



Community Voices on Providence Public Schools

2024 Community Engagement on Education Report



Mayor Brett P. Smiley

Executive Summary

As the City of Providence prepares to resume management of the Providence Public School District (PPSD), the Administration is conducting internal systems reviews to prepare City departments for new responsibilities, developing strategies to achieve the goals of the PPSD Turnaround Action Plan (TAP), and listening to community priorities to develop better-informed plans.

This report summarizes the City of Providence's community engagement on public schools from June through December 2024. The City engaged nearly 1,200 people— including youth, families and caregivers, teachers, and other community partners – through a survey and community conversations on education. These perspectives help identify current concerns under the State intervention and envision a brighter future for our schools. They also represent a growing and continuing partnership between the City and our community as we build trust and understanding between one another.

These are the four central messages the City heard from the community:

Frustration with the quality of education:

Community members are broadly frustrated with the quality of education in Providence. Some areas where the community felt especially discouraged include: A failure to align curricula and testing with meaningful educational objectives; an inability to adequately fund schools; low standards for student achievement; inadequate support from teachers for students; and insufficient support from school leadership, the District, and the State for teachers.

Collaboration and engagement failures: The State intervention has caused families and students to experience chaos and confusion, stemming from communication failures. Students are distrustful that PPSD, State, and City leaders are effectively collaborating to better their experiences and ensure that they are prepared for continuing education and life, and caregivers do not feel there

are adequate pathways to get involved. Community members see dysfunction, incompetence, and paralysis as root causes of schools' poor performance – politics and finger-pointing are hindering improving students' lives.

Feeling unheard: Community members – especially students – feel decision makers at all levels fail to hear, understand, and act upon their concerns. This frustration runs deep and will take years of work to regain the community's trust. Many of these concerns are rooted in a lack of understanding about different entities' (e.g. PPSD, the Rhode Island Department of Education, the City, and the School Board) responsibilities and how the community can hold each one accountable.

Hope for a brighter future after returning to local control: When management of PPSD returns to local control, families and students hope to have more opportunities to influence key school decisions through School Board and City leadership. Community members are especially excited about more school-level decision making with greater autonomy for students and teachers. Local control can offer educators and parents new pathways for collaboration and innovation to best serve all students' needs.

The results of this community engagement will be incorporated in the City's plan for the transition of PPSD back to local management to be released in Spring 2025.

The City will continue engaging the Providence community. We will broaden discussions about strategies to implement the Turnaround Action Plan; deepen engagement with youth-led organizations; and provide spaces for the community to respond to this and future City reports on education.

Together we can accelerate our progress toward our shared goal of excellent and equitable education for all students.

Introduction

In 2019, the State of Rhode Island took over the management of the Providence Public School District (PPSD). A review by the Johns Hopkins University Institute for Education and Policy revealed significant challenges in supporting students and meeting essential milestones. The Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) conducted a robust community engagement process and analysis to develop the PPSD Turnaround Action Plan (TAP) and create a model public school system where every student can receive a world-class education.

Because the State takeover included a provision for a re-evaluation after five years, Mayor Smiley formed the Return to Local Control Cabinet as a partnership between the Administration, the City Council, and the School Board in October 2023 in order to prepare the City of Providence for the return of PPSD to municipal management. The Cabinet established the following goals for the City prior to a return to local control:

1. Prepare a plan for reabsorbing District operations back under the authority of Providence municipal government.
2. Address inefficient and burdensome City systems to ensure the effective governance of Providence Public Schools after the school district transitions back to local control.
3. Improve PPSD performance on a select group of metrics within the Turnaround Action Plan where community members could have an impact even before the District returns to the City.
4. Engage with the Providence community to ensure widespread community participation, engagement, and support in improving educational outcomes before and after the District returns to local governance.

Administration staff are now executing the Cabinet's plan. Staff are implementing the

Cabinet's workplan including carrying out the community engagement strategy, reviewing internal processes, and developing the Transition Plan. The Cabinet will continue to meet quarterly to guide the ongoing work and set a shared direction and priorities.

While numerous stakeholders are involved in this process (including City, District, and State governance), none are as important as the voices of our community. Envisioning the best future for PPSD is impossible without robust community engagement.

This report reflects perspectives shared with the City by youth, families and caregivers, teachers, and other key partners from June through December 2024. These perspectives are essential for informing the plan for the return of PPSD to the City of Providence's management.

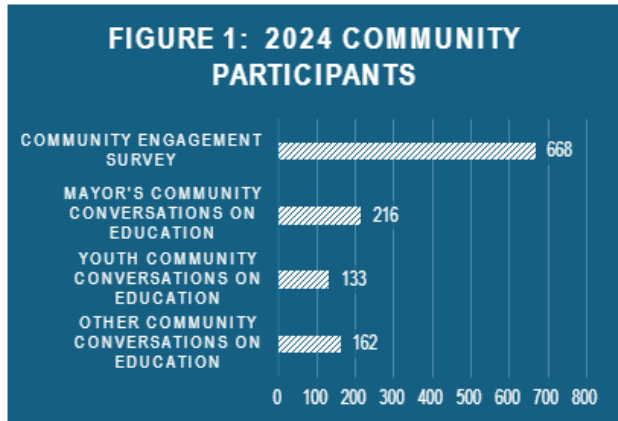
Acknowledgments and Gratitude

Creating this report would not have been possible without the help of nearly 1,200 community members – including families and caregivers, youth, teachers, school leaders, faith communities, and other partners across Providence, who shared their perspectives through the survey and community conversations on education.

In particular, the City would like to thank the organizations that partnered with us to make their community's voices heard, including: OurSchoolsPVD, Rhode Island for Community and Justice, the Smith Hill Library, East Side Crimewatch, West Broadway Neighborhood Association, Johnson & Wales University Design Research Studio, New Way Church, Smith Hill Partners Initiative, the Providence Teachers Union, and Stop the Wait.

Methodology

To collect community feedback, the City employed three strategies: An online survey, a professional poll, and a dozen community conversations. This approach allowed constituents different avenues to make their voices heard, enabling the City to best meet community members where they are. Figure 1 illustrates the number of participants in various community engagement opportunities.



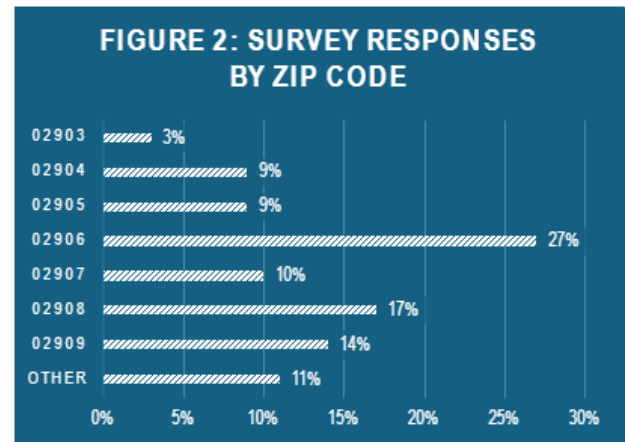
Return to Local Control Survey

The City developed the community survey with the Return to Local Control Cabinet. This survey gathered perspectives from 668 community members, with considerable geographic, racial, and ethnic representation. Every Providence zip code is included, as shown in Figure 2. For respondents who provided their racial or ethnic background, 41% of community members identified as BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color). For the purposes of this report, we define BIPOC as respondents who offered a racial or ethnic identity other than white.

