



Mayor of Providence

Brett P. Smiley

April 8, 2026

The Honorable Joseph M. McNamara, Chair
House Education Committee
Rhode Island State House
82 Smith Street
Providence RI, 2023

Dear Chair McNamara, and Honorable Members of the Committee,

I am writing in strong support of House Bill 7414, *An Act Relating to Education, The Paul W. Crowley Rhode Island Student Investment Initiative*, which will end the state takeover of the Providence Public School District (PPSD) and return schools to local management on July 1, 2026. The time has come for our community to resume responsibility for our schools, having spent the past three years laying the operational, fiscal, and governance groundwork to ensure we are all prepared to do so successfully. A return to local leadership will allow us to build on progress made under the State takeover while being responsive to the needs of our students, families and caregivers, and educators.

As you know, the State of Rhode Island assumed management of PPSD in 2019 following a review by the Johns Hopkins University which revealed significant challenges in the District. Under the State takeover, with the implementation of the Turnaround Action Plan (TAP), PPSD has shown improvement in recent years, however, there is still much more work to be done. Sustained improvement will require strong local governance, aligned with municipal support and resources, and consistent community and family partnership.

From day one, education has remained one my Administration's top priorities. Since I assumed office in January 2023, the City has been preparing for resuming management of the District. We convened a Return to Local Control Cabinet, bringing together stakeholders from the Providence City Council and School Board, along with members of my Administration, who were essential in developing a framework outlining what the City has already taken and those required to ensure a successful return. The release of *Providence's Plan for Our Schools: Building a Brighter Future in 2025*, reflects that collaborative work and provides a clear roadmap for governance, funding, students outcomes, educator support, and community engagement.

Our planning for a return to local control has not been limited to this report. City senior staff meet regularly with the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE), PPSD leadership and Providence School Board leadership to align priorities, identify operational issues, plan for a smooth transition, and to ensure open, consistent communication. These standing meetings allow for ongoing problem-solving and shared accountability as we prepare for schools to return to local management on July 1, 2026.

The Providence School Board has also done extensive community engagement in preparation for their role in a return to local control. In 2025, the School Board conducted 18 community listening and outreach sessions across neighborhoods throughout the city. The sessions served as a way for residents to identify ongoing challenges in the District and to share their hopes for the future of Providence schools

under local leadership. They have also taken part in more than 40 hours of professional development trainings with the City, RIDE, PPSD and the Council on Great Cities on topics including ethics, financial management, and governance to ensure their preparedness for schools to return to local management.

Our broader two year-long planning process has involved nearly 1,200 individuals, including parents, educators, and students, sharing their thoughts on the State takeover and their hopes for improvement in PPSD. The message is clear: Providence families are ready for PPSD to return to City management, with 80% of respondents wanting the schools to return immediately or in the near future. Community members we engaged with were often frustrated with the current quality of education and believe that the best way to ensure improved educational outcomes for our students is by returning PPSD to local control.

Providence's Plan builds on the progress made under the TAP while highlighting the areas in which local management will lead to greater improvement. It includes strategies to improve student outcomes across all levels of education, from universal Pre-Kindergarten through high school, with a focus on a student-centered learning environment, safe and modern facilities conducive to 21st-century learning, expanded out-of-school learning opportunities, and targeted support for our most vulnerable students, including multilingual learners and those in need of special education supports.

The City has also demonstrated fiscal readiness ss with the largest increase to PPSD's budget in 17 years. We have made historic investments in school infrastructure, with a \$1 billion capital plan that will ensure all of our students learn in new or like-new buildings. Through these investments, my Administration will ensure that every school in PPSD has the resources they need to succeed.

When the District transitions back to local control, the Administration will continue to rely on education experts to lead on academic matters. City departments will lend their expertise to support departments within PPSD, to ensure that strong systems are in place to support our educators and students. We are committing to ongoing community engagement throughout this process to ensure that community members' voices are heard.

Every student deserves access to high-quality education, and I believe that the most meaningful way to ensure our students have access to the education they deserve is by returning PPSD to local management. Providence is ready. We are implementing a clear, actionable plan, with community input, strong collaboration with the City Council and School Board, and a shared commitment to continued educational excellence.

We are ready to resume management of our schools, and we need the General Assembly's support in returning the Providence Public School District to local control on July 1, 2026. I thank Representative Slater for his ongoing commitment to our students and urge the Committee to pass this legislation and return management of Providence Public Schools to the City of Providence.

I look forward to working with you in this process.

Sincerely,


Brett P. Smiley
Mayor