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Why 360 High School Should Stay Open

Friends of 360 High School

March 11, 2024

## Executive Summary

The closure of 360 High School deserves immediate reconsideration. 360 High School should NOT be closed for the following main reasons:

1. 360 High School is an oasis of positivity in a troubled school district
2. 360 High School has a unique approach to secondary education, which should be a model for other schools in the district
3. 360 High School serves often-marginalized students in the lowest income neighborhood in Providence

### 1. Oasis of Positivity

All who enter 360 High School can feel the energy, positivity and warmth of the environment and our data supports it. On Surveyworks,, the statewide survey of schools, 360 not only outperforms JSEC, it outperforms Providence and the state as a whole on nearly every category in all the surveys (family, student and staff).

Statistics to note:

- Rigorous Expectations: 60% of students at 360 respond positively compared to 53% of the state
- Communication: 71% of 360 families respond positively as opposed to only 54% in Rhode Island as a whole
- School Leadership: 82% of 360 staff respond positively compared with only 45% statewide.

### 2. Unique Approach

We built our positive school culture by centering restorative practices and youth development principles, with our schoolwide focus on literacy, including the district's only Linguistics Lab. These practices are a model for other high schools.

- At the December 2023 Instructional Site Visit, the schoolwide focus on literacy led to measurable improvements in instruction
- Linguistics lab is offered nowhere else in the district and is focused on learning disabled students as well as those who reached high school simply never having learned to read.
- Every teacher has completed at least three days of training in Restorative Practices which focuses on maintaining consistent positive regard for all students.

### 3. Serving Often-Marginalized Students Well

360 serves the highest proportion of Multilingual Learners in the city, with the exception of the Newcomer Academy; 86% qualify for free/reduced price lunch; 78% of our students are Latino and 15% are African American; 14% have IEPs. Schools with this set of demographics are not often served by the most experienced teachers, but 360 High School has

- The longest serving female high school principal
- Only 7% less than fully certified (compared with 24% of the district)
- Low staff turnover rate and highest teacher attendance in the district's secondary schools

### Correcting Misinformation

Since the decision to close 360 High School has become controversial, the district and the Commissioner attempted to portray 360 as chronically underperforming and costly to run. But data from the state's own website contradicts these assertions.

- 360 has only been a one-star school since the pandemic and every school in the country has struggled to make up for learning losses that occurred during that unprecedented time.
- Only 2 students need to score in the high growth area this year for 360 to leave Comprehensive Support and Improvement status
- 360's per-pupil expenditure is about \$3500 less than the average for Providence high schools
- 360 offers dual enrollment and ACN courses, rather than AP courses, for equity reasons: students do not need to pass a test to earn college credit, as they do with AP courses.

On February 6, 2024, Superintendent Javier Montanez hosted an emergency meeting with 360 High School faculty. At the meeting and in the subsequent letter describing his decision, the Superintendent announced that PPSD would “merge” the two schools in the Juanita Sanchez Educational Complex in order to combine 360’s exceptional culture with the newly planned Career and Technical Education program being designed at JSEC. The merger, however, did not include 360 staff or administration: only 360 students would be invited to stay at the newly formed JSEC. All of the 360 staff, including the principal and assistant principal, were displaced and will have to apply for new positions within the district, with no guarantee of rehire. After about 10 minutes of discussion, the Superintendent left the meeting in the hands of a Transformation Officer and the Human Resources director, never returning (despite promising that he would).

360 families, staff and students have been devastated by this decision but have organized together to fight it.

- On February 7, 300 students walked over two miles to the Providence Public School District main office to protest the decision, but no leadership came out of the building to speak with them.
- Over 150 community members attended the meeting of the Providence School Board on February 15, but the Superintendent was not there to hear their questions and concerns, nor was he there when a smaller group attended the February 29 Board meeting.
- Another large group from 360 attended the Rhode Council of Elementary and Secondary Education meeting on February 27 to voice their opposition to the closure, but the Commissioner was absent from that meeting.
- The Commissioner was invited to attend an after-school faculty meeting, but declined saying through her Chief of Staff that the person responsible for the decision was the Superintendent, and when we followed up with the Superintendent we received an out-of-office reply. As of this writing, no meeting has been arranged.

