

ANGÉLICA INFANTE-GREEN
Commissioner

HARRISON PETERS
Superintendent



Providence Public School District
Office of the Superintendent
797 Westminster Street
Providence, RI 02903-4045
tel. 401.456.9211
fax 401.456.9252
www.providenceschools.org

June 1, 2020

An Open Letter to the Providence Community:

I believe in hope, and I have seen so much of it in the short time I've been in Providence. In the face of a pandemic, our students and teachers and parents have proven that we are capable of meeting big challenges. Like many of you, though, that sense of hope can be harder to come by while watching another pandemic – racism – tear communities apart. For many of us right now, the words "Black Lives Matter" can feel more like a plea than a truth.

Since I arrived in Providence in February, equity has been my top priority. As your Superintendent, I'm committed to creating a safe and welcoming environment for all students: one that respects our commonalities and celebrates our differences. I stand beside all PPSD educators in a pledge that the district will not tolerate racism, discrimination or injustice in our classrooms, whether those classrooms are brick-and-mortar or virtual. Starting today, we will be on call to connect students with resources. If you are a parent reading this, please reach out to your child's school if you feel you need support in guiding these conversations with your students.

Under the leadership of Dr. Barbara Mullen, PPSD's Chief Equity Officer, we are developing and expanding educational practices that are anti-racist, culturally responsive, and sustaining. Her team's work will only be successful, though, if every member of our district community commits to building cultural responsiveness. When classes return in the fall, PPSD will engage our educators in student-facilitated conversations about identity, race, and bias and how each impacts teaching and learning. This student-led effort will set us on a path to improve learning environments for students and teachers alike.

I understand that is hard to ask anyone to be hopeful right now. I've always been an optimist, but it's even hard for me at this moment. We're fighting a global pandemic that is disproportionately impacting people of color. Millions of families – including thousands here in Providence – are facing significant economic hardship. I'm sharing this personal inventory and reflection with you today because I firmly believe that students who are struggling with the pain and uncertainty of this moment need to know that the adults in their lives are struggling, too.

To our students and teachers of color: I know you're hurting and scared. The rawness and grief you feel are real. I also know how damaging it can be to suppress that hurt and pretend everything is fine during school hour. Frankly, that's what black professionals of my generation have been taught to do our entire careers. So, as long as I'm in this position, PPSD will not tolerate a culture that asks you to ignore it, push it down or code-switch past it.

To the many allies in our community: I humbly ask that you share in this work. But I also respectfully ask that you give space for your classmates and neighbors of color to express and process a sense of grief that you certainly empathize with, but may not – and in some ways, cannot – fully understand. I still hold on to Dr. King's words that the moral arc of the universe bends toward justice. Despite my own hurt, sadness and exhaustion, I continue to have hope that the one institution that can fix our broken nation is education.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to me if you need anything.

In solidarity,

Harrison Peters
Superintendent