

RHODE ISLAND

Urbans **E**ducation
Task **F**orce

Final Report of the Rhode Island Urban Education Task Force

Building Our Future

**An Agenda for Quality Urban Education
in Rhode Island**

October 2009

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Executive Summary outlines the main concepts and recommendations of the final report of the Rhode Island Urban Education Task Force, *Building Our Future: An Agenda for Quality Urban Education in Rhode Island*.

The Executive Summary and the full report were produced by the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island. Copies of both publications and additional information about the work of the Rhode Island Urban Education Task Force are available at www.annenberginstitute.org/UETF.

Introduction to the Task Force Report

For the majority of the twentieth century, Rhode Island's families and communities thrived on an economy driven by textile and jewelry manufacturing and fishing. By the close of the century, however, financial services, trade, health, and education had replaced manufacturing and fishing as the strongest sectors of the state's economy.

For decades, our nation's leading economists, educators, and business, political, and civic leaders have predicted that the U.S. educational system's failure to produce students equipped to participate in the new global economy would have dire economic and social consequences (NCEE 2008).

Our collective failure to redesign our state's and our nation's educational system to respond to the new world of learning and work has forced many companies to outsource high-skill jobs overseas, leaving whole communities and families behind in their wake. The warning signs of our collective failure are all around us and have become increasingly acute in the last year.

- Rhode Island has one of the highest unemployment rates in the country (*Providence Journal*, September 18, 2009).
- Rhode Island has the highest proportion of children living in poverty compared to other New England states (*2009 Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Factbook*).
- Rhode Island is the lowest-ranking New England state in overall child well-being (*2009 RI KIDS COUNT Factbook*).
- Rhode Island has the second-lowest proportion of college-educated workers of any New England state (Crissey 2009).

These statistics present our community with a clear choice: support the educational status quo

and continue our downward spiral, or create a future as great as our state's past by transforming our public schools so that they produce young people who can strengthen our economy, our families, and our communities.

The Importance of Our Urban Core

Such a transformative agenda should be pursued by every school and community in our state. But, as a small and densely populated state, our economic and civic futures are highly linked to the health of our core cities: Providence, Central Falls, Newport, Pawtucket, and Woonsocket. And no factor is more important to the health of these cities – and hence the state – than education (profiles of Rhode Island and the cities are included in appendices B1–B6 of the full Task Force report).

As noted in the Rhode Island Public Expenditure Council (n.d.) publication *Cities Count*, “by 2020, one in five members of the state's workforce will have come from the State's urban core school systems.” Currently, outcomes for students in those cities are improving but remain unacceptably low (see appendices B7–B8 of the full Task Force report for more details and sources):

- Only about half of elementary and middle school students from these communities achieved proficiency in the 2007–2008 assessment in English language arts, compared with about 77 percent in the rest of the state.
- About three in ten students reached proficiency in math in the urban areas, compared with about seven in ten students in the rest of the state.
- The graduation rate in Rhode Island's urban districts is 61 percent, compared with 74 percent in the state as a whole.

- Urban students make up under a third of the state’s public school population, but are a large majority of the state’s students who are characterized as English language learners and as low income.
- The mobility rate in the urban core was 44 percent in 2007-2008, compared with 14 percent for the rest of the state.

Our current system of urban public education is not a worthy vessel for children and youth in our urban core, nor for the many dedicated educators who work with them. Redesigning the current system to fit the needs of the twenty-first century will require vision, bold action, and an approach that harnesses the state’s political, educational, social, and civic resources. It will require a technical blueprint, but one that also recognizes that reform requires concerted political, social, and cultural change.

The Work of the Urban Education Task Force

To address these many challenges, Governor Donald Carcieri created the Urban Education Task Force in January 2008 and charged us to work with multiple stakeholders to forge a plan to generate action and the political will needed to take the first steps toward its implementation. The Task Force heard consistently about participants’ frustrations with the disconnect between their schools and their district central offices; with territorial politics and poor communication that divide school from community, parents from teachers, and teachers from principals and their school district leaders; and with the lack of consultation with teachers, parents, and students about policies that affect them. They urged not just new policies from their public servants, but the creation of new cultures and practices that would foster trust and

engagement in public education (see appendix C1–C2 of the full Task Force report for more details on educators’ and community members’ comments in public meetings).

