

Providence
Schools

Opening Doors

TO OUR CHILDREN'S FUTURES



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A Message from Providence Public Schools

Dear Providence Community,

On behalf of the City of Providence, the Providence School Board, and Providence administrators, teachers and staff, it is our great pleasure to introduce Providence Public School District's (PPSD) roadmap for achievement. This roadmap is the result of hard work and collaboration by countless stakeholders. It represents a community undertaking and our best shared thinking, and it provides us a laser-sharp focus on nine innovative strategies that will drive our practice in the short-term as we seek to dramatically accelerate student achievement in our district's schools. We look forward to the ongoing collaboration needed to implement the strategies outlined in this plan.

We have titled this plan: "Opening Doors to Our Children's Future" because we recognize the importance of our responsibility to open doors to bright futures for each and every one of our nearly 24,000 students. We strongly believe that, in order for students to be contributing members of our city, state, and nation, it is a moral and economic imperative that our students are highly educated. Every day, we work relentlessly to provide high quality education to our students to ensure their success. However, we know there is much more to do.

Over the past year, working in close collaboration with educators, staff, family members and community members, we have reflected on our long-term direction, defined our short-term priorities, and started planning our next steps. After establishing our long-term vision, the PPSD Executive Team targeted nine strategies that we can implement with a sense of urgency. We know that in order to reach our goals and realize our vision, we must focus on the strategies that have the potential to generate dramatic improvement in the next 18-24 months.

The nine strategies outlined here share a common thread: each is designed to provide our schools with the differentiated support and autonomy they need to be successful, while also developing district-wide infrastructure to ensure shared responsibility for effectively serving every child. We have a tremendous amount of work ahead of us, and these strategies will serve as a shared roadmap to achieve our desired outcomes.

We have enormous confidence in the ability of our staff, families and partners to join together to open doors to a bright future for all of our Providence Schools' students.

Sincerely,

Susan F. Lusi, Ph.D.
Superintendent of Schools
Providence Public School District

Keith Oliveira
President
Providence School Board

- Mission** Providence Schools will prepare all students to succeed in the nation's colleges and universities and in their chosen professions.
- Vision** The Providence Public School district will be a national leader in educating urban youth.
- Core Values**
- **Respect.** Together, we operate as a team. We respect one another and work collaboratively as a team to support and serve our students and educators.
 - **Equity.** We are guided by the conviction that all students can learn and achieve at high levels.
 - **Excellence.** We strive for excellence in all that we do and maintain a positive attitude and unwavering focus on results.
 - **Accountability.** We share responsibility and accountability for the success of our students and our schools.
 - **Appreciation for our diversity.** We are enhanced by the diversity of our school communities and staff; we embrace and celebrate our diversity



Providence Public School District (PPSD) is the largest school district in the state of Rhode Island. PPSD operates 39 schools serving approximately 24,000 students and their families. More than 3,200 men and women come to work every day in support of our 22 elementary schools, six middle schools, nine high schools, and two charter schools. We are proud that every day, in all of our schools and across the district, our teachers and staff work hard for our students, dedicated to offering students rich learning environments and committed to finding the most effective ways to help our students grow and succeed.

Of our employees, approximately 2,000 are teachers and more than 600 others directly support students in schools. Remaining staff members support students and schools in a variety of roles: crossing guards, bus monitors, central office administrators and staff overseeing functions like finance and purchasing, IT; facilities and operations, human resources, and academic oversight.

PPSD is the largest department of the City of Providence, accounting for approximately half of the city's operating budget.



Who We Serve In recent years, PPSD has experienced relatively stable enrollment.

Our schools are diverse learning communities.

Ethnicity	PPSD
Hispanic	64.5%
Black	17.5%
White	8.8%
Asian	5.06%
Multi-Racial	3.15%
Native American	0.92%

- PPSD also serves a high concentration of students with special needs. Approximately 19% of students are English Language Learners (ELL) and 16.5% of students receive special education services. Nearly 60% of students come from homes where English is not the primary language spoken.
- Combined, students and their families speak 31 different languages and hail from 52 countries of origin. Approximately 89% of students qualify for free or reduced-price meals.



The Challenge

We face real challenges that can affect our ability to execute our strategies and reach our goal. We operate in an environment of increased accountability, reduced purchasing power, and more rigorous graduation requirements. The Rhode Island Department of Education has identified more than half of the district's schools as low performing, based on federal requirements. At the same time, as a result of sequestration federal funds have been greatly reduced, and local funding has not kept pace with increasing costs. In addition, as a result of the new Rhode Island performance Based Graduation Requirements, over 80% of SY 2012-2013 juniors were not on-track to graduate.

In recent years, student academic proficiency rates have remained unacceptably low and relatively stagnant. Academic achievement gaps persist, particularly among English Language Learners and students with disabilities. Our district-wide student data stresses the need for dramatic improvement. If current performance continues, we know that our students will be unprepared for success in their chosen careers.

