



Providence's Plan for Our Schools: Building a Brighter Future

April 2025



MAYOR BRETT P. SMILEY
CITY OF PROVIDENCE

LETTER TO THE COMMUNITY

As Mayor, there is no priority more important than offering Providence children and youth a world-class education. I have heard from the community the eagerness for the City of Providence to manage Providence Public School District (PPSD). I share that vision for a bright future for our students as we deepen the partnership between the City and the District as we integrate our management and align our resources and priorities.

This plan sets the course for the City's preparation to oversee the District and to ensure a smooth and integrated approach with strong leadership and commitment to continuously improving educational experiences for our students.

This plan will continue the District's progress on goals of the Turnaround Action Plan. We join the State and the District in celebrating PPSD's increase in student achievement on both math and English Language Arts on the 2024 RICAS. Student absenteeism continues to decline across the District and the number of career and technical education programs has almost doubled. The City and PPSD have partnered on a \$1 billion capital plan so that all of our students learn in new or like-new school buildings that facilitate 21st century learning. In 2024, Martin Luther King Jr. Elementary School became the District's first elementary school—and the second PPSD school after Classical High School—to be recognized as a National Blue Ribbon School. As we plan for the return of PPSD to local management, we will continue this progress and maintain our dedication to the Turnaround Action Plan in close partnership with leadership at the District

Education has been a priority since day one when I took office in January 2023, when we hosted a large, community-wide conversation on education. In the years since, the Return to Local Control Cabinet—a group of partners from the Providence School Board, City Council, and senior members of my team guiding the City's planning for the District—has overseen a robust community engagement strategy and internal technical review to guide the City's thinking and planning to manage the District.

The return of PPSD to local management is an opportunity to implement the shared vision for a world-class Pre-K to 12 education where every student has the resources to succeed and continue the academic progress made during the State intervention. We will address long-standing systems, operations, and governance hurdles that have gone unaddressed for decades, and center community voices as we plan for this next phase of public education in Providence. Aligning the City, School Board, and City Council at every stage to improve student outcomes will ensure that we place the needs and priorities of our children and youth first to support our students' long-term success.

Our vision for a world-class education includes universal, high-quality Pre-K so all our children have a critical foundation for lifelong learning and are ready for the first day of Kindergarten. Many Providence elementary schools demonstrate high academic achievement. In the City's vision for Pre-K to 12 education, students and educators at all PPSD elementary schools will have the resources to support high academic achievement in each of their classrooms. Targeted interventions will improve student outcomes and increase student achievement in middle school—and allow students to develop leadership skills and participate in enrichment like the arts, athletics, and clubs during these critical years. Our middle school students will be able to identify a high school program that best supports their academic goals. Each of our high school students will learn about the various post-secondary opportunities and pathways—and will have a clear plan at graduation, whether for



college, career and technical education, employment, or a combination of these pathways. Support for multilingual learners and students receiving special education services will be integral to and interwoven in our work to offer a world-class education at our elementary, middle, and high schools.

