

March 18, 2024

Dear Commission Members,

I'm sorry not to be with you this evening. I had a medical procedure today that precludes my attendance, so this letter will need to suffice.

I strongly support the commission report as presented. It presents a compelling vision for Providence Schools, one in which:

- Providence Public Schools will provide a work environment that will attract and retain high quality educational professionals.
- All educators within Providence Public Schools have a shared commitment to provide all children with a quality public education.
- All educators have a meaningful voice and collaborative role in fulfilling their shared commitment.
- Teachers have a responsibility to maintain high professional standards, and they have the authority and responsibility to support their colleagues in meeting them.
- All educators are personally accountable for the quality of their contribution to this shared commitment.

Achieving this type of collaboration, collective responsibility and shared accountability among the adults -- administrators and teachers -- in the school system is crucially important to improving student outcomes in Providence. Labor and management have long been at odds in Providence, and this has to change.

The report provides a balanced way forward to begin achieving this vision, including changes through collective bargaining to create the conditions and expectations for collaboration, building capacity, and recommending some important legislative changes that will remove barriers to collaboration.

Some commission members and some who testified before us have said that you can't legislate collaboration. While it is true that legislation is not by itself sufficient, based on my experience trying to forward collaboration in Providence as superintendent, working in partnership with then union president, Steve Smith, I can say that legislative changes are absolutely necessary to the effort. Collaboration that is completely voluntary and personality driven will not last over time, as is shown by the lack of staying power of our efforts and the fact that little has changed in Providence since the publication of the PROBE Commission report in 1993.

I will close by underscoring the importance of each of the proposed legislative changes:

- *Amend R.I.G.L. §16-13-6 (specifically for Providence Public Schools), which currently mandates that all layoffs due to declining enrollment must be made exclusively on the basis of seniority.* Teacher quality is the most important within school factor for student achievement. As we heard in the testimony, seniority is not synonymous with quality.
- *Streamline (specifically for Providence Public Schools) the due process requirements under the Rhode Island Teacher Tenure Act (R.I.G.L. §16-13-4) to consist of arbitration*

*under a specified timeline.* The inability to have expedited due process under the law curtailed our efforts in Providence to build a robust and meaningful peer assistance and review process because time consuming and expensive due process requirements remained even after labor and management had jointly agreed that a teacher should be removed.

- *Amend (specifically for Providence Public Schools) R.I.G.L. §16-7-29, which mandates a salary schedule “recognizing years of service, experience, and training.”* The current statute precludes building out career ladders that reward initiative and taking on additional responsibilities because the bulk of dollars allocated to salaries are dedicated to paying annual steps. The salary schedule Mr. Smith and I were negotiating would have required a change in state law.
- *Creat[ing] statutory authority for site-based innovation schools* is one way to create charter-like flexibilities in traditional public schools -- something important to achieve in all schools as explained in the report.
- My preference would be that the recommendations outlined in this report could be done absent use of the Crowley Act or a similar analogue to the Massachusetts receiver act. However, the testimony heard and the examples used point to the importance of threatened intervention to make some of these more dramatic changes. State authorities should be clarified to provide greater impetus for collaboration because again, collaboration cannot be left up to personal preference.

Finally, I support aligning administrator accountability with professional unionism. Collaboration and collective responsibility are two-way streets. They need to be a requirement for all parties.

Thank you, and I'm sorry to miss this evening's session.

Regards,

Sue Lusi