

## Providence School Board Policy

### Strategic Direction: School-Based Autonomy

#### Purpose:

To articulate the Providence School Board's strategic direction to drive significant improvement in student achievement consistent with the Providence School Board's Statement of Core Beliefs and Commitments.

The fundamental intent of the Providence School Board's strategic direction policy is to further drive student achievement and well-being by allowing all stakeholders at the building level (administrators, teachers, students, parents and community partners) to take greater ownership of their school community through autonomous, shared decision-making.

#### Background & Issue:

Providence must create a high-performing school district that educates all students at high standards and eliminates the achievement gap. The Providence School Board believes that this goal can most effectively be achieved by empowering our school-based administrators and teachers who work directly with our students and families. It is further the expectation of the Providence School Board that our school-based professionals shall work in a spirit of labor management collaboration in making student-centered decisions that serve the interest of improving student achievement. In return for greater autonomous decision-making authority, the Providence School Board and the Providence School Department shall hold our school-based professionals accountable for achieving meaningful and sustained results in increasing student achievement and developing positive school cultures.

Much work has already been done in the area of developing an aligned curriculum and providing appropriate teaching materials and supports from the Providence School Department to our schools. However, the Providence School Board believes this foundation can be built upon by providing school-based leadership teams with the authority to use their professional discretion and expertise and allow them to become the primary drivers of sustained improvements of teaching and learning in their buildings.

#### School-based Decision-making and Autonomy:

School-based leadership teams, comprised of administrators and teachers, are best positioned and equipped to understand the particular learning and social/emotional needs of their students. Therefore, schools shall be given as much flexibility as practicable to design and implement effective academic program designs, teaching and learning strategies, support services, and operational methods within the standards established by the R.I. Department of Education, the Providence School Board, and the Providence School Department and shall be based upon knowledge of research, best practices and the results of rigorous performance monitoring.

**Comment [MB1]:** Mass Insight recommends that student achievement and well-being need to be mentioned explicitly here. While it is in the above sentence, this is the sentence that would be cited as key to the policy. Also, "autonomous, shared leadership" could be interpreted as at odds with itself. If the principal is to be accountable, then explicitly mentioning that accountability ultimately lies with the principal here is important.

**Comment [AM2]:** Consider whether this should be a policy OR whether this should be instead messaged as the strategic direction of the Board.

If this is policy, this vague statement could be used against the district if someone tries to challenge a decision made by a school-based team to argue that it's the best choice...might usurp unintentionally the power of the principal.

School site teams will be given as much latitude as possible to manage budgets; procurement; staffing; professional development; workforce configuration; schedules; student affairs; extra-curricular activities; wrap-around services; and parent and community relations. Schools may also adapt and/or change district curriculum and teaching approaches, with agreement from the school district, based on evidence of student need, best practices for addressing those needs, and an articulated plan for effective monitoring of the new approach.

#### **Providence School District Role:**

As the transition to greater school-based autonomy is made, the role of the district's central office will shift from one of mandating uniform practices, services, and approaches in all schools to one of:

- Building the capacities needed to ready each school site for flexibility and autonomy.
- Providing resources in a way that is equitable based on student numbers and need.
- ~~Providing differentiated~~ Differentiating services to schools based on the requests from the school sites.
- Developing and implementing accountability and performance monitoring systems that ensure that differentiated approaches among schools results in high quality and common learning outcomes for all students.
- Reporting on results, lessons learned, and consequent adjustments to the Providence School Board and the public at large.
- Deliberately planning and facilitating cross-site learning to support innovation and continuous improvement through sharing best practices and lessons learned.

**Comment [AM3]:** Is providing the right word here? Perhaps allocate instead?

#### **Policies and Practices:**

The Providence School Board recognizes that providing school-based autonomy will require changes in the policies of the Providence School Board; changes to administrative practices and the structure of the Providence School Department; changes to provisions of all collective bargaining agreements; re-designing of leadership training for building-level administrators; and a re-distribution of resources within the Providence Public Schools District to be directed towards the school sites and away from central district administration. Effective implementation of school-based flexibility and autonomy will also require greater analysis of current building-level readiness and capacity to take advantage of this autonomy.

**Comment [AM4]:** Because the prior phrase says "towards the school sites," this phrase may be unnecessary—and potentially limiting in the future.

#### **Providence School Board Policy:**

It is, therefore, the policy of the Providence School Board that, to the extent possible and within the context of the Board's vision, that important decisions regarding academic program design, instructional practice, personnel matters, building operations, and resource utilization should

be made by the educational professionals closest to, and with the greatest understanding of our students.

The principal, as the site-based leader and the person responsible for the overall operation of the school, in accordance with state and local guidelines, shall work collaboratively with teacher-leaders, students, parents, and community partners in a shared decision-making process at the school site. Mechanisms such as teacher-led committees, student councils, parent councils, and community partnerships should be engaged to ensure that there is meaningful stakeholder voice in the school-based decision-making process.

It is further the expectation of the Providence School Board that all such school-based decisions shall be student-centered and purposely intended to increase student achievement and improve school culture and climate.

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**Comment [MB5]:** Perhaps these two paragraphs should be switched: it would literally put students first in the policy.