
Chart a Course, Stay the Course

Rhode Island's Path to a World Class
Public Education System

I promise

I WILL
LISTEN + OBTAIN
TEACHERS
NAME: Rish

Chart a Course, Stay the Course

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To do our best work as a state – and to truly improve outcomes for all Rhode Islanders we need to chart a course, and stay the course as a community – committed to high achievement and equity for students, families, and educators.

Introduction

Convened and led by the Rhode Island Foundation, around a call to action that resonated with each of us as educators and education stakeholders, academics, labor leaders, community and business leaders, philanthropic funders, state leaders, advocates for children and families, concerned citizens, parents, and one-time students ourselves, we came together more than a year ago to begin a candid, overdue, dialogue about long-term planning for education in Rhode Island.

Just after we agreed to come together and begin this dialogue the first-ever Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS) scores showed us where we stand compared to Massachusetts. The results were disappointing, and concerning. But, the truth is, 25 years ago when students in Massachusetts took the same test for the first time, scores were not much different. The difference though, is that in their case the test was adopted alongside a collective action plan that state leaders, educators, students, and families were committed to. Since then they've adopted high standards, and they've stayed the course. While Massachusetts is



not without flaws, they are one of the top performing public education systems in the country. Over time – and with sustained commitment to an enduring vision and long-term plan that transcends election cycles, overcomes special interest inertia, and is guarded and guided by doing what is right for Rhode Islanders – our public education system can be even better.

Rhode Island is ready to capitalize on its ‘moment in time’.

Here are some recent examples:

Members of the General Assembly, led by the Speaker of the House, Senate President, and the chairs of each chamber’s Education Committee and key members of those committees made pre-K to 12th grade public education a priority by passing several bills during the 2019 legislative session that resemble elements of the Massachusetts model. The Governor showed her support for these efforts by signing the bills into law. Their collaborative action has set the public education system in Rhode Island on a straighter path to success by aligning curriculum, providing a fast-track certification process for educators who are ready to become principals, putting structures in place that support site-based school management, and expanding the state’s pre-K program.

In 2018, with urging from the General Treasurer and the Rhode Island School Building Task Force Rhode Island voters approved authorization of \$250 million in bonds, over five years – with no more than \$100 million issued in any one year – in order to fund school housing aid and the school building authority capital fund. And it’s a good thing, without buildings that are warm, safe, and dry, our students and teachers cannot do their best work.



In the spring of 2019, the Governor and Rhode Island Board of Education have appointed a new Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education who has the credentials and experience to lead. So far, she has been bold, empathetic, decisive, and willing to listen.

And, there is the work of our group. Since the fall of 2018 our focus has been to take the long view – crafting a vision, priorities, and strategies for pre-K to 12th grade public education in Rhode Island, and keeping in mind what the system will provide for students in 10 years’ time.

Together, we’ve engaged in intense discussions and debates, in-person on almost a monthly basis. We’ve worked to craft a unified and enduring vision, have identified priorities, and strategies that we believe are both aspirational and actionable.



I promise
To continue to be involved
in the process no matter
how hard it gets.
NAME: Steffy Molina

Committee Process

As a group, our intent was not to create a comprehensive strategic plan for public education in Rhode Island. It was to identify – and agree to – what the most pressing needs are within the public education sector, and to commit to supporting strategies to address those needs over the long-term.

With that, our first task was to develop a vision. Through our discussions around the vision, we recognized that it was also important to outline action steps related to the delivery of the vision. Once the vision and action steps had been determined, we utilized a variety of outside resources, including the 9 Building Blocks for a World-Class State Education System (National Center on Education and the Economy, 2016), the Rhode Island Department of Education 2015-2020 Strategic Plan, and advice from experts like David Driscoll, former Education Commissioner in Massachusetts to develop a set of priorities linked to the most pressing needs within the system, the vision, and action steps we'd already identified.

Following the development of the priorities, we worked to identify and agree to strategies that support each priority area, and ultimately adopted twenty strategies. Lastly, we identified nineteen suggested next steps to achieve the strategies and therefore move the priorities forward.



