



State of Rhode Island

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Second Vice-Chair, Committee on Education
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Providence kids deserve great schools, but they still don't have the great schools they deserve. This sentence could have been written 5 years ago, before the PPSD takeover, and also 25 years ago. The need to improve our schools in Providence is not new. We must figure out a way forward that supports our kids and creates lasting and sustainable change for our schools.

As a legislator trying to navigate our state responsibility for Providence Schools, and as a parent with children in the Providence Schools, I was hopeful that the state takeover would provide the opportunity we needed to set a new course. While there are good things that happen in our schools every day, and there were good things happening before the takeover, I do not think the takeover has led to the change many of us had hoped for.

With this in mind, I have had many questions. What is the purpose of a takeover? And what is an example of a successful takeover that we might model this after? What makes successful school governance?

Eventually, Providence will once again be in charge of our own schools. And what will governance look like then? The school board had been an appointed board. The city council voted last year to create a hybrid board that has 5 appointed and 5 elected seats. I am concerned that there hasn't been adequate public conversation about what our school governance should look like, and also that the "elected/appointed" conversation is too narrow.

And, with more questions than answers, I was thrilled when Alissa Simon, a student at Brown University, came to me to ask if she could support the education work I undertake as a legislator. What started as the opportunity for Ms. Simon to do the research on takeovers and school governance I didn't have the time to do myself has turned into this report on school takeovers and governance.

Reading and reflecting on this report, it seems to me that the answers are not that complicated. Whether a district is in a takeover or not, what works best is involving the community and ensuring adequate funding. Involving the community in governance in a meaningful way is also key to a school and school district success.

It is my intention that this report brings the benefit of Ms. Simon's research to the Providence community as well as to my colleagues in state government. Providence is our capital city, and we will all benefit when we have high-quality and sustainable education for the kids in Providence. In order to be a world class city, in a world class state, we need world class schools,

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which will help recruit companies and their workforces, faculty for our universities and more. Plus when our kids succeed, we all do.

We continue to be at an inflection point for Providence Schools. I continue to hope we can rise to the occasion and build something great and sustainable. My conclusions are:

1. Control of the Providence schools should return to Providence sooner rather than later.
2. Whoever is running Providence schools, whether the state or the city, we need to do a much better job involving the school community in our schools - this sort of community-level organizing and involvement takes an investment of time and staff, and is key to having a thriving school community.
3. We need to consider what school governance should look like when the schools return to the city. I do not think that the hybrid school board is the final decision, nor do I think it is a good one. Can we look at the existing structures and make them more accountable? Can we involve the school communities more meaningfully? Do we want to consider some new, outside-the-box ideas? One that I have proposed is an elected school board at the school level, elected by the whole school community, that feeds into a central school board for the city (not exactly the same, but not wholly different from Chicago; not exactly the same but not wholly different from charter school school-level boards). I hope we hear a lot of other ideas, too, and have a meaningful conversation over the next months that lead us to making some decisions about what we want our governance structure to be like when the city gets control of the schools back.
4. And, again, what works for governance? Like for schools more generally, community involvement! Let's keep building structures to ensure robust community involvement and leadership that values and nurtures that involvement.

Everyone agrees that the children in Providence deserve world-class schools. Whether under state or local management, successful schools are focused on and accountable to the communities they serve. We can work to make that happen now, and as the schools transition back to local control. I look forward to continuing the conversation and working toward the schools that our kids in Providence deserve.

Sincerely,



Rebecca Kislak
Representative – District 4, Providence