

ANGÉLICA INFANTE-GREEN
Commissioner



Providence Public School District
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DR. JAVIER MONTAÑEZ
Superintendent

FROM: Dr. Javier Montañez, Superintendent of Providence Public School District
Testimony Opposed to SB 2526
April 8, 2026.
TO: House Education Committee

Dear Chair Hanna Gallo and members of the Senate Education Committee,

I would like to begin by expressing my pride in the significant progress our students, educators, and staff have made under the community-driven Providence Turnaround Action Plan (TAP). This work has strengthened collaboration among the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE), the Providence School Board, and the City.

The Paul W. Crowley Rhode Island Student Investment Initiative, R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-7.1-5 (the “Crowley Act”) was initiated in 2019 to address decades of serious challenges outlined in the Johns Hopkins Report. However, there’s always been an understanding that schools would eventually return to local control. The key question is not if, but when and how.

At this time, I respectfully urge you to oppose Senate Bill 2526 as there is currently no transition plan in place to ensure ongoing success. The district is actively working with RIDE, the School Board and the City of Providence through their own, separate designated working groups to develop a sustainable plan. However, plans are not expected to be complete until June.

Given the magnitude of this transition and to ensure continued progress of Providence students, this timeline does not allow sufficient opportunity to thoroughly vet, refine and incorporate meaningful feedback from the community. A rushed or incomplete plan risks undermining the very progress PPSD has worked hard to achieve.

We have spent years rebuilding this District under the Turnaround Action Plan. That work is delivering real results (Appendix A):

- PPSD is one of the few school districts in the state to surpass pre-pandemic scores for RICAS in both English Language Arts (ELA) and Math. Since SY2021-22, the District has been able to close COVID learning gap with a 6.6% increase in math and 4.6% increase in ELA.
- The district has reduced chronic absenteeism by nearly 28 percentage points since 2021, the largest improvement in the state. The 2024–25 attendance rate of 29.3% is the lowest since prior to the state intervention.

- Welcomed students into four brand new schools at D'Abate Elementary, Narducci Learning Center, Pleasant View Elementary and Spaziano Elementary School. We expect to welcome students to the brand new Spaziano Upper Campus (grades 6-8) by next school year, and work is underway on several other projects to make sure all our students have access to new or "like-new" buildings by 2030.
- Since state intervention, two PPSD schools received the prestigious Blue Ribbon award. The US Department of Education recognized Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Elementary School in 2024 for closing the achievement gap. In 2025, when RIDE took over the program, Robert Bailey IV Elementary School was also recognized for closing the achievement gap.
- Classical High School became one of the two high schools in the state to earn a 5-star accreditation in 2025.
- The number of seats available to Pre-K students expanded from 506 seats in 2020 to 940 seats for the current academic year (SY 25-26).
- Students now have access to a dual language program from elementary through high school.
- The number of teachers holding the English as a Second Language (ESL)/Bilingual and Dual Language (BDL) teaching certifications has increased by 13 percentage points since the start of state intervention.
- Following extensive work and support from RIDE, the district brought an end to monitoring by the U.S. Department of Justice, which began in 2018 before state intervention. Providence exited monitoring in 2024 ahead of several neighboring communities, including Boston, which has been under DOJ oversight since 2010.
- Students now have more access to Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs and pathways from 18 options at the beginning of state intervention to 29 this school year (SY25-26). 100% of students who completed CTE program requirements in SY 24-25 graduated with many already having jobs lined up before graduation.
- The Superintendent created and led three advisory councils including the Parent Advisory Council (PAC), the Districtwide Advisory Council (DWAC), and the Student Advisory Council (SAC), which regularly engages over 100 community members to be integral part of the school community

The progress seen is not by accident, but by design. I am concerned that Senate Bill 2526 could disrupt the progress our students have worked hard to achieve by requiring an immediate, full return to local control. Abrupt changes like this can create instability in the systems that support student learning, increasing the risk of setbacks.

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**Opposing this bill is not opposing local control.
It is insisting that local control be done correctly.**

If the General Assembly rushes a transition with no set plan, mistakes are more likely, and the consequences will fall on students. A responsible transition should be guided by what best supports our students. That means having a clear, comprehensive plan, allowing time for meaningful public input and refinement, and using a phased implementation that includes collaboration and accountability.

I urge you to reject Senate Bill 2526 because transitioning back to local control with the concept of a plan is not worth putting our children's progress at risk for.

On behalf of the Providence Public School District, I thank you for your time, commitment, and thoughtful consideration to serving our students and communities. I appreciate the work you do, and your careful attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Javier Montañez", with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

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Appendix A



2025: ACADEMIC GAINS

- ☑ Only district in RI to improve on **Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS)** ELA, RICAS Math, SAT ELA, and SAT Math.
- ☑ Recently exited **multilingual learner (MLL) students** exceeded the performance of the entire student body.
- ☑ Of the nine schools in Rhode Island who showed **≥5% growth in achievement and drop in absenteeism** five were from Providence Public Schools.
- ☑ **Advanced Placement (AP) exam pass rate** grew from 33% to 56% and **AP engagement** rate increased from 2,075 to 2,136 exams.
- ☑ **Career and Technical Education (CTE)** programs and pathways expanded from 9 to 28, CTE completion jumped from 3% to 42%, and 100% of seniors enrolled in CTE programs graduated.
- ☑ **Graduation rates** rose to 79.4% (closing state gap to <5 pts) - the highest rate in 10 years.

