsive teaching, supporting differently abled students, community collaboration for equity, and the launch of district ethnic affinity groups

- 18) PPSD partnered with Diversity Talks to launch a 60-educator cohort program, facilitated by students. PPSD will partner with Diversity Talks to curate another cohort for the 2021-2022 school year. Student facilitators from three high schools are leading professional development sessions for a diverse group of educators across the district, including building leaders, teachers, related service staff, and district leaders.
- 19) PPSD held Equity Office Hours with over 150 educators to discuss diversity, equity, and belonging in a small-group setting. These sessions included educators, students, parents, and community members. Prior to each session, participants registered and received key definitions so they could participate in rich and open conversations during the office-hour sessions.
- 20) PPSD partnered with national equity and diversity leaders to launch the “Say Their Names” toolkit in response to national unrest after the death of George Floyd and in support of students, families, and educators. PPSD will continue to work with local partners to curate resources for educators and leaders to engage in critical classroom conversations about race, justice, and civic engagement. This toolkit has been accessed by 400 educators across the district and used throughout the year to

address civil unrest, COVID inequities, and the 2020 elections.

Engaging and listening to students to inform district policies

- 21) One of the major themes that emerged during the community forums was the need to ensure that student voice is elevated to inform district policies. In an effort to directly hear from students, Commissioner Infante-Green started conducting school-specific student roundtables. These roundtables provide the Commissioner an opportunity to engage with and hear directly from students, one school at a time. The roundtables typically immediately follow coffee hours that the Commissioner and Superintendent host with teachers and administrators from that same school. This provides an ongoing opportunity for the Commissioner and Superintendent to focus on the set of issues that are affecting that particular school, and to discover themes and trends that affect the district as a whole.
- 22) To ensure that student voices were represented in the development of the Providence’s TAP, two students served as community members on the CDT. In addition, the CDT invited other students to provide their direct feedback on its preliminary recommendations for the TAP.
- 23) As part of Superintendent Peters’ Entry Plan, he held several student roundtables to gain insight into their perspectives on the district. The Superintendent has continued these roundtables, including holding a student-specific feedback group on the district’s reopening plan over the summer. The

Superintendent continues to make himself available to students who reach out to discuss concerns about their schools and the district.

24) RIDE recruited a small group of students from schools, organizations, and afterschool programs to participate in Focus Fridays. This group was tasked with developing activities and events that would help RIDE proactively involve youth from PPSD on decisions, initiatives, and strategies. Youth were able to meet with Commissioner Infante-Green and RIDE staff to discuss policies they were considering, while offering their feedback on issues affecting them as students. The meetings included feedback

on initiatives like the TAP and brainstorming sessions pertaining to youth-led events.

25) RIDE worked with these students to develop the Stand-Up Youth Summit, with the goal of better understanding key issues related to school culture and safety. The three-hour, virtual event drew 60 high school students from Providence and across the state. The event was originally planned for March 2020, but was postponed due COVID-19. However, thanks to the efforts of a group of passionate students, the event was held virtually in April 2020. PPSD students were heavily involved in the planning of the Stand-Up Youth Summit.

Inside Story: Supporting Emotional Health

SEL has long been recognized by researchers and practitioners as an effective approach that can lead to better student achievement and provide students with the life skills needed for future success. Prior to the state intervention, PPSD

RIDE quickly recognized both COVID-19 and distance learning as major disruptions in the daily lives of students and families, and began working with Pure Edge to expand their well-being services to students and families. Over 2,000 individuals participated during the month of April alone.

had already incorporated SEL into select curricula. Johns Hopkins reviewers noted Providence teachers' enthusiasm for SEL despite the lack of much needed resources for SEL competencies. "There is real pride in the fact that SEL is being implemented in some schools," they noted.

Early in her tenure, Commissioner Infante-Green made it clear that the expansion of social-emotional learning would be an essential component in RIDE efforts to improve school culture and enhance students' educational environment. She also understood the role it can play in staff self-care. In November 2019, RIDE partnered with Pure Edge, Inc. to provide online social-emotional support to teachers, made possible through generous philanthropic support.

