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Public Comment Re: Providence Public Schools
Rhode Island Council on Elementary and Secondary Education
June 3, 2021
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Thank you for the opportunity to provide public comment. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to speak on the urgent need to continue the transformation of Providence Public Schools.

For twenty-seven years Rhode Island KIDS COUNT has published the Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook which provides a statistical portrait of Rhode Island's children. Year after year data showed us dire outcomes for children in Providence Public Schools including one of the state's lowest reading, math and SAT outcomes, graduation rates, and college enrollment rates and one of the state's highest rates of chronic absenteeism and number of schools identified for intervention.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT supports efforts to turnaround Providence Public Schools, and I was honored to serve as Co-Chair of the Community Design Team (CDT). Developing the CDT recommendations and providing guidance for the Turnaround Action Plan was incredibly hard work, but implementation is the most challenging phase of policy and transformation. Implementation is both an art and a science that requires mastery of mission-focused content and flexible people-centered processes. The implementation of the Providence Turnaround Action Plan has been met with many challenges however we cannot let these challenges impede progress. Now is the time to double-down on the commitment to recreate Providence schools so they provide students and families with a high-quality, anti-racist education.

We are encouraged by the 2021 *SurveyWorks* results which show increases in student perceptions of positive student-teacher relationships, school climate, and school safety. We commend the Commissioner, the Rhode Island Foundation, Rhode Island Institutions of higher education, and community partners that have come together to develop pathways to diversify the educator workforce and provide financial support for educators to earn their ESL certification. Other signs of positive progress include the development of the Districtwide Advisory Council and Student Advisory Council, the creation of the rapid response tool for families, launching of the dual language middle school program at Gilbert Stuart Middle School, and teacher engagement in Parent Teacher Conferences. All these accomplishments were key recommendations authored by the Community Design Team.

We all know more work is needed. We cannot stop the forward momentum and get stuck in the backswing of progress. In the struggle to correct the failings of previous generations of leaders and practitioners I plead with my fellow educators, advocates, and community leaders to keep dialogue and

the exchange of ideas civil, respectful, and student-focused. Disagreement that is rooted in bias and utilizes racist stereotypes to advance an argument is wrong and upholds the harmful practices of the past. We are called to serve the children and families of Providence. Let our words reflect the respect they deserve.