

5 Statewide Educator Quality Development System

The Urban Education Task Force recommends collaboration within and across districts to improve educator quality by implementing innovative models that differentiate career paths for teachers and provide more professional growth and evaluation opportunities.

Introduction

In the private sector, human capital is generally defined as the accumulated value of an individual's intellect, knowledge, experience, competencies, and commitment that contributes to the achievement of an organization's vision and business objectives. When this idea is applied to K–12 education, the “business objective,” or bottom line, is student achievement and, more broadly, the development of young people into productive members of our participatory democracy. In public education, *human capital* – or, perhaps more appropriately, *educator quality* – refers to the knowledge and skill sets of our educators that directly result in increased levels of learning and positive outcomes for students. In short, we are talking about their talent level – what teachers, principals, and administrators know and are able to do.

Given this definition, human capital management in a comprehensive educator quality development system refers to how an organization tries to acquire, increase, and sustain the talent level of educators over time. More specifically, it refers to the entire continuum of activities and policies that affect educators over their work life at a given school district. This range of activities includes pre-service/preparation and licensure; recruitment and selection; hiring and induction; placement and reassignment; professional development, mentoring, and support; and evaluation, career advance-

ment, compensation, and the removal of ineffective educators (see examples of human capital management frameworks in appendix 5S). A human capital approach – here referred to as a comprehensive educator quality development approach – to a problem like recruiting, developing, and retaining high-quality educators in urban schools involves districts and states coordinating efforts around each component of the continuum for maximum effect.

Given the time constraints of the Task Force's life, the focus of attention in this area was on those activities or continuum components that most impact the pre-existing and fairly stable workforce of Rhode Island's urban districts. Key areas with the most potential to help current educators improve and, through that improvement, positively impact student learning and outcomes were identified as evaluation, professional development, and ongoing support. The extent to which states and districts are effective in these focus areas has a direct effect on whether they can attract and keep high-quality new teachers. Moreover, success in these areas also impacts how well states and districts are able to provide specific feedback to preparation programs on how to produce the sort of educators these states and districts need, how well they are able to identify and recognize their most effective educators, and, ultimately, how they deal with those who are chronically ineffective. In this sense, these areas form a foundation for the reform of other areas of educator quality development.

Several important components of the educator quality continuum (including recruitment and teacher preparation) are not dealt with directly in this document. However, in the long-term recommendations that follow, the Task Force proposes ideas for addressing these other educator quality development elements at a future

date. We hope that state-level action in the areas identified by the Task Force will assist the urban districts' efforts to create individualized, comprehensive educator quality development strategies that take advantage of specific district strengths and acknowledge specific district weaknesses.

At the core of these recommendations is the conviction that a shared conception of what effective instruction looks like and how we measure it in actual teachers is the cornerstone of all urban educator quality initiatives. We believe that this conception is multifaceted, involving professional standards of practice in areas such as content knowledge, pedagogy, classroom management, and family engagement; a code of ethical conduct; and evidence of student learning and progress. We also believe that a variety of metrics are necessary to accurately and fairly assess the performance of an educator against this conception, ranging from classroom observations and evaluation conferences to formative classroom assessments, student portfolios, and classroom artifacts to subjective and objective evidence of student learning. A commitment to this complicated picture of effective instruction is necessary for real educator quality development reform to work.

Current Rhode Island Context

To fully understand these recommendations, it is important to be aware of some state-specific contexts.

State Policy and Regulatory Issues

Rhode Island has put in place the foundational base to develop an evaluation system for all educators that will be based on the Rhode Island Professional Teaching Standards (RIPTS) and the Rhode Island Standards for Educational Leadership. Both sets of standards

were adopted by the Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education and are being used in some districts to pilot the use of new evaluation systems. In the fall of 2009, the Regents will accept public comment on the "Educator Evaluation System Framework" that will detail the standards and criteria necessary for every district evaluation system (see appendix 5S). In addition, Rhode Island's new Commissioner of Education has recently released her vision for the state's education system, "Transforming Education in Rhode Island." Central to the agenda accompanying this vision is her plan to ensure educator excellence. The recommendations in this report articulate a direction that is in many ways similar to the Commissioner's agenda; to the extent they do, they should be viewed as an affirmation of that work which has gained momentum since the inception of the Task Force.

While the development and adoption of these standards at the state level are important first steps, the following recommendations suggest ways in which the state might play an even larger role in evaluating and developing educator quality than in the past. In 2008, Rhode Island continued to score near the bottom in prominent national rankings of how states support and regulate teacher quality (see appendix 5S). These recommendations are in part designed to address some of the problems identified in those national report cards, and it is the opinion of the Task Force that these national reports should continue to guide reform within and beyond the scope of these recommendations.