The survey was open from June 24, 2024 to December 31, 2024 and was promoted through a wide range of outlets including:

- Bookmarks with a link and QR code to the survey, which City staff distributed at the Back-to-School Backpack event;
- Door-to-door literature drops reaching over 700 households;
- Digital ads on social media sites, including Facebook and Instagram, to encourage constituents to take the survey;
- Notifications on the PVD311 system throughout Summer and Fall 2024;

- Personalized and mass communications (emails, phone calls, and meetings) to over 200 community partners, faith leaders, and education-oriented non-profits to share the survey with their networks; and
- Posters and displays at City Hall and Providence Recreation Centers with information and a QR code for the survey.



While the survey was open for all to participate, it was not a randomized control poll which would have offered statistically relevant analysis. Nonetheless, the results provide key insights to inform the City's priorities in preparing for the return of the school district. Additionally, the City monitored survey participation throughout and adapted engagement strategies such as promotion at tabling events and door-to-door outreach to ensure key constituencies were engaged in the process. In particular, youth engagement proved to be more effective through in-person events developed in partnership with youth-led organizations.

Survey Public Opinion Poll

As part of the City's annual Community Satisfaction Survey, Public Policy Polling surveyed 600 Providence residents from January 22-24, 2025. The margin of error is +/-4.0%. 12% of interviews for the survey were conducted by telephone and 88% by text message.

Community Conversations on Education

Between September and December 2024, the City hosted or supported a dozen different community conversations on education. To best engage different parts of the community, these conversations took three different forms:

- **Mayor's Community Conversations on Education:** The City hosted two large events to bring all corners of our community together, garnering a total of 216 youth, families, teachers, and community partners. The first event took place on September 14, 2024 at Providence Career & Technical Academy and focused on where schools have made progress and fallen short on eight key Turnaround Action Plan (TAP) metrics during the State intervention. The second event on December 14, 2024 at Juanita Sanchez Educational Complex built off of the first conversation by discussing ways the City and community can collaborate to improve those metrics going forwards.
- **Youth Conversations on Education:** Given interest in having youth-specific spaces to discuss the state of PPSD, the City supported three Youth Conversations on Education that brought together over 130 attendees. City support included funding, collaborative planning, and facilitation at the events. Three community partners, (OurSchoolsPVD, Rhode Island for Community and Justice, and the Smith Hill Library) hosted these events to organize youth, drive participation, and ensure a diverse array of perspectives among middle and high school students.
- **Neighborhood Conversations on Education:** The City offered funding, planning, and facilitation support for other conversations to reach specific communities in Providence. These Neighborhood Conversations on Education gathered 162 participants virtually and in person. Participating community partners included: East Side Crimewatch, West Broadway Neighborhood Association, Elmwood Neighborhood Association, Johnson & Wales University Design Research Studio,

New Way Church, and Smith Hill Partners Initiative.

All community conversations on education took place between September and December 2024. The City promoted these events through:

- A sign-up form on the City's website for partners interested in hosting a community conversation on education, also promoted at community events;
- Personalized and mass communications (emails, phone calls, and meetings) to over 200 community partners, faith leaders, and education-oriented non-profits to share information about the Mayor's Community Conversations on Education with their networks;
- Notifications through the PVD311 system;
- Digital ads on social media sites like Facebook and Instagram to encourage constituents to attend the Mayor's Community Conversations on Education;
- Several meetings, emails, and phone calls with youth organizations to plan and support their Youth Community Conversations on Education; and
- Flyers and bookmarks at various other community engagement events for the Mayor's Community Conversations on Education, and promotional displays on screens in City buildings and Recreation Centers.

The City appreciates the wealth of insights shared through the survey responses and community events as are shared in this report. Ongoing community engagement and involvement in implementing the Turnaround Action Plan will be essential to achieving the outcomes PPSD students and families deserve and a smooth transition back to municipal management of the school district.

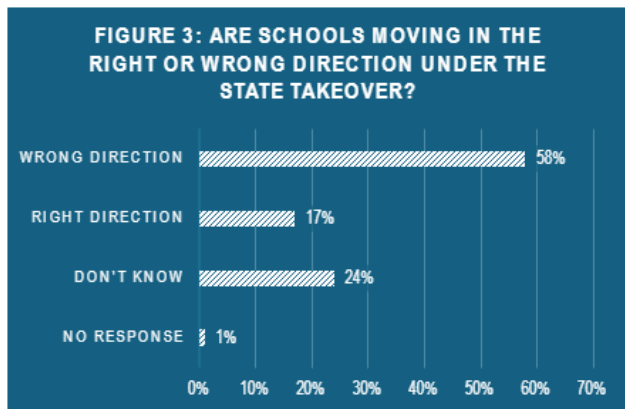
Survey Results

Direction of Providence Public Schools

Most respondents feel that schools have been moving in the wrong direction since the State began managing PPSD in 2019. Figure 3 below illustrates survey answers to the following question: “Since the State began managing PPSD in 2019, do you feel that PPSD is moving in the right direction or the wrong direction?”

The majority (58%) feel schools are moving in the wrong direction while less than a quarter of respondents (17%) expressed that PPSD has improved under State management. Notably, majorities of every geographic, racial/ethnic, and affiliation to schools (students, teachers, parents, and alumni) demographic group said schools were moving in the wrong direction – those results can be found in Appendix A. Results from the City’s annual Community Satisfaction Survey mirrored these concerns, as just 22% of community members were satisfied or very satisfied with the quality of public education in Providence, compared with 60% who were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.

On the flip side, the community has experienced numerous challenges since 2019, especially regarding insufficient support for students receiving special education services; inadequate communication with families; too much bureaucracy, with poor communication by non-educators; inappropriate budgeting decisions; and excessive school closures.

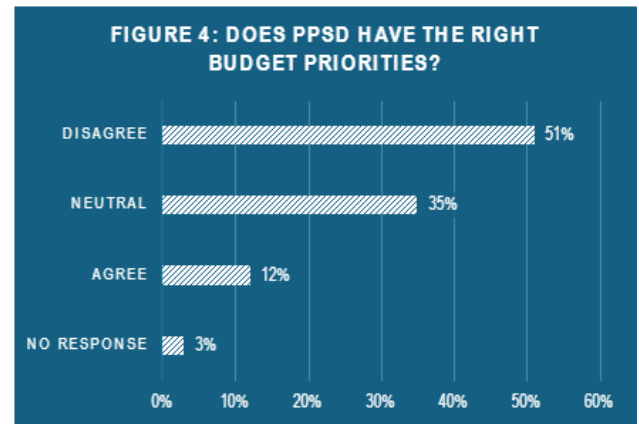


Budget and District Management

Survey respondents are distrustful of PPSD’s budget strategies and District management

under the past five years of State intervention. The Return to Local Control Survey asked whether respondents agree or disagree with the following statement: “The Providence Public School District chooses the right budget priorities to implement the Turnaround Action Plan.”

As demonstrated in Figure 4 below, four times as many community members felt PPSD had the wrong budget priorities compared with those that felt District choices were correct.



Notably, 35% of participants were neutral on this item, which may highlight a lack of clarity about how PPSD and RIDE budgeting practices have changed since 2019.

