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## **City of East Providence invests in education - by Roberto DaSilva**

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Roberto DaSilva

In 2021 the city of East Providence celebrated the opening of its new \$190 million high school. The school was the first in Rhode Island built under a state program that includes hundreds of millions of dollars in borrowing that was previously approved by voters. The city paid for just under half the cost of this project with the remaining balance funded through the R.I. Department of Education.

Today, education is still a priority in East Providence. In 2022, voters overwhelmingly approved bonding for \$148 million for repairs and additions to Martin Middle School and Waddington Elementary School. These two major education investment projects are progressing rapidly through the design process with construction expected to commence in 2025. The city was also excited to secure a \$340,000 Learn365RI grant under an education program created by governor Dan McKee and the R.I. Department of Education utilized through funds received from the federal government. The Learn365RI program is designed to shift learning from the traditional 180 school day model to 365 days of learning through the support of partnerships between municipalities, local education agencies and community-based organizations to expand extended learning experiences for students in East Providence.

Educational investment is not limited strictly to elementary and secondary education investment in East Providence. The city has also successfully competed for adult workforce training and education funding, receiving a \$350,000 U.S. Dept. of Labor grant to fund an East Providence Workforce Training Program. Secured through the Community Project Funding Program in the government spending bill for fiscal year 2022, this initiative will support workforce and professional development opportunities for approximately 530 low-to-moderate-income East Providence adults who enroll in certification coursework through Roger Williams University's University College. These classes will provide certificates in high demand occupations including, medical office assistant and accounting and bookkeeping clerk education. Classes will conveniently take place at our new high school and will be scheduled for weekday evenings. All classes will be taught by faculty members from Roger Williams University in cooperative partnership with the city and East Providence School Department.

The city is also a partner in the Recompete Rhode Island Program, a coalition of organizations and government agencies dedicated to working together to revitalize our adult workforce through an application for these federal funds. At this time, the coalition has submitted an application for \$20 million in grant funds to launch a transformational job training initiative that will prepare our workforce for the economy of the future. A decision on this grant is expected in early 2024.

Quality education plays an extremely important role in our ability to market East Providence as a top tier location for economic investment.

Businesses know that attracting the best candidates to their firms is often reliant on potential employees recognizing that their school aged children will receive a high quality education that prepares students for the promising careers of the future. A well trained adult workforce is also vital for promoting continued economic investment and prosperity. To that end the city will continue to seek out and participate in efforts to ensure the most educated and highly qualified labor force in the

region.

Roberto DaSilva is the mayor of the city of East Providence, R.I.

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