When COVID-19 prompted a quick pivot to online learning in March 2020, RIDE quickly recognized both COVID-19 and distance learning as major disruptions in the daily lives of students and families, and began working with Pure Edge to expand their well-being services to students and families. Over 2,000 individuals participated during the month of April alone.

to make a safe space and foster the skills to help people manage when they are hurting. At the secondary level, students engaged in project-based lessons based on the coronavirus and its impacts on their lives—lessons designed to build collaboration, rapport and decision-making skills. This curriculum was so successful that other Rhode Island school districts began requesting it. RIDE has

now made it available for free to all local education agencies statewide.

RIDE and PPSD are now working to support an evaluation of SEL learning throughout the district. Other initiatives include the adoption of expanded SEL competencies for teachers, the development of an SEL website for PPSD staff, and the scaling of classroom-level SEL practices.



Recognizing that social-emotional skills would be critical to the transitioning back to in-person learning, in the spring 2020, the district contracted with national experts to develop a unique back-to-school curriculum, focused on rebuilding and celebrating community. Planned for the first week of school, the lessons were designed to build skills for understanding one's own emotions and others' feelings during the ongoing public health crisis.

Through this transition curriculum, elementary students received three reinforcing lessons a day on understanding harm, building empathy, and restoring trust. During circle time, students learned

At the secondary level, students engaged in project-based lessons based on the coronavirus and its impacts on their lives—lessons designed to build collaboration, rapport and decision-making skills. This curriculum was so successful that other Rhode Island school districts began requesting it.

Additionally, RIDE applied for and received a federal *School Climate Transformation* grant, a portion of which PPSD is using to train special education staff on tiered SEL supports for students.

MOVING FORWARD: BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

To strengthen the SEL curriculum in PPSD, leaders will make a continued effort to heighten the SEL competencies of teachers and school leaders alike. RIDE and PPSD will launch initiatives to engage students in district-wide policy discussions and provide them important supports to grow both academically and socially.

Major initiatives on the way include:

- 1) Thanks to support of a group of philanthropic partners, two PPSD schools will soon host innovative SMART Clinics, which are set to open in early 2021. The clinics will directly embed health services into the school buildings to provide service to students, educators, and staff. The clinics are based on the SMART Clinic model, which has been successfully used to improve student and community health in schools in Chicago and Alabama. The SMART model takes a holistic approach to improving the health of students, teachers, staff, and the whole school community. By integrating health issues into all aspects of the school, the clinics will improve the short- and long-term health of all involved. Plans are being considered to expand the SMART model to other schools in Providence and other districts in Rhode Island.
- 2) Meetings of the Superintendent's new Student Advisory Council will soon begin to provide direct feedback to the Superintendent from the students' perspective to inform district-wide policy. This student advisory council was formed to provide PPSD students an opportunity to directly engage the district's leadership around

topics and policies that are important to them. Although not a new concept, this type of advisory has not existed at the district in many years. PPSD is dedicated to ensuring students have representation and a seat at the table. Recruitment for this Student Advisory Council is currently in progress.

- 3) To address an issue that has been of particular concern across the community, RIDE, PPSD, and the City of Providence initiated a series of student, educator, and community conversations to gather feedback on the future of school resource officers (SROs) in schools.



COMMUNITY VOICES

“When I called FACE to ask for help about my IEP student, they responded quickly and provided the guidance necessary to help my child. As a PTA president in my son’s school, I also referred a parent member to the PTA with concern about their students, and FACE staff responded and gave prompt support.”

– Carolina Linares (PAC Parent)

- 4) PPSD secured a \$460,000 Gates Foundation Model, Design Initiative Grant to improve culture and climate in middle schools. PPSD will use grant resources to establish a richer, more inspiring school climate and culture for eighth-grade students, elevating student voice and

improving the eighth-to-ninth-grade transition experience. This grant will directly address the challenges students face transitioning from 8th to 9th grade. Research indicates that students' success in 9th grade is a key indicator in determining on-time graduation. To improve school climate and culture, the grant will support continuous improvement around scale and implementation of restorative practices and the reduction of disproportionate discipline referrals for Black students. Grant efforts will subsequently include building network leadership capacity to lead improvement practices around equity, restorative justice, and high expectations for adolescents with unfinished learning. PPSD will also use the grant to reduce chronic absenteeism, elevate student voice, and improve culturally responsive practices.

