



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

Peter McWalters
Commissioner

February 17, 2009

Mr. Thomas Brady, Superintendent
Providence Public School District
797 Westminster Street
Providence, RI 02903-4045

Dear Superintendent Brady:

I am in receipt of your January 26, 2009 letter that responds directly to my May 19, 2008 requirement for the Providence Public School District (PPSD) to “identify any current operating procedures, whether they originate administratively or from a labor management agreement that stand in the way of improving learning environments of students.” Your letter details the specific key challenges and proposed solutions needed to ensure full implementation of all RIDE directives and reform initiatives that have been approved in the *District’s Corrective Action Plan for 2008-2009 and 2009-2010* (November 8, 2008).

Your letter and previously submitted documentation specify how the district has worked strategically and diligently to implement the District Corrective Action Plan and the 2008 Hope Order of Reconstitution. At our December 12, 2008 Face-to-Face meeting, we had the opportunity to review your progress on the *District’s Corrective Action Plan* as well as your implementation of the 2008 Hope Order of Reconstitution. Based on the quarterly progress report as well as active collaboration between RIDE and PPSD staff, we acknowledged that Providence has fully or partially complied with seventeen of the twenty-two action directives contained in your *District Corrective Action Plan*.

Recent NECAP results indicate that positive change is occurring in Providence as a result of a series of state-mandated organizational and instructional interventions that you have aggressively implemented. We believe that the improvements in student achievement can be attributed to the collective effort of your central office leadership staff, the committed focus on learning and teaching at the individual schools, the hard work of principals, teachers, and support staff, the engagement of students and parents, and the collaborative working approach you and the School Board have taken with your collective bargaining units. We urge your central office staff to continue to provide the necessary leadership and support to the Providence schools, teachers, and students and their parents so that continued progress can be made.

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The Board of Regents does not discriminate on the basis of age, color, sex, sexual orientation, race, religion, national origin, or disability.

While progress is being made, Providence Public School District has remained in corrective action for seven consecutive years. For the past two years, I have directed PPSD to do the following:

- Develop a protocol for the assignment of highly effective teachers and staff to high-need classrooms and schools;
- Create a process for a staffing stability plan;
- Assume ownership of professional development to ensure that critical core content curriculum and interventions can be supported;
- Implement human resource and staffing policies to ensure retention of highly trained intervention teachers, team members, and coaches; and,
- Obtain assurances from the Providence Teachers Union (PTU), APPSSA and Local 1033 that their members will participate in professional development and will support the fidelity of implementation of the district's curriculum and intervention programs.

Further, when I issued the *Status Report and the Revised Order of Reconstitution and Corrective Action for Hope High School* on June 10, 2008, I directed PPSD to assume responsibility for leading and supporting improvements at Hope High School Complex and all Providence high schools. This included restructuring current teacher leadership positions across all Providence high schools, modifying your District Corrective Action Plan to address specific components with the revised Order, and communicating with me directly if it is impossible to implement any portion of your District Corrective Action Plan and the Revised Order because of financial exigency or any other reason. Your District Corrective Action Plan was modified to address the Revised Order. On December 12, 2008, you alerted me of the potential issues within the District Corrective Action Plan and the Revised Order that are impossible to implement in all high schools based on a combination of financial, equity and contractual reasons, and you have specified in your January 26, 2009 letter proposed solutions for addressing these issues.

I applaud the fact that the Providence Public School District has worked in collaboration with the PTU, APPSSA and Local 1033 to implement the *District's Corrective Action Plan*. Together, you have figured out ways to address the serious challenges faced in accelerating student achievement. Working with your collective bargaining units, you have engaged in strengthening professional development so that it more fully addresses student needs. You have done this when the city and state economic conditions have been strained. These have been challenging fiscal times that have required that all stakeholders invested in public education combine talents and work cooperatively toward achieving new solutions for overcoming practices that impede accelerating student achievement. Based on our discussion on December 12, 2008 and the status reported in your January 26, 2009 letter, I recognize that all parties have, in good faith, tried to resolve the issues that I directed PPSD to address, but have been unable to reach consensus.

While I know that you will continue to work in collaboration with the leadership of the PTU, APPSSA, and Local 1033 to improve teaching and learning in Providence schools, I can no longer let the actions I directed PPSD to implement remain at a standstill. Therefore, under both the requirements of the federal No Child Left Behind Act and the statutory accountability system that directs the Commissioner to exercise "progressive levels of control over the school/and or district budget, program, and/or personnel" (R.I.G.L 16-7.1.5), I am hereby directing you to implement the following Orders for the 2009-2010 school year:

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1. Protocol for the Assignment of Highly Effective Staff to High Need Schools and Classrooms

PPSD will introduce and implement incrementally criterion-based hiring and job assignment processes that are driven by student need rather than by seniority. The criterion-based hiring system will fill all vacant positions with candidates selected through district-managed interview process. A detailed description of the criterion-based hiring process, the district-managed interview process, communication strategies with staff, and the two-year time-frame for incremental phases will be submitted to RIDE for review no later than March 16, 2009. The two-year plan shall identify the schools that are to be included in the incremental phases and provide a time-line for when the criterion-based hiring process will be district-wide. This list shall include six schools at a minimum, with at least two schools from each level of the system (elementary, middle, and high) that are in the furthest level of sanction status, including two new schools (i.e., Nathan Bishop Middle School and the Providence Career and Technical Center) that will open in 2009-2010. These schools were closed because of insufficient student performance over long periods of time and/or the lack of viable career and technical programs that meet state standards. In addition to criterion-based hiring, staffing procedures in all schools in 2009-2010 will adhere to the following: (a) administrators shall make justifiable staffing and schedule changes throughout the academic year in response to changes in student enrollment or instructional need; and (b) instructional assignments, including but not limited to grade level and courses, shall be driven by student needs first rather than by weight of teacher preference sheets. Existing processes that exist in contractual language and/or school operations (e.g. school-based SITs and/or joint PSD/PTU program committee) that impede these practices, or that prevent compliance with applicable law, shall be removed or modified.

