

Meeting the Challenges to Urban Education in Rhode Island

Preliminary Recommendations to
Governor Donald Carcieri
from the Rhode Island Urban Education Task Force

Addressing Rhode Island's Urban Education Challenge

The Rhode Island Urban Education Task Force is pleased to present the following preliminary recommendations to strengthen and transform the educational opportunities available to students in Rhode Island's urban core communities. These seven recommendations – the culmination of Phase 1 of the Task Force's work – are based on a year of research and deliberation by the thirty-two-member Task Force, informed by consultation with national advisors and community members.

The purpose of releasing preliminary recommendations at this time is to signal to state and community leaders what the Task Force has concluded are critical priorities for transforming urban education in Rhode Island, and to invite them to play an active role in the next phase of this work. During Phase 2 (January to June 2009), the Task Force will test these seven priorities with educator and community constituencies, consult further with national advisors and "best-practice" sites, and develop action strategies for each of the recommendations. It is important to note that, during this phase, the Task Force may modify these preliminary recommendations or add new ones based on further discovery.

At the end of Phase 2, in June 2009, the Task Force will publish its final recommendations.

Background to the Task Force

The Challenge

Rhode Island is a small and densely populated state. Perhaps even more than in other areas of our country, the future of the state is linked to the health of its 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.

As noted in the Rhode Island Public Expenditures Council 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. Only about one of three students from these communities achieved proficiency in the 2005-2006 end-of-year assessment in English Language Arts, compared with over 69 percent in the rest of the state. Also, nearly a third of all students in our urban areas score substantially below proficient on the end-of-year test, compared with only 9 percent of all students in the rest of the state.

Despite making up just under a third of the state's public school population, students in the core districts also make up more than half of the students who have changed schools within one year (often switching to schools in the other urban core districts), and over two-thirds of students qualify for the free lunch program.

As these statistics suggest, children and youths in Rhode Island's urban core districts – and thus the schools in those cities – face substantial challenges. Yet these cities also possess numerous assets that can help children, families, and schools meet these challenges. Universities, city agencies, community organizations, businesses, and museums and other cultural institutions all have substantial resources that can help support student learning and development.

The challenge for Rhode Island, like other states, is to tie these resources together with schools to help ensure that all young people have the educational opportunities they need to be successful in the twenty-first century.

The Charge to the Task Force

To meet this challenge, Governor Donald L. Carcieri formed the Rhode Island Urban Education Task Force and charged it 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, which consists of educators, public officials, and community leaders with a wide range of perspectives and expertise (see Appendix A), was given an eighteen-month time frame (see Appendix B) in which to understand the challenges of urban education in the state and consider innovative solutions.

Specifically, the Task Force is examining:

- effective state support and intervention strategies – “what works” – and ways to use data to improve policy and practice;
- collaboration opportunities among our urban schools and districts, as well as between state agencies and organizations; and
- new relationships and partnerships with community-based organizations, cultural institutions, businesses, and the faith community.

The Task Force was specifically not charged with addressing statewide education funding. Task Force members, however, feel strongly 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. To be sure, the current fiscal crisis in the state and nation will challenge the short-term capacity for making large new investments in education and related supports for children and youth. Nonetheless, the Task Force believes it is essential to put forth a bold and comprehensive vision for the future of urban education in this state, which, when

realized, will create a strong foundation for long-term civic, social, and economic vitality for Rhode Island.

The Work of the Task Force

Phase 1 (January–December 2008)

To consider the issues in its charge, the Task Force met six times between January and November 2008. Members heard from four national advisors: Barnett Berry of the Center for Teaching Quality; Frederick Hess of the American Enterprise Institute; Paul Reveille, Massachusetts Secretary of Education; and Jesse Register, former superintendent of Hamilton County (TN) Schools. The Task Force also reviewed nine policy briefs on topics relevant to the panel’s deliberations.

The Task Force created three subcommittees to examine specific aspects of urban education improvement:

- **Systems Innovation**, which considered ways to introduce new forms of governance and instruction. This subcommittee met four times.
- **Human Capital**, which examined ways to strengthen the quality of teachers and administrators and ensure that school systems had appropriate infrastructures for developing human capital. This subcommittee met three times.
- **Public Engagement**, which looked at ways to inform shareholders about the work of the Task Force, gather input, and develop strategies for sustaining community mobilization in support of the recommendations of the Task Force. This subcommittee met five times and co-hosted a community forum held at Central High School in Providence.

Between June and November 2008, the three subcommittees developed the preliminary recommendations presented in this report. This process included the review of social

science and promising-practice research and consultations with national leaders in the each subcommittee's focus area. The resulting recommendations were presented to the full Task Force in mid-November for discussion (summaries of these discussions are included with each recommendation).

Phase 2 (January–June 2009)

As the focus of the final phase of the work of the Task Force shifts to the specific recommendations, the working-group design is being restructured to align with the seven policy priorities. Task Force members will select the priority area they wish to work on during Phase 2, based on their knowledge, interest, and professional experience. The working groups, which will be supported by research and planning staff, will continue to call on national advisors

and examine promising practices here in Rhode Island and other states.

The Task Force will test its recommendations by holding a series of public forums with key constituencies throughout the state. Plans are under way for a targeted outreach to teachers, working with state and local teacher union leadership (several whom are members of the Task Force). Likewise, the Task Force will hold additional forums to enable community leaders and parents to respond to the preliminary recommendations and propose others.

The Task Force will factor this information into a set of final recommendations, along with action strategies for each, for presentation to the Governor and General Assembly by the end of June 2009.

Recommendations of the Task Force

Introduction

More than in most states, education in Rhode Island is locally controlled. Local districts provide more than half of the funding for schools, while the state provides only 41.1 percent of education funds. (Nationally, states provide 46 percent of school funds and local districts provide 44 percent.) Local districts in the Ocean State also have considerable latitude over curriculum and other educational policies.

The Task Force does not recommend a radical overhaul of school governance that would give the state greater authority over the five large urban districts. However, the Task Force agrees that there are many things the state could do within the current governance framework that would strengthen educational opportunities and outcomes in those districts. These proposals are consistent with the state's current role in education. And they are consistent with other national proposals for state involvement in improving urban education (Education Commission of the States 2003).

The state has an important role to play in five key areas of urban public education improvement in Rhode Island. Each of these areas is addressed by the recommendations outlined in this report.

- **Ensuring resource adequacy.** Although the state provides less than half of the funds for schools, the state funds are critical to ensuring that all districts have the resources necessary to enable all students to learn at high levels and that all schools within districts have the resources necessary to meet the needs of their student populations. Districts also need to play a key role in managing human resources. (Recommendation 6: Statewide Educator Performance Management System)
- **Increasing efficiency.** In addition to making sure that resources are adequate, the state has the ability to help districts and schools use their funds wisely. If the state expands its capacity to collect and use data effectively and encourages collaborations among districts, then districts can determine the most effective and efficient uses of available resources. (Recommendation 7: Developing Cross-system Efficiencies)
- **Spreading innovation.** Many promising practices already exist in Rhode Island, but they remain isolated pockets of innovation. The state is in a unique position to help nurture and share new ideas across Rhode Island and help them spread to benefit more students. (Recommendation 1: Innovation Zone for Successful Schools in Rhode Island)
- **Promoting school readiness.** One of the most promising avenues for improving student performance is ensuring that students come to school and begin their early years ready to learn. The state can work with partners in a variety of sectors to help expand opportunities for early childhood and primary learning. (Recommendation 3: Statewide Pre-kindergarten Education; and Recommendation 4: K-3 Literacy Instruction)
- **Providing alternative pathways for student success.** Students have a wide range of abilities and interests. The state can help ensure that all students can succeed by providing a range of opportunities for students to pursue their interests and pathways for them to demonstrate their knowledge and skills. (Recommendation 2: Expanded Learning Time; and Recommendation 5: Multiple Pathways for At-Risk Youth)

Taken together, these recommendations are aimed at creating a coherent set of policies that

will help support all young people in the state's five large urban districts throughout their school careers, from preschool to college and the workplace. If these recommendations are adopted, all young people in the urban centers will have a high-quality foundation in learning, varied options for innovative educational

approaches, and a range of pathways to success that meet their life aspirations and interests.

At the same time, Rhode Island will have a sound educational infrastructure that will serve the state well and help lead all of its residents toward a stronger future.