- 5) PPSD will work with local partners to continue to curate resources for educators and leaders to engage in critical conversations about race, justice, and civic engagement in the classroom. Through strategic partnership opportunities, PPSD will generate the equity framework, which will include equity score cards, equity priorities as articulated by community leaders, and an articulated lens by which to fold authentic decision making into an expanded community of practice.
- 6) RIDE proposed \$1 million in its FY2021 budget to increase the number of counselors, social workers, and other mental health professionals in schools using funds previously allocated for School Resource Officers to strengthen school culture. RIDE will continue to advocate for these funds, which will help enhance the number of school counselors and mental health professionals in PPSD schools. ★

Our Central Office Will Be Effective, Efficient, and Responsive

WHERE WE WERE: **BUREAUCRATIC DISTRICT OFFICE STIFLED CHANGE**

Multiple levels of bureaucracy within PPSD have stifled innovation and reform efforts for decades. A divide between the Central Office and school building staff led to confusion in schools across the district, while teachers and school leaders often complained about the many layers of management they had to navigate to address basic issues. The current teachers' contract has stifled innovation and flexibility at all levels and continues to threaten academic quality and professional development.

As stated in the Johns Hopkins report, the "Providence Public School District is overburdened with multiple, overlapping sources of governance and bureaucracy with no clear domains of authority and very little scope for transformative



FROM THE JOHNS HOPKINS REPORT

"Providence Public School System is overburdened with multiple, overlapping sources of governance and bureaucracy with no clear domains of authority and very little scope for transformative change."

change. The resulting structures paralyze action, stifle innovation, and create dysfunction and inconsistency across the District. In the face of the current governance structure, stakeholders understandably expressed little to no hope for serious reform."

Year 1: Strengthening the Foundation

Commissioner Infante-Green recognized the need for a functional and effective Central Office as a priority in her efforts to transform the troubled school district into a world-class education system. In early 2020, she recruited and appointed a leadership team experienced in school transformation. The team immediately applied smart budgeting practices and was successfully able to realign \$1 million in district resources for school-level priorities.

Building a strong team: Restructuring and repurposing resources at PPSD's Central Office

- 1) Commissioner Infante-Green's appointment of Harrison Peters, a leader with significant experience in urban school system reform, as the Turnaround Superintendent gave the turnaround effort an immediate energy boost.

Previously, as Deputy Superintendent-Chief of Schools for Hillsborough County Schools, Peters was responsible for the day-to-day operations of the district's 250 schools that educate 220,000 students. His team achieved record-breaking graduation rates, industry certifications, and college scholarships, as well as a significant reduction in the student achievement gap. When he served as Chief of Schools on the south side of Chicago, Peters was credited with significantly increasing ACT scores, 3rd grade reading, math proficiency, and graduation rates. A proud veteran of the United States Navy, Harrison served on the USS Cleveland before beginning his career in education.

- 2) To align resources and deliver on the Commissioner's commitment to better serve families and the community, RIDE announced two additional positions in the PPSD turnaround leadership team on the day Peters was named Superintendent: first, the Chief of Family and Community Engagement, which was a position elevated from an earlier executive director position and is responsible for the strategic vision for all stakeholders – family, students, partners, and community members – who support student success; second, the Chief of Equity, Culture, and School Supports, a new position responsible for setting districtwide strategy around race and equity priorities while also providing direction on improving school culture and climate.
- 3) Early in his tenure, the Superintendent created a network structure to provide immediate collaboration to schools through on-the-

ground coaching and support. The elementary network and secondary network include dedicated instructional, data, and evaluation supports, moving these traditional Central Office functions closer to the school level. This approach allows school leaders to build stronger working relationships, have greater accessibility to information and decision-making power, and ultimately be more effective. The reorganization also includes network-specific supports around climate and culture, attendance, and family support services. Each network is led by a Network Superintendent, a seasoned administrator with a strong understanding of best practices in coaching and instruction. In addition to the superintendents, each network includes an executive director of school supports, a director of instructional supports, and a number of other staff members dedicated to serving the needs of individual schools and their leaders.