Through each iteration of the process it was of paramount importance that we come to consensus – so that individual members of the group, representing powerful constituencies and education stakeholders, could commit to supporting the work over – and beyond – the next decade.

Outreach sessions were also conducted to reach beyond those of us who sit on the Long-term Planning Committee. Over 150 individuals representing parents, school board members, principals, teachers, superintendents, mayors, and business leaders provided feedback through 21 outreach sessions. Feedback opportunities were also made available via an online survey targeting parents. Student feedback was reviewed through the statewide Survey Works data.



Additionally, in December 2019, we hosted a statewide convening, Make it Happen: World-Class Public Education for RI that attracted over 325 individuals from across the state for the one-day event. Participants represented students, parents, educators, business and community leaders, along with other interested stakeholders. The intent of the event was to gather overall perspectives on the priorities and strategies and to begin identifying next steps to help move the work forward.

On the following pages the final vision, priorities, strategies, and next steps are outlined.

Vision

The following vision was agreed upon by all of us, and helped set the foundation for identifying priorities and strategies.

Rhode Island’s world-class public education system prepares all students to succeed in life and contribute productively to the community.

To equitably and urgently deliver on this vision, we:

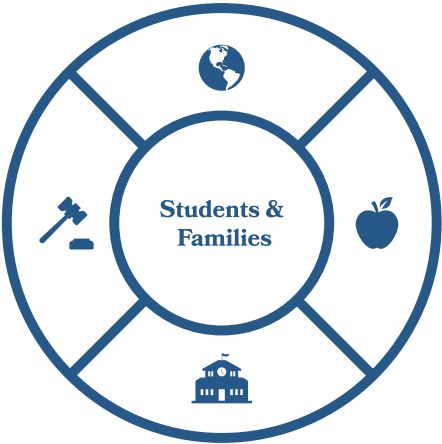
- Put students at the center, ensuring that school is rewarding, engaging, and responsive to interests and needs
- Respect, enable, empower, and value teaching
- Serve students who are being left behind and close achievement and opportunity gaps
- Deliver relevant learning so students are prepared for the current and future economy
- Engage families in actively shaping students’ experiences
- Leverage the expertise of community partners and the support of all Rhode Islanders
- Distribute leadership, so decisions are made at the appropriate level for the greatest benefit of students
- Hold adults accountable for student learning
- Provide sufficient resources and distribute them equitably
- Align policies, structures, and supports to work best for students and teachers
- Set ambitious statewide standards and high expectations – and stay the course

Participants at the Make it Happen event agreed with this vision, and were extremely vocal about the need to amplify the role of student and family voice. These voices are fundamental and critical to charting a new course and staying on course. The following priorities, strategies, and next steps cannot be achieved and long-lasting through efforts that do not explicitly include the perspectives of students and families. These perspectives serve as the overarching priority that is interwoven into all efforts aimed at creating a world-class public education system.



Priorities, Strategies & Suggested Next Steps

Four priorities have been identified as fundamental pillars – each of the priorities is important on their own; but the real power is in the four being pursued and brought to life in tandem to achieve the vision. Each of these priorities are essential to ensure that all students’ needs are met. Meaningful and sustained engagement with students and families is essential for all aspects of this work to be realized. Priorities are presented below.



To support the four priorities, we identified and agreed to twenty strategies and a series of suggested next steps.

High Standards



Priority:

Create, build, and implement a world-class pre-K to 12 educational system that is rooted in rigorous standards, has aligned curriculum and instruction, and ongoing assessment, and that includes comprehensive social and emotional learning, and promotes and develops multilingualism.