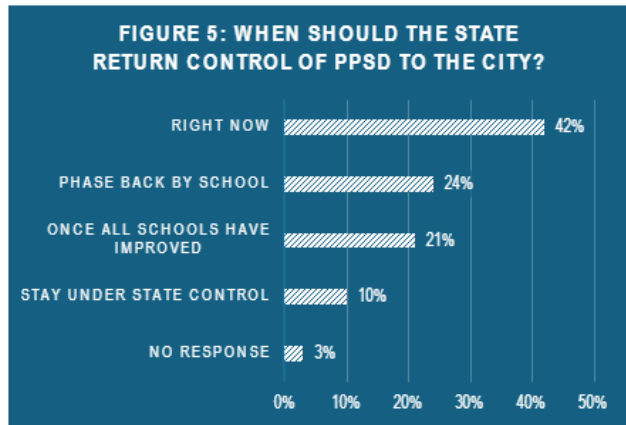
Pluralities of every geographic, racial/ethnic, and affiliation to schools (students, teachers, parents, and alumni) demographic group believe PPSD has the wrong budget priorities – although those figures range substantially from 42% to 74%. Demographic breakdowns can be found in Appendix B.

The Community Satisfaction Survey also reflected these results: only 18% of respondents were very or somewhat satisfied with the general management of PPSD whereas 61% were very or somewhat dissatisfied. Community members were similarly uneasy about the level of funding for PPSD (25% satisfied, 50% dissatisfied).

Return to Local Control Timeline

When asked “When should the State let the City of Providence run the Providence Public School District again?” survey respondents are eager to

see an end to the State intervention of PPSD. A plurality of respondents (42%) said that the State should let the City run PPSD “right away.” An additional 45% responded that the State should return control of the District in the near future – either phasing schools back individually or once all schools had made more progress along the TAP metrics. Just 10% of respondents wanted the State to continue running the schools for the foreseeable future. Figure 5 highlights these findings below, with demographic breakdowns in Appendix C.



Survey responses to other questions demonstrated some of the reasons why community members are eager to return PPSD management to local control. The Turnaround Action Plan listed five promises on progress that PPSD would make under State management:

- Every student will attend a school that is safe, where there are high expectations, and where educators are committed to student success. There will be a positive, respectful school culture;
- Every school will be staffed and led by supported, empowered educators.



Photo Credit: OurSchoolsPVD and Harris Galvin

- Every family will have the opportunity to choose among multiple excellent instructional programs;
- Every student will have access to robust, rigorous extracurricular and co-curricular programming; and
- Every student, family and educator in Providence will benefit from an efficient, effective, and responsive District administration.

Many constituents felt PPSD has failed to make progress on all of these goals since 2019 – and less than 20% of respondents on each goal indicated improvement since the start of the State intervention. Few community members believe that State management of PPSD meets any of the promises made to the people of Providence.

The City also asked survey respondents whether PPSD was adequately offering services to expand college readiness; increase programs for MLLs; expand special education services; and increase social and behavioral support for students. Only around 5% believe the District offered these sources excellently.

In the years ahead, survey respondents believe that increasing attendance rates, school ratings, and test scores (English language arts, math, and the multilingual learner ACCESS test) are the most important priorities to improve PPSD. Above all, community members want the City to prioritize addressing social and economic disparities and expanding support for students with diverse learning needs. More survey results are visualized in Appendix D.

Community Conversations on Education

Community conversations on education were organized around the eight Turnaround Action Plan (TAP) metrics below that were identified by the Return to Local Control Cabinet as both essential to successful outcomes for PPSD students and an opportunity for the City and the community to make significant progress even before the school district returns to the City.

- Increase the number of PPSD schools rated 2-stars or higher;
- Increase the percentage of students meeting their Multilingual Learner (MLL) targets on the ACCESS assessment;
- Increase the percentage of students present 90% of the school year;
- Increase parent and caregiver engagement with the District’s formal community engagement structures;
- Increase the percentage of students meeting and exceeding expectations in 3rd grade Math RICAS;
- Increase the percentage of students meeting and exceeding expectations in 3rd Grade English Language Arts (ELA) RICAS;
- Increase the percentage of PPSD students who graduate within four years; and
- Increase the percentage of students who graduate with college credit, Advanced Placement (AP) credit, or a Career and Technical Education (CTE) credential.

School Quality

Community engagement around school quality focused on two TAP metrics: Increase the number of PPSD schools that are rated 2-stars or higher; and increase the percentage of students who graduate with college credits, AP credits, or CTE credentials.

Participants expressed confusion around the value of the school Star Rating system. Community members felt this system evades transparency, lacks nuance, and hinders evaluating schools on more meaningful criteria (e.g., teacher quality, opportunities available to students). “The Star Rating system is not transparent and gets in the way of what really matters for students,” one community member commented. “The Star System is impeding quality. What is it actually doing, and who is it for?” Confusion around the

Star System embodies uncertainty about why the City, State, and District use certain metrics and how those measures tangibly benefit students.

Youth highlighted the need for counselors rather than School Resource Officers – which are law-enforcement officers assigned to work in a school setting – and better curricula (especially including ethnic studies) to improve meaningful student experiences at school. Teachers stressed the need for more safety in and around schools.

Community members worry about the value and accessibility of AP and college credits. “Make sure students across the system are aware of and can access AP credits and CTE, no matter what school they attend,” one parent wrote.

Some expressed that overemphasizing AP classes leads students, families and caregivers, and educators to focus more on specific test outcomes rather than overall skill development. Others noted that AP and college-level classes are not useful to students without addressing problems around accessibility and affordability of attending post-secondary education. Nonetheless, community members were hopeful about progress being made on CTE, but noted the importance of better collaboration with community partners to align those opportunities around jobs with high need: “CTE helps students explore what they’re interested in, and help them have real life experiences and relationships with community members.”

Once again, community members highlighted systemic issues and inadequate grounding in local needs as barriers to properly making the most of AP, CTE, or college credits. Youth want greater access to these courses across all schools – regardless of language barriers. Some caregivers hoped for more opportunities around non-college training on CTE, “especially around the green and blue economy.”

Family and Caregiver Engagement

Community members want conversations about family and caregiver engagement to include all those that care about public schools. “The word community is missing from this discussion,” one caregiver commented. More community members and organizations (e.g., libraries, recreation centers, advocacy groups) should feel invested in this discussion.

Current engagement mechanisms are not accessible to all Providence community members, particularly those that rely on internet service, English language literacy, or in-person attendance. Solving these problems presents trade-offs, so the City should create as many avenues to engagement as possible. Some described the need for a “two-way street” between government entities and community partners.

Community members also sought to make engagement opportunities “fun” and “productive.” Some ideas included more interactive sessions, games, and informal meetings. Planning with youth conversations also highlighted the importance of making engagement opportunities worthwhile. The City has worked to address these values in more recent engagement. During the December Mayor’s Community Conversation, community members had opportunities to interact with City departments and partner organizations to learn about ways to engage with opportunities to improve progress on TAP metrics and receive educational materials and merchandise. During our youth conversation with OurSchoolsPVD, the City provided funding for participants’ stipends, meals and transportation.

Test Scores

Community engagement around test scores focused on three TAP metrics: Increase the percentage of students meeting and exceeding expectations in 3rd Grade Math RICAS; 3rd Grade English Language Arts RICAS; and MLL targets on the ACCESS assessment.