- 4) To support the transition prior to the appointment of Superintendent Peters, Dr. Frances Gallo, a highly regarded veteran leader of several Rhode Island school districts, served as Interim Superintendent. Additionally, then-Zone Executive Director Dorothy Smith provided keen leadership before and after Dr. Gallo's term by serving as Acting Superintendent. Once Harrison Peters came on board officially, Dorothy Smith moved a new role of Senior Advisor to the Superintendent, providing vital guidance until her retirement earlier this year.
- 5) Prior to Superintendent Peters starting at PPSD, RIDE recruited a new Chief of Staff and Chief Operating Officer to lead critical roles in

PPSD's transformation. Both positions provide direct daily support and guidance to the Superintendent and serve as levers to promote, enact, and manage change within the district.

Shifting and reprioritizing district resources to have a closer, positive impact on students success

- 6) In response to a major finding of the Johns Hopkins review, RIDE initiated a comprehensive, top-to-bottom financial analysis of the district. This 10-week-long deep dive, conducted by EY, painted a picture of a district where the status quo had kept investments from reflecting student needs. At its core, the analysis found that overall budget numbers were not major obstacles. Rather, a "fixed costs" mentality was cited by numerous district staff as a stumbling block to change. Senior leaders have used this analysis as a guide to the realignment of district resources to fuel transformational change. For example, the district was able to leverage multiple funding sources to make a significant purchase of ELA and math curricula districtwide, the largest curriculum purchase the district has ever made.
- 7) PPSD engaged in a districtwide reorganization focused on student needs, reducing Central Office costs by \$1 million annually. This freed up valuable resources for use on top priority issues at the school level and shielded schools from the financial challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. While districts across the state provided layoff notices to many teachers and school-based staff, PPSD was able to avoid any school-based layoffs. While the reorganization

plan did not include any teacher layoffs, it did include a net reduction of approximately 30 Central Office staff members. Reductions include employees in the finance, human resources, student affairs, and central supply offices.

- 8) Clarity on the district's finances had been a major issue for years. New leadership has since identified a number of ways the Finance and Budget Division could be reorganized to better support schools and phase out outdated district functions. For example, payroll has been reorganized to reduce the number of staff focused on processing paper timesheets and increased a focus on building systems to automate and monitor weekly payroll. Additionally, positions were reallocated to create network budget coordinators who, similar to HR, are assigned to schools and accountable to meeting school needs related to budget and finance issues.
- 9) Leveraging analysis from the EY-Parthenon report, PPSD conducted a comprehensive review of current vendor contracts. Senior leadership reviewed all major contracts spanning across all functional areas, from academics to facilities, to identify those that could be reduced or eliminated. This review produced over \$275,000 in savings that the district was able to reallocate to other initiatives.
- 10) The EY report suggests that there should be more flexibility around supporting students who are differently abled, including fluidity in services and support, not just programs.

PPSD restructured two roles to include building capacity for BIP (behavior intervention program) students and students on the Autism spectrum. These teachers are able to focus on inclusive practices for these students and support a more collaborative and nimble approach to service delivery. PPSD is continuing to build out the intersectionality of work between the Office of Equity and Diversity and the Office of Specialized Instruction, with a focus on continued professional development, inclusive practices, and high expectations for differently abled students.

- 11) In direct response to one of the major findings of the Johns Hopkins report, PPSD streamlined the procurement system, removing multiple layers of purchasing approvals and red tape, while strengthening transparency and compliance. Previously, schools and departments were required to submit RFPs to be reviewed by multiple individuals and committees in the City of Providence, and were beholden to approval of contracts by multiple governing boards with overlapping and conflicting authority. PPSD streamlined the process by creating a tiered system for review, with lower value contracts having a simplified review and approval process and larger value contracts being reviewed by the school board to support transparency.
- 12) PPSD's practice of supply and resource reallocation across the district was significantly outdated. The district reorganized the central supply and warehouse functions and focused moving and other supports directly to the school level.