Our goal in this packet is to present our case that 360 High School should NOT be closed. There are three main reasons why 360 High School should remain open:

1. 360 High School is an oasis of positivity in a troubled school district
2. 360 High School has a unique approach to secondary education, which should be a model for other schools in the district
3. 360 High School serves often-marginalized students in the lowest income neighborhood in Providence

We provide evidence for each point below.

### **1. Oasis of Positivity**

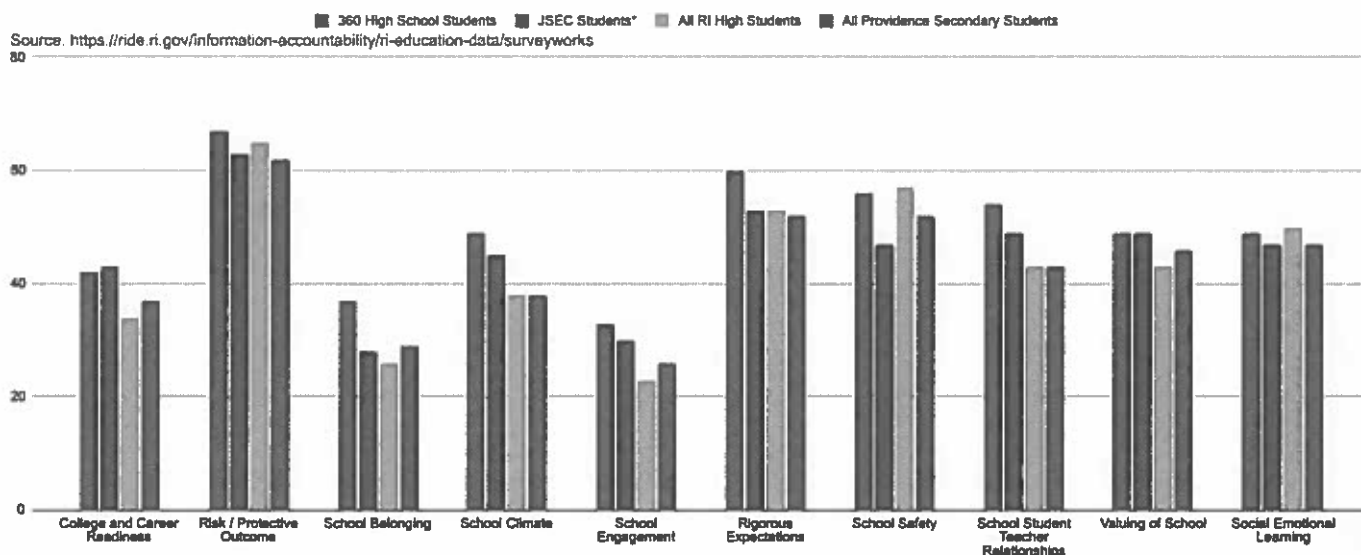
All who enter 360 High School can feel the energy, positivity and warmth of the environment. The Superintendent wrote in his letter to families that “we intend to build on the best elements of both schools by pairing the positive school culture and restorative practices at 360 High School” and the Transformation Officer Khaleel Desaque, in announcing the closure to 360 staff on February 6, noted that 360’s “school culture is second to none.” Students and families who made public testimony

described the school as a “home” and a “family” where students are “nurtured, supported and challenged.” Our data supports these assertions.

In the four graphs shown below, 360 is the blue bar. On nearly every topic with every group that took Surveyworks, the statewide survey of schools, 360 not only outperforms JSEC, it outperforms Providence and the state as a whole.

The first two graphs show data from students. The first graph is focused on secondary students.