Community members were concerned that curricula do not leave room for sufficient assessment and intervention for students who need to develop additional skills. Curricula are also inadequate at supporting foundational skill



learning in elementary school, so students are not prepared for more difficult topics in later grades. Youth in particular seek a curriculum that is “expansive... not repetitive.”

There is interest in more school- and teacher-based decision making around curricula. Community members feel that current curricula are too “top-down” and that more decisions should come from individual schools and teachers. “Too much time is spent on analyzing data and preparing for tests, and not enough priority is given to training teachers to strengthen their instruction,” one educator commented in the survey. Participants were also eager to see more opportunities for experiential learning and project-based work.

Community members were dissatisfied with the over-emphasis on test scores. Participants stressed how test scores capture a snapshot of student performance but are not indicative of general ability or knowledge. One community member wrote that “kids are suffering from endless testing to gather data to ‘prove’ success.” Another suggested that schools “focus on learning experiences for students that are greater than test prep.”

Some participants described current curricula as a “backwards design” – decision makers determine what tests will evaluate and teachers are required to create lesson plans accordingly. Instead, educators and students want a forward-thinking school structure, where tests are “dynamically tailored” to the topics most valuable for students to learn. While there is interest in eliminating some standardized testing requirements

altogether (especially following changes in Massachusetts, which recently eliminated MCAS as a graduation requirement), constituents understand many of those decisions cannot happen at a City level.

Attendance and Graduation

Community engagement around school quality focused on two TAP metrics: Increase the percentage of PPSD students who graduate within four years; and increase the percentage of students who are present 90% of the school year. Graduation rates and attendance are intertwined, and most community feedback centered around barriers to attending school.

Students face physical and logistical barriers in getting to school, from inconvenient transportation access to appropriate footwear and clothing. During our youth conversations, many were frustrated by insufficient bus pass accessibility and illogical transportation routes. Students also cited poor engagement in classrooms as a reason for low attendance rates: “[It] makes me feel unmotivated to come to school,” one high schooler mentioned on a sticky note.

Reductions in staff have impacted school administrators’ and educators’ ability to address concerns around attendance and graduation or adequately engage with families and caregivers. Some specific issues that community members mentioned include: Fewer administrators like assistant principals and inadequate multilingual staff who can connect with students and families; disrespect for educators and treatment by the State as “non-professionals;” and changes every few months in PPSD organizational structure.

School points of contact are often unclear: Families, caregivers, and community advocates do not always know the appropriate person to contact. A Pre-K parent noted that “I find that at every pass, the adults running things are not communicating like adults. The goal should be to provide proactive, transparent, thoughtful communications.” Another parent also blamed District dysfunction:

“Communication issues are my biggest concern, and I’m not seeing that addressed here. There is often a lack of accurate or

updated information on PPSD’s website, in Skyward and ParentSquare. For example, major errors across multiple departments caused my son to be excluded from the Kindergarten school choice lottery, even though our registration and choices were completed on time. There has been no resolution. [We need] a thorough investigation and needs assessment on top-level positions within the PPSD Senior District Leadership.”

Community members need more opportunities for community partners to engage directly with the City and the District around attendance and graduation.

Youth Reflections

Youth are the main focus of our schools; as such, their voices are central to reflections on the City’s community engagement. Despite their visions for a better public school system, youth are dismayed at the current condition of PPSD under State management and feel consistently excluded from decision making. While one report cannot remedy those concerns, this section seeks to highlight student perspectives about where Providence schools stand now and where they can improve.

Facilities: Youth are distraught about the hazardous state of school buildings, which hampers their ability to learn, feel safe, or even want to attend school. Some students reported puddles in hallways and stairwells during rainstorms. Others noted the lack of proper heating and air conditioning makes classes in winter and summer difficult. One high schooler reported they got a concussion after part of a defunct ceiling fell on their head. Students cannot learn as effectively when educational spaces are uncomfortable and unsafe.

District Leadership: Students feel that District and school-based leadership has failed them over the last five years but also do not know who to blame for these problems. Youth in our conversations largely do not understand the Turnaround Action Plan; why the City has chosen to focus on specific metrics; and how decisions around school closures have been reached. Inconsistent messaging around school budgets – especially how those decisions impact sports and transportation – has alarmed students and heightened their anxiety throughout Fall 2024. Students raised concerns

that perceived poor system management by PPSD has also directly harmed their ability to learn, particularly regarding the September 2024 network breach. One high school student explained that Wi-Fi problems during the network breach “destroyed things” because some teachers planned their entire curriculum around internet access. Youth felt that the lack of internet service left teachers “lost” and students behind academically even weeks after the network outage.

Student Support: Students felt they lacked sufficient support from educators and school leaders – both academically and emotionally. Many remarked that while they love their teachers, educators do not have sufficient resources or support to help students, leaving them overworked. Youth understand that City, District, and State decisions constrain teachers from going the extra mile, but they still need more from their educators. Youth suggested that some teachers care more about “salaries and tests” than student wellbeing. Due in part to academic pressures, students also feel overwhelmed and lack sufficient physical and mental health support. “[Mental health] has affected me since freshman year,” one student said, highlighting how those without formal diagnoses feel there is nowhere to turn. “There is nobody who specializes in my kind of stress.”

Attendance: Among the most common themes youth raised throughout our conversations the difficulty of attending school at all – particularly due to transportation concerns. Notably, some of our conversations took place during November 2024 when PPSD threatened to revoke many student bus passes, which substantially heightened anxiety around this topic. Several issues frequently arose around transportation: Insufficient access to bus passes; confusion around how to access bus passes; and illogical bus routes. Difficulty in getting to school does not impact how school leaders discipline youth once they arrive – some reported weekly detentions for busses that ran late. Youth see transportation barriers as a systemic issue that significantly hampers their ability to attend school. One high school student summed this notion up concisely: “I start school at nine, I wake up at six. That is not a me problem.”

Diversity: Youth made clear the importance of increased educator and curricular diversity in the City’s preparations around returning PPSD management to local control. Educators’ racial/ethnic backgrounds and lived experiences do not match those of students, with a particular dearth of male educators of color. Youth feel more confident and supported when they have more teachers with similar identities to them. Aside from educators’ backgrounds, there is also strong interest in hiring more teachers comfortable guiding an ethnic studies curriculum. The youth groups we spoke with have been advocating for including an ethnic studies curriculum as a graduation requirement for years, along with teachers who are adequately trained in relevant topics. Youth seek input into designing that curriculum, which they hope is expansive and reaches students K-12.



Excitement and Concerns

Many community members have hope for a brighter future once PPSD management returns to City control. Youth, caregivers, teachers, and local partners hope that they will better be able to make their voices heard and influence decision making. “I believe that local control allows for a more responsive system,” one community member wrote. “There are more chances for parent engagement and student involvement and community influence.” Others mentioned that there may be “less hoops to jump through” as City and School Board decision makers are more in touch with the community. Broadly, the community believes that returning to local control

could be a “fresh start” for education in Providence.

Community members are also eager for a City-run school district because of perceived failures by State leadership over the last five years. Comments from our conversations on education reflected sentiments from the survey: Community members feel that little has gone well since the start of State management, including perspectives such as: “Sadly, it’s not better” and “I haven’t noticed any improvement.”