1 Innovation Zone for Successful Schools in Rhode Island

We propose that the Governor and the General Assembly enact legislation that will lead to the creation of a zone of innovation. This zone will support the development and dissemination of the effective practices of innovative schools – including regular district schools as well as new and existing charter schools – in Providence, Pawtucket, Woonsocket, Newport, and Central Falls.

FULL TASK FORCE DISCUSSION of the Recommendation

In general, Task Force members described this recommendation as “too amorphous” and agreed that more conversation is necessary before developing an action plan. Task Force members noted that in the current form of the recommendation, members were placing their own interpretations on what “innovation” means. Does it mean simply the sharing of good ideas? Or is “innovation zone” coded language for waivers from labor contracts or other regulations? There were several concerns about equity – that schools not in the zone would have to absorb ineffective teachers if other schools were reconfigured or that resources would be “taken away” from regular public schools in order to develop new schools.

Also, the term *zone* seemed to be a misnomer to some Task Force members, since it implies a geographic configuration of schools. Several small groups noted that the current formulation bypasses the school district, and some Task Force members expressed concern about that. (One suggestion to avert that problem was to create “zones” around district-designated priorities, such as arts and culture, English language learning, early literacy, etc.)

Despite all the concerns, Task Force members found it easy to embrace the idea of spreading innovation, which they endorsed as a critical aspect of the Innovation Zone.

Next steps include visiting some sites such as the Boston Pilot Schools and EdVisions Schools and discussing with their leadership how the schools work together to share their positive practices. The Task Force members also suggested working with the groups developing mayoral academies to discuss possible collaboration. There will also need to be additional discussion at future task force meetings to define this recommendation further.

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We envision that the innovation zone legislation will support the creation of some new charter schools. But the charter school strategy is insufficient to address the needs of the young people in all our city schools. To improve education at scale, not just school by school, the zone will create the infrastructure to develop and share innovative practices among new and existing schools.

WHY it is important and WHAT NEEDS it will meet

Innovations in education aren’t easily shared. Without explicit methods of design, implementation, dissemination, or reproduction, which districts in their present form seldom provide, most innovations and improvements are not likely to spread from one school or district to another. Similarly, charter schools, which are promoted as incubators for innovation, often are instead islands in the stream, with no infrastructure for supporting the development or dissemination of their ideas and practices. The innovation zone would build an infrastructure to support, spread, and sustain improvement across a network of schools – including conventional district schools and new and existing charter schools. The zone might also focus on two or more specific challenges, such as supports for English language learners; adolescent literacy development; or mathematics, science, and technology.

KEY ACTIONS to develop this approach

Short term

Over the next six months, the Task Force will flesh out what the innovation zone could look like. Key questions to address would include:

- How would schools be included in the zone? Would it be voluntary? Would schools with particular characteristics be targeted?
- What role would the development of new schools play in the zone?
- What are the supports that need to be developed to effectively share and spread innovative practices?

- Are there mandates or requirements that will need to be waived for effective participation in the zone?
- What role could be played by higher education, cultural organizations and institutions, community groups, and local and national reform support organizations (e.g., KIPP, TFA, New Leaders)?

Task Force members will go on “best practice” visits to communities that are experimenting with similar efforts. These visits might include the Boston Pilot Schools, the Knowledge Is

Power Program, and the EdVisions schools in Minnesota and Wisconsin.

Discussion with superintendents, school committees, community-based organizations (CBOs), teachers and teacher unions, and state government agencies will also be critical to negotiate an acceptable plan.

Long term

In the long term, finding the necessary funding and building an adequate infrastructure of human and financial capital with the capacity to make the plan work will be major challenges.

2 Expanded Learning Time

We recommend that the Governor and the Legislature collaborate on an “expanded learning time” (ELT) initiative in the four urban school districts that have been under state intervention for at least three years: Providence, Woonsocket, Pawtucket, and Central Falls.

FULL TASK FORCE DISCUSSION of the Recommendation

Task Force members were generally positive about this recommendation. They felt that it was important to recognize and build on structures that already exist in Rhode Island, including the Providence After School Alliance (PASA), Childhood Opportunity Zones (COZ), and 21st Century Learning Centers. As partnerships between schools and community organizations are central to the concept of expanded learning time (ELT), ELT model design must consider how to recognize and integrate existing and emerging organizations that can provide supports in a range of areas. Task Force members felt strongly that, in addition to academic supports, it would be critical to include a focus on the arts, recreation, and social services to address a variety of youth-development needs.

Special consideration must also be given to developing structures and supports for addressing the needs of English language learners and special education students. ELT will have implications for collective bargaining, and Task Force members suggested engaging labor unions in planning efforts. It was suggested that connections be made to the Task Force’s recommendation for a statewide performance management system (Recommendation 6), particularly in relation to teacher professional development. Several groups mentioned concern about the current fiscal climate and noted that consideration must be given to finding sustainable funding sources to implement the initiative.

Primary among the Task Force’s next steps will be to conduct further research, including site visits to other ELT models, such as those in Massachusetts and New York, to discover what has and has not worked in these models and infuse that knowledge into a working model for Rhode Island.

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Toward this end, we urge the Governor to work with the Massachusetts Expanded Learning Time Initiative and the National Center on Time and Learning, as well as other partners with expertise in expanded learning time, to become an official partner in the national program, thus qualifying for financial assistance from foundations and the federal government in operating the expanded learning time program.

We also urge that Rhode Island adopt a model based on the Massachusetts model, which adds 300 more hours (25 percent more time) to the school schedule in the identified pilot schools.

WHY it is important

An expanded learning time initiative is not just extending time, but providing high-quality, engaging, enriching learning opportunities during that time. After-school and summer programs are successfully expanding learning by making good use of expanded time to offer new and different ways of learning that build on youth development principles.

- Support for expanded learning time has grown in recent years as schools across the United States have tested different models and experienced, in many cases, improved student achievement.
- Rather than restricting student learning to the current national average of 6.5 hours per day and 180 days per year, this reform strategy expands the time available to students both to reinforce their basic skills and to help them move beyond proficiency, provide targeted support, and increase the opportunities to participate in electives or explore non-academic subject areas.
- A recent study of high-performing small urban high schools in California, Illinois, and Massachusetts shows that these schools increased total student learning time by an average of 20 percent, mostly by extending the school day.

- A recent study of successful district efforts to create support for turnaround schools shows that each of these districts included ELT in their short-list of initiatives.

WHAT NEEDS it will meet

In the past several decades, expectations for what children must know and be able to do to be successful have changed dramatically. With higher learning standards in place for today's students, the traditional school calendar has proven to be inadequate, particularly for students who are most in need, who face barriers to learning, and who have limited access to enrichment opportunities outside of school. ELT provides students with more time to master skills in core academic subjects and to receive targeted support so they can move beyond proficiency. Expanded learning time also provides increased opportunities for enrichment activities such as art, music, and languages that engage students in school and provide a broader range of learning experiences.

To qualify to participate in the ELT initiative, schools must redesign their schedule and programs to provide a more engaging and productive school day, which includes after-school experiences. The after-school approach builds on the school-day experiences of youth but does not mirror it. In addition to boosting in-school success, after-school programs contribute to the development of work-ready skills such as teamwork, problem solving, critical thinking, oral communication, civic engagement, conflict resolution, healthy decision making, and more.

The after-school approach to learning is necessary to the success of any effort to expand learning opportunities. The proven after-school approach to learning embraces the following practices:

- Academic instruction is designed to meet the needs, abilities, and learning styles of students and provide them with a better chance to succeed.
- Engaging, relevant activities are often project based, community based, or both and are designed to increase student motivation to learn.
- Linkages are made to the school day, but content is delivered in different ways by applying school-day lessons to real-world settings.
- Student choice is built into the program design.
- Partnerships among schools and CBOs are essential because they bring new and diverse learning opportunities.
- Students have opportunities to work both independently and in groups and to play leadership roles.
- Communication between families and school-day staff is ongoing.

OPPORTUNITIES and BARRIERS for implementing this recommendation

Fiscal

The primary barriers for the program are fiscal in nature. Schools participating in the Massachusetts model (see the section "Promising work under way") receive \$1,300 per student in state funds to implement ELT.

The National Center on Time and Learning is looking for partners nationally to implement expanded learning time initiatives, and Rhode Island has been considered as a potential partner site. If Rhode Island qualifies, federal support for the initiative may be available. Private foundations have also expressed interest in supporting ELT in Rhode Island.