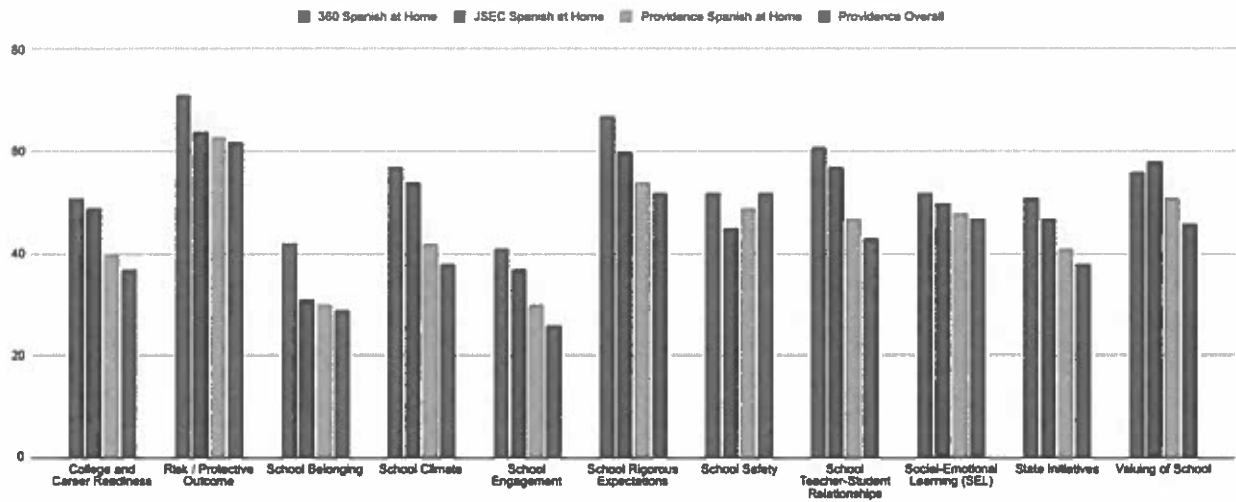
Students responding favorably to questions about their high school, 2023 Surveyworks



Notice that the blue bar—360 High School—is the highest in every category except for College and Career Readiness, where it still outperforms Providence and Providence secondary students. We particularly pride ourselves on our ratings in School Climate, Rigorous Expectations and School Belonging.

The next chart focuses on students who speak Spanish at home, typically our multilingual learners who make up about 1% of our student body, and are a growing proportion of Providence public school learners.

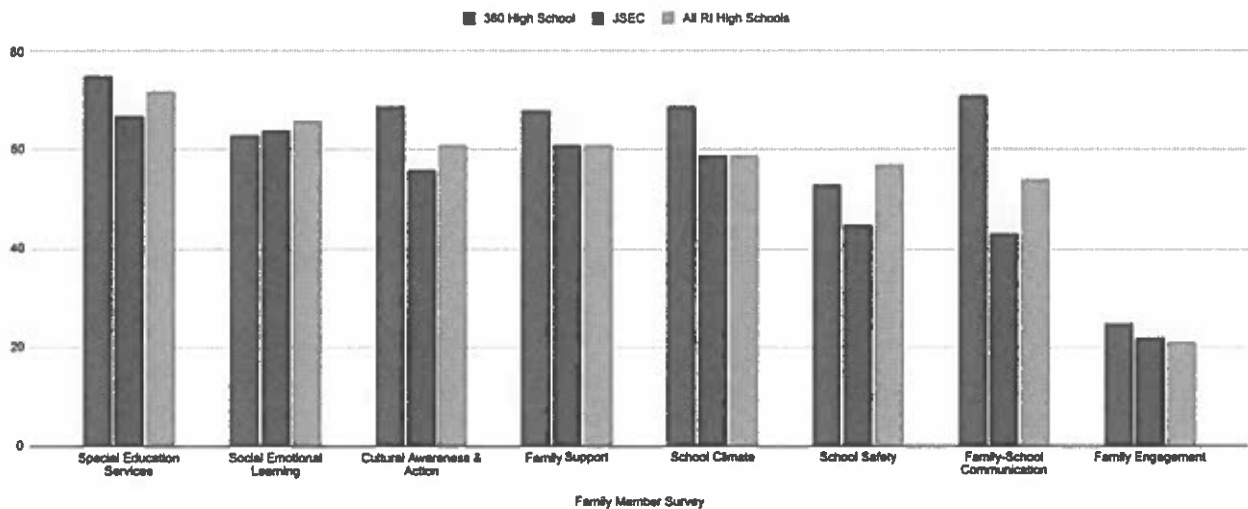
Percent Students Who Speak Spanish at Home Responding Positively about Various Survey Topics  
SurveyWorks Secondary Survey 2023



