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**Public Comment Re: Oversight of Providence Public Schools
Senate Oversight Committee**

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Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today.

For 27 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 has shown poor outcomes for children in Providence Public Schools including being among the state's lowest reading, math, and SAT scores, 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 turn around Providence Public Schools.**

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.

We are encouraged by the 2021 *SurveyWorks* results:

- Seventy-six percent of Providence Public School students in grades 3-5 and 65% students in grades 6-12 report that their **teachers take time to make sure they understand the material**, an increase of four and 13 percentage points respectively from the Spring 2020.
- Eighty-five percent of Providence Public School students in grades 3-5 and 77% of students in grades 6-12 report their **teachers are respectful towards them**, an increase of three and 13 percentage points, respectively.
- Seventy-nine percent of Providence Public School students in grades 3-5 and 55% percent of students in grades 6-12 report their **teachers seem excited to be teaching their classes**, an increase of 10 and 14 percentage points, respectively.

Other signs of positive progress include the adoption of a **unified high-quality K-8 curriculum**, creation of the **rapid response tool for families**, launching of the **dual language middle school program** at Gilbert Stuart Middle School and expansion of the dual language program at Spaziano Elementary School, and **teacher engagement in Parent Teacher Conferences**. All these accomplishments were key recommendations authored by the Community Design Team.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is paying close attention to the impact of COVID-19 on chronic absence. During the 2020-2021 school year, **55% of Providence Public School students were chronically absent** meaning that they missed 10% or more of the school year (18 or more days in a 180-day school year). Partnering with students, families, and community partners to develop outreach strategies can help schools re-engage chronically absent students and address lost learning opportunities.

The first three years of the Turnaround Action Plan included priority initiatives that reflect the most common concerns raised by the community and were aligned with the metrics of the PPSD Transformation Scorecard. Priority initiatives for years four and five are designated to be developed in June, 2023. This timeline is approaching, and **we urge the Rhode Island Department of Education to reconvene students, families, educators, and community stakeholders to identify the initiatives for the final stage of the Turnaround Action Plan which should include a strong and comprehensive plan for responsibly returning the school district to community governance and control.**

Now is the time to double-down on the commitment to recreate Providence Public Schools. Our students and families are trusting each of us to get this right, to transform the district, and to create an equitable high-quality education system. Thank you for your commitment to Providence students and families. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today.