



Donald L. Carcieri
Governor

NEWS

Office of the Governor

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Tuesday, October 27, 2009

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Rhode Island Urban Education Task Force Releases Final Report and Action Plan

Action already underway in Expanded Learning Time, Educator Quality and Pre-kindergarten Education

Central Falls, RI—Governor Donald L. Carcieri today joined Warren Simmons, Executive Director of the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University, Rhode Island Elementary and Secondary Education Commissioner Deborah Gist, and Board of Regents Chairman Robert Flanders, Jr., at Central Falls High School to release the final report of the Urban Education Task Force: *Building Our Future: An Agenda for Quality Urban Education in Rhode Island*.

Governor Carcieri formed the Urban Education Task Force in 2008 and charged it with developing specific recommendations for consideration by the Governor and General Assembly on ways to strengthen and transform urban education in Rhode Island, specifically the five urban districts of Central Falls, Newport, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket. Members of the Task Force include leaders in education, government, and community organizations.

The report outlines seven recommendations to improve urban education in Rhode Island, and calls on educators, community leaders, elected and appointed public servants, the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, school district leaders, parents and students to work together to implement an agenda for improving urban education statewide.

“On multiple indicators, students in our urban districts continue to lag far behind those in our suburban and rural districts. I put together the Urban Education Task force to help us identify and make the necessary changes to improve the level and quality of education in these communities,” said Governor Donald L. Carcieri.

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“I extend my appreciation to the members of the Task Force, our school leaders, students and the community leaders who worked tirelessly over these past 18 months to develop meaningful solutions to improve education in our urban districts,” said Carcieri.

These initiatives are part of a comprehensive agenda for urban education in the state that includes improving early literacy, expanding learning time, developing innovation, creating multiple pathways for at-risk students and collaborating across districts and schools. The report also highlights work that has developed over the last 18 months in these areas. With support from the Governor and the General Assembly, funding for some of these initiatives was included in the budget passed over the summer. The Task Force hopes these initial steps will help the state attract additional public and private funding for further implementation.

“Taken together, these recommendations can fundamentally change outcomes for Rhode Island’s children. We urge their implementation in the same spirit that they were developed: collaboratively and with great hope for Rhode Island’s future,” said Warren Simmons, Executive Director of the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University and the Chair of the Task Force.

“I would like to thank the Governor for convening this task force nearly two years ago, and I would like to thank Warren Simmons for this skillful leadership,” said Robert G. Flanders, Jr., Esq., Chairman of the Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education. “I know we all agree that we must do more to improve the performance of all of our students. The hard and thoughtful work of this task force makes me confident that we can work together to advance learning for all.”

“I want to thank the many people from across the state for their hard work and expert thinking on the issues of urban education,” said Deborah A. Gist, Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education. “I endorse the goal of innovation in urban education through a Center for Innovation, which RIDE will manage. In fact, I would like to see the entire State of Rhode Island become a ‘zone of innovation’ in which education leaders and entrepreneurs could create new, different schools to serve all of our students. I look forward to taking on the vital and challenging work of implementing the recommendations of the task force.”

The recommendations of the Urban Education Task Force include:

- Pre-Kindergarten Education

The UETF recommends launching a high-quality pre-kindergarten program in Rhode Island, starting with a pilot program in 2009 and continuing with full implementation after the pilot, giving priority to children in communities with low-performing schools and low literacy performance in fourth grade.

In June 2008, the General Assembly passed the RI Pre-Kindergarten Act, which directs RIDE to engage in a planning process for a RI pre-K program. In 2009, the Governor included \$700,000 in funding for the Pre-K Demonstration project, an initiative that was supported by the General Assembly. Programs began operating in fall 2009 and are serving more than 100 children from urban and urban-ring communities.

- Early Literacy

The UETF recommends the implementation of a comprehensive system of supports for K-3 literacy, with a focus on English language learners. It also recommends the development of a comprehensive, guaranteed, viable early literacy curriculum and mandates its use in districts in corrective action.