PROMISING WORK under way

Massachusetts adopted the ELT initiative in 2006. There are now twenty-six schools in twelve districts participating in the program, serving well over 5,000 students. Schools that are accepted in the program receive state funds in the amount of \$1,300 per child to implement an expanded schedule.

Partnerships between schools and community-based partners are so critical that Massachusetts 2020 recently encouraged joint proposals from ELT schools and external organizations for multi-year, integrated school-community partnerships meant to enrich the experiences of students, teachers, partnering organizations, and families. The funds will be awarded directly to the partner organizations to support their work with ELT schools. The ELT School-Community Grants are for a two-year period, beginning in July 2008, to support in-depth programming and facilitate relationship building between schools and partner organizations.

KEY ACTIONS to develop this approach

Legislation is required to expand the learning time available to our urban students. This legislation should address the following elements:

- Added time for core academic subjects, such as mathematics, science, and English/language arts.
- Expanded learning blocks that give teachers time to teach through hands-on, interactive projects that help students apply their skills to real-life situations.
- More opportunities for teachers to collaborate during the school day so they can plan lessons together, develop a higher-quality curriculum, and use data more effectively to improve learning.
- More opportunities for teachers and after-school program staff to collaborate and participate in joint professional development.
- Allowance for school districts to implement the program in partnership with community partners and parents, so that program scheduling and content incorporates their values and is responsive to their needs.
- Staffing that includes teachers from the participating school and CBO staff and/or staff from an existing school-based after-school program; a full-time site coordinator (an employee of the CBO or existing school-based after-school program); and at least one school employee who devotes a portion of the day to ensuring high educational goals, standards, and alignment. Staff-to-student ratios may vary, but average 1:10 to 1:15.
- Programming that provides children with net gains in enrichment opportunities that enhance their social and emotional abilities, as well as skills building that emphasizes science and social studies; high-quality arts; and service and fitness activities that are not offered during the current school day and that are conducted in a child-centered environment, encouraging student choice, voice, and active, experiential learning.
- At least 50 percent of funds allocated for the ELT program should be used to support CBO services or those services of an existing after-school program based at the participating school. These funds should be used for direct programming for students.
- Participating schools should identify at least one community-based partner or existing after-school program already based at the participating school that has the experience and capacity to serve as a partner in a comprehensive ELT program, including but not limited to the 21st Century Community Learning Center programs, the Providence After School Alliance, and the Child Opportunity Zones administered by the Rhode

Island Department of Education. Such a partner will meet the Rhode Island After-School Program Quality Standards as measured by the Rhode Island Program Quality Assessment tool (RIPQA).

- If there is CBO-operated after-school program in the participating school, those schools should identify and incorporate the provider into the planning process.
- Provision of integrated, engaging enrichment activities such as robotics, forensics, music, ceramics, drama, video production, and athletics – all of which develop children’s cognitive and social skills.
- The creation of programs to develop twenty-first-century skills such as researching, writing, team projects, problem solving, and using technology.
- Permit individual and small-group tutoring, especially for special education students and English language learners.
- The development of pathways for students to earn credit toward graduation through approved ELT activities.

3 Statewide Pre-kindergarten Education

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

FULL TASK FORCE DISCUSSION of the Recommendation

Task Force members supported the idea of a mixed-delivery system for the Rhode Island pre-K system and felt that pre-K was a fundamental recommendation for the group. A couple of small groups noted that there is not yet universal full-day kindergarten in Rhode Island public schools, and that should be considered as a related issue. Some groups questioned both the universal/statewide nature of the recommendation and the voluntary versus mandatory nature of the program.

Issues of service provider capacity and levels of training for staff were also brought up in a few groups, as well as the need for quality control and the assurance of high standards for early care and education offered by providers participating in the system. The questions of political support and the financial impact of starting a state-funded pre-K program in Rhode Island were discussed. A few groups discussed the importance of making sure that the needs of English language learners are addressed in the process. Task Force members were also interested in cross-sector partnerships to support this work, including starting interventions at birth and tying pre-K to public health services and other social services for urban families.

Next steps include building greater support for the work already going on in Rhode Island on this issue and using communications and other avenues to increase political support for this work.

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WHY it is important

Research has consistently shown that three- and four-year-olds who attend a high-quality preschool are more successful in kindergarten and beyond – both academically and socially. Several longitudinal research studies have shown that providing access to high-quality preschool is one of the most cost-effective investments government can make. Momentum is building across the country to improve access to high-quality preschool programs. Many states have launched major pre-kindergarten education initiatives in recent years. Rhode Island is one of only twelve states that has no state-funded pre-kindergarten program.

Participation in preschool education has been steadily increasing during the past decade for young children from middle- and upper-income families. Nationally, 66 percent of four-year-olds and more than 40 percent of three-year-olds were enrolled in a preschool education program in 2005. However, enrollment in pre-K remains highly unequal. Many of the children who might benefit the most from pre-K participation do not attend. Families with modest incomes (under \$60,000) have the least access to preschool education.

The quality of preschool education is critically important. Only high-quality programs produce lasting positive outcomes for children. High-quality pre-K classrooms are staffed by a well-educated and appropriately compensated teacher and teaching assistant with a small group of children (twenty children or fewer). Teachers use a variety of teaching strategies to engage children in carefully designed, play-based learning opportunities to foster development of language, literacy, math, and social skills.

WHAT NEEDS it will meet

The following summary of the benefits of pre-K, from the national organization called Pre-K Now (funded by Pew Charitable Trusts), highlights some of the research findings about the positive impact of high-quality pre-K.

Pre-K benefits children, their families, and their communities. From improved academic outcomes to the economic savings to schools and states, the benefits of high-quality pre-K are irrefutable.

Successful Students

- Pre-K increases high school graduation rates.
 - » Chicago children who attended a pre-K program were 29 percent more likely to graduate from high school than their peers who did not have pre-K. (Source: Chicago Longitudinal Study)
- Pre-K helps children do better on standardized tests.
 - » Michigan fourth-graders who had attended pre-K passed the state's literacy and math assessment tests at higher rates than their peers who had no pre-K. (Source: "State Efforts to Evaluate the Effects of Pre-Kindergarten," Yale University Child Study Center)
- Pre-K reduces grade repetition.
 - » Maryland fifth-graders who attended pre-K were 44 percent less likely to have repeated a grade than their peers who did not attend pre-K. (Source: "State Efforts to Evaluate the Effects of Pre-Kindergarten," Yale University Child Study Center)
- Pre-K reduces the number of children placed in special education.
 - » Among Chicago children, those who attended pre-K were 41 percent less likely to require special education services than their peers who did not attend. (Source: Chicago Longitudinal Study)

Responsible Adults

- Pre-K reduces crime and delinquency.
 - » Chicago children who did not attend pre-K were 70 percent more likely to be arrested for a violent crime by age eighteen than their peers who had been pre-K participants. (Source: Chicago Longitudinal Study)
- Pre-K lowers rates of teen pregnancy.
 - » North Carolina children who attended pre-K were less likely to become teen parents than their peers who did not attend pre-K (26 percent vs. 45 percent). (Source: The Carolina Abecedarian Project)
- Pre-K leads to greater employment and higher wages as adults.
 - » Forty-year-old adults in Michigan who attended pre-K as children were more likely to be employed and had a 33 percent higher average income than their peers who did not have pre-K. (Source: The High/Scope Perry Preschool Project)
- Pre-K contributes to more stable families.
 - » Forty-year-old adults in Michigan who attended pre-K as children were more likely to report that they were getting along very well with their families than their peers who did not attend pre-K (75 percent vs. 64 percent). (Source: The High/Scope Perry Preschool Project)

Stronger Communities

- Every \$1 invested in high-quality pre-K saves taxpayers up to \$7.
 - » Pre-K results in savings by reducing the need for remedial and special education, welfare, and criminal justice services, according to a number of studies. (Sources: "The Economics of Investing in Universal Preschool Education in California," Rand Corporation; The High/Scope Perry Preschool Project)

- Pre-K improves efficiency and productivity in the classroom.
 - » Children who attended pre-K at Head Start centers had more advanced skills in areas such as following directions, problem solving, and joining in activities, all of which allow teachers to spend more time working directly with children and less on classroom management. (Source: “The Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey,” U.S. Department of Health and Human Services)
- Rhode Island’s pre-K program will start with a high-quality, pilot pre-K project and expand over time.
- The ultimate goal is universal pre-K for all three- and four-year-olds; however, the program will start with providing pre-K for children in the highest-need communities first (with high concentrations of low-performing schools).
- Pre-K programs need a consistent and stable funding stream sufficient to meet quality standards. Several states fund pre-K through their state education aid funding formulas.
- Rhode Island’s pre-K program quality standards will meet or exceed National Institute for Early Education Research’s pre-K standards, including a lead teacher with a BA and specialized training in early childhood education and an assistant teacher with a CDA or equivalent.
- Children ages three and four will be enrolled in the pilot.