Strategies:

- Establish statewide standards for multilingual education
- Create robust college and career pathways that provide students with opportunities for internships and work experience
- Establish state and local expectations for a positive school culture, safe school environment, and meaningful parent and community engagement
- Implement standards aligned curriculum and instruction that is grade-level appropriate and culturally responsive
- Sustain a rigorous, statewide, assessment system

Suggested Next Steps:

- Conduct ongoing curriculum, instruction, and assessments audits (for quality and bias) at the local and state level
- Identify and invest in high-quality curriculum and maintain an inventory for districts to select from
- Align coherent pre-service and in-service professional development around curriculum implementation
- Create a school culture “tool-kit framework” with students, parents, and community stakeholders that articulates expectations for student learning and behavior
- Establish statewide frameworks around rigorous multilingual education and provide supports for multilingual learners
- Create and maintain a sustainable accountability structure with a periodic reporting schedule

Educator Support



Priority:

Invest in the recruitment, preparation, and continuous professional development and retention of a diverse network of excellent educators, teachers, education support professionals, and school leaders who are supported in applying the knowledge, skills, and disposition of a professional educator.

Strategies:

- Recruit, foster, mentor, and prepare the next generation of educators*
- Examine and improve educator* preparation programs
- Provide current, relevant, and comprehensive professional development to prepare educators* for ongoing success
- Reexamine and address the barriers that prevent the recruitment and retention of racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse educators*
- Examine and address issues pertaining to the recruitment and retention methods for hard to fill teaching areas
- Engage family and community to promote and support public education as a career

** Educators refers to: educators, teachers, school leaders, and education support professionals*

Suggested Next Steps:

- Build awareness of education as a robust career for current students (starting no later than during middle school)
- Reexamine entrance and exit requirements for educator programs
- Advocate for additional classroom supports for new educators
- Develop a system of incentives to attract individuals into teaching in high need areas
- Engage with the RI chapter of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (RIAACTE) for suggested improvements across the teacher preparation system

Investment Priorities



Priority:

Commit to meaningful and sustained investments in public education that promotes excellence and distributes resources equitably based on student, school, and community needs.

Strategies:

- Reexamine and modify existing funding formula to align with state and local priorities
- Link investments to viable academic, economic, and professional development outcomes
- Leverage partnerships with business, community, and social service organizations to supplement investments in public education
- Enable active and meaningful family and community engagement in supporting investments tied to students' learning
- Modify existing clauses in the Rhode Island Constitution to best protect and serve students

Suggested Next Steps:

- Advocate for a permanent funding oversight committee
- Develop a public awareness campaign that shares information about the current system and alternative approaches
- Disseminate funding reports to community members (including students, parents, teachers, and the business community)
- Explore a media strategy advocating for the importance of public education
- Advocate for modifications to existing clauses in the Rhode Island Constitution be put before voters in an effort to best protect and serve students

Clear Governance



Priority:

Institute coherent and effective governance structures with clear roles and responsibilities at the state, district, and school levels that are accountable to students, families, educators, and policy makers.

Strategies:

- Align responsibility and authority at each level of governance
- Commit to school-based management with district and state support in policy guidance, professional development, and technical assistance
- Engage community, including parents and students, to be part of the decision-making process
- Establish mechanisms for review of outcomes and accountability, including rebuilding existing statutes and regulations

Suggested Next Steps:

- Instruct school communities around new legislative accountability requirements
- Provide required training and on-going support on school governance to all responsible parties
- Develop school and district level strategies to engage, promote, and sustain student, parent, and family voice (including new communication methods such as teleconferences, skype meetings, and live streaming of community meetings)

I promise

to continue to be involved in
helping the community, the
educational system, and others.

NAME: Efrain Freeman
(student)