Once again, 360 is the highest in every category except one, but exceeds the district and the state in all categories.

Families agree that 360 is a positive place for their children. Below again, 360 is the blue bar and in every category but one it exceeds JSEC and all Rhode Island high schools.

Family Members responding favorably to questions about their child's high school, 2023 Surveyworks  
Source: <https://rde.nl.gov/information-accountability/ri-education-data/surveyworks>

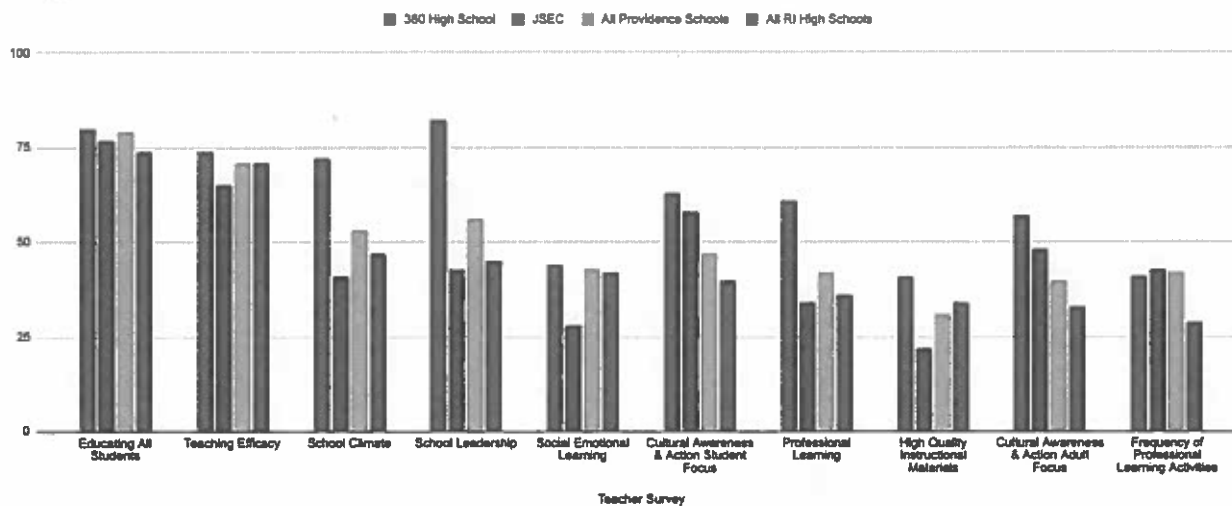


A particularly important area for families is Family School Communication, where 71% of 360 families respond positively as opposed to only 54% in Rhode Island as a whole.

The staff survey continues the positive trend.

## Teachers and Staff responding favorably to questions about their high school, 2023 Surveyworks

Source: <https://rlda.ri.gov/information-accountability/ri-education-data/surveyworks>



Of particular note is the score on School Leadership, where 82% of 360 staff respond positively in this area as compared with only 45% statewide. This reflects the strong leadership of Principal Kerry Tuttlebee, the longest serving female high school principal in the city, and Assistant Principal Rich Norris. Under the current closure plan, this amazing leadership team will be dismantled and displaced.