Constituents also highlighted budget and management issues under State control – one parent wrote that “I believe the State has done a poor job of allocating resources to accommodate the growing number of families and the needs of our Providence children.” Youth in particular have been frustrated with budget uncertainty throughout Fall 2024 and threats from PPSD to cut sports programming and bus passes.

Beyond budget issues, community members are dispirited by what they see as “top-down,” “bureaucratic,” and “confusing” mismanagement of schools by PPSD under State intervention. There are “unclear pathways for students to know who’s making decisions,” one youth commented. Decision making is “out-of-touch” and makes “no positive, but some negative impacts on learning,” according to a teacher. A caregiver lamented: “It has been a huge challenge having non-educators make community decisions.” Across the board, the community feels that the State-controlled school district cannot properly manage its budget or its school operations to best serve Providence students.

Another key hope is that City management will enable the creation of a more culturally relevant and purpose-driven education system. Another noted that City control could help create a school system that is more “youth-centric” and “equitable” with more teacher autonomy and school-based decision making.

Nonetheless, community members also expressed concerns about what local management of PPSD will look like and want to ensure that the City is prepared to turn Providence schools around. “I am worried that if there is not a transition plan in place with student, family, school, and community

input, it will fail and we’ll be back in the same position,” one constituent said.

Academic Success

Many highlighted the importance of more curricular flexibility rather than alignment with pre-set standards. Educators and youth want a greater say in designing curricula to best meet student interests and need. Teachers hope to advance student learning by tailoring lessons to the needs of the students in their class. Students want to study more practical lessons for a changing 21st century world – especially by increasing programming around ethnic studies, world history, and current events. Teachers reiterated that many of these subjects earn less emphasis in curricula because standardized tests do not sufficiently evaluate “human-centered” topics.

Community members see academic success as intertwined with better non-academic support for youth and educators. They say that social and emotional learning (SEL) is key to developing a resilient, skilled student body, so schools must invest more in SEL expertise. Schools must also reverse the cuts that have been made to student support – especially mental health support – by hiring more guidance counselors and trained psychologists. Educators want to improve their capacity to help their students but are insufficiently incentivized to do so without proper compensation. Schools can better provide financial and organizational support so that teachers can be the best versions of themselves as possible. Community members feel that City and District decision makers can better understand these issues by spending more time in schools, learning about what does and does not work.

School Culture

Community members are eager for better facilities and infrastructure that supports the wellbeing of all who learn and work in Providence schools. “Kids don’t want to attend school in a building that looks like a prison,” one constituent remarked. All corners of the community were excited by recent investments in school buildings and hope to see sustained infrastructure

development in the years to come. Youth in particular say that better school buildings would increase their morale, comfort, and willingness to learn. Participants also want to see improved digital infrastructure (e.g., more secure networks, better integrated learning platforms) and more convenient transportation options.

Community members noted that the City and District can improve school culture for everyone involved in Providence schools when leadership and curricula are more culturally responsive and diverse. The District must work harder to increase the number of educators of color with similar backgrounds to PPSD students so that youth have mentors with similar lived experiences. Schools should update health and sexual education programming that are more gender inclusive and age appropriate. New culturally relevant materials – everything from including ethnic studies curricula to more diverse book selections in school libraries – will help students feel seen and heard. Community members want schools to be places that appear designed for people like them.

Students, teachers, and caregivers seek new opportunities to feel empowered about education in Providence. Teachers advocated for more organizational support, better benefits, and appropriate access to resources. Families and caregivers will feel more connected to education when they have more avenues to advocate for their interests and more clear ways to communicate with educators, school leaders, and the District. Youth want spaces where they can be an active part in decision making – especially through more student involvement in governance. Some such ideas include having a student seat on the School Board, more City-led forums, and greater say in developing curricula and school codes of conduct. Empowering the community and increasing morale will in turn open up new pathways for productive education.

Attendance

One common idea to increase attendance rates was to promote more programming for youth before and after school. Community members hope to see more coordination between

recreation centers with public schools to better provide these services. Some youth highlighted the importance of diversifying before and after school options, as not all students want to spend that time on homework help or athletics. Other improvements to programming could include providing more nurses and mental health counselors in these spaces to meet the needs of all students.

Families and caregivers believe that they can help with youth attendance when they can better communicate with school leaders and understand school selection. Caregivers for children from Pre-K to high school noted that registration is difficult and the options available are confusing. Some community members want greater ability to choose which schools youth attend, and education for parents, caregivers, and youth about which options are available to them.

Community members hope to see more efficient and accessible RIPTA transportation routes – or possibly even a “City version” of a public transit network – or a local public transportation just for Providence. Short of that, the District should better coordinate school start times to reflect existing bus times. Youth and caregivers also advocated for alternate solutions like walking school busses, where students walk to school in groups with adult supervision. Community members want to better understand who is eligible for a bus pass and how to apply, with the hope of eventually expanding access to more students.

Multilingual Learners

Under local control and in the years ahead, community members hope that the City can better provide support for multilingual learners. A key aspect of improving education for these students will be communication. Teachers, youth, and caregivers alike have noted that outreach has been insufficient under the State intervention. Schools should do better at providing resources and education for families in multiple languages, especially in Spanish.

Safety is a core concern for multilingual learners and their families. Ahead of upcoming changes to

federal policy, community members also want to see systemic changes on the City level. Families and caregivers hope for increased City protections for these students and their families. “The City needs to protect undocumented students,” one community member wrote. Installing more counselors and nurses rather than police in schools could also make multilingual learners feel safer.

Hiring more dual language teachers can further make schools feel accessible for these students. The District and City must work to help undocumented students and multilingual learners feel comfortable attending school – and feel able to make their voices heard at City-led community events.

Readiness to Get Involved

Community members are eager to get involved in supporting our schools. 57% of Return to Local Control Survey respondents expressed interest in personally working to ensure that schools are ready to return to local management.

Many expressed particular interest around attending community meetings, serving on community advisory boards and school improvement teams, and learning more about City-supported programs like summer learning opportunities and behavioral health initiatives.

Conclusion

The City's plan to transition Providence Public Schools back to local control will incorporate strategies to address the key themes we heard throughout this initial community engagement process. We hear that the City will need to provide clearer communications about the importance of the Turnaround Action Plan (TAP) and making progress on student achievement. Some items we must address include:

- Broadening discussions around school quality to include non-academic and out-of-school outcomes. Some such topics may include quality of life issues (food, housing, transportation needs), social and emotional growth, and structural inequalities preventing students from arriving at school on equal footing. Community members seek to expand conversations around TAP metrics to systemic issues that impact how youth and teachers experience schools.
- Better promoting and explaining how youth can make use of community engagement opportunities and take part in decision making. This work must come from collaboration between the City, PPSD, and RIDE. Youth conversations should also strive to focus on the issues that students care about most – particularly dedicating more space to discussing youth concerns around building diverse school leadership and culturally relevant curricula.
- Increasing coordination between governing entities and community partners to provide students with excellent out-of-school programming – specifically through partnerships between City recreation centers and PPSD schools for before and after school programs.

As the City prepares to resume management of PPSD, community members have made clear how important it is that the City take their voices into account in its future planning. The community perspectives here have driven the City's engagement strategy over the second half of 2024, which in turn has informed the contents of

this report. These findings will help shape the City's forthcoming transition plan for PPSD that will be released in Spring 2025. The City is determined to demonstrate it is ready to run PPSD again – and to include community perspectives at each step as we collectively work to improve education in Providence.