- Expanded Learning Time

The UETF recommends that Rhode Island launch an expanded learning time initiative in the five urban school districts and implement it through a partnership between the Governor's office, RIDE, and appropriate community-based organizations, with targeted technical assistance from the National Center on Time and Learning. An expanded learning time initiative means not just extending time, but providing high-quality, engaging learning opportunities during that time.

There are a number of initiatives already in progress in RI, including the Providence after School Alliance, RIDE's Childhood Opportunity Zones and 21st Century Learning Centers, full-service community schools, the RI After School Plus Alliance, the Woonsocket Afterschool Coalition, and successful charter school models, among others. Additionally, the Governor proposed and the General Assembly supported funding for expanded learning time pilots that more fully integrate after school programs in our urban schools.

- Multiple Pathways for Student Success

The UETF recommends implementing a number of steps to create multiple pathways to graduation and post secondary success for young people, such as partnerships with adult education programs, access to AP courses, and courses offered at nontraditional times. The UETF recommends supporting districts in creating early warning systems that can be used to identify middle school and high school students at risk of dropping out, provide tailored support to at risk students, develop more alternatives to traditional middle school and junior high schools, and develop a Multiple Pathways for Student Success Initiative at RIDE, in consultation with the RI Office of Higher Education and the RI Department of Labor and Training.

- Statewide Educator Quality Development System

The UETF 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. This would require regular and substantive evaluation for all teachers with evidence of instructional effectiveness as a major evaluation criterion that is based upon the work of the Board of Regents and the Department of Education on RI Professional Teaching Standards and evidence of student learning and progress.

- Innovation for Successful Schools

The UETF recommends that RIDE, the urban districts, charter school leaders, the mayoral academies and charter school directors work collaboratively to develop the infrastructure and policies that will support innovative practices in RI schools, specifically a Center for Innovation and a Zone of Innovation, as starting points for catalyzing and spreading educational innovations. This Center and Zone would identify, develop, support, and spread innovative educational efforts in RI's urban districts and throughout the state.

- Educator Collaboration

The UETF recommends creating new capacity for cross-district and partner collaboration to harness the state's full potential for progress. In addition to achieving greater efficiency of resources and a shared sense of accountability for outcomes, this new capacity would further drive progress in the critical areas of curriculum, instruction, assessment, and educator quality. The vehicle for this collaboration would be an Urban Education Consortium which would serve as an ongoing voice for education reform in the state, monitor and support the efforts to implement the recommendations, report on the state of urban education in Rhode Island, and conduct public forums to engage and mobilize various constituencies and shareholders.

Governor Carcieri thanked the members of the Task Force and accepted the recommendations in the report. "I extend my appreciation to the members of Task Force, educators and the community for the time, thoughtfulness and effort put in to address the issue of urban education. Our next step is to continue the momentum, ensure we hold ourselves accountable to the recommendations, and build on the partnerships that we have created through the work of the Task Force and ensure continued support and collective action," continued Carcieri. "I therefore support the recommendation regarding an Urban Education Consortium and ask that Warren work with other key stakeholders to move this forward."

"Members of the Task Force came from all different constituencies to create a partnership for change," said Simmons. "With the Urban Education Consortium, we will continue that constructive and fruitful partnership so that our urban students receive all the supports and opportunities they deserve."

The Urban Education Task Force includes 26 people, including superintendents from the cities, state and district leaders, union leaders, charter school representatives, community and legislative leaders and higher education officials. Hundreds of other individuals were involved in task force work through work groups in each recommendation area, community and constituent forums and a community list serv.

The work of the Task Force was made possible by generous grants from the Nellie Mae Education Foundation and the Rhode Island Foundation, and with support from the Wallace Foundation and the Bank of America.

The final report, including an executive summary, list of Task Force members and other information is available at: <http://www.annenberginstitute.org/UETF/>.