All of this positive data—from 360 students, families and staff—is important in and of itself. But these are also leading indicators of improvement (Supovitz, Foley & Mishook, 2012). Test scores are lagging indicators: they improve AFTER you have created the space for learning. This data shows that our school community trusts each other, cares for each other and challenges each other. These are all prerequisites for improving and sustaining academic outcomes for students. (Bryk, 2002)

## 2. Unique Approach

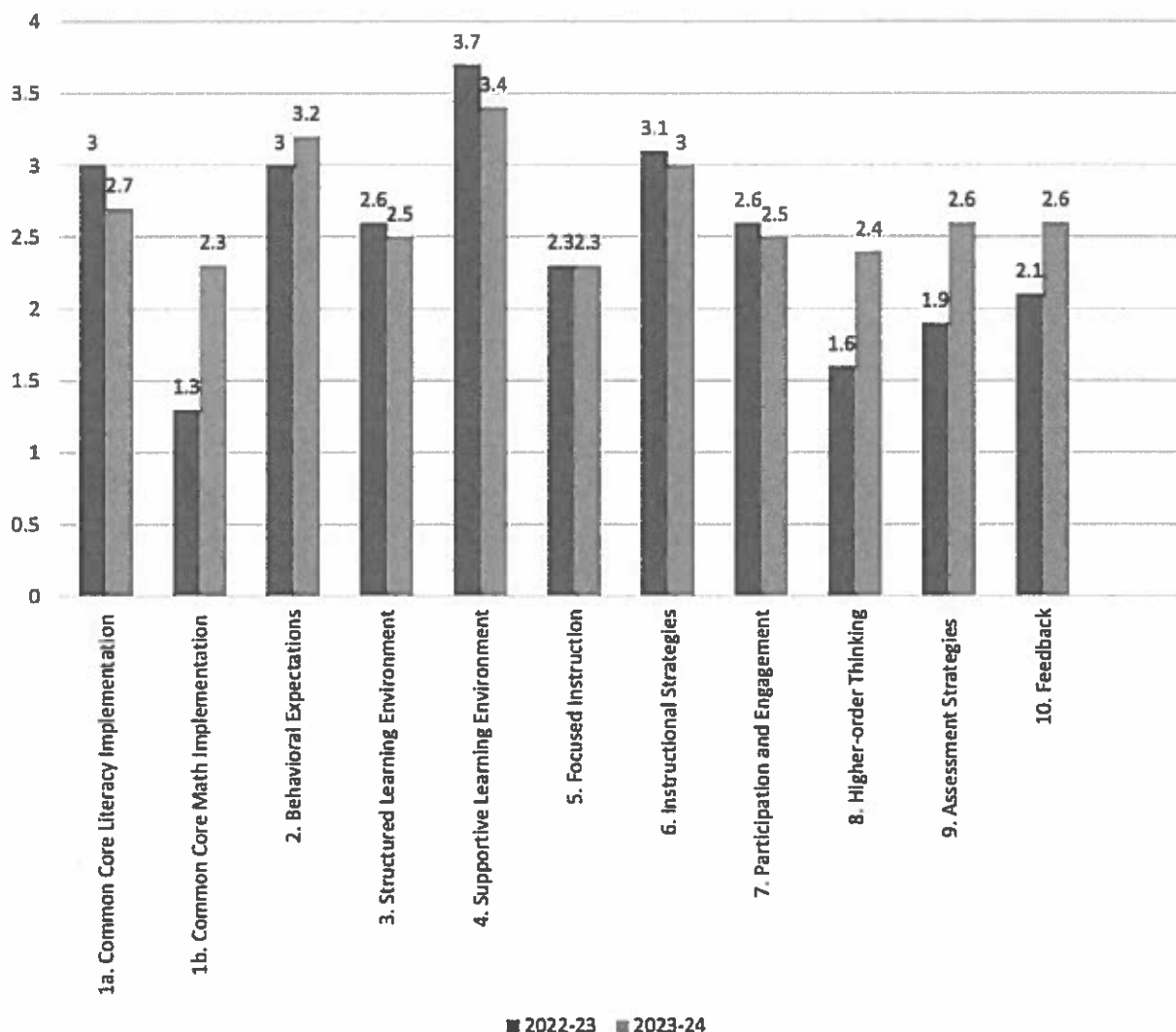
360 High School's well-documented positive school culture did not just come about by chance. We—the staff, students and families that make up our school—built it intentionally and together. We did this by centering restorative practices and youth development principles, with our schoolwide focus on literacy, including the district's only Linguistics Lab.