Restructuring and enhancing how PPSD Central Office serves schools, educators, students, and the community

- 13) PPSD reshaped how the Office of Family and Community Engagement interacts and provides services to families. This redesign included a more centralized way to engage parents who either call or walk in to the district office. PPSD shifted its approach to be a rapid response and support team that addresses issues or challenges families may be experiencing. PPSD incorporated new technology that allows the team to document and track parent feedback requiring a resolution. PPSD also added the opportunity for families to rate the district's level of customer service. As part of the revamped team, PPSD added two new translators and a volunteer manager to help facilitate parent engagement opportunities.
- 14) By restructuring the Student Affairs Office (SAO), PPSD has brought this important work closer to school leaders and schools. Student safety and disciplinary concerns frequently came up as an issue in the Johns Hopkins report. SAO has been relocated to the network level, and the hearing process for student discipline issues has been reorganized so that schools better meet the needs of their students. In addition, an external partner is working to conduct a review of this support to see how to improve the district infrastructure to be less reactive and more proactive in meeting PPSD's most vulnerable students' needs.
- 15) In order to create a more streamlined and effective Office of Human Resources, the new Chief Operating Officer assumed responsibility

for the HR function, and the previous Chief of Human Capital position was eliminated. PPSD went further, streamlining the Office of Human Resources by reducing head count and realigning positions to support schools first. Now, staffing and recruitment officers are built into the network-based approach, dramatically increasing responsiveness to school leaders.

- 16) PPSD leveraged content supervisors in the Teaching and Learning Team to support implementation of curriculum-related shifts in PPSD schools. In these roles they are leading the organization of professional learning so school teams can implement the resources well. PPSD now works with schools and networks to get resources to schools in as timely a manner as possible within the guidelines of the modified procurement process.

Additional efforts to increase Central Office's effectiveness, efficiency, and responsiveness

- 17) This fall, the district embarked on customer service training in a wide-ranging effort to be more responsive to district families. More than 200 school staff members and the Central Office are participating in training on recently adopted customer service standards: Courtesy and Respect; Communication and Accessibility; Professional, Cultural, and Linguistic Responsiveness; Environment of Belonging; and Awareness and Continuous Improvement. These standards will be rolled out in a more public way later this school year to set clear service expectations for families, students, and employees.

- 18) The Chief of Equity, Culture and Student Support issued an RFP for a program review of Specialized Services, which currently serves 4,675 students with disabilities – including 1,700 in private schools or community day care. The review should provide PPSD with much-needed situational awareness so it can move forward with identifying best practices in service delivery and organizational changes to improve efficiency.

- 19) The Superintendent launched a number of initiatives to be more visible and responsive to families during the pandemic. These included a number of videos and messages delivered through social media channels to reach both families and stakeholders. He also began regular weekly updates to staff to keep them informed of all school reopening developments as they happened, from curriculum and technology to cleaning protocols and PPE deliveries. Lastly, to support feedback and continuous improvement, Superintendent Peters launched innovate@ppsd.org for all members of the school community to make suggestions to improve school and district operations.

- 20) PPSD has worked to create Research-Practice Partnerships in an effort to leverage higher education institutional knowledge and capacity to assist with research that is relevant to the district and will improve student outcomes. PPSD forged three major Research Practice Partnerships forged since the 2020 school year. One is with the Annenberg Institute at Brown University. Another is with the Regional

Education Laboratory for New England and the Islands (REL-NEI), focused on district activities to address chronic student absenteeism. More recently, The Policy Lab at Brown has been assisting in a three-year cohort analysis of MLLs as part of PPSD's U.S. DOJ agreement.

21) To increase overall coordination and effectiveness of implementing the TAP, PPSD created a digital, web-based tool and meeting structure that allows named individual accountable owners to plan and track the execution of each turnaround initiative.

Inside Story: Putting Your Money Where the Students Are

Often the toughest budget decisions yield the most dramatic and positive results. That spirit was the motivation for Commissioner Infante-Green's decision to request a top-to-bottom financial analysis of PPSD immediately after the state intervention began in June 2019.

After the troubling findings of the Johns Hopkins report came to light, the Commissioner committed to implementing sweeping reforms in a district that has suffered from decades of neglect and underachievement. To succeed, sound finances would be essential, leading RIDE to select EY, the globally prominent accounting firm, to carry

out a 10-week financial assessment of PPSD that "aimed to assess the financial health of the district and to provide a more detailed view on current resource allocation."

The EY team analyzed budget and personnel data across multiple years to evaluate how resources were being allocated and to assess potential areas for reallocation in the district. As part of this work,



After the troubling findings of the Johns Hopkins report came to light, the Commissioner committed to implementing sweeping reforms in a district that has suffered from decades of neglect and underachievement.

EY interviewed and held in-depth discussions with 50+ stakeholders across the district, city, and state to develop an understanding at depth of the district's financial resources and identify cost savings.