Conclusion

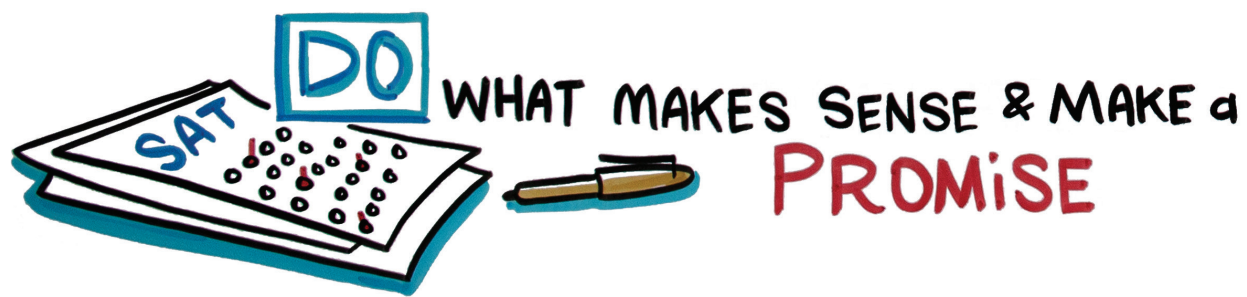
The previous pages outline the vision, four priorities, twenty strategies, and nineteen suggested next steps that the Committee has agreed upon. We recognize that this report is only one piece of a larger movement focused on the state of public education in Rhode Island. Each element of that movement – including the work we have done together – is leading us toward collective, sustained action. There is more to do, much more – and we cannot allow this ‘moment in time’ to slip by. The outrage, the excitement, the concern, the motivation, the hard work and the commitment all must be maintained. This is not a challenge just for the education community to address, but an opportunity to coordinate across the ecosystem of services for children in the state to provide holistic supports including the health, housing, and economic sectors. Throughout the state, we must continue to expect and demand better for students with a focus on equity.

**SHARED UNDERSTANDING
OF METRICS & TERMS
CLOSE the GAP**

In ten years’ time, we envision all students in Rhode Island will have access to a world-class public education system that is rooted in rigorous standards, with aligned curriculum and instruction; invests in the recruitment, preparation, and retention of a diverse network of teachers; creates meaningful and sustainable funding mechanisms;

and is governed by clear roles and responsibilities, with accountably measures clearly articulated. We must stay focused on these high standards to close achievement and opportunity gaps, and stay the course that has been outlined in these pages.

We urge all Rhode Islanders to join us in charting a new course in creating a world class public education system. Let’s be ambitious, bold, and demand more for all our students in every community throughout our state. We will continue to do our part to ensure that our state’s students, families, and educators are supported and prepared for the future – with fidelity to, and guided by, the vision, priorities, and strategies you see here.



Endorsed

Long-Term Education Planning Committee

- Kathy Bendheim, Independent Consultant
- Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT
- Victor Capellan, Sr. Advisor to the Commissioner, Rhode Island Department of Elementary/Secondary Education
- Jeremy Chiappetta, Executive Director, Blackstone Valley Prep Mayoral Academy
- Barbara Cottam, Chair, Rhode Island Board of Education
- Dr. Jeannine Dingus-Eason, Dean, The Feinstein School of Education and Human Development
- Tom DiPaola, Executive Director, Rhode Island School Superintendents’ Association
- Tim Duffy, Executive Director, Rhode Island Association of School Committees
- Frank Flynn, President, Rhode Island Federation of Teacher and Healthcare Professionals
- Tom Giordano, Executive Director, Partnership for Rhode Island
- Chris Graham, Chair, Greater Providence Chamber of Commerce Education Committee
- Dr. Julie Horwitz, Professor, Feinstein School of Education and Human Development
- Carlton Howard, Co-Founder & Chief Connector, EduLeaders of Color
- Angélica Infante-Green, Commissioner of Education, Rhode Island Department of Elementary/Secondary Education

Dolph Johnson, Executive Vice President, Chief Global Human Resources Officer, Hasbro

Bob Littlefield, Executive Director, Rhode Island Association of School Principals

Susanna Loeb, Executive Director, Annenberg Institute for School Reform

Keith Oliveira, Executive Director, Rhode Island League of Charter Schools

Dr. R. Anthony Rolle, Dean, Alan Shawn Feinstein College of Education and Professional Studies

John Simmons, Executive Director, Rhode Island Public Expenditure Council

Neil Steinberg, President and CEO, Rhode Island Foundation

Bob Walsh, Jr., Executive Director, National Education Association Rhode Island (NEARI)

With thanks to Mary-Beth Fafard for serving as the committee’s facilitator

Illustrations provided by:



I promise
to advocate for my son,
all children, and my state
always.
NAME: Kaleena Harrington



RHODE ISLAND
FOUNDATION

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