In the midst of these criticisms, we also heard and saw a foundation for hope and success through our local best-practice visits and our conversations with students, teachers, and parents who are building partnerships and developing promising practices to create high-quality schools in Rhode Island (see sidebar for examples).

Building Our Future

We can build on these and numerous other successes by marshaling the will and resources needed to redesign our public education systems as systems to support innovation and enhance efficiency and effectiveness. In its final report, the Urban Education Task Force puts forward recommendations in seven areas that will create the infrastructure, collaboration, and culture to build the kinds of schools Rhode Island needs to thrive in the twenty-first century. This ambitious endeavor requires business, government, labor, K–12 and higher education, the faith institutions, and community groups to seek common ground to build upon and to sustain our effort over time.

This endeavor also will require us to shift from a culture enamored of differences and conflict to one that seeks unity around shared values and strategies. Despite a diversity of ideologies, experiences, and backgrounds, the members of this Task Force reached consensus around a core set of action steps. One clarifying comment from the Rhode Island Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals, related to the Educator Quality recommendation, is included in the full Task Force report (see page 9 of this Executive Summary for a summary of the comment).

The Task Force process was not perfect – some working groups were not as inclusive as others, member engagement varied, and some constituent voices undoubtedly went unheard. But the experience of the last eighteen months has taught us that differences are obstacles that can be overcome when multiple stakeholders come together over time to engage in dialogue, examine research and best practice, and work toward a common goal – creating an education system that builds our community’s future.



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Promising Partnerships and Practices in Rhode Island

Examples of promising partnerships and practices to create high-quality schools in Rhode Island include:

- Central Falls High School and the University of Rhode Island partnership to address the persistently low rate of student achievement
- Newport Public Schools’ partnerships with the Newport Public Education Foundation and Positively Newport Schools
- Pawtucket School Department’s development of the Walsh School for Performing Arts in coordination with the Rhode Island School of Design, the Sandra Feinstein-Gamm Theatre, and Fusionworks Dance Company
- the opening of two state-of-the-art education facilities in Providence: the Career and Technical Academy and the renovated Nathan Bishop Middle School
- the partnership between Providence Public Schools, the Providence After School Alliance, and the mayor’s office to build a seamless system of rigorous and rich out-of-school learning opportunities through its after-zones model
- the Feinstein E-learning Academy developed by the Woonsocket School Department, where students who are behind in their schoolwork or who are at risk of dropping out can earn credits toward graduation
- Rhode Island Mayoral Academies, the oversight organization for a new type of public charter school in the state, which opened its first school this fall
- Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program (UCAP), an independent public school that serves 140 seventh-, eighth-, and ninth-graders from the cities of Providence, Central Falls, and Cranston
- the partnership between the Central Falls School District and the Learning Community Charter School on the Growing Readers Initiative, which links Central Falls elementary schools with supports and strategies implemented at the Learning Community
- the Rhode Island Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals’ recent grant from the American Federation of Teachers to support meaningful teacher evaluation in Rhode Island

Recommendations

Governor Donald L. Carcieri charged the Rhode Island Urban Education Task Force with developing specific recommendations for consideration by the Governor and the General Assembly on ways to strengthen and transform urban education in the Ocean State. The Task Force first met in January 2008 and met as a plenary group nine times over the next eighteen months. Formal meetings of the task force are listed in appendix A2 of the full report.

The Task Force was specifically not charged with addressing statewide education funding. However, Task Force members emphasized that improving the equity of state funding is essential to improving education in the state. Currently, Rhode Island is the only state in the country that does not dispense its basic education aid on a predictable formula that incorporates the number and characteristics of each district's students. This is particularly important in these challenging economic times.

