

Dear Study Commission Members,

I'm sorry that I'm unable to be with you this evening and appreciate Senator Zurier's willingness to read this for me.

**My hopes for the study commission:**

My hope is that this commission will develop a legislative framework for education in Providence Public Schools that obligates the adults in the system – management and labor – to take collective responsibility for student success and to work together in ways that are dictated by best practice. Doing this will require working together to create healthy and supportive teaching and learning environments (cultures) in schools, because a toxic adult culture will never enable teachers to do their best work, and the student culture mirrors the adult culture in schools. Miserable teachers and administrators don't create joyful and engaging learning environments for students.

I know that relationships between labor and management are not good right now, and I still believe that changing the legislative framework that is the basis of that relationship is essential. It is easy for management to say a particular union leader is "impossible to work with," or for labor to say that a particular superintendent or commissioner "is ridiculous," but we have ample evidence that the challenges in Providence go beyond individuals. I started working in Providence when Diana Lam was superintendent, Phil DeCecco was PTU president, and Peter McWalters was commissioner. Now looking back over nine superintendents, three union leaders, and four commissioners, (with apologies to anyone I may have missed) I think it's fair to say that no one has been able to put the system on a path of sustained progress. This is a systemic problem, and students and families can't wait for it to be solved on the basis of personality. We need to create conditions that make collaboration the norm, not the exception.

I also want to be clear that I think doing this work is absolutely necessary for improving education in Providence but will not be sufficient. Creating a different legislative framework will not immediately improve the current relationships. What it can do, though, is to create the obligation to work together. Right now, it's too easy to retreat to respective corners and just say "no," rather than working together to create a path forward for educational improvement.

Every school that I have deeply admired, including in Providence, has been characterized by adults working closely together to continuously improve their

work with students. Creating these environments doesn't happen by chance. It requires intentional, ongoing work and a shared commitment to creating excellence. When Steve Smith and I tried to support this type of work, we had some successes, but not nearly enough, and state law did not support our efforts. I want to see that change.

Thank you all.

Sue Lusi

**People I would recommend to testify – in no particular order and not exhaustive:**

Peter McWalters, former Commissioner of RI

Heather Peske, National Center for Teacher Quality

Susan Moore Johnson, Harvard Graduate School of Education, emeritus