



State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Shepard Building
255 Westminster Street
Providence, Rhode Island 02903-3400

Peter McWalters
Commissioner

February 15, 2007

Dr. Donnie Evans, Superintendent
Providence Public School District
797 Westminster Street
Providence, RI 02903-4045

Dear Superintendent Evans:

I want to congratulate you on the latest NECAP results in Providence. Between the 2005 and 2006 testing, Providence elementary and middle schools increased the percentage of students proficient in reading by 7%. This was the fifth largest increase in any district in the state and a performance worthy of recognition. Your performance in mathematics was similar. Your schools increased the percentage of students meeting the standard by 8%, which was the sixth strongest performance by a district in the state. Although your performance in writing was not as strong, it is clear that the hard work of the teachers, administrators, students and parents in Providence is changing the status quo. Yet, much more remains to be done.

Far too many students in our urban schools—including those in Providence--do not develop the skills and knowledge they need to succeed upon graduation. What we are now learning is how much sustained work is required to create the kind of schools in which all urban students can flourish academically. In order for all the students to reach the proficiency levels we have targeted as necessary, and for our agencies to meet their legal responsibilities, we will need to combine our talents, energies and resources and work cooperatively toward accelerating student performance.

It is in the spirit of a joint venture that I inform you that I am hereby placing the Providence Public School District (PPSD) in corrective action. As we move into this new phase of accountability, I am mindful that, more than ever, the future of Providence's children rests on our ability to work together to solve the many problems that have historically prevented them from having the schools they need and deserve. Specifically, this letter lays out the authorizing powers that led me to place PPSD in corrective action and describes in some detail what the corrective action process will require of the PPSD central office, certain Providence schools, and the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE). It also details the ways in which I propose we work together for the immediate future and outlines my expectations for our communication around critical issues.

I. Authorization for Corrective Action

As we discussed in our January 18, 2007 Face-to-Face meeting, under the authorities detailed in Article 18 of Rhode Island General Law, RIDE began to classify schools as high,

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moderate and low performing in the 2000 school year. That year, based upon the concentration of low performing schools in the district, PPSD was invited into the department's progressive support and intervention process and accepted that invitation. Although the original state accountability system did not identify districts as in need of improvement, this agency began to do this in the 2003 school year in order to comply with the requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation. In Rhode Island, a district is in need of improvement if 40% or more of its schools are in need of improvement or if it has schools in need of improvement in two out of three grade levels (elementary, middle, or high). You can find further details on what the state, district, and schools must do as part of corrective action in *Progressive Support and Intervention: the Rhode Island System of Accountability for Schools and Districts*, available on the RIDE website. On the basis of the 2005 state assessment data, RIDE has identified PPSD as a district in need of improvement for five (5) consecutive years and our accountability system specifies that PPSD begin to operate under a corrective action plan.

In addition to the district identification, you have several schools that either are entering into the corrective action process or have moved beyond that into the restructuring process. The following is the list of state identified schools:

Schools in the Restructuring Process

Middle Schools

- Nathaniel Greene Middle School
- Oliver Hazard Perry Middle School
- Roger Williams Middle School

High Schools

- Hope Arts School
- Hope Information Technology School
- Hope Leadership School
- Feinstein High School
- Mt. Pleasant High School

Schools in the Corrective Action Process

Elementary Schools

- Alfred Lima, Sr. Elementary School
- George J. West Elementary School
- Veazie Street School

Middle Schools

- Esek Hopkins Middle School
- Gilbert Stuart Middle School
- Nathan Bishop Middle School
- Samuel W. Bridgham Middle School
- Springfield Middle School

In this state's accountability system, you have the discretion to add schools to this list that have not made adequate yearly progress for more than two years in a row. Should you exercise this prerogative, we expect you to inform us as soon as possible.

II. Progressive Support and Intervention Authorities

In the Rhode Island accountability system, the Department of Education is empowered by Rhode Island law to exercise "progressive levels of control over the school/and or district budget, program, and/or personnel." In addition, federal law empowers RIDE to take one or more of the following actions to initiate the corrective action process in a school district:

- Defer programmatic funds or reducing administrative funds,
- Fully implement curriculum based on scientific research, including professional development,
- Replace district personnel staff most relevant to the failure of the school to improve,
- Remove particular schools from district jurisdiction,
- Replace the superintendent and school board with a receiver or trustee,
- Restructure or close the district, and
- Provide inter-district choice to students.