From the beginning, the Task Force emphasized the need for a set of recommendations that, as a whole, would provide a statewide agenda for improving urban education from

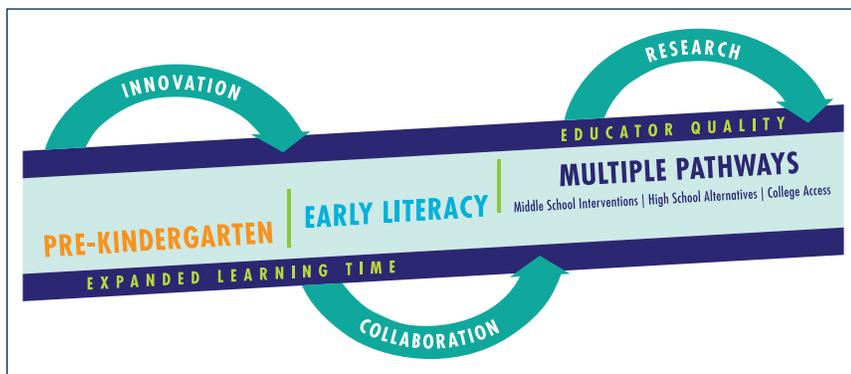
pre-kindergarten through high school. The figure below illustrates how the recommendation areas fit together to create a comprehensive agenda for urban education in Rhode Island. The pre-kindergarten, early literacy, and multiple pathways recommendations attend to the specific learning needs of our state's children. The expanded learning time and educator quality recommendations are focused on helping to improve learning supports and provide additional learning opportunities. The innovation and collaboration recommendations address key infrastructure needs (including research) and the new ways of working that will foster continuous improvement in our urban districts and the state as a whole.

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.

Pre-Kindergarten Education

The Urban Education Task Force 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. The specific recommendation is:

- ▶ Move beyond the Pre-Kindergarten Demonstration Program to implement pre-K in Rhode Island using a mixed-delivery system (childcare, Head Start, schools).



Early Literacy

The Urban Education Task Force recommends the implementation of a comprehensive system of supports for K–3 literacy, with a focus on English language learners. Specific recommendations are:

- ▶ Develop a comprehensive, guaranteed, viable early literacy curriculum and mandate its use in districts in corrective action.
- ▶ Strengthen oral-language development to support early literacy by
 - engaging a public relations partner to develop early literacy public service announcements;
 - bringing Rhode Island’s urban communities together to share resources to support cross-district or statewide early literacy activities.
- ▶ Develop expertise in teaching emergent literacy by
 - reviewing current certification requirements for the Certificate of Eligibility for Employment, for a Professional Certificate, and for recertification and alternate certification and recommending how expertise in teaching English language learners to read and write can be incorporated into the requirements;
 - bringing Rhode Island’s urban communities together with the regional education collaboratives to share resources to support cross-district or statewide professional development in early literacy.

Expanded Learning Time

The Urban Education Task Force recommends that Rhode Island launch an expanded learning time (ELT) initiative in the five urban school districts and implement it through a partnership between the Governor’s office, RIDE, and appropriate Rhode Island community-based

organizations, with targeted technical assistance from the National Center on Time and Learning. Specific recommendations are:

- ▶ Implement expanded learning time at demonstration sites selected through a voluntary, competitive proposal process.
- ▶ Ensure that the planning and implementation process is inclusive.
- ▶ Include a series of key design components in the ELT initiative that have been adapted from successful models to the Rhode Island context.
- ▶ Target specific age ranges with appropriate learning opportunities.
- ▶ Implement the ELT initiative at the state level initially by hosting it through a public-private partnership that is governed by a Statewide Expanded Learning Steering Committee, in order to maximize capacity and efficiency and ensure that this initiative is a catalyst for change and not a one-time project. The Task Force recommends that this public-private partnership include the Governor’s office, RIDE’s Office of Middle and High School Reform, and the Rhode Island Afterschool Plus Alliance.
- ▶ Engage the Rhode Island higher-education community in the ELT initiative.
- ▶ Allocate specific roles and responsibilities to the partnering organizations in the public-private management structure according to the functional needs of the ELT initiative.
- ▶ Offer ongoing technical assistance and professional development to both the local participating schools and the Steering Committee to ensure that practice and policy are responsive to best practice.