PROMISING WORK under way in Rhode Island

In 2007 the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and Rhode Island KIDS COUNT formed a Pre-K Exploration Committee that brought early childhood leaders together to review research and best practices for pre-K in other states and to share ideas on how to launch a pre-K program in Rhode Island. In June of 2008, the Rhode Island General Assembly passed the Rhode Island Pre-Kindergarten Act which directs RIDE to engage in a planning process for a Rhode Island Pre-K Program, including a pilot pre-K program and plans for scaling up the program after the pilot stage is completed. During the fall of 2008 the Commissioner appointed a Pre-K Planning Committee to do additional work to design the components of the pre-K program in keeping with the required elements set forth in the law.

The core premises for the pre-K program, based on RIDE’s recommendations and the Pre-Kindergarten Act, are as follows:

- Voluntary enrollment. Children will not be required to attend pre-K.
- Pre-K will be offered in a variety of settings, including child care, Head Start, public schools (this is referred to as a *mixed-delivery-system model*).

KEY ACTIONS to develop this approach

Short-term

The Planning Committee will complete its work by the end of November. At that time it will send its more detailed recommendations on program design for the pilot pre-K program to the Commissioner for consideration by the Rhode Island Department of Education. The target date for the launch of the pilot program is fall of 2009.

4 K–3 Literacy Instruction

The Task Force recommends implementing a comprehensive system of supports for K–3 literacy, including embedded professional development for teachers and a reading safety-net program for students.

WHY it is important

Historically, educators have swung between a mostly phonics model of reading instruction and a just-let-the-kids-read, whole-language model. From these pendulum swings, we have learned that the *extreme approaches to teaching reading don't work*. One approach is very structured but does not address reading comprehension and the other is very loose and does not provide students with real reading strategies. Hence, neither approach has made a dent in increasing the number of urban students reaching proficiency in reading, as reflected in NECAP scores and other urban standardized-test scores nationally. What is lacking in both extreme approaches is any meaningful attempt to teach reading comprehension, which over time is the determinant in a student's reading proficiency. Programs like Direct Instruction can actually serve to prevent reading comprehension by focusing solely on decoding and phonics skills for so long that students do not learn to engage text at the comprehension level.

In addition, for students from low socio-economic backgrounds, a lack of vocabulary is a huge barrier to reading proficiency and one that has to be considered in crafting a reading program in urban schools. One of the most persistent findings in reading research is that the extent of students' vocabulary knowledge relates strongly to their reading comprehension and overall academic success (see Baumann, Kame'enui, & Ash, 2003; Becker, 1977; Davis, 1942; Whipple, 1925).

According to the Hart-Risley Study, “the average child in a professional family is provided with 215,000 words of language experience, the average child in a working-class family provided with 125,000 words, and the average child in a family receiving public assistance with 62,000 words of language experience. In four years of such experience, an average child in a professional family would have accumulated experience with almost 45 million words, an average child in a working-class family

FULL TASK FORCE DISCUSSION of the Recommendation

After agreeing that early literacy is fundamental to student achievement and success, Task Force members discussed four main aspects of this recommendation in more detail. First, there were questions about the level of specificity of the recommendation and whether it was too prescriptive. This was related to the need for the recommendation to be applicable and relevant to all district contexts and needs.

Second, a number of groups discussed the connection of early literacy to other parts of the education system, particularly the need to embed early literacy education in a K–12 context and continue literacy interventions past third grade. Some groups also cited the need to tie early literacy efforts to family education programs, numeracy education, and arts education.

Third, the need to address literacy barriers faced by students who are English language learners was brought up in multiple small groups. Finally, the issue of parent engagement, district supports, and community partnerships was also mentioned as important to the success of literacy improvement of any kind.

In addition to addressing these four issues, next steps include bringing in literacy experts from all affected districts to further develop this recommendation, perhaps by convening a meeting of district reading specialists. Task Force members also requested that national experts on literacy be brought in to advise the group on this issue.

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would have accumulated experience with 26 million words, and an average child in a welfare family would have accumulated experience with 13 million words. By age four, the average child in a welfare family might have 13 million fewer words of cumulative experience than the average child in a working-class family.”

(Betty Hart is professor of Human Development at the University of Kansas and senior scientist at the Schiefelbusch Institute for Life Span Studies. Todd R. Risley is professor in the Department of Psychology at the University of Alaska–Anchorage and director of Alaska’s Autism Intensive Early Intervention Project. The two have collaborated on research projects for more than thirty-five years. This article is excerpted with permission from *Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experiences of Young American Children*, copyright 1995, Brookes.)

WHAT NEEDS it will meet

Teachers in Rhode Island urban schools want their students to be successful readers. They are seeking a model for reading instruction and reading intervention and support that is not a boutique one-on-one model that cannot be funded over time or a pre-packaged, off-the-shelf program that does not meet the needs of their individual students.

Urban students and teachers need a systemic team approach to ensure that all students receive well-crafted reading instruction with a balance of whole-language and phonics instruction, with rapid and responsive supports for students who are falling behind in spite of this well-crafted and well-delivered instruction.

PROMISING WORK under way in Rhode Island

The recommendations that follow have begun to show results, not only at the Learning Community Charter School in Central Falls, but also as part of a strategic partnership between the Learning Community and the Central Falls School District, where two elementary schools, with the support of LC team members, are implementing the recommended reading reforms with success.

KEY ACTIONS to develop this approach

Long-term

- Embedded professional development for urban teachers in the following five areas:
 - » Explicit reading strategy instruction – the teacher explicitly demonstrates a new strategy or teaching point in front of the whole class of students. This includes a “think-aloud” where the teacher shares a typically silent thought process out loud.
 - » Daily time for students to read with clear expectations of practicing the new reading strategy, individually and/or in small groups with teacher conferring and monitoring.
 - » Explicit, daily (no more than twenty minutes) phonics instruction.
 - » Trimester or quarterly assessments that inform at least three-day-per-week small-group reading instruction. All students are in dynamic reading groups, which change based on assessment data.
 - » Vocabulary instruction early and often: vocabulary taught in multiple contexts, oral literacy development, repetition of vocabulary, explicit vocabulary instruction. (*Bringing Words to Life: Robust Vocabulary Instruction* by Isabel L. Beck)
- Establish reading safety-net system at each urban elementary school.

Even with this balanced model of reading instruction and robust vocabulary instruction, we recommend the creation a *reading*

safety-net system at each urban school. Especially in urban schools where English is frequently a second language or there are very low literacy levels at home, students may struggle with reading strategies over the course of the year. When a student dips below benchmark level in reading, as measured by a developmental reading assessment and a battery of grade-level-appropriate assessments, students are picked up by the reading safety-net system. They are pulled during their classroom's literacy block (after the explicit strategy instruction has taken place) for

small-group, targeted reading-specialist support with other students from the class or grade level who are at the same level. Students should not be released from the reading safety net until they have met benchmarks for two quarters in a row.

Reading safety-net services are far more cost-effective than one-on-one reading recovery models and can be successfully provided by an early literacy assistant under the supervision of a trained reading specialist.

5 Multiple Pathways for At-Risk Youth

The Task Force recommends implementing a number of steps (see Key actions to develop this approach in this section) to create multiple pathways to graduation and post-secondary success for young people.

FULL TASK FORCE DISCUSSION of the Recommendation

In general, Task Force members were enthusiastic about the recommendation for multiple pathways. It was suggested that the Task Force look at what is in place and working in Rhode Island to build upon what already exists, noting models such as a pilot linking education and career awareness in Cranston, the Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program, and the Davies Career and Technical School. Members noted that Rhode Island needs to move from piecemeal strategies that are currently operating throughout the state to multiple pathways that are systemic and statewide, with criteria to define both who is “at-risk” and what are appropriate levels of intervention.

