



# Legislative Commission on Professional and Labor Management Standards in Providence Public Schools

Rhode Island Senate  
November 7, 2023



Just

14%

of teachers would **recommend teaching** to a friend, family member, or acquaintance.

Only

1 in 3

teachers believe their school often **meets the needs** of their most vulnerable students.



How do contracts and the relationships among the people who bargain them contribute to these outcomes, and how can we fix it?

50+

interviews conducted

*with school system leaders, union leaders, lawyers, community organizers, school transformation experts, PL providers, and policymakers*

16

contracts reviewed

*building upon a previous E4E-TNTP contract review of teacher contracts covering 50 LEAs*



How do contracts and the relationships among the people who bargain them contribute to these outcomes?

1.

Adversarial processes, including bargaining, prevent effective collaboration.

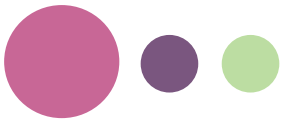
2.

Teachers are seeking a different profession than their contract currently provides.

3.

Rigid contract structures create barriers to innovation, such as team teaching models.





# The latest fight over Providence schools

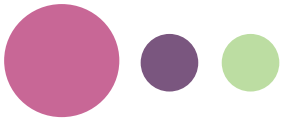
By [Dan McGowan](#) Globe Columnist, Updated December 12, 2022, 8:52 a.m.



Another year, another Christmas where the Providence Teachers Union and the city's school department aren't going to be exchanging gifts.

The dysfunctional relationship between the two groups was on full display once again this weekend when union leadership [took to Twitter](#) to announce that the district (and the Rhode Island Department of Education “have made a decision to close a number of Prov Schools.”





“We don’t have a culture where collaboration is acceptable in union relations. It gets you attacked. The default position is ‘We’re us, and they’re them, and we have to fight for everything we get.’”

– Former union leader

“Let’s play the game and wear each other down and get you to a point where you’re so exhausted and over sitting with me, that you’ll give me more. We’ll say, fine, we don’t need this, we’re willing to give this up, we’ll take it off the table.”

– Former district leader





## Solutions

And where we've seen them work

### **Build informal mechanisms for collaboration and information sharing outside of the bargaining process**

“Places where we’ve seen the contract be leveraged successfully are places where they have governance structures where you’re not just coming to the table for negotiations. You have a system where you’re regularly meeting about the vision and goals for teaching and learning and how that relates to working conditions. Then, when it comes time for collective bargaining, those places in the contract, there can be movement.” - Education consultant

### **Think broadly about who has relevant expertise, & bring them into the work**

“When the community is a strong stakeholder, institutionalization [of processes, relationships] can happen in a productive way. The community expects & appreciates stability, they have an expectation of leadership to act in certain ways that’s felt & understood.” - National union leader

### **Leverage mediation mechanisms when consensus is not possible**

**Lawrence, MA:** “The parties acknowledge that a Receiver has been appointed for the District, is vested with all the powers of the Superintendent and the School Committee ... and can exercise all powers granted to the School Committee, District, and/or Superintendent herein.”





## Teachers want differentiated compensation for teachers who:

### **WORK IN HARD TO STAFF SCHOOLS**

Favored by 93% percent  
of teachers, including  
96% of teachers of color

### **WORK IN HARD TO STAFF SUBJECTS**

Favored by 87% of  
teachers, including 93%  
of teachers of color

### **RECEIVE MULTIPLE OUTSTANDING EVALUATIONS**

Favored by 75% of  
teachers, including 84%  
of teachers of color







## Teachers want districts to be nimble in the face of hiring challenges.

<b>Staffing Shortages</b>	60% of teachers report that staffing shortages continue to be a very serious problem.
<b>Apprenticeship Models</b>	Teachers of color are twice as likely as white teachers to say that residency and apprenticeship models are likely to boost recruitment of a high-quality, diverse workforce.
<b>Payment for Taking on Additional Work</b>	The second most popular reason teachers choose for planning to leave the classroom is, “I take on too many additional responsibilities for which I am not compensated.”





# Teachers want increased **teacher leadership opportunities** and improved **professional growth systems**



**In 2020, 89% of teachers** reported that opportunities to progress in their teaching career in terms of responsibility, authority, title, and/or increased pay (otherwise known as “career ladders”) would make them more likely to stay in teaching.