Multiple Pathways for Student Success

The Urban Education Task Force recommends implementing a number of steps to create multiple pathways to graduation and postsecondary success for young people, such as partnerships with adult education programs, access to AP courses, and courses offered at nontraditional times. Specific recommendations are:

- ▶ Support 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 supports to students identified using the early warning system and track these students to ensure that they get back on track for graduation within a reasonable amount of time.
- ▶ Develop more alternatives to the traditional middle school and junior high school models so that all children have reasonable access to schools that are built around the needs of students who are “exceptions to the rule” and are struggling in their schools.
- ▶ Develop a Multiple Pathways for Student Success Initiative at RIDE, in consultation with the Rhode Island Office of Higher Education and the Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training. The initiative should build on the new BEP elements that address multiple pathways and will be responsible for supporting, coordinating, and monitoring state and district efforts to develop key alternative high school opportunities for Rhode Island’s urban students who are struggling in the traditional high school system. The initiative will also be responsible for developing a research-based “on track to graduation” measure that can be applied to each district and monitored annually.
- ▶ Create a statewide college access working group which would include, at minimum: RIDE, the Rhode Island Office of Higher Education, representatives from school dis-

tricts, educators, public and private higher-education institutions, the Rhode Island School Counselors Association, college access programs, college disability support services programs, community organizations working on college access issues, and students and their families to develop and coordinate a postsecondary access agenda for the state.

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. Specific recommendations are:

- ▶ 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 in the Educator Quality recommendation in the full Task Force report and should involve both the Rhode Island Professional Teaching Standards and evidence of student learning and progress.
- ▶ 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.
- ▶ Pursue national funding opportunities to pilot several currently available models integrating educator evaluation, support, and professional development in Rhode Island’s urban districts.

- ▶ Provide full support for RIDE’s continuing work with school districts, their unions, and other partners to develop the RI 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.
- ▶ 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.
- ▶ Review and revise teacher certification, including the Certificate of Eligibility for Employment (CEE), the Professional Certificate (PC), and the requirements for each.
- ▶ 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.

Comment on the Recommendation

The Rhode Island Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals, in a comment included as a whole in the full task Force report and summarized here, notes that RIFT concurs with these recommendations with the following clarifying points.

- Student assessments are not valid or reliable measures of teacher effectiveness. There is no evidence that monetary incentives as described in value-added models improve teacher performance, and teachers do not want to risk their basic salaries so that some individuals 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 depend on evidence of student learning. Certification and licensure requirements and timelines should be independent of employment decisions by individual employers.
- We do not agree with the recommendation to support the Board of Regents’ and RIDE’s work on the Educator Evaluation System Framework. It is unfeasible and inappropriate to evaluate all educators annually as proposed in this framework; tenured teachers should be on a three-year evaluation cycle unless there is cause to evaluate more frequently.

Innovation for Successful Schools

The Urban Education Task Force recommends that RIDE, the school districts that are the focus of the Task Force, charter school leaders, including the League of Charter Schools, the Mayoral Academies, and charter school directors, work collaboratively to develop the infrastructure and policies that will support innovative practices in our schools. We propose both a Center for Innovation and a Zone of Innovation as starting points for catalyzing and spreading educational innovations. Specific recommendations are:

- ▶ Develop a Center for Innovation led by RIDE, which would help identify, develop, support, and spread innovative educational efforts in Rhode Island’s urban districts and throughout the state.
- ▶ Enact legislation as soon as possible to create a Rhode Island “Zone of Innovation” – which would initially include Central Falls, Newport, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket – that provides a policy environment in which school districts and educational entrepreneurs are encouraged to create new, different schools.

Educator Collaboration

The Urban Education Task Force 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. Specific recommendations are:

- ▶ Create an Urban Education Consortium, serving as a public-private partnership, that would be endorsed by the Governor, the Board of Regents, the General Assembly, and the Commissioner of Education but would be supported by private donors and governed by an independent advisory board.
- ▶ Expand the existing Research Collaborative to support the implementation of the Task Force recommendations.