Fiscal Issues

While some aspects of a statewide educator quality development system should have relatively low, or even no, costs associated with them, others certainly will. Given the current economic downturn in Rhode Island and the lack of state funding currently available for initiatives in this area, these recommendations

attempt to balance low-cost action or changes to regulatory policy with the piloting of promising practices that can potentially be funded with federal grants or outside foundation funding. The hope is that these policy changes and state pilots will inform and shift the Rhode Island conversation about what state programs and/or functions have the greatest potential to positively impact educator quality. Once implemented, the intent of these recommendations is to produce data that will indicate where funds should be allocated to support statewide educator quality as the state emerges from its current economic struggles.

Recommendations, Action Steps, and Partner Responsibilities

The Task Force offers three short-term recommendations that will address critical aspects of educator quality development in Rhode Island and lay the foundation for four long-term recommendations in this area moving forward.

Short-term

The Task Force has engaged in a concerted effort to research similar educator quality development systems in other states, close consideration of the individual components of the system in Rhode Island, and a review of the best practices around each nationally. As a result, the Task Force makes the following recommendations.

RECOMMENDATION Require the regular, substantive evaluation of all teachers – both tenured and non-tenured – with evidence of instructional effectiveness as a major evaluation criterion. This regular evaluation should be based upon the multifaceted conception of instructional effectiveness laid out above and involve both the RI Professional Teaching Standards and evidence of student learning and progress.

The Task Force believes that educators should be continuously growing and improving and that regular evaluation of individual educator's strengths and weaknesses should drive this growth process. In line with these views, the Task Force recommends that full support be given to the Board of Regents' and RIDE's work on the Educator Evaluation System Framework, along with its proposed requirements of regular evaluation of all teachers and the use of instructional effectiveness as a driving criterion in those evaluations. The Task Force supports the articulation of a multifaceted view of instructional effectiveness that looks at a teacher's performance against the RIPTS rubric during observed lessons and in professional practice, as well as at evidence of student learning and progress.

At this point, local district leaders – in partnership with local union leaders – should determine what objective and subjective evidence of student learning and progress should be used. After an evaluation of value-added data in Rhode Island and the consideration with teachers of what, if any, role the unions can play in providing evidence of student learning and progress in reading and math, the question of the appropriate metrics should be revisited at the state level. Along with this, the issue of how we measure student learning and progress in subjects other than reading and math must also be reviewed. Above all, the implementation of this recommendation depends on getting wide, cross-stakeholder agreement on indicators and on how we measure student learning and progress and determine teacher effect on them. Without widespread concurrence that the ways we measure are both fair and accurate, other reforms based on the assumption that we can accurately identify those teachers who are the most effective are destined to fail.

RECOMMENDATION Ensure the enhancement of the current RIDE data-collection system to allow for the collection of all data needed to attempt teacher value-added data analysis.

According to a 2003 study by the RAND Corporation, “value-added modeling (VAM) is a collection of complex statistical techniques that use multiple years of students’ test score data to estimate the effects of individual schools or teachers.” While it is widely held that there are limitations to what value-added data can and cannot tell us about teacher quality, there is also evidence to suggest that it may be valuable – in conjunction with other measures of effective instruction – in identifying growth areas for educators, contributing to a multifaceted view of educator quality, helping educators tailor instruction to the actual needs of students, and driving district- and state-level reform of quality development systems (more on the Rand study of VAM appears in appendix 5S). While Rhode Island has the two critical components of a longitudinal data system needed to collect and analyze value-added data, it currently does not perform either of these functions. Deriving whatever value this data can provide requires that Rhode Island first collect and review it.

The relative value and reliability of this data will drive how it is used in the future and what role it can play alongside a framework of professional teaching standards, classroom observations, formative assessments, and other tools to evaluate and support our educators. While VAM is not the only way we can measure student learning and progress, it would be an important one if it could be done accurately. Every effort should be made to secure the federal, private, or state funding to make the necessary enhancements to the

existing data infrastructure, explore potential value-added models, create a user-friendly interface for accessing this data, and engage the various stakeholders in a conversation about what these data can tell us and how they should be used.

RECOMMENDATION Pursue national funding opportunities to pilot several currently available models integrating educator evaluation, support, and professional development in Rhode Island’s urban districts.

The Task Force recognizes that the state is moving deliberately in each of the areas mentioned above, as well as in the overall endeavor to define what effective teaching looks like and how it is measured. To edify and inform these efforts, the state should pilot one or more nationally proven models that integrate elements such as job-embedded professional development, using data to drive instruction, teacher leadership, evaluation based on multiple measures, and peer coaching. Done well, these sorts of pilots can help Rhode Island make sure the reforms chosen to be enacted at scale in the urban districts and across the state are representative of national best practices and informed by the cutting-edge innovation embodied in these models.