**In 2022, teachers of color** chose improved professional learning and leadership opportunities as the top two mechanisms for retaining a high-quality diverse workforce, favoring them even more than higher salaries.





WHAT TEACHERS WANT

# Teachers want to more strategically collaborate with other staff members.

In 2023, the most popularly desired resource for helping students overcome pandemic-induced learning setbacks was more support staff, and the most highly sought after professional learning support was how to effectively collaborate with those staff members.





Teachers want performance prioritized over seniority.

Teachers prefer the use of **teacher performance** over **teacher seniority** in layoff decision-making by a 2-to-1 margin.

When presented with a series of nine options for approaches to reducing costs in the event of a financial downturn, including freezing hiring, offering “buyouts” to teachers near retirement, and laying off teachers based on performance, **layoffs based on seniority were the least popular option.**





## Solutions

And where we've seen them work

**Broaden opportunities for teachers to engage in the collective bargaining process beyond participating in a final vote**

**Expand focus of engagement beyond top union & district priorities**

"It's a fairly normal process in a responsible union that there's a way of collecting priorities or interests. But when you're in charge, you construct the questions, and what you ask has a lot to do with what feedback you get." - Former union leader

**Regularly communicate with teachers and the broader community, through public bargaining if appropriate**

"I know from talking to teachers that they don't feel like there's transparency on what's at the bargaining table until there's stuff for them to vote on. They just know, this is dragging on, but we don't know over what." - Former district leader





“The world of work has changed dramatically for everyone except teachers. What it’s like to work, the level of flexibility, the demographic makeup of the workforce. Teachers contracts reinforce a job that no longer makes any sense for people to be in. The strict rules applying to teachers don’t fit what the rest of the world has evolved to become.”

– National Nonprofit CEO

“Providence Public School District is overburdened with multiple, overlapping sources of governance and bureaucracy with no clear domains of authority and very little scope for transformative change. The resulting structures paralyze action, stifle innovation, and create dysfunction and inconsistency across the district. In the face of the current governance structure, stakeholders understandably expressed little to no hope for serious reform.”

– Johns Hopkins 2019 Review of Providence Public Schools





# Solutions

And where we've seen them work

**Create opportunities for schools to opt into becoming “pilot” schools**

**Massachusetts:** Allows school stakeholders to apply to become an “Innovation School,” which has increased flexibility around: curriculum; budget; school schedule and calendar; staffing policies and procedures, including waivers from CBAs; school district policies; and/or professional development

**Shift from opt-out waivers to school-based decision-making**

**Lawrence Public Schools:** Stipulates all schools “shall have a teacher leadership team as the vehicle for shared decision making at the school level”, with a district-established structure but which schools may propose modifications to; lists items determined at school level, including professional development, schedule, & class size



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How can we meaningfully change the contractual process to drive transformational change?

1.

Focus on relationships and create mechanisms for trust-building.

2.

Authentically gather teacher perspective to transform teaching into the profession they seek.

3.

Build in more opportunity for flexibility to allow schools to keep pace with a changing world.



# Thank you!

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# Appendix





THE CURRENT SYSTEM IS NOT WORKING

# Rhode Island

**% of students  
proficient in 8th grade  
math down 5 points**

National Assessment for Educational  
Progress, 2019 - 2022

**% of students  
proficient in 8th grade  
reading down 4 points**

National Assessment for Educational  
Progress, 2019 - 2022

**41% of teachers  
chronically absent,  
3rd highest in nation**

Civil Rights Data Collection 2015-2016  
report

**29 % point gap between  
students of color and newly  
recruited teachers of color**

People of color represent 52% of  
students, but just 18% of teachers  
recruited between 2018 and 2021





THE CURRENT SYSTEM IS NOT WORKING

# Providence

**10.2% of PPS students proficient in math, 14.9% in ELA**

2021-2022 state assessment scores in grades 3-8 and 11

**16 % point gap between math proficiency of white & Hispanic students**

24.5% of white students meet expectations on state math assessments, compared to 8.2% of Hispanic students

**Student enrollment down 14% since 2017-2018**

From 24,075 students to 20,725 last school year

**69 % point gap between students and teachers of color**

People of color represent 91% of students, but just 22% of teachers