Members agreed that an emphasis should be placed on high-quality strategies with ongoing assessment. Some questioned whether the term “at-risk” should be used, or if the spirit of the recommendation entails thinking about education differently for all urban students. Many Task Force members emphasized connectivity with career awareness and suggested thinking about how to engage the business community. Members also felt that strategies for early years – from Pre-K to elementary – should be included, and that multiple pathways should utilize resources that exist outside of schools, such as the creative community and social services. The potential role of technology was emphasized. Task Force members also noted that the recommendation must address more specifically the needs of English language learners and special education students.

Next steps will include prioritizing the components of this recommendation and designating long- and short-term goals. Some suggested areas for initial focus include stronger pathways for high-achieving students; early warning systems to identify students at risk of dropping out; and best-practice school interventions in middle school to help students who are behind catch up.

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Youth in Rhode Island’s urban core are struggling; high school graduation rates hover between 45 percent and 60 percent in the cities of Central Falls, Providence, Pawtucket, and Woonsocket. Creating multiple pathways has been proposed as a solution to help these young people persist in school, graduate, and transition to post-secondary enrollment, training, and/or employment. What emerges are three central compelling problems:

- How do we identify the students at greatest risk for dropping out?
- How do we raise performance for these students?
- How do we increase attachment so they stay long enough to persist toward a credential?

These issues do not emerge newly formed in ninth grade. Nor are they limited to youth who are having difficulty in school. Students’ need for engaging curriculum, involvement with at least one concerned adult, and a path to opportunity begins in middle school. Both struggling students and those who need greater academic challenges or a clear career path need to be engaged early on.

WHY it is important

An introduction to multiple pathways

A proficiency-based education system focuses on knowledge and skill development for high school graduation proficiency, college readiness, and employment and career success.

Motivation, time, and learning supports are critical determinants of whether and when youth will achieve these outcomes. Multiple pathways is a term that refers to the different ways that motivation and interest, time and supports are used to get all students to or as close as possible to achieving one or more of these outcomes as quickly as possible. Multiple pathways as envisioned in this recommendation fall into the following categories:

- pathways for those who are ready to progress quickly (e.g., through dual enrollment or advanced placement);

- pathways that allow for more time and additional supports for students who are at greatest risk;
- pathways that utilize different education, training, and work-experience learning arrangements in schools, at workplaces, in the community, and through technology from those currently available.

Pathways allow for individualized programs of study embedded in students' individual learning plans. This level of individualization implies different timelines and different levels of support thought to be necessary to get to one or more of the proficiencies our public education system seeks. Ideally, an individual graduation plan commences in the sixth grade so that levels of support and individualized pathways can be designed while the student is in middle school.

Identifying students at greatest risk of dropping out

It is possible to identify the risk factors that are most predictive of dropping out of high school. Schools can decrease dropout rates by having systems in place to comprehensively identify a majority of those at risk for dropping out and then implementing multiple strategies to support each student on his or her path to graduation. This includes preventative interventions for at-risk populations as well as recovery programs for populations that are off-track for graduation.

Using a reliable prediction system for evaluating student dropout risk allows schools, administrators, and teachers to focus on prevention rather than recovery. Cities across the country, including Boston, Chicago, Philadelphia, and New York City, are beginning to use data on academic performance (test scores and grades), grade retention, age, attendance, and discipline indicators to create these early warning and intervention systems. These systems are made accessible to teachers and administrators in

ways that allow them to assess what the contributing factors are and what interventions would be most appropriate for individual students.

WHAT NEEDS it will meet

The following is a list of potential pathways, each of which responds to a particular need or profile of a young individual.

Flexibility

Some youth are forced to leave school when they must take on employment (or more hours) to help with family finances or to support themselves, have a child, or help out at home with childcare.

For these individuals, the best response would be increased flexibility of services. They can no longer participate in a full school day. If they were offered a variety of learning opportunities, whether during extended hours or through technology, they could complete the requirements for graduation while not adhering to a traditional schedule.

Engagement

Some youth leave school (often as early as middle school) when they do not feel personally engaged by the school community, when they have not forged a connection with one significant adult, or when they do not feel inspired by the curriculum at hand. This group of students can include high-achieving students who are disengaged because they are bored in school and those who disengage because they struggle academically or for other reasons. For these students, there is little need for additional pathways, just a need to provide more enriched curriculum, challenging coursework, connections to the real world, academic supports, and meaningful connections to adults in the school.

Career pathways

Young adults, particularly in distressed urban communities, are keenly aware of and concerned about employment and their future. Without exposure to a variety of career opportunities through training and industry, they cannot see themselves in these roles. The career and technical offerings of high schools need to be expanded and tied to high-growth industries, particularly to the sectors identified by the Governor's Workforce Board. Schools should work with these industry partners to ensure that vital, genuine opportunities exist for their kids to see and train for emerging jobs. Following a dual-enrollment model, these students could achieve a high school diploma while simultaneously earning a certificate in a high-growth area. Upon graduation, or one year after, these individuals can be employed in advanced manufacturing or as an LPN or move into the emerging green-jobs arena. Redesigning state education funding to allow for career and technical placements across the state in the student's field of interest is vital.

Supports

Certain youth will require additional academic support to remain in school and progress toward graduation requirements. English language learners and those students performing below grade level in literacy or numeracy would fall into this category. These students need additional supports provided through expanded learning time, more tutoring opportunities, or some other method. Another approach that works for middle school students at risk for dropping out is accelerated learning, whereby students who have repeated one or more grades have the opportunity to complete more than one grade in a given school year. An example of this approach in Rhode Island is the Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program, a

public school that enrolls seventh-, eighth-, and ninth-grade students from Providence, Cranston, and Central Falls and provides promotion in grade to make up for grades students have repeated so they can go on to high school with their peers with the academic and social skills that will enable them to be successful.

At-risk and older youth

Some students have repeated grades or moved and their progress has been delayed. In this case, community partnerships may be good resources. If the individual feels too old to participate in a traditional K–12 model, he or she can access adult education services at a local center. Ideally, the LEA and the center coordinate services and create plans to link academic and other services so that the student can access as wide a range of resources and supports as necessary.

Promising work under way in Rhode Island

Potential resources/strategies might include the Vermont model – the High School Completion Program. In 2007, 260 at-risk youths were served for approximately \$1.2 million. These students were able to access a menu of services provided both by their districts and local adult education agencies, which received agreed-upon reimbursements for each service. Each student has an “individual graduation plan” which can include a GED, courses toward completion of high school credits, a work/internship plan, social services, and so on. Providers are certified through the Adult Education System. The approximate cost per enrollee was \$4,600. Half of the enrolled students received either a GED or a high school diploma.

Presently, the Rhode Island Legislature has approved a “fast track to college” program for nineteen-year-olds which, if supported, could provide for a similar model to be initiated in Rhode Island. What would be promising would be to extend this capability to students sixteen and over.

KEY ACTIONS to develop this approach

The following are specific recommendations that emerged.

1. Establish a partnership with one or more adult education program and youth center to open up at least one adult high school in the state, likely in the urban core, operating at non-traditional hours including evening and weekend schedules.
2. Provide access to staff-assisted and faculty supervised technology – enabled learning opportunities including courses sufficiently aligned with graduate schools of education and state-approved practice and instructional online learning opportunities.
3. Offer required courses at non-traditional times to allow youth who have to or choose to work to attend classes taught by highly qualified teachers.
4. Implement opportunities for taking approved courses online while securing opportunities for youth to access highly qualified teachers in person, via the phone, or through electronic mail.
5. Expand academic in-school supports during and after the regular school day for English language learners.
6. Increase the capacity of UCAP to serve middle school students at risk of dropping out through accelerated learning. This program currently serves students from three school districts (Providence, Central Falls, and Cranston) and could be used to serve students in the other urban districts. Superintendents from the participating districts make up the UCAP board. This model emphasizes collaboration among urban districts, a challenging curriculum, and a supportive school community.
7. Establish or expand, in comprehensive high schools, career and technical programs of study tied to career pathways in critical industry clusters, particularly those tied to the state's eight critical and emerging sectors.
8. Increase access to Advanced Placement courses for high-performing students who may be disengaged from school. Ensure that these students have what they need in terms of course offerings to competitively apply to selective colleges and universities. Build on successful college access programs serving urban youth in Rhode Island to ensure that students have the supports they need to get to college. Also consider bringing the College Summit program that now operates in seventeen states to Rhode Island to further this agenda.
9. Establish partnerships between school districts and state-approved adult education programs to allow older limited English proficient youths to complete their individual learning plans at the adult learning center, using their pupil expenditure to support services they need until they are twenty-four or meet the proficiency-based graduation requirements, whichever comes first.
10. Implement or expand dual-enrollment models between schools and post-secondary education institutions, between schools and transition-to-college and certificate training programs offered by post-secondary institutions, or approved training providers in workforce development. Currently, Rhode Island has a dual-enrollment policy which allows youth to co-enroll in college courses while completing their high school credential. In 2004-2005, 4,000 Rhode Island high school juniors and seniors took advantage of this policy to gain college credit while enrolled in high school. This policy could be expanded so that students could co-enroll in training or non-credit opportunities that would allow them to work immediately following graduation, or one year hence.

