Fund for Rhode Island Public Education

2020 Year in Review
In December 2019, Angélica Infante-Green, Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education, announced the establishment of the Fund for Rhode Island Public Education (RIPE) at the Rhode Island Foundation to accept donations from individuals, corporations and foundations interested in improving Pre-Kindergarten through 12th grade public education statewide and supporting initiatives that benefit the education of public school students in Rhode Island. This Fund is an important avenue through which Rhode Islanders, and beyond, can contribute to and join our efforts to improve public schools and support students and educators statewide. When students are positioned to excel in college, careers, and in life, our economy and our state are stronger.

To improve educational results for every Rhode Islander, in 2020 the Rhode Island community charted a course committed to high achievement and equity for students, families and educators. RIPE helps us stay on that course. Managed and administered by the Rhode Island Foundation, the funds allocated in 2020 have been in alignment with Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) priorities and donor intent for the statewide priorities:

**World Class Talent, Excellence in Learning, & Engaged Communities.**
RIDE has identified WORLD CLASS TALENT as a priority for the department with the aim to create conditions that value educators and leaders, support a teaching force that reflects the rich diversity of Rhode Island, and promote student success. Educators are professionals who need support to continuously develop skills and knowledge relevant to the students they teach.

RIPE funds were and will continue to be used to support the RIDE Educators of Color Committee, made up of Rhode Island educators, with a mission to “create structural changes to eliminate disparities and uphold our core values of Anti-Racism, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Empowerment, and the Health and Safety of all students, families, educators and staff.” The funds help support initiatives that include race and culturally responsive professional development and trainings as well as building a hiring and retention support system for educators of color.

“As a BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color) elementary special educator just entering the teacher workforce, being part of the RIDE Educators of Color Committee since its inception has significantly contributed to my professional development journey,” noted Ayana Bass. “Every time we meet, I get more excited about the work we are doing, and it leaves me feeling supported, empowered, and exhilarated for the long and necessary journey ahead of us. It has been an honor to work and learn with fellow BIPOC professionals who are dedicated and compassionate about contributing to sustainable change within education.”

Ongoing areas of focus for this priority include creating flexible pathways into the teaching profession and developing programs aimed to expand and diversify the educator pipeline, as well as providing high-quality professional learning for educators that is relevant and valuable.
RIDE’s strategic plan defines EXCELLENCE IN LEARNING as the job of educators system wide to provide tools, opportunities, and environments that support student learning and the development of the whole child.

A number of RIPE donations have been focused on the transformation underway in the Providence Public School District, including dedicated funding to improve middle and high schools and summer programming for newcomer, multilingual learner students.

In addition, funds supported access to an online course, Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) in Times of Uncertainty and Stress: Research-Based Strategies, to provide the Rhode Island education community with the knowledge, skills and strategies to understand and manage their emotions and those of their students. This effort was a partnership between the Governor’s office, RIDE, the Rhode Island Foundation, the Rhode Island Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals (RIFTHP) and the National Education Association Rhode Island (NEARI).

A Rhode Island educator and course participant said, “I enjoy how this course allows us to examine our own actions, reactions, and helps us to reexamine our inner thoughts and self in order to improve our health and well-being in order to be effective educators and happier in life.”

Ongoing work in this priority includes providing comprehensive social and emotional supports for students, the promotion of multilingualism, and the creation of pathways for students to pursue strengths and interests.
Engaged Communities

ENGAGED COMMUNITIES refers to student-centered decisions and policies being made by those closest to the student—family, community members, school administrators, and teachers.

Through the RIPE fund, Rhode Island was able to bring the nationally recognized SMART Student Health and Wellness Model to the state, starting SMART clinics at three schools in the Providence Public School District. This model is focused on wellness and classroom success, and each school’s medical team treats all students and staff at the school.

“Just as we know that kids who read, succeed, we know equally as well that students who are healthy in body and mind are more engaged in the classroom and more likely to be on a path to graduation,” said Barbara Papitto, Chair of The Papitto Foundation. “By making this investment in the health and wellness of children in Providence, we hope to make it easier for them to focus on achieving their dreams — whether that’s going to college or, perhaps, starting a business.”

Funds also helped create the conditions for meaningful community engagement by ensuring a variety of statewide meetings and materials were accessible and translated.

Ongoing work in this priority is focused on providing resources that build school and district capacity to maintain ongoing and intentional community engagement to strengthen relationships with families and community members. Outcomes-based partnerships will be established with community organizations and industries to broaden the scope of services for students.
RISING TO THE TECH CHALLENGE

Facing the global COVID pandemic, Governor Raimondo and RIDE moved schools to distance learning statewide in March 2020. While schools were able to switch to this mode of learning after a week of planning, it soon became clear that students and families across the state needed support in accessing computers and internet for their learning. As a result, Commissioner Angélica Infante-Green and Rhode Island Foundation President and CEO Neil D. Steinberg issued a challenge to ensure that every Rhode Island student had access to the technology they needed for learning at home. With $100,000 donated from the Rhode Island Foundation, the challenge brought in nearly five times that amount with a total of $475,000 to provide 1600 Chromebooks and 750 Wi-Fi hotspots to 20 school communities with students and families in need.

Central Falls Public Schools received funds to purchase devices for their students. “The support we received just after the pandemic hit last Spring was absolutely critical,” noted Superintendent Stephanie Downey Toledo. “The generous support enabled us to purchase Chromebooks for students and as a result minimized the time when they couldn’t access their learning.”

The challenge attracted contributions from nearly 70 donors, with donations ranging from $25 to six-figure contributions from CVS Health and Brown University. This generosity from the community helped Rhode Island become a national model for distance learning. At $150,000, CVS Health made the largest donation so that the Woonsocket Education Department could purchase 750 Chromebook laptops for students in grades three through five, ensuring that every Pre-K through grade 12 student in the district had access to technology for remote learning. A $100,000 donation from Brown University’s Fund for the Education of the Children of Providence supported internet access for Providence students through the purchase of 400 hotspots and ongoing connectivity to Cox Internet for approximately 35 families. Donations to the fund from Delta Dental of Rhode Island also helped secure licensing for high-quality online content from NBC News Learn.
DONORS

The contributions to the Fund for Rhode Island Public Education shows us what Rhode Islanders can accomplish when we come together. We are grateful for every donor who contributed to this new fund in 2020. And, we are looking to build on this foundation in 2021 as RIDE implements a four-year strategic plan that reflects the Chart A Course, Stay the Course priorities and the Commissioner’s vision. We are thankful for the 114 gifts from 106 donors who contributed in 2020, raising over $3 million for both undesignated and designated programming. Gifts ranged from $12 to $500,000.

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