



Resolution of the Providence School Board in Support of Safe, Just, and Equitable Schools

WHEREAS, the Providence School Board is committed to school safety and a positive school climate, in which all students feel safe, cared for, respected, and protected; and

WHEREAS, according to the Student Code of Conduct, the mission of the Providence Public School District “is best supported by a positive school climate and learning environments that foster rigorous education, positive social-emotional development, and individual student success...utilizing restorative practice as a key intervention”; and

WHEREAS, research has found that reduced classroom sizes, restorative practices, engaging culturally relevant curriculum, mental health supports, and supportive relationships between students, parents, school staff and the community, enhance school culture and reduce the need for increased security measures on school grounds; and

WHEREAS, students of color make up approximately 91% of those who attend Providence Public Schools; and

WHEREAS, the Providence School Board has made a strong public commitment to affirming the lives of our students, and has been working to change our institutional culture to align with that commitment and undo the normalization of racial inferiority, bias, and disparate impact, as evidenced by its Strategic Plan, Racial Equity Policy, and Code of Conduct Policy; and

WHEREAS, “researchers have cited punitive disciplinary practices as a key element in a ‘school-to-prison’ pipeline, especially for students of color and those with disabilities” (PPSD Code of Conduct Policy); and

WHEREAS, PPSD personnel have too often relied upon School Resource Officers (SROs) and law enforcement for disciplinary purposes, when de-escalatory and developmentally appropriate approaches to undesirable student actions would have been more effective, while minimizing loss of instruction time; and;

WHEREAS, according to data provided by the Center of Youth & Community Leadership in Education (CYLCE), approximately 230 students have been arrested on school grounds by Providence Police since 2016, more than two-thirds of them males of color, and almost one-fifth children between the ages of 11 and 13, thereby exposing them to the criminal justice system and often inflicting trauma with lasting consequences;

WHEREAS, one-third of the charges against children arrested on school grounds were for disorderly conduct, incidents which could (and should) have been more effectively addressed by school personnel, restorative practices, or other community-based services; and¹

¹ The count is of arrests of young people at Providence school addresses, excluding arrests of anyone over 19 years old and after 5pm. Data analysis from the Center for Youth & Community Leadership in Education at Roger Williams University in support of the Providence Alliance for Student Safety (PASS)

WHEREAS, efforts to control students by invoking police in school discipline can diminish students' belief in the legitimacy of school staff authority, creating an adversarial relationship between school officials and students, and producing alienation and mistrust that undermines school climate, culture, and learning;

WHEREAS reports and investigations by community groups, scholars, and the federal government have all pointed to implicit biases and inequalities of race, language and disability as major obstacles to the success of PPSD students, teachers, and schools;

WHEREAS, city council members and young people here in Providence have repeatedly called for 'counselors not cops' in the public schools; and

WHEREAS, the School Board has committed itself to listening to "those who have endured discrimination and intolerance as they share the stories and truth about their experiences and feelings"²; and

WHEREAS, the School Board committed itself in June 2020 to "stand steadfast in our commitment to foster an inclusive, anti-racist educational environment where every student teacher, staff member, parent and community member is treated with dignity and respect" and to "actively acknowledge, address and prevent racial bias that occurs as a result of policies, practices, and actions";³

WHEREAS, the School Board seeks to foster an environment in Providence public schools in which conflicts are de-escalated, and students are provided developmentally appropriate and fair consequences for misbehavior that address the root causes of their misbehavior, while minimizing loss of instruction time;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Providence School Board respectfully requests that PPSD/RIDE (and/or the Superintendent) remove SROs from Providence Public Schools at the conclusion of the 2020-2021 academic year, and that the MOU with the Providence Police Department not be renewed; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Providence School Board declares schools a sanctuary space from law enforcement and directs the Superintendent and all staff to not cooperate with or facilitate the criminalization of any of our students, families or staff by federal, state or local law enforcement on school campuses; and to ensure the physical and emotional safety of our students, all staff are directed to do everything legally possible to protect children from witnessing or being subject to engagement with federal, state or local law enforcement on school grounds.

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED, that PPSD will provide clear sanctuary policy and protocols, that are developmentally appropriate, thoughtful of secondary trauma to youth being witness to engagement with law enforcement, with guidelines for what engagement with law enforcement looks like, in developmentally appropriate ways, and that respect the due process and human rights of children. These policies will be reviewed annually before schools start by all PPSD staff, and supported with all necessary professional development for implementation.

² Resolution of the Providence School Board to Combat Institutional Racism, June 17th 2020.

³ Ibid.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that PPSD will not allow an armed presence of any kind on school grounds and recognize children have the right to go to school in environments that are not akin to prisons. In the event law enforcement is needed on school grounds, interactions will be limited as much as possible to only adult staff and scheduled before or after school, with no or as few children as possible present, and if students are involved, law enforcement will only be involved after parents/caregivers and the Public Defender's office are notified.

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED, that the Board directs the City of Providence and the Providence Police Department to reallocate any funds previously used to pay for law enforcement services in Providence Public Schools toward student support services such as school-based social workers, psychologists, restorative justice practitioners, or other mental or behavioral health professionals, to meet the needs of students.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Board directs the Superintendent to prioritize regular review of existing social-emotional supports, mental and behavioral health services, wraparound supports to meet students' developmental needs, and specifically its support for implementation of restorative practices, at each school. This review should be shared with the School Board and the community, and should ensure that each PPSD school has adequate staff resources and training to handle conflict or other challenging behaviors, and to provide students with the support they need to thrive as positive community members.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: That the Board directs the Superintendent to immediately initiate an inclusive process, to include but not be limited to, school administrators, teachers, students, parents, community partners, and experts in mental health, behavioral health and restorative practices, to do the following:

- 1) Draw upon relevant experiences, research and proven best practices to develop an approach to school culture and safety in PPSD that fosters a positive, restorative climate and approach to discipline that does not depend upon law enforcement, in keeping with the Board's commitments as laid out in the Strategic Plan, Racial Equity Policy, and Code of Conduct Policy.
- 2) Outline necessary investments in professional development, human resources, curriculum and family engagement, to ensure the success of this new approach;
- 3) Report out to the community and the School Board a plan for implementation for the 2021-2022 school year.

Presented this _____ day of _____

(Month, Year)

President Nicholas J. Hemond

Clerk

Date Approved: _____