Our intention is to implement these actions in ways that will create the best results for students. That means working as collegially as possible with your district at the central office and school level to make those changes that will have a positive impact on learning, will be most resource efficient, and will be within the scope of our combined powers to effect in a timely manner.

The following actions are joint RIDE/PPSD responsibilities with respect to schools entering either the corrective action or restructuring process. With respect to schools identified in need of corrective action, we will work with you to implement appropriate interventions from the following actions:

- Replace the school staff most relevant to the failure of the school to improve,
- Fully implement curriculum based on scientific research, including professional development,
- Decrease management authority of school,
- Appoint outside advisor to the school,
- Extend the school day or year, or
- Restructure internal organization of the school.

With respect to schools identified in need of restructuring, we will work with you to implement appropriate interventions from the following actions:

- Reopen the school as a charter school,
- Replace all or most of the staff,
- Place school under private management,
- Place school under RIDE management, or
- Restructure staffing or governance.

III. Corrective Action Requirements

In order to fulfill the above requirements of the Rhode Island accountability system, RIDE requires PPSD to do the following:

1. Develop a corrective action plan or a restructuring plan for each state identified school in your district, and
2. Develop a district corrective action plan, which includes plans to improve your central office as well as plan to support each of those schools in corrective action or in restructuring.

We require plans for school improvement that clearly identify the changes each school is targeting in student learning behaviors and in teacher practice. RIDE will work with your central office to ensure that the Providence One Plan (POP) meets both federal and state requirements for corrective action and restructuring plans. RIDE will also participate in the peer review process for the plans in the identified schools.

Your district corrective action plan must have two major components. One component must contain a set of plans that specify the ways that the central office will support each school that has a corrective action or restructuring plan. Since the needs of schools will vary, these plans cannot be written until the central office has assessed the capacity of each of these schools to carry out their corrective action or restructuring plans. The second component must specify the actions the district needs to take to bolster its own capacity to meet the needs of all students, teachers, and schools and to meet federal and state requirements (e.g. highly qualified teachers, IDEA, BEP) for providing comprehensive educational programs.

As these plans are developed, we believe that an open, inclusive process is needed to ensure community engagement. In addition to the district professional personnel, we believe that the planning process should minimally include parents, school board members, community stakeholders, and the Providence Teachers Union (PTU).

All plans required by the corrective action process must include the specification of timelines, benchmarks, responsibilities, fiscal and other resources, as well as sources of evidence that will be used for evaluating the outcomes of the plan. The fiscal resources should identify their federal, state and local sources (e. g, Title I, Article 31 set-aside) and shall be consistent with the planned expenditures of funds reported in the district Consolidated Resource Plan (CRP). RIDE will work with PPSD to develop a suitable template for the required action plans. Once all the required plans are completed, they will be integrated into a single District Negotiated Agreement (DNA) that will guide our improvement efforts over the next two years.

Our expectation is that, at the end of the planning process, Providence will have an agreed upon set of concrete processes in place that will directly and powerfully improve the learning environments of students in these schools. In order to do this, the plans must put into action processes that ensure that these schools have highly qualified teachers, strong professional development, excellent leadership, rigorous programming, active use of data to adjust and drive instructional change, access to evidence-based programs and materials, and any other resources that can be provided by the central office and RIDE to accelerate student performance. Any current standing operating procedure, whether originating administratively or from a labor-management agreement, that stands in the way of this primary goal must be changed so that students are served better.

Given the requirements of a process of this magnitude, we have set deadlines for the completion of the planning phase. The following is the timetable set for district and school plans:

- School corrective action and restructuring plans by April 30, 2007
- Draft district corrective action plan by May 1, 2007
- Final district corrective action plan by June 1, 2007.

As these plans are completed and approved by RIDE, you shall begin a process of communicating them to students, teachers, families, and other constituencies within two weeks of the completion of the plans. We will help you think through that communication plan and offer whatever assistance seems reasonable. Further, RIDE will work with PPSD during summer 2007 to prepare school and central office personnel to implement these plans.

IV. The PPSD/RIDE Working Relationship

In order to work collaboratively, we need to make explicit the expectations we have in terms of working together to ensure that your district corrective action plan and your schools' corrective

action or restructuring plans are well designed, implemented, and evaluated. At a minimum, we expect focused attention on improving teaching and learning by engaging in the following processes.