### Schoolwide Focus on literacy

As part of our authentic approach to improving outcomes for students, we have focused on developing schoolwide literacy practices. This has included schoolwide strategies for annotation, SAT prep, and finding evidence. Every classroom is focused on building literacy using these practices in Inquiry Circles and a structured process for analyzing and understanding graphs.

At the December 2023 Instructional Site Visit, commissioned by the state as part of 360's Comprehensive School Improvement, these practices led to measurable improvements in instruction, as shown in the graph below.

SUMMARY OF CLASSROOM OBSERVATION DATA  
Average Rating by Indicator, Year-Over-Year



### Linguistics Lab

Linguistics lab was designed by 360 teachers in response to the needs of students in special education and in tier 2 reading intervention. These are students who might have a diagnosed learning disability but also includes those who reached high school simply never having learned to read. Many of these students are dyslexic, but getting treatment is difficult because it is very expensive and requires a 1:1 or 1:2 service.

At 360, special education staff and administrators brainstormed how to provide the necessary supports without impacting the budget. The principal used grant money to support 3 staff to earn the Graduate Certificate in Dyslexia Knowledge and Practice (a 12 credit program), which meets the requirements of the Right to Read Act. Staff learned how to screen, diagnose and treat dyslexia and other reading disabilities and used this expertise to design the Linguistics Lab.

Linguistics Lab is offered nowhere else in the district and is an evidence-based and emotionally considerate literacy instruction for young adults. The instruction is direct, explicit, multi-sensory, structured, sequential, diagnostic and prescriptive. Linguistics Lab not only teaches students reading and writing, but also the science of reading, the reading brain, history of the English language, linguistics and etymology. Eighteen students have benefitted from their participation in Linguistics Lab, and their transformation as they learn to read has been nothing short of miraculous. “I have to have Linguistics Lab. Where will it be next year?” - 11th grade Linguistics Lab student after hearing about the 360 High School Closure

#### Integration of Diverse Learners

360 offers inclusive education for MLLs, students with learning disabilities, and students with severe and profound needs. Students receive services in English Language Development classes, inclusion services for those with mild to moderate disabilities, resource (small group) in Linguistics Lab for those with more significant literacy needs, and self-contained classes for those with severe and profound needs. What is different about 360, is that these models are combined with a range of students in order to create truly diverse learning environments. Though a resource for special education, Linguistics Lab is also available for students in need of tier 2 intervention. Our regular education classes are also available for students with severe and profound needs and this is not limited to gym and art - some students from self-contained classes are attending biology and civics classes. In addition, all students participate in Flex Block which is a once a week 85 minute elective, where the whole school is integrated. This model of integration is unmatched in the district.

#### Youth Development & Restorative Practices

360 High School was designed by the community, supported by funds from the Carnegie Corporation with an Opportunity by Design Grant (as described in [this video](#)). Youth development principles became central to our work, and that led founding principal Kerry Tuttlebee to look for restorative approaches to school discipline. Since our founding, every teacher has completed at least three days of training in this approach to discipline which focuses on maintaining consistent positive regard for all students, using circles to discuss and jointly solve recurring problems, and making efforts to restore trust when transgressions occur.

#### Making

Providence Public Schools featured 360 High School in [this video](#), which emphasized our mission to help our students become the creators, and not just consumers, of content. That mission starts in high school, with our dedicated makerspace (mostly grant-funded) which features 3D printers, laser cutters and sewing machines. Students make things outside of the makerspace as well, such as podcasts, websites and videos. They have planted over 50 trees on our campus and painted multiple murals. Finally, each student also completes an individual learning plan that helps guide their progress through the school.