11. Implement an individualized graduation plan for at-risk youth in and out of school. This plan, to be established by a district/school representative, the student, his/her parent(s) or guardian(s), and a representative of a state-approved adult education program or youth center, will allow the student to choose from a menu of school- and community-based education, training, work experience, and support services opportunities. Approved activities will be reimbursed by the district, following a fee-for-service schedule determined by the state. Upon achievement of outcomes, providers will receive an additional outcome reimbursement.
12. Use the unique student identifier system to flag students at risk of dropping out at key points in the educational pipeline, with a focus on sixth grade, eighth grade, ninth grade, and eleventh grade. Create systems, opportunities, supports, and resources tailored to the specific needs of these students to get them “back on track” for graduation.
13. Expand opportunities for out-of-school, high-risk youth from families facing severe economic hardship to access education and training programs leading to a GED and certificate in a residential setting such as Job Corps.
14. Implement a program in each district that combines work and learning, allowing students to develop work experience, receive wages, apply skills learned in school, and learn new skills on the job tied to occupations in the skilled trades.
15. Ensure that Rhode Island has full and complete data-sharing capacity at the state and local level across RIDE and DLT so that progress through PK–16 and the workforce can be tracked and analyzed.

6 Statewide Educator Performance Management System

The Task Force recommends putting in place an educator performance management system, outlined in this section, to build human capital in Rhode Island's urban districts.

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 (OECD 2001). When we apply this idea to K–12 education, we realize that our “business objective,” or bottom line, is student achievement. In public education, human capital refers to the knowledge and skill sets of our educators that directly result in increased levels of learning for students. In short, we are talking about what teachers and principals know and are able to do – their talent level.

Given this definition, human capital management refers to how an organization tries to acquire, increase, and sustain that talent level 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 and preparation; recruitment and selection; hiring and induction; deployment and redeployment; training and support; evaluation, career advancement, compensation, and the termination of ineffective educators. (See Figure 1 on next page for a depiction of this human capital continuum.) A human capital approach to a problem like recruiting, developing, and retaining high-quality educators in urban schools involves districts coordinating efforts around each component of the continuum for maximum effect.

Given all of this, the Task Force is charged with recommending state-level initiatives and policies that support Rhode Island's urban districts' efforts to develop these sorts of

FULL TASK FORCE DISCUSSION of the Recommendation

Task Force members agreed that success for this recommendation depends largely on effective collaboration with state and local labor unions. Unions have a vested interest in building the teaching profession and ensuring that their members receive the support they need to be successful, and districts need a reliable tool to identify and manage both their highest-performing and chronically under-performing teachers. Achieving all of these objectives requires a comprehensive performance management system. But for the system to be effective, it must be developed and implemented in collaboration with unions and must deal directly with tough issues like awarding tenure, pay, and the financial costs of meaningful support, which will demand a careful balance of competing interests.

All major stakeholders must play important, discrete roles. It must be clear what these roles are and where accountability and authority will lie for each component of the recommendation. The roles must be informed by open dialogue between all constituents early and often while developing the final recommendation and must be designed to ensure alignment among the system's components and between the system and other important entities like the TCAP.

While this recommendation deals primarily with evaluation, support, rewards, and accountability for adults, Task Force members stressed that the end goal is better education for students. Feedback suggested that the Task Force make this connection explicit from the outset and refer back to it often during the development of the system.

Task Force members emphatically stressed the need to involve educators in the development of the performance management system. While close consultation with RIDE, the Regents, and external experts was applauded, Task Force members maintained that only educators themselves could provide the guidance needed to make such a system comprehensive and effective.

Other feedback touched on consulting best practices in other states and districts and realistically considering questions of culture and how such a system would gain traction.

Next steps include rethinking the working group charged with developing this recommendation, scheduling a development timetable for the next six months, and identifying locations for best-practice site visits and outside experts who could inform the development of the recommendation. Additional discussion will be needed at future task force meetings to develop this recommendation further.

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comprehensive and coordinated approaches to maximizing the talent levels of their educators. As a state task force working from this higher level and within the time constraints of the Task Force’s life, we are focusing on a limited number of key leverage points along the continuum. In addition, we have identified a number of other related issues for exploration over the coming months, including certification, compensation and incentives, Rhode Island’s teacher preparation programs, and the factors governing teacher placement. We hope that state-level action in these few areas will assist individual districts in their efforts to create individualized, comprehensive human capital strategies that take advantage of specific district strengths and acknowledge specific district weaknesses.

The Task Force recommends the research, development, and eventual implementation of a statewide educator performance management system (SEPMS) as a key lever for positively impacting human capital in Rhode Island’s urban districts. This term refers to a collection of human capital management components including:

- state-level content standards for excellent teaching and leadership;
- required annual evaluations for all educators that prioritize professional growth and improvement;
- district-specific performance standards based on state-level content standards that create clear expectations for educators and reflect a multifaceted definition of performance;
- model evaluation tools and guides;
- peer assistance and review (PAR);
- embedded professional development linked to content standards and individual educators’ evaluation results;
- ongoing training and support;
- actual accountability with real, positive incentives for high performers, meaningful growth and support options for all educators, and clear steps for dealing with chronically ineffective educators;
- a career ladder for teachers with hybrid roles that provides opportunities for leadership that are not necessarily administrator roles;
- a greater focus on support during the first three years of teaching, the award of tenure, and certification;
- incentives and alternate compensation structures to reward excellent urban educators.

In its final form, it is critical that this recommendation give specific ideas about how all of the components mentioned are aligned – not only with each other, but also with other elements on the human capital management continuum not dealt with here, student learning content standards, and possibly even a minimum statewide curriculum. The next six months will require further research on each of these components and different ways to coordinate them so that the final recommendation is clear about the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders, including the Rhode Island Department of Education, state and local government, district leadership, principal and teacher unions, and educators in the schools themselves.

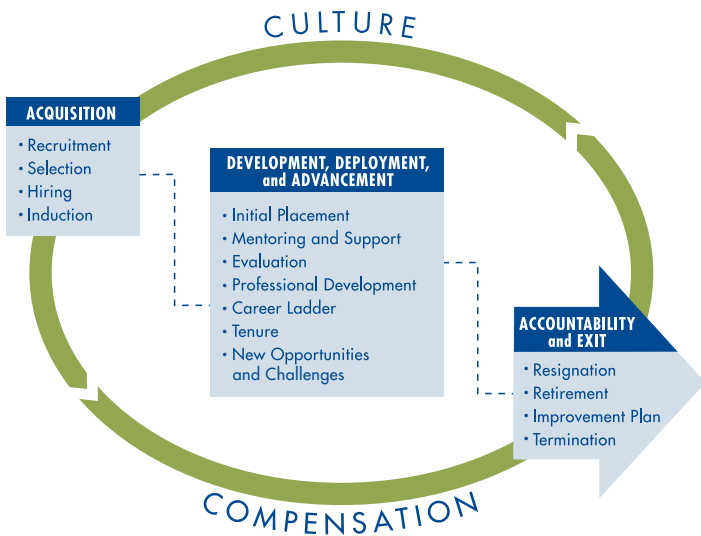


FIGURE 1.
Human capital continuum

WHY it is important

Research¹ in both the fields of private-sector management and education tell 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 perform well;
- compensation and incentives that are somehow linked to how individuals perform and distinguish themselves.