Currently, there are unique opportunities to secure external funding for existing national models that integrate educator evaluation, ongoing support, and professional development that could inform Rhode Island’s own efforts to create systems with this same integration. The American Federation of Teachers’ Innovation Fund, the U.S. Department of Education’s Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF), and the opportunities represented by the current work of organizations like the Gates Foundation and the Ford Foundation

make it evident that there are unique opportunities to pilot new work around educator quality. In a time when new state or local funding for significant reform is unlikely, Rhode Island must take advantage of external opportunities to foster new work around educator quality that can inform its ongoing efforts to improve in the areas identified previously.

Specifically, the Task Force recommends that Rhode Island apply for federal support, such as a TIF grant, to pilot the TAP System for Teacher and Student Advancement in the five urban districts. In addition, the Task Force recommends that Rhode Island secure AFT and/or private foundation funding to pilot some variation of peer assistance and review (PAR) programs currently implemented in places like Toledo, Ohio (additional details in appendix 5S).

Research in the fields of both private sector management and education (see appendix 5S) tells us that to truly build a better educator profession, we need

- consistent performance-based accountability with clear performance standards;
- constructive ongoing support;
- regular opportunities for professional growth and peer collaboration;
- a substantive career path with multiple career options that become available when individuals exhibit excellence and/or specific skills sets (e.g., exceptional teachers with coaching skills might be teacher/mentors, while teachers with substantial technology knowledge might have a hybrid role as a teacher/tech coordinator);
- compensation and incentives in addition to salary that are somehow linked to the way individuals and groups perform and distinguish themselves.

TAP and PAR programs stress these elements and integrate them into a cohesive, building-level program. The Task Force recommends a concerted, coordinated state/local effort to introduce these programs to specific schools and teachers. This effort should include local school district leadership, local and state-level labor leaders, RIDE, and any appropriate external organizations. Assuming the willing participation of particular schools and their staffs, the Task Force further recommends that the state launch a cross-district pilot in an effort to invigorate the dialogue around the issues of evaluation, professional development, and ongoing support necessary to inform RIDE's work in these areas.

In the following section we address how the results of these pilot programs and the state and local collaboration necessary to implement them can be used to inform Rhode Island's efforts to establish its own Educator Evaluation System Framework that integrates these elements and to implement it in an effective way with districts.

Long-term

The limited scope of the recommendations put forth in this report should not be taken to imply that additional reforms are not necessary. Rather, the Task Force encourages the Board of Regents, RIDE, and the urban districts to finalize a plan for proposing additional reforms that build on what is accomplished and learned from the implementation of the short-term recommendations and address the components of the educator quality development continuum system that were not dealt with there (e.g., teacher and school leader preparation, educator compensation, school leader professional development). This plan should include

not only recommendations for when certain components of the system are piloted, evaluated, revised, and brought up to scale, but also a clear timeline that lays out future legislative and fiscal actions needed if the system is to be fully implemented. Moreover, these reforms should be developed in conjunction with the teachers they will be designed to support. With these stipulations in mind, the Task Force makes the following recommendations.

RECOMMENDATION Provide full support for RIDE’s continuing work with school districts, their unions, and other partners to develop the Rhode Island Professional Teaching Standards and to create model evaluation tools and guides for districts that detail how to use the RIPTS in the evaluation process. Further, Rhode Island unions and the teachers they represent in the urban districts should continue to be consulted throughout this development process.

While a balance between state and local district decision making is important in all areas of educator quality development, the Task Force supports RIDE’s work to create a series of statewide performance standards with accompanying model evaluation tools and evaluation processes that build on the RIPTS framework. As these further tools and processes are developed, and as RIDE pilots them in different districts, the Task Force recommends that RIDE, the Regents, local districts, and their unions together review the extent of RIDE’s role in this area and decide jointly on a role that is appropriate and possible for RIDE to play. This review of RIDE’s role should involve considering whether RIDE has the capacity and authority to

- develop extensive evaluation process requirements statewide;

- establish a statewide rubric for educator effectiveness combining the RIPTS with objective measures of student achievement;
- train local district evaluators;
- ensure inter-rater reliability;
- collect aggregated evaluation data to help districts and schools tailor professional development and ongoing support.

To the extent such a joint review indicates that RIDE has the capacity and support necessary to play any or all of these roles effectively, it should do so. However, where a review of RIDE’s role indicates that certain functions are best left to the local districts, RIDE should examine how it can best support the local education agencies in performing them. Undergirding all of these efforts is the continuing need to engage Rhode Island educators in the process of creating these new tools and processes to ensure the investment of those whom these tools are designed to support, as well as the practicality necessary to make these tools useful.

RECOMMENDATION Create a cross-stakeholder panel to develop research-based, statewide standards and best practices for professional development and to advocate for the restoration of state funding for professional development.