With the court resolution of the City's and State's interpretation of the City's annual funding obligation to the district, and greater transparency in financing, the City is now well-positioned to work collaboratively with RIDE, PPSD, the Providence School Board and the City Council to develop a robust transition plan for all parties to effectively return the District to the City's management.

Next Steps

The City is grateful for the partnership with the organizations that helped engage nearly 1,200 community voices to inform the City's planning for the return of PPSD to local control. There is much more work to be done and the City plans to continue listening to community members and helping engage all community members with improving student outcomes and return to local control planning.

As a result of the clear desire to continue this type of engagement, the Mayor will continue hosting Community Conversations on Education to maintain accountability on progress and receive feedback and ideas. The City will also continue to partner with community organizations to host more focused conversations on issues of concern and key opportunities.

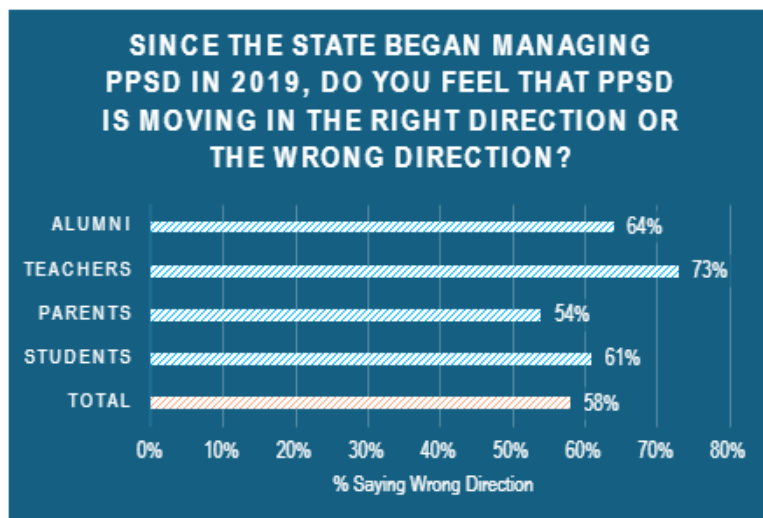
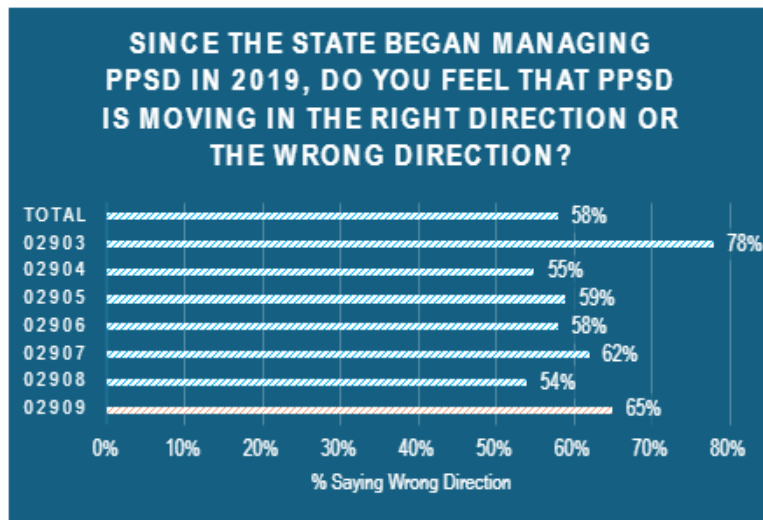
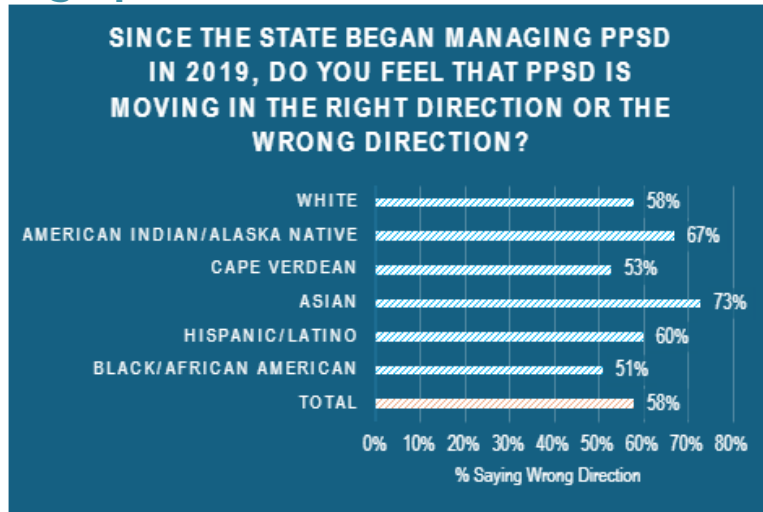
In April 2025, the City will release its transition plan detailing how it will reassume management of PPSD. This plan will outline key steps the City will take to improve internal operations and District systems in response to the 2019 Turnaround Action Plan goals and Johns Hopkins Report concerns. Core areas of focus will include refinements around governance, finances, operations, facilities, and opportunities for collaboration with the District and State. Community engagement

throughout 2024 has informed the contents of that upcoming transition plan.

Making PPSD the center for excellence and equity in education that our students deserve will require partners from all corners of our community. There are many ways to get involved in improving Providence schools on the City's website at www.providenceri.gov/tap/. We invite everyone to participate in the ways that will be most impactful for themselves and for our PPSD students.

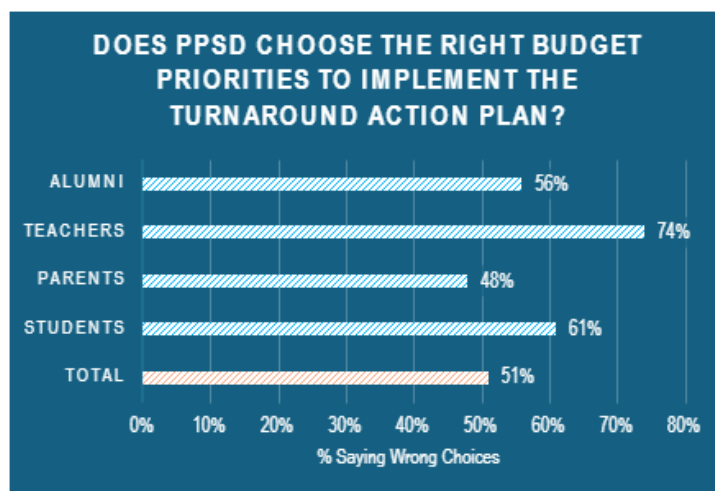
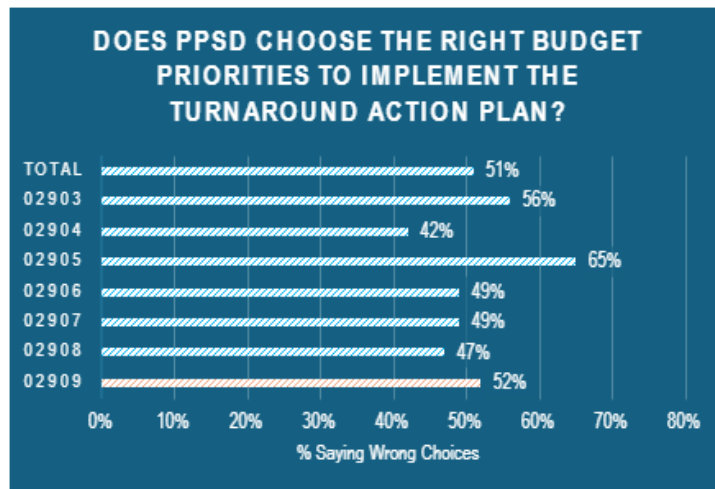
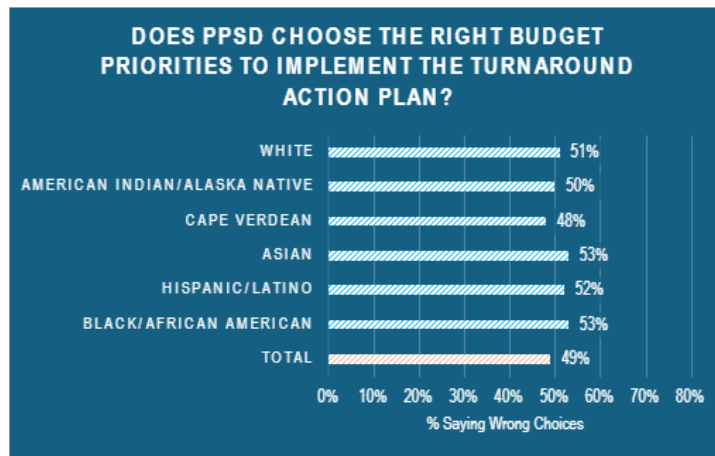