### **3. Serving Often-Marginalized Students**

Equity is a “core value” in PPSPD’s Turnaround Action Plan, yet the one high school slated for closure, 360 High School, serves



- 56% MLLs –the largest proportion of multilingual learners at any high school in Providence, with the exception of the Newcomer Academy
- 78% Latino students,
- 15% African American students,
- 86% qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch
- 14% with IEPs

Equity requires that the students with the highest need be supported by the best teachers. Closing 360 High School would dismantle our stable and highly qualified instructional team, including

- Longest serving female high school principal
- Only 7% less than fully certified (compared with 24% of the district)
- Low staff turnover rate
- Highest teacher attendance in the district’s secondary schools

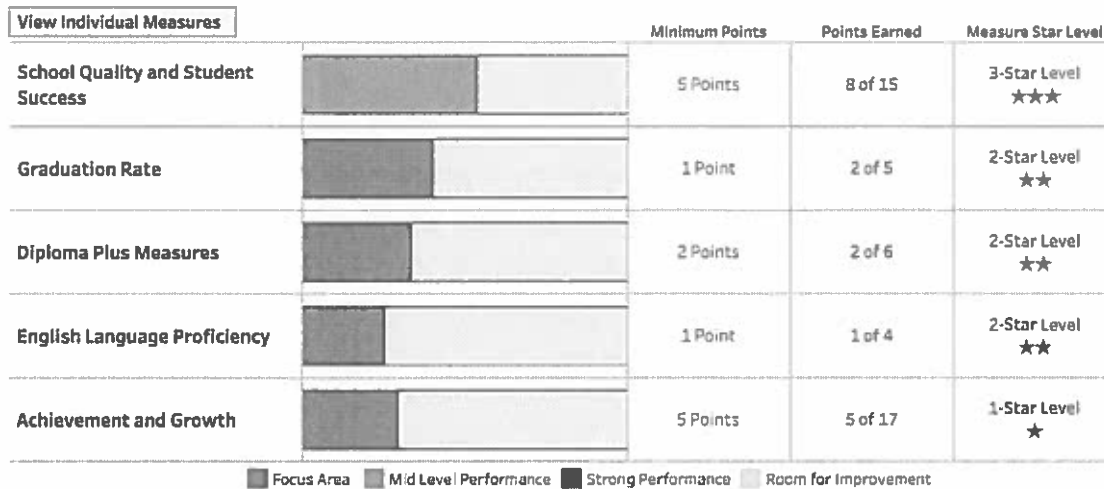
Additionally, while the district suffers record numbers of teacher resignations, the decision to close 360 is driving high quality teachers, especially those with the specialized certifications such as secondary science and special education, out of the district. As one 360 staff member wrote in an op-ed in the Boston Globe, “I do not want to work for a district that does not value great leadership, student safety, and school community.”

Since the decision to close 360 High School has become controversial, the district, in its panel presentation to the School Board on 2/15, and the Commissioner, in her televised remarks on Channel 10 on February 16, attempted to portray 360 as chronically underperforming and costly to run. But no performance data was cited as part of the decision to close 360 in the Superintendent’s 2/6 letter and data from the state’s own website contradicts these assertions.

Below is 360 High School’s state report card, readily available here. According to the report card, 360 earns 3 stars in “School Quality and Student Success.” We earn 2-stars in every other area except for achievement and growth, where we have 1 star. Our graduation rate was artificially depressed in recent years due to data nuances, such as the fact that high school students with IEPs who are entitled to services until they are 21 do not count as graduates if they use PPSD transition services.

### 360 High School - Accountability Overview

This school has been identified for Comprehensive Support and Improvement since 2019-20 and did not meet the exit criteria for 2023-24.

