



State of Rhode Island

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

March 24, 2022

DELIVERED BY HAND

Angélica Infante-Green
Commissioner, Rhode Island Department of Education
255 Westminster Street
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Commissioner Infante-Green:

At a meeting last week of the Providence School Board, a number of our constituents (who are stakeholders in the Providence Public Schools) expressed their concern and dismay about the District's failure to describe the process and timetable for its search for a new Superintendent. Their concerns involved two principal issues, namely delay and a need for transparency and accountability.

With regard to delay, the District and Mr. Peters reached an agreement in May, 2021 to terminate his tenure as Superintendent. Prior to the State takeover, the Providence Public Schools typically required a 9-12 month cycle to complete a Superintendent search, beginning the search at the start of a school year so that the new Superintendent could assume responsibility the following summer to prepare for the next school year. In our experience, we have learned that this is a typical calendar for school districts nationally, as it allows candidates to complete their responsibilities in the district they currently serve, while allowing them time to come "up to speed" in Providence before the students return to school. Had the Providence Public Schools followed its historical pattern (and to our knowledge the norm for other school districts), the search for our next Superintendent would have begun at the start of the current school year, and by now would be completed or nearly so, allowing our next Superintendent to begin work this summer to lead the district into the next school year. Unfortunately, the District failed to meet this basic responsibility, which may mean that we may lose most or all of next school year without a permanent Superintendent.

The second concern has to do with transparency and accountability. The Providence Public Schools enacted a set of policies to govern their actions, including Policy CBB (attached), which calls for (1) a broad-based screening committee, (2) a well-defined due diligence process, (3) a public forum and (4) the development of a list of three (3) finalists. To our knowledge, the District's first post-takeover search complied with one or at most two of these four requirements. While we cannot say the District's procedural failures caused it to hire a Superintendent whose poor job performance led to his termination in less than one year, it is clear that the previous search's lack of transparency and accountability further undermined public confidence in the takeover as a whole, particularly when the poorly-designed search yielded such a poor outcome.

At last week's hearing, Acting Superintendent Montañez informed those assembled that your office would announce the next Superintendent search process in the coming weeks. On behalf of our constituents, we ask you to complete that task without further delay, and for that process to contain the elements of transparency and accountability contained in Providence School Board Policy CBB (attached). Because the State's Order of Control and Reconstitution called for you, as Commissioner, to assume all the authority held by the Providence School Board and Providence city government with respect to the operation of the Providence Public Schools, we believe that Providence Public Schools Policy CBB is not only a "best practice" for you to

consider, but is in fact a binding requirement, as the policy would bind the Providence School Board had they retained their pre-takeover authority, and neither you nor they changed the policy as of the time that the current vacancy was created. Even if you disagree, we also believe that any departure from the transparency safeguards in Policy CBB would further undermine the District's already damaged relationship with stakeholders.

With that in mind, we request your prompt and urgent attention to the needs of the Providence Public Schools community. We hope and expect to hear from you (via an email to the members of our group) soon, with more information about the timing and procedure for the District's next Superintendent search. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

David Morales (S.D.2.)

State Representative David Morales (District 7)

Edith Ajello (S.D.2.)

State Representative Edith Ajello (District 1)

Rebecca Kislak (S.D.2.)

State Representative Rebecca Kislak (District 4)

John Lombardi (S.D.2.)

State Representative John Lombardi (District 8)

Anastasia Williams (S.D.2.)

State Representative Anastasia Williams (District 9)

Grace Diaz (S.D.2.)

State Representative Grace Diaz (District 11)

Samuel Zurier

State Senator Samuel Zurier (District 3)

Samuel Bell (S.D.2.)

State Senator Samuel Bell (District 5)

Enclosure

- cc: Barbara S. Cottam, Chair, R.I. Board of Education
Members of the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education:
Michael Almeida, Ed.D.
Amy Beretta, Esq.
Colleen A. Callahan, Ed.D.
Karen Davis
Patricia DiCenso
Jo Eva Gaines
Marta V. Martinez
Lawrence Purtill

GENERAL SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION

RECRUITMENT OF SUPERINTENDENT

General Policy Under ordinary circumstances, the Providence School Board will designate a Screening Committee for the process, comprised of representatives from parent groups, teachers, administrators, the business community, students, and civic organizations.

The Screening Committee will accept applications, conduct a paper screening, conduct personal interviews, and make a final recommendation to the Board. A subcommittee of the School Board will interview, conduct a public forum, visit references and previous job stations, and recommend three (3) finalists for consideration by the full School Board. The School Board will make the final selection.

Exceptional Circumstances When an outgoing Superintendent leaves providing less than six (6) months' notice, or when other circumstances exist that require prompt action by the School Board, the School Board may appoint a Superintendent without conducting a search. In order for the School Board to be able to invoke this option, the following must occur:

- a. The candidate must be eligible and qualified to serve as Superintendent.
- b. A two-thirds (2/3) vote of the School Board members present must find that there are exceptional circumstances justifying an appointment without a search. As part of its vote, the School Board must identify the exceptional circumstances justifying the lack of a search.

Legal reference

History

Policy Adopted: April 25, 1994

Policy Amended: September 23, 2002, Resolution 9-40-02