Appendix A Demographic Breakdowns on School Direction



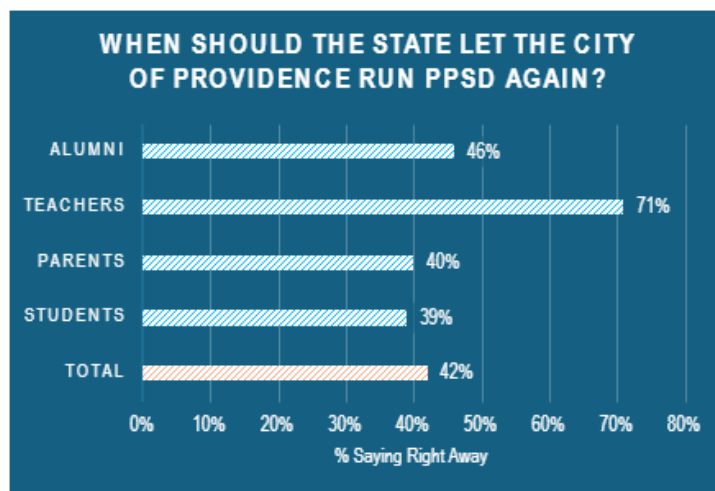
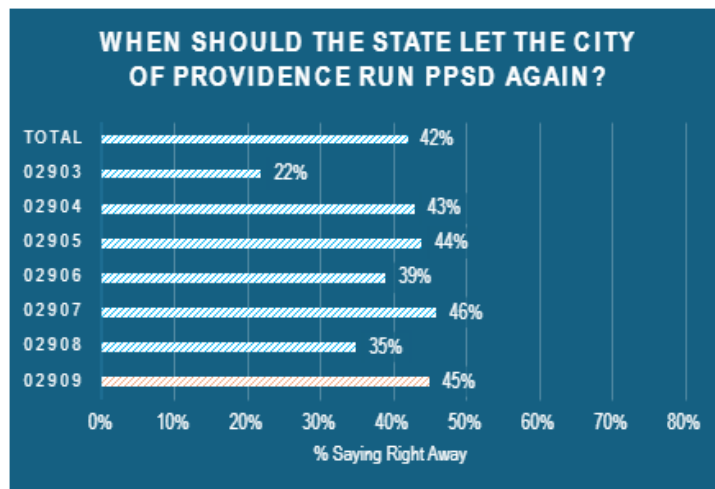
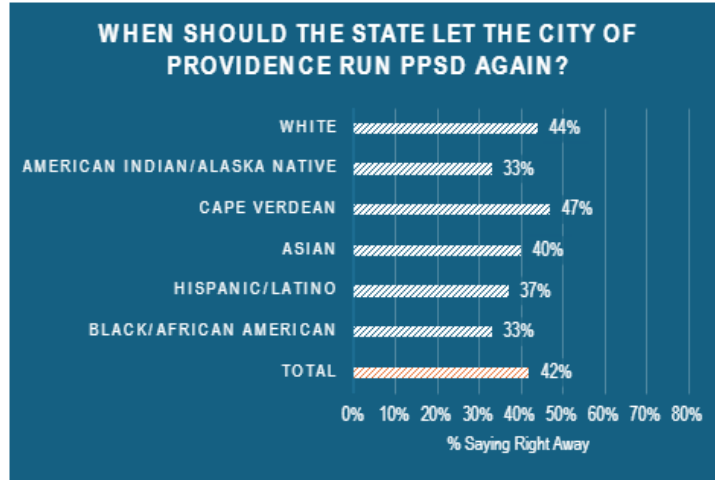
Appendix B