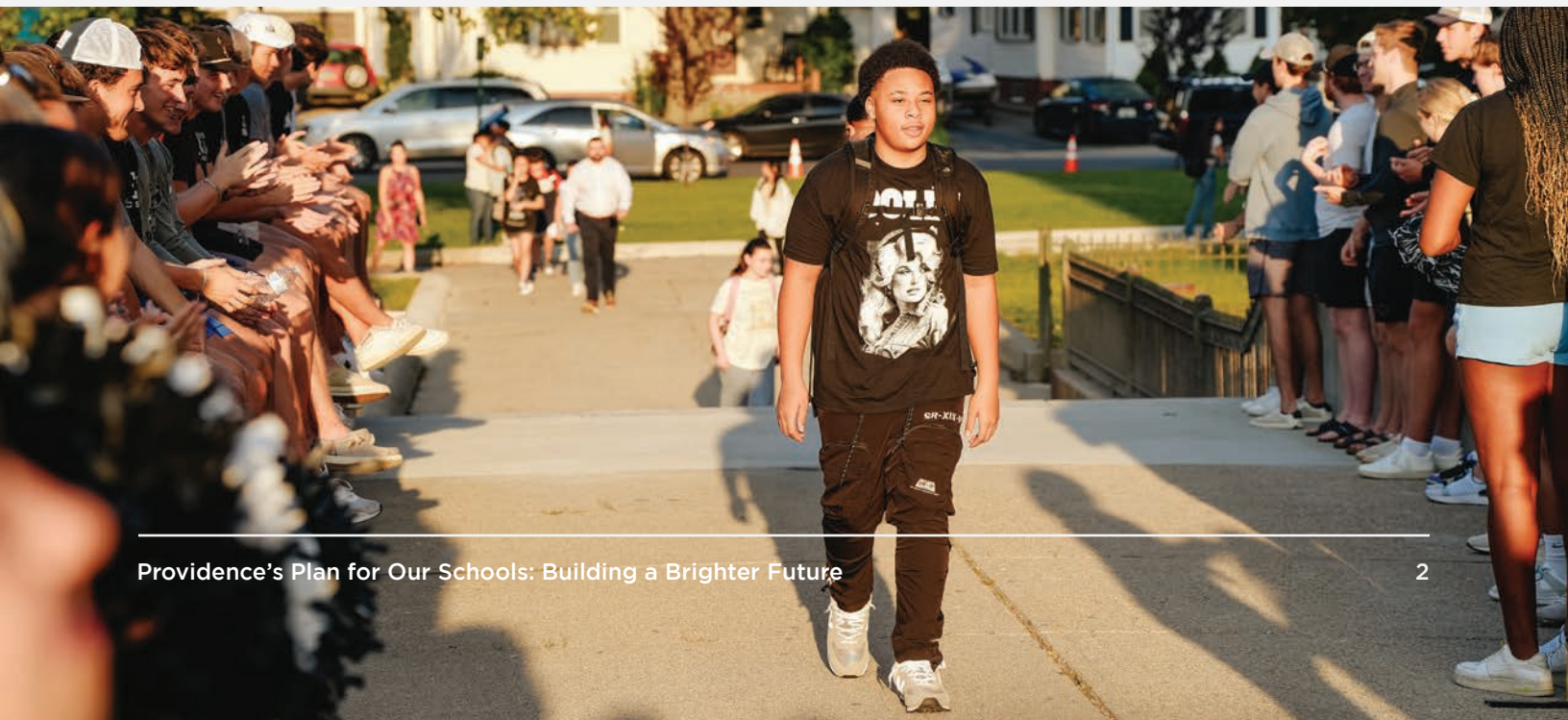
Thoughtfully designed learning spaces, both indoors and outdoors, can enhance learning, engagement, creativity, and well-being. Safe school facilities with modern security and heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) will allow for 21st century learning across our schools—and will ensure that these are safe spaces for learning and exploration. A well-designed green schoolyard plays a crucial role in supporting students' academic, social, and emotional growth while fostering a culture of innovation.

The City is prepared to respond to the challenges that led to the State intervention in 2019. We are ready to build a thriving public school system so that this type of intervention never occurs again for our schools. Our vision for education at PPSP will be supported by a system that values equity, access, and high standards for students, educators, and school-based leaders. This report presents the City's vision to build a stronger, more responsive school system for our students and a rewarding and supportive professional environment for our dedicated educators and school-based leaders. I invite everyone to become involved in building this brighter future and support the Turnaround Action Plan at providenceri.gov/tap. I look forward to a partnership with our district leadership, students, educators, families and caregivers, and community partners, in this work to provide a world-class public education for each child in Providence,

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Brett P. Smiley". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Brett" and last name "Smiley" clearly legible.

Mayor Brett P. Smiley





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Ensuring a quality education for all students is among the highest priorities for a city government. Since the State intervention in the Providence Public School District (PPSD) began in 2019, the District has made progress on goals outlined in the Turnaround Action Plan (TAP), including on increasing student achievement on the Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS); declining student absenteeism; increasing the number of opportunities for career and technical education (CTE) for our high school students; and continued implementation of the \$1 billion capital plan that will provide much-needed investments in our school buildings. PPCSD is at a critical and pivotal moment as the State, the District, and the City prepare to transition the District from State to local management. Since taking office, Mayor Smiley has prioritized strategies for the City to improve outcomes for children, both in and out of the classroom.

The Smiley Administration formalized a collaboration with the Providence School Board and Providence City Council to prepare for the return of PPCSD to the City's management in Fall 2023 when the Mayor established the Return to Local Control Cabinet. The Cabinet has been an intergovernmental working group of School Board members and senior staff from both the City Council and Mayor's Office which guides the City's strategy for the District's return.