2. Implementation of a Staffing Stability Plan

PPSD will ensure staffing stability and minimize the undue turnover of teaching faculty in all elementary schools by creating a "school-based teacher" for less senior teachers facing transfer or lay-off. School-based teachers shall have the opportunity to stay within their current elementary school rather than moving to another school through the consolidation process. School-based teachers will be assigned to cover classrooms in the event of teacher absence and will provide supplementary instructional services throughout the school year. For 2009-2010, there shall be a minimum of one school-based teacher per school. In 2009-2010 PPSD will provide RIDE with documentation with the number of schools and number of teachers affected by this change on a quarterly basis as a part of the District Corrective Action Plan updates.

3. Assignment of Professional Development based on Student Needs

PPSD will continue to vigorously implement the required mandatory professional development that addresses the curriculum and instruction intervention programs that are needed to improve student performance. The Superintendent is to exercise his authority to assign the amount and focus of professional development based upon student need and in alignment with the aggressive curriculum development cycle that is anticipated over the next several school years. The Superintendent will provide direct oversight of the type, amount, and content of the district's mandatory professional development requirement. The professional development requirement for each teacher shall be differentiated based on instructional and curricular demands to meet student

needs. PPSD shall provide the Commissioner with a full description of the district's mandatory professional development requirements, including the type, amount, and content and how the differentiation to meet student needs will be implemented for review no later than April 15, 2009. In 2009-2010, PPSD will provide documentation on the impact of this action with its quarterly progress updates on the District's Corrective Action Plan.

4. Creation of Teacher Leader Positions

The Status Report and the Revised Order of Reconstitution and Corrective Action for Hope High School directed you to establish the position of teacher leader and eliminate department chair positions in all high schools for the 2008-2009 school year. This Order was not implemented in 2008-2009 because of both administrative and contractual issues. You have been in discussions throughout this school year with the Providence Teachers Union regarding issues of staffing, job duties, and logistics in implementing teacher leaders. Therefore, this Order shall be addressed and implemented in the 2009-2010 school year. PPSD will eliminate the positions of department chairs and department heads for the 2009-2010 school year, institute the position of teacher leader in all middle and high schools, and implement a criterion-based selection process for these positions. After consultation with Providence Teachers Union in regard to the impact of this aspect of the Order, PPSD will implement this Order and will submit the job specifications, the criterion-based selection system, and the time-frame for completing the hiring of a full cadre of teacher leaders to the Commissioner prior to the interview process. PPSD will provide the Commissioner with a listing of the teacher leaders selected by school when the process is completed.

5. Implementation of High School Regulations & Hope High School Staffing

The Status Report and the Revised Order of Reconstitution and Corrective Action for Hope High School directed PPSD to assume oversight of Hope High School as well as to ensure implementation of the Board of Regent's secondary regulations. PPSD was asked to submit a budget analysis of the costs associated with supporting the staffing requirements and protections at Hope High School. Given the information provided by PPSD in your January 26, 2009 letter and the need to ensure equitable distribution of human and fiscal resources across all Providence high schools, I am granting your request to assume full control of Hope's staffing practices and school schedule for the 2009-2010 school year. In assuming this control, you must continue to ensure that the staffing stability and gains made at Hope remain and areas of improvement are addressed. PPSD will provide the Commissioner with an update report by May 31, 2009 on the implementation of the Revised Order at Hope High School and a budget plan as to how the realized savings, and/or areas of improvement will be implemented across all high schools.

6. Evaluation and Support for Teachers, Teacher Leaders and Administrative Leaders

Implementing the above directives requires that teachers and administrative leaders at all levels be held to high standards for performance and provided with support to meet those standards. The Providence School Board's Aligned Instructional System holds this expectation as well. In the Revised Order, I directed you to articulate PPSD's plan for evaluating high school leaders and providing them with support on improving instructional leadership. This need is equally applicable to all levels of the system. To date, PPSD has not addressed this issue. Therefore, I am directing PPSD to articulate its plan for evaluating all school leaders, central office leaders, and teaching staff for the

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2009-2010 school year. This plan, including standards, criteria, processes, necessary training and responsibilities, shall be submitted to the Commissioner for review by May 31, 2009.

This Order applies to the Providence Public School District and all of its employees. This Order requires that PPSD communicate with all faculty, staff, and constituents affected by these changes. Please ensure that I receive copies of the communication provided to staff and constituents regarding these changes. Implementing standards and accelerating student performance is challenging and serious work requiring all of us to think differently and be willing to change our practices to benefit students. I look forward to our continued work toward this aim.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you need further clarification.

Sincerely yours,

Peter Mc Walters
Commissioner of Education

cc.

Sharon Contreras, Chief Academic Officer
Steven F. Smith, President of Providence Teachers Union
Larry Roberti, President, APPSSA
Don Iannazzi, President, Local 1033
David V. Abbott, Deputy Commissioner/General Counsel