

Improving Urban Education

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City of Providence, Rhode Island

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Overview: Improving Urban Education

- Why mayors should be involved
- Providence's experience
- Funding education
- Changing relationships & 21st Century contracts
- The link to after-school
- Next steps



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The role of the Mayor

Frontline of urban issues

- public safety, schools, housing, economic development, neighborhoods, homeland/ hometown security

Increasingly larger role in all issues

- street-level view of what works/ doesn't work
- bear the financial burden – our capacity & constraints
- share growing frustration with funding cuts/ mandates
- strength in collaboration (USCM, NLC, New Cities)

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Providence's situation

2003 - inherited a city with financial & ethical issues

- \$59m deficit, growing structural debt; waste, fraud & abuse; public distrust and disengagement
- my job: restore public trust; address the basics

Identified early on the urgency of school reform

- performance statistics, infrastructure, losing middle class
- stability in school leadership
- role of school board & superintendent – sharing vision

Strong schools a must. It was and is our most important task

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Our challenges

Providence demographics

- 2nd largest city in New England
- 49 languages, 94 countries (16,000 students from homes where English not 1st lang.)
- transitory population (33%), high drop-out & spec. ed. rates
- poverty (1/2 RI's median income, 3rd highest child-poverty rate in US)

Limited financial resources for school funding

- shrinking revenue base with increasing costs
- 25,000 students & 2,000 employees. 42 school bldgs. (majority 60+ yrs. old & 78% rated "poor condition")

Costly/ outdated contracts

- Health care, debt service & retirement costs as drivers

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Our opportunities

Legal & structural advantages

- Mayor appoints School Board Nominating Comm.
 - Commission recruits/selects nominees for Mayor
 - Public process
- Mayor appoints School Board
- Mayor with School Board appoints School Superintendent

Together, we share a common vision

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Our most important task

Requires all of us working together to ensure every child has access to a high quality education

- Improving student achievement, infrastructure & contracts, so we may become a national leader in educating urban youth and so all students may succeed in our colleges & universities and their chosen professions



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PESI (Providence Effective School Initiative)

10 dimensions to improving student achievement

- Principal as leader (strong instructional support)
- a vision & mission clearly understood by all
- high expectations for all: students, teachers, staff & families
- assessment & monitoring (data to inform practices)
- instructional delivery – highly-qualified teachers
- safe, caring and orderly schools
- parent/community involvement
- professional development
- school-culture dimension: family oriented w/ clear roles & expectations
- ethical practices – consistent behavior & doing right thing for children

This year, principal as leader and creating customer-service culture

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Providence Schools

Realizing the Dream

Providence Public School Department School Facility Master Plan

December 2006

DEJONG

Infrastructure

DeJONG and Gilbane studies (January 2007)

- Our structures; 'built city', large learning communities
- Facility planning considers cost, condition, enrollment & education ("right-sizing" school)
- cost - \$600m to renovate in one year, \$95m – 13 years, \$50m - 30 yrs,
- Students cannot get a 21st Cent. Education in decaying 19th & 20th Century facilities
- Next step: community outreach and buy-in

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Contracts

Student-centered, treating professionals as professionals

- Teacher quality
- Differential pay
- Principal as the school leader

Engaging parents and the community

- Stakeholders & partners in process

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Financing education

To achieve our vision – face reality of funding it

Historically, march towards 50/50 funding, away from reliance on regressive property tax

- movement stalled, State Banking Crisis; funding - incremental & uncertain; Governor cut, Legislature restored
- political reality – no gain to state lawmakers
- RI Supreme Ct. ruled Gen. Assembly "school board for the state"
- now, taking a new look at funding

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Our strategies

2004 - formed a mayors' working group

- RI Public Expenditure Council – recommended predictable funding formula based on actual cost of educating a child
- waged awareness campaign
- annual legislation – Constitutional guarantee of fair, adequate public school education
- legislation forming a Commission study funding formula. It passed. Committee appointed & report due out in February. Hearings on report to follow, with a final policy recommendation

Raising awareness about need for adequate state funding.

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Changing contracts & relationships

In Providence ---

- Creating 21st Century labor agreements – shared goals & responsibilities for student achievement
- Student-centered contracts, not teacher-centered

Partners with Union officials

- Strengthened relationship with union leadership
- treating teachers as professionals they are
- Adam Urbanski – New England Educational Summit - Dir. of the Teacher Union Reform Network, aimed at creating a new vision of teachers' unions supporting reform to advance student achievement. The goal of the new contract is to delineate roles of teachers & administrators, "in undertaking purposeful change necessary to restructure schools..."

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Link to Afterschool

Critical to educational reform is out-of-school time

- hours of 3 pm – 6 pm most risky in life of child
- part of nat'l effort - systemically address out-of-school time
- launched PASA (Providence After School Alliance) with Wallace Foundation, Bank of America and other support
- since 2004, built network of *afterzones* linking activities for 1,000 middle-school youth
- earning national awards & headlines; more important, keeping young people safe & engaged in quality activity

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How Mayors can demonstrate commitment to education

- weekly school visits
- host regular meetings with School Board & Superintendent; cabinet meeting presence
- appoint liaison with the School Department- Special Asst. for Education
- Mayors' working groups – collaborate, testify; op eds, media outreach
- use Reverse 911 to welcome children & families back to school and to advise about *AfterZones*
- host events as school fundraisers– Inaugural Ball (Volunteers in Prov. Schools & Providence After School Alliance)
- host statewide/ regional conferences on education reform/funding
- create special public funds for education (music & arts)
- constantly engage the public and parents
- create partnerships with organizations– NE Patriots, Ocean State Job Lot, Fidelity, Chamber of Commerce, Aramark
- engage students & families in city events (MLK, Inauguration, student art displays)

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More ways mayors can demonstrate commitment to education

- host internships and school visits to city offices
- coordinate superintendent searches
- explore programs such as America's Promise – Pathways to Promise- pharmacy technician training (planning stages in Providence)
- vocally support smaller learning communities within larger structures; analyze infrastructure; encourage training for school boards (Broad Institute, etc.)
- partner with colleges and universities – mentoring students/faculty; artists' support to students in art classes
- assure essential funding to achieve a vision; coordinate closely budgetary processes and keep transparent
- lobby before the Governor & State legislator for necessary funds
- conduct public sessions on topical issues(school construction,) use bilingual materials and reach out to different communities
- lead, convene, communicate, be a catalyst for change & champion schools

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Next steps

- wrestle with funding formula & state funds
- expand PASA & expand linkage w/ in-school time
- continue working with Supt., School Bd. & Administration – to craft next steps, and engage parents/ community in process
- measure, re-assess goals and adapt

At end of the day, Mayors have no choice but to step up and fix our schools

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