Building a better profession for our educators in Rhode Island, and specifically in its urban districts, is the most important thing we can do to improve the level of education available to students in our schools. Currently, no consistent system or cycle of evaluation – arguably a cornerstone of any profession – is in place in Rhode Island’s urban districts. In these districts, we have rates of educator turnover that are much, much lower than these rates in other urban districts nationally. Given this relative stability of the educator workforce in Rhode Island at this time, it is critical that we prioritize how we assess, support, and grow the talent level of this workforce over recruitment, teacher preparation, etc.

WHAT NEEDS it will meet

- It will help improve the quality of teaching in districts through development of staff.
 - » It will tie embedded professional development to standards and actual evaluation results.
 - » It will provide structured opportunities for growth and advancement.
 - » It will support struggling educators and reward those that excel.
- It will require accountability measures that will positively impact students.

» Teaching and leadership standards will address student performance.

» It will provide clear steps for managing chronically ineffective educators.

- It will delineate the roles of the state, districts, boards of education, central offices, unions, and schools.

OPPORTUNITIES and BARRIERS for implementing this recommendation

State policy and regulatory issues

Over the past five years, RIDE has worked to convert the Rhode Island Beginning Teaching Standards into the Rhode Island Professional Teaching Standards (RIPTS) using national research and widely recognized frameworks of what effective instruction looks like. These content standards were designed to serve as the statewide cornerstone for performance standards and evaluations and they were approved by the Rhode Island Board of Regents in 2007. Some districts in Rhode Island have already begun piloting evaluation instruments and performance standards aligned to RIPTS. In addition to these efforts, RIDE has been working to complete the Rhode Island Professional Leadership Standards (RIPLS) to serve the same purpose for principals and school administrators.

While the development and adoption of these standards at a state level are important first steps, there are a number of other policy and regulatory issues to consider. As the research and development of a performance management system progresses, the Task Force will

¹ Barrier, M. (September, 1996.) "Improving Worker Performance," *Nation's Business*; Danielson, C. (1996). *Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD; Hawley, W. D. (1985). "Designing and Implementing Performance-Based Career Ladder Plans," *Educational Leadership* 43, no. 3: 57–61; Odden, A. (2000). "New and Better Forms of Teacher Compensation are Possible," *Phi Delta Kappan* 81, no. 5: 361–366; Elmore, R. F. & Burney, D. (1997). *Investing in Teacher Learning: Staff Development and Instructional Improvement in Community School District #2, New York City*. New York: NCTAF; Teacher Advancement Program Foundation Web site, <www.talentedteachers.org>.

need to consider whether the state has any role in activities like: mediating between districts and unions around evaluation and professional development; providing guidance and possible approval for local district performance standards and evaluation processes; creating and supporting new career opportunities for educators.

Governance issues

More than any specific governance issue associated with this recommendation is the need to be very clear about the roles and responsibilities of the different state and local entities in its final iteration. Balancing the desire for consistent, statewide standards of quality with individual municipal and district autonomy will not be easy. Moreover, agreeing on appropriate roles for a district's central office, its unions, and its school staff is equally important and complicated. At this juncture, the Task Force recommends a careful study of these issues in places where statewide content standards are already in use and a thorough effort to gain input and investment from all stakeholders in Rhode Island.

Fiscal issues

While some aspects of a statewide performance management system mentioned above should have relatively low, or even no, costs associated with them, others certainly will. When considering important steps like the creation of hybrid teacher leadership roles, offering new incentives and compensation structures based on performance, instituting peer assistance and review, or new types of ongoing training and support, we must be clear about financial implications. This means laying out the relationship between any state-level directives, any attendant costs associated with those directives, and how state and local funds are combined to meet those costs. Again, the Task Force recommends a thorough exploration of how these issues are handled in other states, a sincere attempt to estimate costs associated with spe-

cific recommendations and a strategic plan for implementing the overall performance management system over time that is sensitive to the current national economic realities.

PROMISING WORK under way in Rhode Island

Please see "State policy and regulatory issues" on p. 23.

KEY ACTIONS to develop this approach

Short term

In the short term, this recommendation requires a concerted effort to research similar systems in other states. In addition, it will require a close consideration of the individual components of the system and a review of the best practices around each nationally. Over the next four to five months, the Task Force recommends that a small work group representing district leaders, unions, principals, teachers, RIDE, and Rhode Island leadership conduct best practice visits, informational interviews, and issue studies to develop a system based on best practices and research of effective models. Once compiled, this system should be vetted by a wider group of Task Force members and community representation and revised to accommodate the realities of public education in Rhode Island.

Long term

In the long term, the Task Force will need to pass this work on to the Board of Regents, RIDE, and the urban districts. In doing so, it should try to develop a plan for implementing the proposed system over time. This plan should not only include 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. It is possible that the Task Force would identify a role for itself that involves advocating for such actions at the appropriate future dates.

7 Developing Cross-system Efficiencies

The Task Force recommends that the Governor and Legislature support collaboration among districts and district stakeholders to produce efficiencies and share capacity. These efforts would free up resources and capacity in the individual districts to focus on their unique needs. While we envision these relationships could take many forms – for example, collaboratives around curriculum development or partnerships to handle basic central office operations such as benefits administration – in this preliminary document we focus on a Research Consortium, which is developing as an outgrowth of the Task Force. In the future, we will discuss more directly how districts could band together in other ways to produce other efficiencies.

WHY it is important

Numerous studies show that high-performing schools and school districts use data and information wisely. This requires not only access to basic data about student characteristics and performance that are collected as part of state and federal mandates, but also the capacity to examine that data in detail, collect and analyze other information related to program implementation and effectiveness, and apply it to improve student and school outcomes.

WHAT NEEDS it will meet

Research entities in Chicago, New York, and Boston have contributed to the overall civic capacity in their communities by helping inform citywide reform strategies in their local communities. To cite one example, the Consortium on Chicago School Research has for nearly two decades been a major source of independent educational research and evaluation in that city.

Local circumstances in Rhode Island attest to the need for a research collaborative.

- The relatively small size of our local education agencies limit the resources any single district can devote to research and evaluation.
- What capacity exists is consumed by the administration of accountability obligations, which continue to increase.
- In Task Force meetings, district leaders have confirmed that a research consortium would be a valued addition both for the capacity issues noted above and for the importance of having a “third party” conduct some studies.

FULL TASK FORCE DISCUSSION of the Recommendation

Task Force members strongly supported the direction of this recommendation but had many questions about its implementation. Task Force members emphasized the need for the research conducted by the proposed Research Consortium to be relevant to the work of schools and school districts. They recommended discussions with district and city leaders, teachers, and principals before proceeding with any specific research and suggested that these same stakeholder groups be represented on a standing advisory council that would advise the Research Consortium. They were uncertain that the PK-16 Council would be the appropriate governance vehicle.

Regarding the larger questions about building efficiencies, Task Force members identified potential areas for savings, including healthcare, purchasing, curriculum development, special education, English language learning, payroll benefits, and extended learning opportunities. They also referred to existing local consolidation experiments – including those in Aquidneck Island and Maine, as well as the curriculum development work in Providence – from which the Task Force might derive lessons. A key issue was how to bring these functions together without diminishing community control over education.

The recommended next steps are to conduct the best-practice visits relevant to the Research Consortium and to examine the regionalization models that exist.

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The Research Consortium could expand on the types of data reporting provided to school districts and the broader community. For example, there is currently no reliable mechanism for reporting to Rhode Island high schools on how their recent graduates are performing in colleges or universities. In partnership with RIDE, the Consortium could offer the technical wherewithal to inform the design of such a system. Part of the role of a Research Consortium could also include working directly with districts to cultivate new capacity in new techniques and best practices for providing data as a tool for teachers and school leaders. Finally, the Consortium could be the training ground for the next generation of education policy analysts who are currently graduate students in our member institutions.

OPPORTUNITIES and BARRIERS for implementing this recommendation

- A statewide mechanism already exists that could serve as a coordinating body for requests to a research collaborative: the Governor's PK-16 Council, which includes the heads of the state's child- and family-serving agencies and business and civic leaders.
- Confidentiality requirements limit data sharing. Data-sharing agreements among the researchers involved, as well as between school districts and the consortium, and ideally with other agencies that serve children, youth, and families will need to be developed that respect confidentiality of individuals but allow for fine-grained data analysis. To make these agreements work smoothly, legislation might be necessary.