The analysis concluded that, while the district is not in financial trouble, a range of strategic opportunities existed for reallocating and aligning funds to better serve students and fund critical needs. Highlights included: (1) revising the district's approach to staffing of teachers to meet the needs of a significant MLL population; (2) driving efficiencies in the Central Office to strengthen school supports and reallocate funds to schools to increase dollars controlled at the school level; and (3) shifting from PPSD's fixed budget mentality, which inhibited change, to a more flexible approach to budgeting.

It became clear that, contrary to what had been reported over the years, a lack of funds was not the district's primary problem; budgeting did not match priorities, and there was no accountability for this fundamental mismatch.

strategies to reallocate "wasted" funds, while developing the district's long-term budget priorities "with the goal of increasing equity and efficiency in the use of funds at the individual school level."

For example, \$1 million in annual personnel and non-personnel savings were quickly identified to reallocate from the Central Office alone. As the districtwide reorganization continued, \$1 million was adjusted to add classrooms to enable MLL students to be more quickly enrolled in classrooms that best meet their learning needs. The new approach to school budgeting also eased fears of pending teacher lay-offs, an early win for educators and students alike.

Upon receiving the analysis, the RIDE and PPSD budget teams rolled up their sleeves and went to work to identify cost savings and practical strategies to reallocate "wasted" funds, while developing the district's long-term budget priorities "with the goal of increasing equity and efficiency in the use of funds at the individual school level."

MOVING FORWARD: BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

A new and invigorated PPSD Central Office will be ever more responsive to the diverse needs of PPSD students, families, and educators alike. The district will expand smart budgeting practices to support better education practices through powerful investments in state-of-the-art technology. Leaders will continue to focus on increasing equity and transparency.



Upon receiving the analysis, the RIDE and PPSD budget teams rolled up their sleeves and went to work to identify cost savings and practical

Major initiatives on the way include:

- 1) PPSD is making a major investment in technology to support teaching and learning. The District is securing 12,422 Chromebooks and 1,300 Wi-Fi hotspots to support distance learning for students; more than 2,000 laptops and 300 webcams/headsets for educator use; and 120 new SmartBoards and 800+ sound systems for improved classroom instruction.
- 2) RIDE and PPSD are developing plans for the district's approach to school budgeting to increase equity and efficiency in the use of funds at the individual school level. This includes providing school leaders with greater information and transparency into their budget, as well as closer alignment between district investments and priorities identified in the TAP.
- 3) PPSD's senior cabinet team will continue to focus on capacity building experiences regarding "Equity Policy," which will guide division equity goal setting. PPSD will continue to support the cabinet team through seven "Equity Centered Capacity Building" professional learning sessions in order to cascade equity-oriented practices throughout their divisions.
- 4) PPSD plans to conduct a survey to gather school leader feedback on Central Office performance. Data will be used to provide comparison points to previous survey findings, as well as to determine a baseline to measure growth and improvement as the district turnaround continues.



COMMUNITY VOICES

"Providence Schools has helped shorten the distance between home and school by adding in digital tools. With their smartphone, parents can watch a video from their principal, listen to a get-to-know-you interview of the teacher, read updates from teachers, and respond back. This growth has been a great addition."

– Amy Punchak (PAC Parent)

- 5) PPSD has secured over \$700,000 in grant dollars to invest more deeply in a districtwide culture-and-climate strategy. This grant includes funding for a new Director of Student Supports, a districtwide Restorative Practices Team, an SEL community supported by a practice and coaching framework, and a Multi-tiered System of Support (MTSS) implementation model.
- 6) PPSD is investing in a new budgeting tool that will make individual budgets more transparent and more easily accessible to building leaders, thereby improving financial decision-making at the school level.

Tracking Transformation: A Timeline of Action

2018

FALL 2018

- Initial Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS) conducted and results released.

- ▶ Initial RICAS results are extremely disappointing in Providence, with just 10 percent of students proficient in Math and 14 percent in English Language Arts.

2019

APRIL 2019

- ▶ April 29: Angélica Infante-Green is confirmed as the Rhode Island Commissioner of Education.

MAY 2019

- In partnership with Governor Gina M. Raimondo and Mayor Jorge O. Elorza, Commissioner Infante-Green asks the Johns Hopkins Institute for Education Policy to conduct an in-depth study of PPSD.