The panel structure and process used to develop the Professional Teaching Standards was a comprehensive and inclusive effort that resulted in a set of research-based standards for teaching with wide support from all relevant stakeholders. The Task Force recommends establishing a similar panel structure and process with the goal of developing a set of state standards for professional development that would build on RIDE’s work on evaluation and the iPlan to drive how individual districts support their teachers. Such a structure and process would ensure that

professional development would be practical, useful, and focused across the state.

Moreover, the Task Force recommends that this body incorporate learning and experiences from the potential program pilots mentioned above, as well as from educators in non-pilot schools, into the conversation about how to best structure support for the state's teaching workforce. This body would also lead the advocacy effort to secure state-level funding for research-based professional development, the establishment of regular feedback opportunities for teachers on the type of professional development offered, and the discussion about how to regularly assess the efficacy of professional development delivered statewide by the districts and unions.

RECOMMENDATION Review and revise teacher certification, including the Certificate of Eligibility for Employment (CEE), the Professional Certificate (PC), and the requirements for each.

RIDE and the Board of Regents are currently conducting a thorough review of licensing policy in the state. The Task Force supports the Commissioner's efforts to add a more rigorous cutoff score for the PRAXIS I basic skills test to the state-articulated requirements for obtaining the CEE and consider the possibility of strengthening the requirements and time necessary for advancing from the CEE to the professional certificate. Specifically, the Task Force recommends considering new requirements for advancing from one license to the other that include providing evidence of student learning and progress as well as the consideration of a longer period of time before advancement that would allow for significant evidence collection and professional development before the professional license is awarded.

RECOMMENDATION Provide full support for RIDE's and the Board of Regents' efforts to prioritize educator quality development and their work to craft a comprehensive, long-term agenda to maximize state support for increasing educator quality.

The recommendations in this report endorse the solid start to augmenting the state's role in ensuring high-quality educators in Rhode Island's urban schools and classrooms that is currently under way. However, a more thorough review of all components of the educator quality development continuum and how the state can best impact them is necessary to keep this work moving forward. Focusing first on educator evaluation, professional development, and ongoing support will lay the foundation necessary for considering the reform of other components, including educator preparation, compensation, and accountability that rely inextricably on how we define, measure, and nurture teacher effectiveness. For example, once Rhode Island has determined an evaluation rubric for effective teaching and metrics for evaluating teachers against this rubric, it can use this model to determine how to

- reform teacher preparation programs;
- recognize and/or compensate the most effective educators (as identified by a comprehensive evaluation process) and school staffs;
- hone any statewide alternative-route programs or recruitment efforts to screen for characteristics of effective educators as defined by the state;
- incentivize the most effective teachers to teach in schools with the lowest-performing students.

To ensure the effectiveness of such a review, it is incumbent upon RIDE and the Board of Regents to meaningfully engage local district leadership, union leadership, institutions of higher education, and principals and teachers in the work of planning and instituting substantive reforms in areas ranging from teacher preparation reform to incentivizing highly effective teachers to stay in the classroom to creating hybrid roles for teachers to educator accountability and alternative compensation structures. It is the hope of the Task Force that the pilot programs recommended in the previous section will produce a new type of dialogue around these issues, driven by the real experiences of Rhode Island educators who have participated in these programs. The data and experiences generated through quality pilots should prove invaluable in considering how to build scalable initiatives designed to maximize educator quality moving forward.

Comment on the Recommendations from the Rhode Island Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals

The Rhode Island Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals, AFT, AFL-CIO, concurs with the recommendations of the Urban Education Task Force with the following comments and cautions:

- Student assessments are neither valid nor reliable in measuring teacher effectiveness. It is currently politically correct to discuss using value-added models for purposes of teacher evaluation and compensation. There is no evidence that teachers perform “better” because of monetary incentives. Further, teachers will not put their basic salaries at risk so that some individuals will benefit to the detriment of others.

- Teacher labor should be included in any discussions of further recommendations affecting educator quality.
- Advancement in certification status should not hinge on evidence of student learning, particularly if this phrase is a proxy for student test scores. The CEE is a certificate of eligibility to be employed. It makes no sense to extend the timeline for conversion to a Professional Certificate from a CEE. Perhaps the suggestion here is that there be a new kind of certificate precedent to the Professional Certificate. Certification and licensure should not be conflated with employment decisions that an employer might make.
- The Rhode Island Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals does not agree with the recommendation that “full support be given to the Board of Regents’ and RIDE’s work on the Educator Evaluation System Framework.” The Regents’ proposal calls for educators to be evaluated annually. We believe that this is unfeasible, given district and school leadership capacity. Further, new teachers should be evaluated often before being tenured and then after tenure be put in a three-year cycle for evaluation unless there is cause to make evaluations more frequently. Student-achievement assessment scores should not be used in teacher evaluation unless valid and reliable.