By Spring 2024, the Cabinet established the City's workplan to prepare for the District's return to local control. The strategies included:

1. Developing a plan for re-integrating District operations that addresses inefficient and burdensome City systems to ensure the effective governance of PPCSD after the District transitions back to local control,
2. Investing in and promoting programs that will support PPCSD's efforts to implement the Turnaround Action Plan, and
3. Engaging with the community to develop responsive solutions and community participation in improving student outcomes.

Following the direction set by the Cabinet, the Administration has developed this action plan through a review of internal processes with expertise and collaboration from across City government and informed

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by robust community engagement. A community survey and in-person Community Conversations on Education involved nearly 1,200 community members and promoted a wide range of opportunities to advance the Turnaround Action Plan. Community Voices on Providence Public Schools, the Administration's report on community engagement was released in February 2025 and informed the Administration's approach.

This plan focuses on the City's responsibilities and opportunities to build a stronger, more responsive school system for our students. Priorities are defined for community and caregiver engagement, supporting learning, governance, funding, supporting talent, procurement, data management, and facilities. Priority actions for each area stem from a close analysis of concerns identified in the 2019 Johns Hopkins Review of the District, community concerns elevated during engagement, and an assessment of current processes that emphasized the past, current, and future states for systems, operations, and governance of PPSD. These actions address the multiple systems and operational concerns that motivated and necessitated the State intervention in PPSD. Priorities are established for actions the City is taking now during the State intervention, as well as once the District returns to local control. Addressing these priorities will allow educators, school-based leaders, and PPSD administrators to focus on what they do and care about most: Offering a high-quality and personalized public education to every student in Providence.

SUMMARY OF PRIORITY ACTIONS

Community Engagement: During the State intervention and when the District returns to local control, the City will continue strategic engagement for the community to share their perspectives on education with the Mayor and Administration and to reflect on the City's preparation for the return of PPSD to local management. This continuing community engagement will allow the City to maintain accountability on progress during the transition and once the District returns to local control. Our community engagement strategy will center topics that are uplifting, collaborative, and feel worthwhile to families and caregivers and increase the quantity and variety of ways that PPSD communicates with the community about family and caregiver engagement opportunities. The City will support prioritizing having an adequate number of staff in District offices engaging families and caregivers, including the Family and Community Engagement (FACE) office, and will work with District leadership to identify the best staffing model for this office. Additionally, the City will leverage the resources of City departments serving youth, including the Department of Recreation and the Division of Human Services, to support the FACE office in their outreach to families and caregivers.

Supporting Learning at PPSD: During the State intervention, the City will continue to support programming that advance progress on key metrics outlined in the Turnaround Action Plan, including after-school tutoring and homework help programs at Recreation Centers. When the District returns to local management, the City will support the Superintendent and District leadership team with a vision for continued implementation of priorities of the Turnaround Action Plan with ongoing engagement of critical stakeholders, including educators, families, and students. The City will support the Superintendent in ensuring that introduction of the Pre-K through 8 model within the District results in improved student outcomes and higher student achievement, especially in middle school grades. Learning during the school day will be augmented with and complemented by high-quality after-school and summer programs for our children and youth. The City will engage with both PPSD and RIDE in resource mapping and program evaluation to identify areas for continued improvement and gaps that remain in the District's current initiatives to make progress on priorities of the Turnaround Action Plan.

Governance: The School Board, City Council, and City of Providence will represent the concerns of the community and serve as the main governing entities when PPSD returns to local control. The

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Superintendent will serve as part of the Mayor's senior leadership team and will supervise PPSD and serve as the chief administrator of the Providence School Board. Priorities before the return to local control include ongoing professional development on student outcomes focused governance for the new hybrid School Board and establishing effective communication and collaboration among all three governing entities and the District. These foundations must remain in place as the District fully integrates, ensuring continuity and effective leadership.

Funding, Finances, and City of Providence Budget Support: The City is committed to honoring the current PPSD funding settlement agreement with RIDE, including the fiscal year 2027 commitment to increase the local contribution to PPSD by the same percentage as the total increase of state aid. The City will ensure continued adequate funding for the District consistent with state law including through 2030, and advocate for local resources to meet the District's needs. We will support other priorities related to youth and education, including more than \$1 billion in school facilities investments and ongoing after-school and summer programming. When PPSD returns to local management, the District will be fully integrated in the City's budget development process. The Mayor and the District will finalize a proposed budget together to be submitted for the Providence City Council's budget hearing and approval process. The City will also support PPSD leadership to build upon ongoing school-based budgeting for principals and other school-based administrators and will work to foster a collaborative relationship with PPSD's Finance Department.