JUNE 2019

- ▶ June 25: Johns Hopkins delivers its report, concluding that in Providence, the “system is fundamentally broken.”

JULY 2019

- ▶ Commissioner Infante-Green and Mayor Elorza host a series of nine public forums across the city, allowing hundreds of parents, teachers, students, and others to voice their concerns with PPSD.
- July 23: The Council on Elementary and Secondary Education votes unanimously to grant Commissioner Infante-Green authority to intervene in PPSD, pursuant to the Crowley Act.

AUGUST 2019

- August 8: Commissioner Infante-Green issues her Proposed Order of Control and Reconstitution of PPSD. She advises Mayor Elorza, Providence City Council, School Board, and Superintendent that they have 30 days to “show cause” why she should not intervene in the city schools.

SEPTEMBER 2019

- September 13: Commissioner Infante-Green convenes the “show cause” hearing and records that no parties object to her Order, per the process outlined in the Crowley Act. Additionally, she receives comments from stakeholders.

OCTOBER 2019

- October 11: Commissioner Infante-Green issues her final Order for Control and Reconstitution.

NOVEMBER 2019

- ▶ November 1: The State of Rhode Island assumes control of the management and operation of PPSD.
- November 21: PPSD partners with Pure Edge to

provide online and free social and emotional learning (SEL) professional development support to teachers.

- District pilots an immediate over-the-phone interpretation service in over 350 languages.
- RIDE's community engagement team partners with a Brown University Urban Education Policy intern to conduct a deep dive into family engagement, student registration, and community partnerships.
- PPSD establishes new human resources (HR) procedures and hires new HR director to improve practices and attract talent to PPSD.
- Commissioner Infante-Green meets with

more than 100 students during 15 in-school conversations.

DECEMBER 2019

- December 13: An independent [analysis](#) conducted by Ernst & Young details Providence schools' financial challenges.
- ▶ December 17: RIDE names the 45 members of the [Community Design Teams](#) (CDTs) to help develop a Turnaround Action Plan for PPSD. Members include parents, students, educators, and advocates.
- PPSD hires new Chief Operating Officer, with management over HR and finance operations.

2020

JANUARY 2020

- January 10: RIDE [establishes](#) a statewide fund for Rhode Island Public Education, with fiduciary support from Rhode Island Foundation.
- ▶ January 30: The district announces an English as a Second Language (ESL) certification program that provides up to \$3,200 to reimburse Providence teachers for participation. The program attracts more than 100 teachers.
- RIDE and PPSD convene more than 100 educators to review and help select uniform curriculum for the district.
- RIDE and PPSD support recruitment and training for three Community Advisory Boards (CABs), with a resulting membership of more than 60 leaders.

FEBRUARY 2020

- February 4: Nick Figueroa is hired as Chief of Family and Community Engagement (FACE)

to lead an expanded FACE office, with staff increasing from 5 to 8.

- February 4: Dr. Barbara Mullen is hired as Chief Equity and Diversity Officer to oversee a variety of programs designed to increase equitable opportunities and outcomes.
- ▶ February 20: Turnaround Superintendent Harrison Peters begins his first day as the leader of PPSD.
- RIDE hires a [Deputy Commissioner for School System Transformation](#).
- RIDE collaborates with national experts to launch a high school specific, multi-year strategy to redesign high schools in the district.

MARCH 2020

- March 1: First two cases of COVID-19 in [Rhode Island](#) are reported.
- March 7: RIDE and PPSD host a Community Design Team (CDT) showcase at Asa Messer Elementary School.

2020 (CONTINUED)

- March 23: Due to COVID-19, PPSD joins all [Rhode Island public schools](#) in transitioning to distance learning for the remainder of the school year.
- March 27: PPSD successfully negotiates an earlier hiring timeline to better prepare for the following year's staffing needs.
- RIDE expands the Pure Edge Partnership to include students, with 2,000 participating in just one month.
- PPSD sends more than 1 million electronic messages to families during the shift to distance learning over the first month of the pandemic.

APRIL 2020

- Thanks to the EY analysis, PPSD identifies \$1 million in annual personnel and non-personnel savings. This money is reprogrammed to support multilingual learner (MLL) classrooms.