Acknowledgments

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Several Task Force members served as working group chairs, volunteering additional time and energy to develop the recommendations and action steps. We thank Tom Brady and Sharon Contreras, Providence Public Schools; Sarah Cahill, Rhode Island Afterschool Plus Alliance; Rosanna Castro, formerly of Brown University; John Simmons, Rhode Island Public Expenditure Council; and Ron Wolk, the Big Picture Company. Elaine Budish, RI KIDS COUNT, and Elizabeth Jardine, Rhode Island Department of Education, stepped in to chair the Multiple Pathways working group when their chair made a transition.

Many local leaders participated in working groups and in Task Force meetings, adding considerable expertise and needed perspectives. While they are too numerous to mention here, we have listed them in appendix A1 of the full Task Force report. We are grateful for their support and input. And we thank Rhode Island College and the Rhode Island Philharmonic Orchestra and Music School, who donated space for Task Force meetings.

Our National Advisory Panel was made up of some of the best minds working in education reform today, including Barnett Berry, Center for Teaching Quality; Rick Hess, American Enterprise Institute; Milbrey McLaughlin, Stanford University; Charles Payne, University of Chicago; Jesse Register, Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools; and Paul Reville, Massachusetts Department of Education.

We received research support from the member organizations in the Research Collaborative; particular thanks to Elaine Budish of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, who developed the statistical profiles of each of the Task Force cities, and Rebecca Lee of the Providence Plan, who analyzed data on student mobility. Several other individuals and organizations provided analysis and support. Young Voices developed and analyzed a survey of students in Pawtucket and Central Falls. Students from Brown's Taubman Center and Urban Education Policy Program, including Nick Vockerodt, Steven Glass, James Huang, Stefanie Mach, and Priya Mahajan, attended meetings, gave feedback, and conducted analyses.

Staff of the Annenberg Institute dedicated themselves to the work of the Task Force. Carol Walker provided thorough and efficient administrative support, organizing the many events and meetings. Kathy Hardie managed the chair's schedule. Margaret Balch-Gonzalez and Tracie Potochnik provided valuable staff support to the working groups. Susan Fisher, Margaret-Balch Gonzalez, Mary Arkins, and Hae-won Kim edited, designed, and published the preliminary and final reports. Amy Rittenhouse designed the Web site.

Elliot Krieger, Rhode Island Department of Education; Amy Kempe, Governor's Office; and Al Dahlberg, Brown University, provided valuable communications advice to the Task Force.

Several organizations partnered with the Task Force to develop community and constituent forums. We thank the Rhode Island Young Professionals, an auxiliary of the Urban League of Rhode Island; the Providence Public Schools; NeighborWorks Blackstone River Valley; the Woonsocket After School Coalition, the Woonsocket Education Department, and the Woonsocket Parent Advisory Council; CHisPA and Progreso Latino; the Rhode Island Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals; the Central Falls Teachers' Union, the Pawtucket Teachers' Alliance, the Providence Teachers Union, and the Woonsocket Teachers Guild; and the Newport Public Education Foundation, the Alliance for a Livable Newport, and the Newport Public Schools.

Jonny Skye Njie, Ina Anderson, Erika Read, and Tehani Collazo played an important role in designing and organizing the community forums. Students who were part of the Woodlawn Community Development Corporation's Tune-In Youth Media Group, Scott Lapham, students from RiverzEdge Arts Project in Woonsocket, and Victor Ramos skillfully produced videos and photos documenting three of the forums. And we are deeply grateful to the more than 450 people who attended the community forums, provided feedback, and participated in our deliberations.

The new Commissioner of Education, Deborah Gist, arrived at a point in our process when most of the recommendations had been completed. Still, she took part in our final Task Force meeting, engaged in the material deeply, and provided thoughtful comments. We thank her for her recent participation and for her future leadership in the critical areas we have identified in the report.

Finally, the Task Force wishes to thank Governor Donald L. Carcieri for his vision of developing a statewide solution to the challenges of urban education in Rhode Island. We were honored to be part of the process to develop an agenda for urban education in our beloved state; now we commit ourselves to supporting the implementation of the ideas herein.

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