Providence School Board president questions state's readiness to give back control

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PROVIDENCE, R.I. (WJAR) — The president of the Providence Public School Board claimed it's on track to reach expectations set by the Rhode Island Department of Education.

These criteria, the board says, are to prove that it's to regain local city control of the schools.

However, President Ty'Relle Stephens questions whether the state is ready to give up control.

In a five-page progress report written by Stephens, he says the board has gone above-and-beyond doing its homework to be ready to manage itself and Providence Public Schools when the state hands them back over.

"The board is as united as possible right now in this instance and there's just a lot of good work being done," he said.

Stephens credited the unity and good work in part to the more than 30 hours of professional development the board has completed with the Council of the Great City Schools, an organization that helps improve urban schools nationwide.

"They work with the board to bring us together, we are now together, and everything is going well," said Stephens.

He said the board is on track to complete and even exceed these three criteria laid out by RIDE Commissioner Angelica Infante Green, but there's still doubt.

"Both the governor and the commissioner made it very clear that they don't believe the school board is ready for return to local control. I had conversations with the governor's office since then," said Stephens. "We're building great relationships, but if the question is whether the school board is ready to return to local control today, the answer is no. We still have a lot of work that we have to do in order to get there, but if the question is whether the school board is on pace for a June 30, 2026 return to local control absolutely."

He said the board has also held more than 15 community listening sessions and plans to hold more, with the hope the state doesn't change its expectations.

"The real question is not going to be whether the school board, city council, the mayor's office is ready to return to local control. The real question is going to be is the commissioner ready to take her hands off of PPSD and give the keys back to the school board," said Stephens.

RIDE responded in a statement to NBC 10 saying the commissioner has publicly emphasized her priority is to ensure a successful transition to local control.

The statement says she, as in the commissioner: "is closely monitoring the efforts of local stakeholders, including the School Board, and remains optimistic that the necessary systems and conditions will be in place to sustain and build upon the district's momentum."