Supporting Talent at PPSD: Educators and school-based leaders are the heart of PPSD—and the City is committed to providing them with a fulfilling professional experience and supporting them in offering high-quality instruction to our students. The City recommends that PPSD implement shared accountability to attract and retain high-quality and professional educator workforce. In a shared accountability model, District leadership, school-based leaders, and community partners together work towards improving student outcomes. This includes fostering a leadership team, both within PPSD and across the School Board, City, and City Council that supports collaborative decision-making structures; accountability for administrators; site-based management; evaluating educators on both the quality of their instruction and their years of service at the District; and teacher accountability based on professional standards. Empowered leadership; performance-based incentives; and pathways for professional growth will remain at the core of the City's approach to site-based management at PPSD. The City will support the District Superintendent in their role in holding school-based leaders accountable to fostering collaborative leadership teams at their schools. The City is also committed to supporting educator retention and to offering more opportunities for professional development.

Procurement: The City will improve functions that, while behind-the-scenes, are critical to improved student outcomes, including purchasing. The City is committed to making purchasing easier for schools in partnership with PPSD's Purchasing Department. The City will evaluate ways to accelerate timelines so that purchasing practices will move efficiently—this may need to include more frequent Board of Contract and Supply meetings and School Board Finance committee meetings. The City will also communicate with District leadership on the new rules that will guide purchasing when the District returns to local management. We will also assess the impact of the 2022 Charter revisions that increased the procurement threshold to \$10,000 for general supplies and \$20,000 for construction to ensure efficiency, transparency, and accountability. This assessment will inform whether the City amends the Charter in 2027, the next allowed date, to further increase the procurement threshold to best serve purchases for the District. The City will assess the time to purchase items before the State intervention and under the new procurement threshold and seek feedback from school-based leaders on their experience purchasing supplies with the new threshold.

Data and Data Management Systems: To support student achievement and wellbeing, many entities gather data on Providence schools, including PPSD, RIDE, community partners, and various departments within the City of Providence. During the transition, the City will develop systems to allow for better collection, management, and security of student performance data. This includes identifying

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roles and functions that may be duplicative within the City of Providence and PPSD's information technology (IT) departments. We will also aim to draft new data sharing agreements (DSAs) and update existing DSAs between the City and PPSD to share key student performance data, including data on attendance and out-of-school learning time. When the District returns to local management, we will prioritize collaborative data and information systems to keep Providence students safe. We will continue to strengthen PPSD's internal IT capacity and security and work to better align systems at the City and District to better track student attendance for consistent data collection and reporting at schools and Recreation Centers.

Facilities: The PPSD capital plan is a successful example of the City, PPSD, and RIDE upholding the Collaborative Working Agreement and working together to ensure that every student has access to a new or like new school. During the transition, the City will continue implementation of PPSD's capital plan that will invest more than \$1 billion in new and like-new school buildings across the District. We will provide staff capacity to manage PPSD's 44 school buildings and provide energy management services. When PPSD returns to local management, the City will remain committed to performance-based contracting for facilities management and will leverage the City's Revolving Fund to maintain these investments in 21st century learning facilities. We will also develop a uniform energy management plan that benefits the City, PPSD, and Providence taxpayers and align with the City's GIS based asset management system for maintaining school yards, play areas, and outdoor classrooms.

PREPARING FOR THE NEXT PHASE

This action plan summarizes the Administration's strategy to resume management of the school district. The plan emphasizes continued implementation of priorities of the Turnaround Action Plan, empowering a student outcomes focused approach to governance of PPSD, and streamlining systems and operations between the City and District as we together work to offer a high-quality and personalized public education to every student in Providence. The next phase of this work will be in accordance with RIDE Commissioner Infante-Green's February 2025 letter on next steps for the PPSD intervention that defines the development of a comprehensive transition plan in partnership with RIDE, PPSD, the Providence School Board, and the City Council with clear timelines and action steps. That transition plan will outline systems, structures, roles, and responsibilities for each entity, including the District, RIDE, School Board, City Council, and City, and outline a clear plan of action for PPSD's return to local management. The priority actions in this report serve as the Administration's foundation for this next stage of planning. Commissioner Infante-Greene's plan will be presented to the K-12 Council for review and approval in June 2025.