- Monthly Face-to-Face Meetings between the Commissioner and his staff and the Superintendent and his staff: These monthly face-to-face meetings are designed to address systemic issues (i.e. labor, personnel, infrastructure, organization capacity, and fiscal) that are affecting the implementation of the district and school improvement plans. These meetings are intended to clarify actions needed, to provide a consistent feedback loop on policy and procedures, and identify issues that need joint problem-solving. The Face-to-Face meeting provides the opportunity to specify mutual expectations between PPSD central office and RIDE around how we will work together to improve teaching and learning and student results.
- RIDE-PPSD Capacity for Support and Intervention Team: PPSD and RIDE programmatic leadership staff will meet at a minimum on a monthly basis to engage in joint problem-solving, planning, monitoring, and reflecting on the strategies and practices being used to improve identified schools in need of improvement and requiring progressive support and intervention. The RIDE-PPSD team's work is to review and provide substantive input on corrective action and restructuring plans, to analyze the effectiveness of supports and interventions being used, to regularly assess the progress being made in identified schools, to use state and district data, including evaluation reports, to design corrective actions and improvement strategies. This RIDE-PPSD team provides the opportunity to build deeper understanding in both organizations of the theory of action and strategies needed to improve student learning. This team is expected to provide progress reports to Commissioner and Superintendent at the Face-to-Face meetings.
- Specific Direction of State and Federal funds: RIDE will direct both state aid for progressive support and intervention and federal aid in Title I, II, and III and IDEA to the specific planned improvement and intervention strategies and activities. RIDE competitive grant applications will also be directed to the extent possible to support those schools in the corrective action or restructuring process. Both the District Negotiated Agreement and the Consolidated Resource Plan will reflect RIDE's input on the necessary supports and interventions needed. PPSD and RIDE staff will engage in preliminary meetings that provide the rationale for understanding the proposed strategies and resources. The joint capacity team meeting can be used as a vehicle for preliminary review of the Consolidated Resource Plan and the Face-to-Face meeting is an opportunity to outline the components of the District Negotiated Agreement.
- Providence-PTU Joint School Improvement Intervention Team: The Providence Teachers Union contract specifies that management and union leadership will discuss protocols related to the application of support and intervention powers in Providence schools. As this letter makes clear, the corrective action and restructuring process are very likely to impact teacher working conditions. RIDE endorses the purpose of this team, which is to cooperatively find ways that required changes can be made in ways most beneficial to improving student learning as well as meeting both management and union interests. RIDE sees this team as a proactive effort to ensure that corrective action and restructuring occurs in the most cooperative fashion possible.
- Monitoring and Evaluation of Strategies and Intervention: The RIDE-PPSD Capacity for Support and Intervention Team will design specific strategies to evaluate the progress being made at the district and school levels. At a minimum, PPSD and RIDE staff will participate on learning walks within the identified schools, will review student and school data jointly, will share evaluation results of programs, and will identify specific programs, schools, and/or implementation activities that need to be evaluated and monitored.

V. Ongoing, Timely Communication and Engagement of the Community

We believe that our joint collaborative problem-solving and planning depends on ongoing and timely communication between our organizations and to the Providence community at large. We expect that each of our organizations will communicate on a regular basis and provide each other with the necessary information to make meaningful decisions. At a minimum, we expect the following to occur:

- Timely communication to RIDE of district actions related to the progressive support and intervention process, including intended changes with respect to personnel, budget, and instructional programs.
- Timely communication by PPSD to its families, the community, teachers, and administrators and other stakeholders about the changes described in the district corrective action plan and the schools' corrective/restructuring plans.
- Active and meaningful engagement of parents in school improvement activities.
- Active engagement of the Providence School Board, the Mayor's Office and the Providence Teachers Union in the design and implementation of the district corrective action plan and the schools' corrective action and restructuring plans.

We look forward to discussing and clarifying the contents of this letter at our February 15, 2007 Face-to-Face meeting. At that time, we will establish clear understandings of the content and process for moving ahead on this most important work.

Sincerely yours,



Peter McWalters
Commissioner

cc. David Abbott, Deputy Commissioner
Mary Canole, Director of Progressive Support & Intervention