Demographic Breakdowns on PPSD Budget Priorities



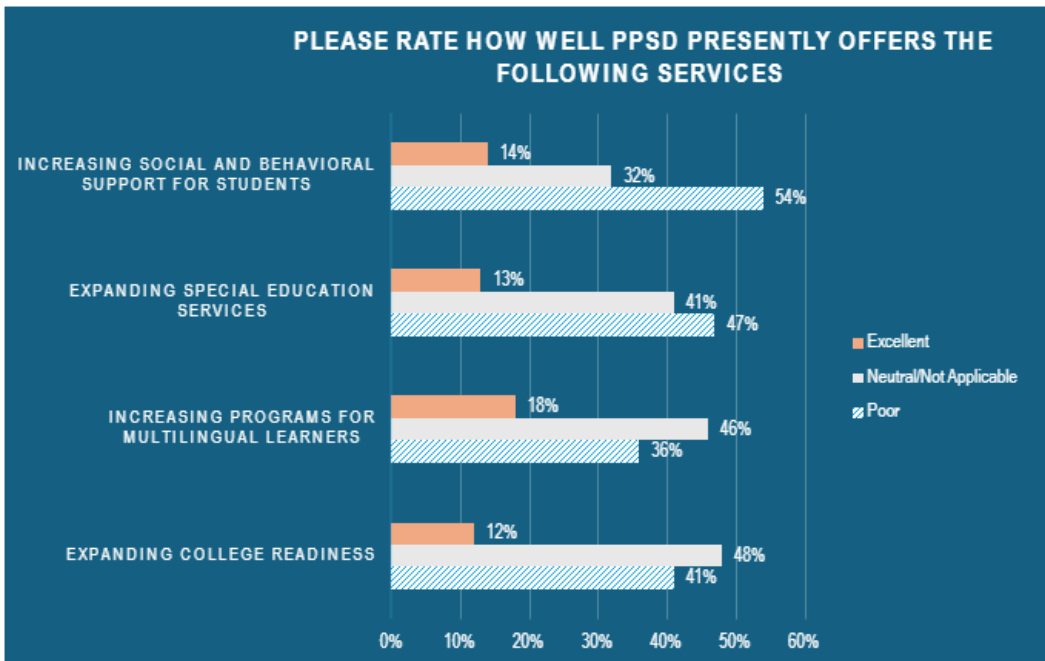
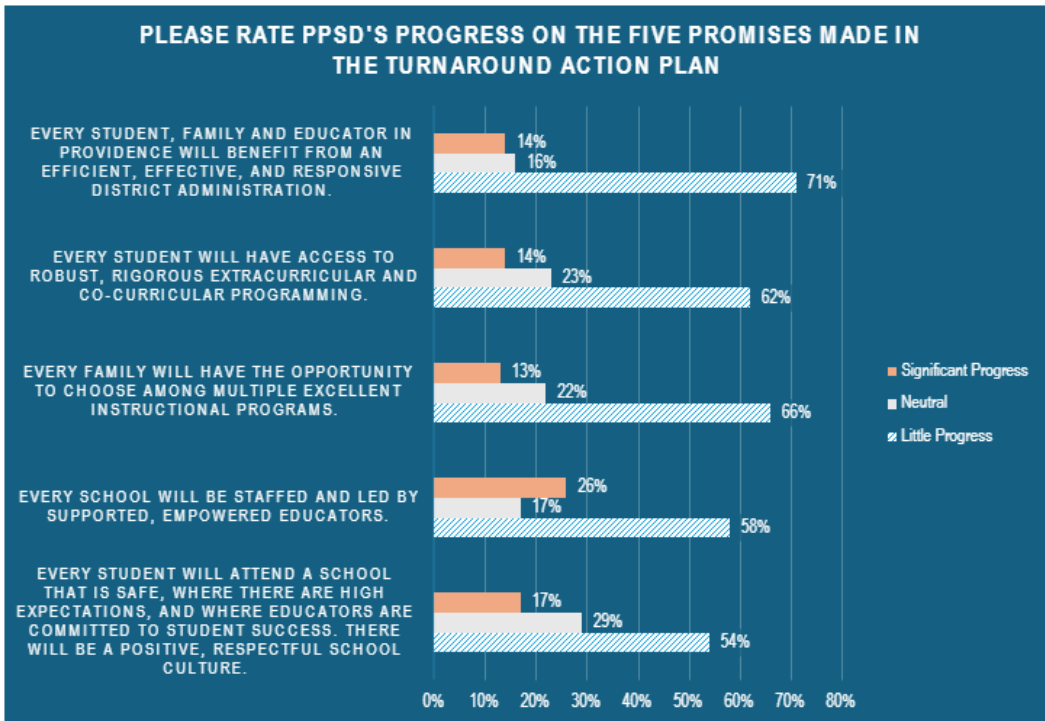
Appendix C

Demographic Breakdowns on Return to Local Control Timeline

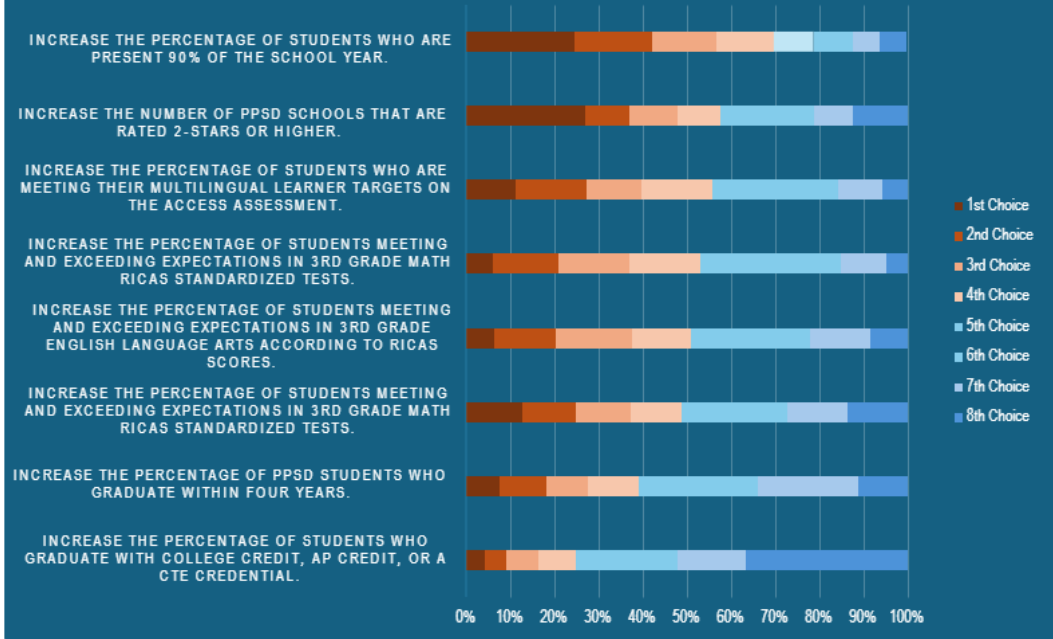


Appendix D

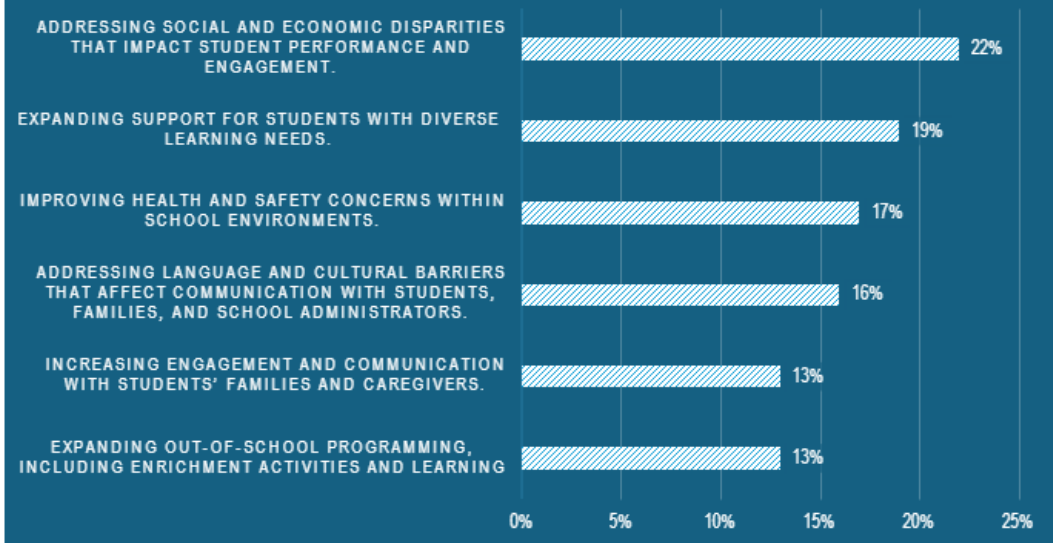
Charts on Other Return to Local Control Survey Questions



PRIORITY TURNAROUND ACTION PLAN METRICS FOR CITY IMPROVEMENT



PRIORITIES FOR THE CITY TO HELP ACHIEVE THE TURNAROUND ACTION PLAN GOALS



Appendix E

Chart on Select Community Satisfaction Survey Questions

Public Policy Polling surveyed 600 Providence residents from January 22-24, 2025. The margin of error is +/-4.0%.