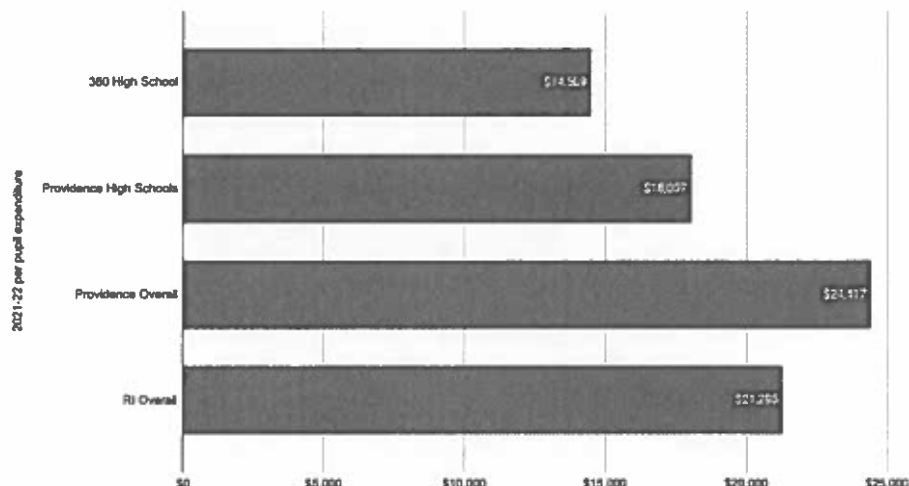


The chart above shows 360 High School's overall performance in Rhode Island's statewide accountability system. 360 High School earned a 1 star rating, which is the star level of their lowest performing indicator.

Certainly, 360's Achievement and Growth is not where we want it to be, but the school is on par with other Providence High Schools, many of which have significantly smaller populations of multilingual learners. And we have only been a one-star school since the pandemic. Since then, every school in the country has struggled to make up for learning losses that occurred during that unprecedented time. We are actually on the cusp of leaving comprehensive school improvement. In an internal analysis done by a former PPST data team member, 360 needed just 2 students to score in the high growth area to gain another star in Achievement and Growth, and leave Comprehensive Support and Improvement status. Unfortunately, the closure decision that the district described on 2/15 as "accelerating the redesign" of 360 occurred before students had the chance to take the test in April.

In the panel presentation on February 15, the district also said that 360 is more expensive to operate than other schools. But our per-pupil expenditure is about \$3500 less than the average for Providence high schools, as shown below.

2021-22 per pupil expenditure  
Source: Rhode Island Department of Education



The district has asserted that it is necessary to close 360 due to costs. Without knowing at the time how many positions would be needed at the newly designed JSEC, the district estimated that closing 360 High School would save \$1.8 million. That is less than 5% of the expected budget shortfall the district is facing.

As documented by the Chicago Consortium for School Research (Gordon et. al., 2018), school closures actually harm students, including lowering achievement and attendance and increasing violent incidents in the receiving schools. For those reasons, closures must provide real opportunities for students to be worthwhile. Building a life science CTE program sounds like just such an opportunity, but none of 360's level one, two and three multilingual learners, who make up about half of our student body, will be able to access the credentialing opportunities. Due to English Language Development course requirements, MLLs will not have space in their schedules to take the necessary elective classes.

#### Transparency

360 High School is a special place. But, even if it were not so special, this closure decision would deserve to be reconsidered. It was made quickly, by a small group of people, without transparency. We understand that tough decisions need to be made, but because they are tough decisions they require MORE community engagement and a clear process. 360 High School should not be sacrificed while the community figures out a better process, a lesson that should have been learned in 2022 with the closure of Carl G. Lauro and ASF Broad Street schools. PPSD's Turnaround Action Plan says "transparency is fundamental" and "families will have a voice in their child's education" but..

- The decision to close 360 High School was made without input from the students and families affected most by the decision.
- When asked about what alternatives were considered, district leadership refused to "list out everything discussed"

The Turnaround Action Plan also promises to use "data to inform decisions" and "monitor progress" but no instructional or academic data was cited as a rationale for closure when the decision was first announced.

It is wrong that a small group of individuals have such unfettered control of our public education system that they can make decisions without any public input and without any accountability. It is wrong that the Superintendent and Commissioner can simply avoid the public when they make controversial decisions. Keeping 360 open is the right decision for the 360 community, it is the right decision for Providence and it is the right decision for public education in our state.