Metrics	PPSD
Attendance	91%
Chronic Absenteeism	32%
4 Year Graduation Rate	65%
Dropout Rate	17%
Reading Proficiency	50%
Math Proficiency	34%

We face these challenges even as we continually renew our commitment to our students and families to provide the best education possible. We are faced with the unprecedented opportunity to dramatically transform our schools and our district in order to accelerate student achievement. We know we can and must do more.



Despite these challenges, we have made significant strides to open doors toward bright futures for our students.

Curriculum and Instruction. Over the past few years, PPSD has developed a core curriculum. We have invested considerable time and energy into developing and implementing a quality curriculum at all grade levels and in all content areas. The aligned and standards-based curriculum helps to ensure that each student has access to the same learning regardless of the school s/he attends. We have also established a framework for effective teaching that we are using to develop a common language and definition of the high quality instruction we want to see in every classroom.

Labor Management. The Providence Teachers Union (PTU) and PPSD have also forged a strong collaborative relationship to jointly manage many of the district's transformation efforts. Together, we have emphasized the importance of a strong labor-management relationships focused on producing lasting change.

Performance Evaluation. Through two initiatives, Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) and teacher and administrator evaluation systems, we have developed and piloted implementation of a system to support struggling teachers while fully implementing teacher and administrator evaluation models. This model affords us the opportunity to focus on the development of our teachers and administrators while simultaneously communicating PPSD's heightened expectations for performance.

Powerful Partnerships. Each and every day our schools work to provide challenging learning opportunities that help students develop academically and emotionally. However, our schools do not operate in isolation; they are part of the fabric of a larger community, and we need the whole community to truly address the needs of every child. PPSD has intentionally established numerous partnerships with diverse community agencies that provide a cadre of resources and volunteers to assist our district with programming, tutoring, mentoring, after-school activities, and social services. Crucial to these efforts is the work of the Providence Children and Youth Cabinet (CYC) of which the Superintendent serves as co-chair. The CYC has more than 20 member organizations dedicated to the success of Providence children from cradle to career. Work with CYC members and other partners has supported the district's ability meet the multiple needs of students at all levels including establishing Full Service Community Schools in some elementary schools, robust out of school time programs in middle school, and Career and Technical Education (CTE) pathways throughout our system.



Our Long Term Direction

Over the past year PPSD has engaged in reflective conversation around the long term direction of the district. The long term strategic plan is designed to bring focus to our work while maintaining a relentless drive toward results. At the foundation, PPSD will invest in high-quality teaching and learning. In the long-term, PPSD will strengthen the instructional core by supporting students and their families, developing excellent educators, and building rigorous and relevant content. In order to improve in each of these areas we must increase expectations while also providing targeted resources and supports. We are asking our teachers, leaders, staff, families, and community partners to reimagine what is possible for our students and schools. We also know we must critically evaluate our systems, processes, and infrastructure. PPSD aims to become a high-performance organization; to do this we must create systems that work and allow for excellent teaching and learning.



The First Step: Defining How Our Change Happens

The long term strategic plan is an ambitious and much needed roadmap for improvement; however, we also know that we must prioritize our work in a way that maximizes the opportunity for student achievement in PPSD. To that end, the PPSD executive leadership team spent time sharpening our focus, identifying the district's strongest levers for improvement, and prioritizing the most crucial work.

This led to the development of a powerful cause and effect statement (sometimes referred to as a "theory of change") that lays out a clear belief about how change will occur.



IF we develop and retain effective school leaders and teachers, AND IF we differentiate the necessary resources and services to each school, AND IF our school leaders and teachers are responsible for individual student outcomes, THEN our schools will effectively serve every child.

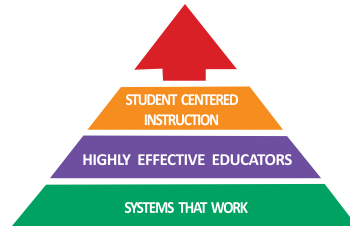
Inherent in this statement is the mindset that we must provide our schools with the differentiated support they need if they are to be responsible for student outcomes and serving the needs of every child. Every child must realize at least a year's worth of academic growth each and every school year. It was with this mindset as our lens that we identified nine strategies that have the potential to generate dramatic improvement in the next 18-24 months.



The Prioritized Strategies

Our Theory of Change converges into three priority areas for PPSD to drive teaching and learning in our school district:

- ✓ **Highly Effective Educators:** Promote high expectations and support the growth and development of teachers, leaders, and staff.
- ✓ **Student Centered Instruction:** Implement a rigorous and engaging curriculum and provide rich learning opportunities at all grade levels and in all content areas.
- ✓ **Systems that Work:** Build, refine, and create systems that support high-quality teaching and learning.



The first set of strategies will create and improve the necessary conditions and infrastructure within PPSD's central office in order to differentiate its support and resources to schools.