2025-26 Focus Areas

We know we have more work to do, we will focus on increasing academic outcomes through evidence-based instruction, advanced course-work, multi-tiered systems of support, and high dosage tutoring.

2025: MODERNIZED SCHOOLS

- ☑ **Four new schools** opened; construction underway at 6 more.
- ☑ Implementing **\$1B school construction plan** to ensure 100% of students have access to new or like new learning spaces by 2030.
- ☑ **State-of-the-art renovations** at Classical and Hope High Schools.
- ☑ Created over 15 new **21st century media centers, wellness spaces, arts spaces, and outdoor learning spaces** in schools.

2025-26 Focus Areas

We know we have more work to do, we will focus on improving community engagement and outcomes around future school building and planning.

2025: STRONGER SYSTEMS

- ☑ **Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI)** schools reduced from 13 to 9.
- ☑ Increase the number of **schools with 2-stars or more** from 7 to 13.
- ☑ **Student-based budgeting** and **student data dashboards** launched.
- ☑ Created a **registered teacher preparation and certification program** to address critical vacancies and increase teacher diversity.

2025-26 Focus Areas

We know we have more work to do, we will focus on partnering with the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) Office of School Improvement to provide direct coaching and feedback on school improvement strategies through accountability monitoring.

JOHNS HOPKINS RESEARCHERS ANALYZED PROVIDENCE PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT (PPSD) PERFORMANCE IN A 2019 REPORT OUTLINING SIGNIFICANT AREAS OF NEEDED GROWTH AND IMPROVEMENT:



JOHN HOPKINS REPORT:

Students are not learning on, or even near, grade level. RICAS scores showed that, across the grade levels, a full 90 percent of students are not proficient in math, and a full 86 percent are not proficient in English Language Arts.



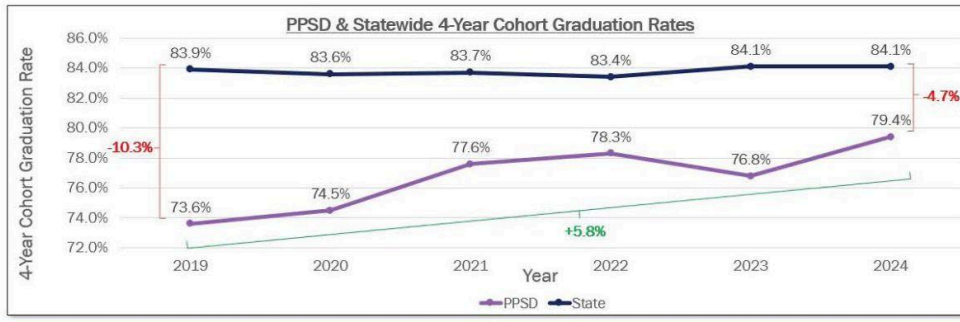
JOHN HOPKINS REPORT:

Many school buildings are deteriorating across the city, and some are even dangerous to students' and teachers' wellbeing.



JOHN HOPKINS REPORT:

PPSD has an exceptionally low level of academic instruction, including a lack of quality curriculum and alignment both within schools and across the district.



What the Data Tells Us:
PPSD's 4-year graduation rate has seen an overall increase over the last 5-years compared to pre-intervention/pre-pandemic rates.

2025: Safer, More Supportive Schools

- ✓ Updated **Student Code of Conduct** emphasizing wellness.
- ✓ **Chronic absenteeism** cut ~30% since 2021, the largest improvement in the state.
- ✓ Increased the percentage of **students who feel a sense of belonging** at their school from 40% to 62%.
- ✓ New **Social Emotional Learning supports** and **family engagement programs**.

2025-26 Focus Areas

We know we have more work to do, we will focus on advancing social emotional outcomes through support systems and community partnerships for health and wellness.

2025: Instruction & Leadership

- ✓ All teachers using **High Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM)** in ELA, math, and science.
- ✓ New **data-driven culture**: School leaders are using data to analyze student progress and to inform interventions related to academic and non-academic supports (attendance) with 60% reviewing data daily and 90% reviewing data weekly.
- ✓ Teachers are focusing **common planning time** on reviewing data to make decisions regarding **instructionally focused small group instruction** for students.
- ✓ The number of teachers holding and using the **ESL/BDL certification** has increased by 13 percentage points.
- ✓ Students meeting their annual **MLL targets on the ACCESS assessment** increased by more than 5%.

2025-26 Focus Areas

We know we have more work to do, we will focus on enhancing instruction and leadership through tiered systems of support including school leader development and coaching, leadership advisory council, and instructional support leaders.

2025: Family & Community Engagement

- ✓ **Parent University** and **Leadership Academy** launched.
- ✓ Families now shape decisions via **District Wide Advisory Council, Parent Advisory Council, and School Improvement Teams**.
- ✓ Increased the number of parents and caregivers engaged with the **District's formal community engagement structures** from 50 to 390.
- ✓ New **family communication system** with greater reach and deliverability to keep families connected with their school, teachers, and the District.

2025-26 Focus Areas

We know we have more work to do, we will focus on strengthening relationships through school based family engagement and leaning into community partnerships.



JOHN HOPKINS REPORT:
School leaders are not set up for success.



JOHN HOPKINS REPORT:
School culture is broken, and safety is a daily concern for students and teachers.



JOHN HOPKINS REPORT:
Parents are marginalized and demoralized. Most parents feel shut out of their children's education.