MAY 2020

- May 20: PPSD selects the bilingual reading curriculum from American Reading Company (ARC) for all students in grades 1-8 after a comprehensive, inclusive decision-making process with teachers and other stakeholders.
- PPSD also selects unified Eureka 5! K-5 math curriculum for use across the district.

JUNE 2020

- June 6: RIDE hosts the Stand-Up Youth Summit to better understand key issues related to school culture and safety.
- June 12: RIDE and PPSD debut "Almost Impossible," a YouTube-based teacher recruitment video and launches a nationwide

social media campaign. More than 160,000 people view the video at least once. More than 9,000 visit the landing page for potential PPSD teachers, leading to nearly 800 live leads for PPSD recruiters.

- ▶ June 23: RIDE releases "Turning Hope Into Results," the [Turnaround Action Plan \(TAP\)](#) for PPSD, grounded in the work of the Community Design Teams and designed to drastically improve Providence Schools.
- ▶ PPSD supports the services of 1.5 million meals to students at 14 school-based sites during COVID-19 response.
- Superintendent Peters launches the districtwide leadership network to better support students and school-based leaders.

JULY 2020

- July 20: PPSD safely opens school spaces to support summer school.
- ▶ July 28: Four new principals [hired](#) and 13 PPSD schools receive new leadership for SY 2020-2021.
- July 31: PPSD publishes a 70-page [reopening plan](#) for a safe and healthy return to schools.
- PPSD conducts mandatory anti-bias training for all new hires, a practice that will continue for all new hires moving forward.
- PPSD conducts four town hall meetings to gather feedback on reopening.

AUGUST 2020

- August 18: PPSD, RIDE, and Mayor Elorza announce an amended \$300 million multiphase [School Capital Plan](#) for Providence school buildings.

- PPSD reduces the radius qualification for bus passes for Providence high school students from two to just one mile from school.
- Former Mayor Joseph Paolino donates the former [St. Joseph's Hospital](#) building to be transformed into a new, state-of-the-art PreK-8 school after extensive renovations.
- PPSD increases professional development day opportunities for teachers from 1 to 5 prior to the start of school, with another 5 embedded throughout the school year.
- PPSD establishes monthly, four-hour professional learning sessions designed to focus on the four key levers of successful school turnaround efforts.
- PPSD works with its custodial vendor to increase custodial staff hours dedicated to cleaning and improve levels of cleanliness.
- PPSD hires a Senior Manager of Facilities and Capital Planning to oversee building projects.

SEPTEMBER 2020

- September 14: PPSD opens under a partial reopening plan.
- September 14: PPSD launches a separate [Virtual Learning Academy \(VLA\)](#) for more than 6,000 students.
- September 14: At the start of the school year, PPSD launches a new [Social Emotional Learning](#) series of lessons to help students transition back to the classroom and build a strong culture.
- PPSD starts the 2020-2021 school year with 22 classroom vacancies, down from 102 the previous year.
- PPSD launches the Accelerate early-college program, allowing seniors to enroll in college

for the year and earn up to 27 credits.

- PPSD revives the PPSD School Building Committee and expands representation to include parents.
- PPSD develops an early warning indicator system that serves as a critical tool in supporting students' academic success.
- ▶ **PPSD procures and distributes substantial cleaning supplies and personal protective equipment (PPE) to support a safe reopening, including 100,000 reusable masks, 100,000 disposable masks, 19,000 bottles of hand sanitizer, and 2,000 1-gallon containers of disinfectant.**

OCTOBER 2020

- Every elementary school performs a deep-dive analysis of student achievement and engagement data, which helps establish cultural and instructional priorities for all 22 district elementary schools.
- PPSD reinvigorates the existing Parent Advisory Council (PAC) and expands recruiting efforts.

NOVEMBER 2020

- ▶ **November 4: Providence voters approve a \$140-million school facilities bond.**
- November 23: RIDE and PPSD announce that teacher participation in upcoming parent teacher conferences will be mandatory.
- PPSD installs 1,836 air purifiers to support improved air circulation in classrooms during the colder months.
- PPSD orders 12,422 Chromebooks, 1,300 Wi-Fi Hotspots, 2,000 laptops for educators, 800 sound systems and 120 SmartBoards to support distance learning technology requirements.

TRANSFORMATION UNDERWAY!



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