STRATEGIES

1. **Negotiating breakthrough contracts that align to the district's strategic priorities with competitive compensation packages:**

PPSD has forged powerful and collaborative working relationships with collective bargaining units. Building upon these partnerships, district leadership will engage all units in the district's improvement efforts. Working collaboratively, we will pursue bold and innovative reform strategies that support student achievement and are respectful of the professionals serving our schools.

2. **Developing coherent assessment and data monitoring systems to improve instruction:**

PPSD aims to become a performance-driven organization through the ongoing use of data and assessments. The district will invest in the structures and capacity necessary to support the collection, analysis, and use of data for continuous improvement.

3. **Designing and implementing a system-wide accountability framework:**

PPSD aims to create a culture of accountability at all levels of the organization. Schools, offices, and departments will identify performance metrics against which to measure the implementation and effectiveness of their work. The district community will then engage in frequent conversations regarding progress and results, allowing for ongoing reflection and improvement.

4. **Revising critical business processes related to student enrollment and student assignment to ensure efficiency, access, and effectiveness:**

In Providence, our goal is to ensure that all students and families have timely access to high-quality educational options.

By revising the critical processes related to enrollment and student assignment, PPSD will support families in making informed decisions regarding their school options.

We intentionally selected these strategies, as they will improve systems and provide data for increased accountability allowing for a sharp focus on what matters most- teaching and learning. The next set of strategies open the door to effective teaching and learning for all staff and students:

5. **Redesign the current professional development strategy and resources to maximize job-embedded learning opportunities informed by current teachers' development needs and student data; and** 6. **Create a robust professional development strategy and plan for school leaders:**

As a district, we must continue to invest in our most critical resource- our people. We will more systematically evaluate staff growth areas and provide targeted development opportunities. These opportunities will emphasize proven strategies and practices that staff can readily translate into their daily work. We know that if we ensure that every teacher and leader reaches his/her maximum potential we will more aptly serve our students and families.

7. **Implement a new teacher and school leader induction program:**

PPSD will design and implement new teacher and school leader induction programs that include mentoring, peer support, and training opportunities. By investing in our people from the start we are ensuring they have the information, support, and guidance needed to be successful in PPSD for many years to come.

8. **Effectively implement a teacher and school leader evaluation system to improve practice, increase accountability, and address employee needs:**

Now that the district has teacher and school leader evaluation systems in place, we will focus our efforts on refining and

improving implementation. By focusing on quality, as opposed to compliance, we will ensure that our system has the integrity required to provide valuable feedback to improve performance and identify areas in which we need to provide additional training and support. Ultimately, this will support the district's vision of ensuring that every school is led by a highly-effective leader and every classroom is led by a highly-effective teacher.

9. **Revise the implementation of the Innovation Zone to further align to national best practices and to ensure identification, scalability and sustainability of effective school improvement efforts:**

PPSD aims to become a smarter, high-performing district that creates school-based flexible conditions and differentiates autonomy to foster innovation resulting in dramatic gains in student outcomes. We aim to start this process with a subset of schools- the Innovation Zone. By aligning our work in the Innovation Zone to national best practices we will create the conditions and capacity to ensure they are scalable, sustainable, and embedded in our culture.

How We Will Do Our Work

We must not only change what we do, by committing to the above strategies, but also how we do it. Realizing the magnitude of change our district needs will require that we commit to ingraining three practices into all of the work that we do.

- **The practice of cultural competency:** We pledge to ingrain the practice of cultural competency so that the cultures of our children and families are honored, understood and built upon.
- **The practice of collaboration with our employees and their unions:** We pledge to engage in the practice of Labor Management Collaboration so that our work benefits from the talent, thinking and engagement of all staff.
- **The practice of partnering with our families and multiple individuals and organizations in our communities:** We pledge to build Powerful Partnerships with our families and community because we know that our efforts alone cannot and will not provide all that our students need.



The Next Steps

The launch of this plan serves as the first step in the process to dramatically improve school and district performance. The success of this plan will depend on our ability to fully implement the outlined strategies and the impact they have on student achievement. To this end, PPCSD has developed processes, practices and metrics that will hold us accountable for executing our plans, and we will be publicly reporting on our progress to the Providence School Board, as well as other stakeholders.

We welcome your input, feedback, and support as we implement our plans.

Call to Action

We know that each and every student can succeed, but we also know we must do everything it takes to open doors to their future and create opportunities for their success. We are confident that with our intense focus on our priorities that we can and will succeed.

However, we cannot do this work alone; the success of these actions depends on deep and sustained community commitment. Please join us as we look to transform our schools and our district. Whether you are a parent looking to volunteer, a community member with a skill to share, an alumnus with words of encouragement, an organization looking to partner, or an individual or corporate partner looking to support a program or scholarship, we want to hear from you.

Please contact: contactus@ppsd.org

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We would like to extend our appreciation to Danielle DePalma from Inspiring Minds RI and Michael Braithwaite from PASA for providing some of the pictures in this publication.