PROMISING WORK under way in Rhode Island

Currently, representatives of several local organizations have been participating in the UETF Research Consortium, including: Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, the Annenberg Institute for School Reform and the Education Department at Brown University, the Providence Plan, and the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

The role of the Research Consortium has been to fulfill specific requests from the Task Force for data analysis, documentation, and research summaries. These efforts have centered on the following types of research activities:

- secondary data analysis of student, school, and community indicators for the urban districts;
- production of promising-strategy briefs in key areas of reform;
- documentation of all meetings and community forums and synopses of expert testimony and community input;
- preparation of preliminary reports.

KEY ACTIONS to develop this approach

Short term

The Annenberg Institute has already submitted a proposal to the Rhode Island Foundation to support the work of the Research Consortium for the remainder of the life of the Task Force. Additionally, the Nellie Mae Education Foundation grant to the Task Force includes \$20,000 of support for Task Force activities.

Over the next six to eight months, the Research Consortium will assist in the preparation of the major reports of subcommittees and the full Task Force; these will include both the preliminary report to the Governor and General Assembly in December and final products in mid-2009.

Other products between November 2008 and June 2009 will include the following new installments of the Resource Guide:

- additional promising strategy briefs (as requested by subcommittees);
- documentation of additional community forums and guidance from National Advisors;
- documentation of promising-practice visits or consultations.

Long term

As this work continues over the remaining phases of the Task Force, other local organizations will be recruited to significantly broaden the capacity and expertise of the group. Various social policy and research institutes at URI, RIC, Providence College, Roger Williams, Brown, RISD, and the Northeast and Islands Regional Lab (based at Education Development Center) have expressed interest in becoming part of this effort moving forward.

Ideally, the Research Consortium will be a lasting legacy of the Task Force. With dedicated funding and a governance mechanism, the Research Consortium could expand on the types of data reporting provided to school districts and the broader community. For example, there is currently no reliable mechanism for reporting to Rhode Island high schools on how their recent graduates are performing in colleges or universities. In partnership with RIDE, the Consortium could offer the technical wherewithal to inform the design of such a system. Part of the role of a Research Consortium could also include working directly with districts to cultivate new capacity in new techniques and best practices for providing data as a tool for teachers and school leaders. Finally, the Consortium could be the training ground for the next generation of education policy analysts who are currently graduate students in our member institutions.

Plan for Public Engagement

The Public Engagement Subcommittee looked at ways to inform shareholders about the work of the Task Force, gather input, and develop strategies for sustaining community mobilization in support of the recommendations of the Task Force. The goals of the public engagement work are to:

- Inform the public about the mission and emerging ideas of the Task Force.
- Gather feedback from shareholders across sectors.
- Mobilize the community to support the recommendations.

Activity	Date
Created e-mail bank of stakeholders across five core urban communities	Ongoing
Conducted meta-analysis of past engagement efforts	September
Launched public Web site	October
Held a community forum	October
Hosted a meeting of community leaders	November
Mapped community themes with emerging Task Force ideas	November
Meeting with mayors and school committees	November/ December
Meeting with union leadership	November/ December
Educator forum	January
On-line educator survey	February
Identify and visit best practice sites for sustained community mobilization	February
Taubman Center for Public Policy poll	March

FIGURE 2
Plan for building community support for the work of the Task Force

Plan for Building Support

See Figure 2 for an outline of the plan.

Ensuring That Public Comment Is Considered in Final Recommendations and Throughout the Process

- Identify where links are missing between community perspectives (see Figure 3, left-hand column) and the emerging ideas of the Task Force (see Figure 3, right-hand column) and continue the conversation about how those links can be created. (Note: Community Themes in Figure 3 were synthesized from past engagement efforts and the community forum of October 4, 2008.)
- Dialogue and address the tension between social and cultural solutions (Figure 3, left-hand column), compared with technical solutions (right-hand column).
- Recognize and resolve the language gap between how the community describes its perspectives and how research or administrative shareholders describe their perspectives.
- Analyze how recommendations can be focused and adapted to ensure meaningful solutions specifically for urban education.

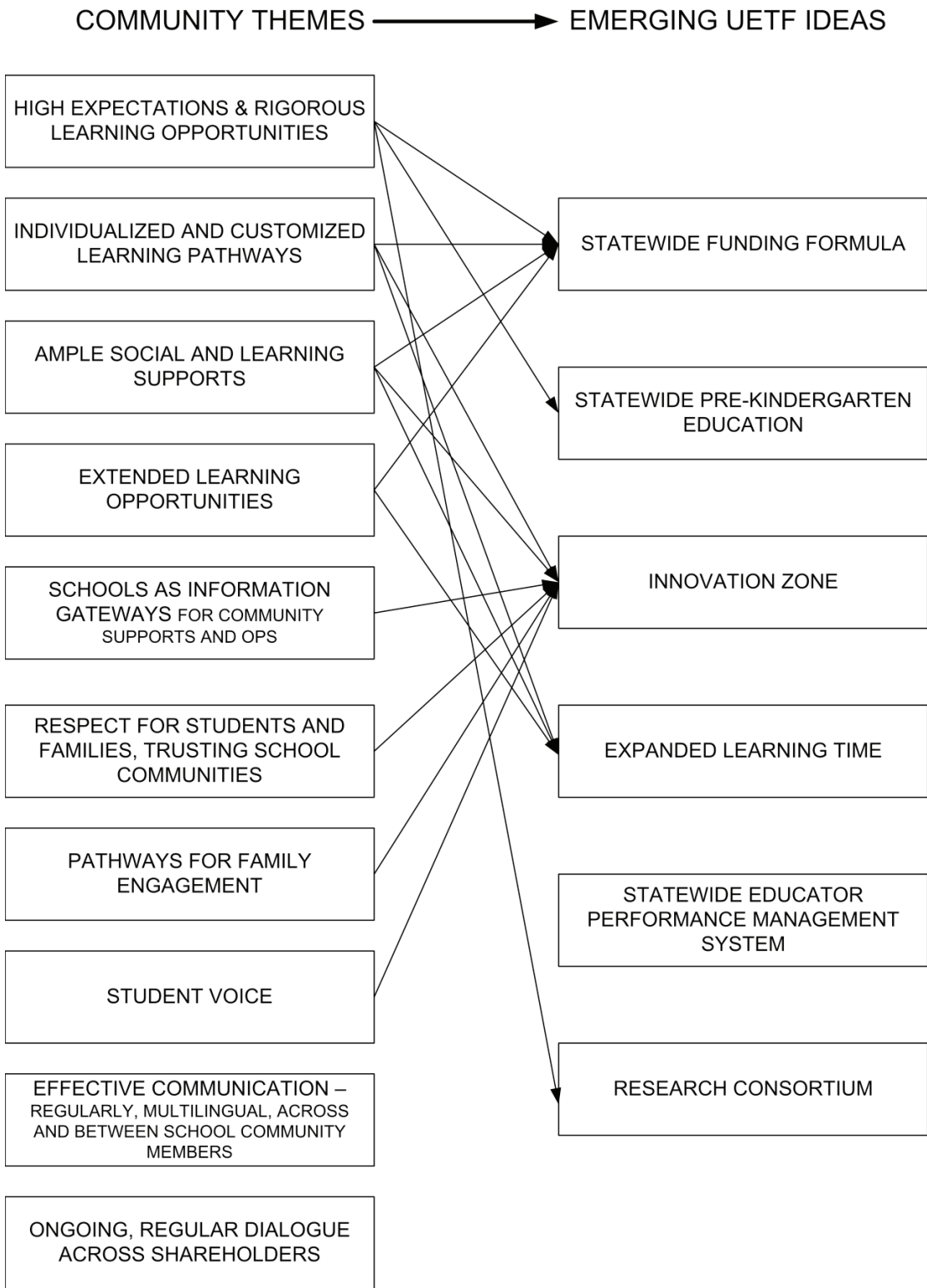


FIGURE 3
Map of links between community themes and emerging Task Force ideas

Members of the Rhode Island Urban Education Task Force

Chace Baptista
Co-Director
Young Voices

David Beauchesne
Director, Education and Community Partnerships
Rhode Island Philharmonic Orchestra and
Music School

Thomas Brady
Superintendent
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Elizabeth Burke Bryant
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Anna Cano-Morales
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Robert Carothers
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Rosanna Castro
Member
Providence School Board

Sharon Contreras
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ary and Secondary Education

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State Representative and House Majority Leader
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Timeline of Task Force Activities

