



Ken Wagner
Commissioner

State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations
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2016 State of Education Address – Statements of Support

Many educators and community members support the initiatives Commissioner Ken Wagner outlined as part of his State of Education Address before the General Assembly.

Keep reading to find out what they are saying!

Statements Expressing General Support:

“English learners, particularly from the Latino community, have long been underserved and undervalued by Rhode Island public schools, and our schools can no longer ignore this growing student population. Through their commitment to and support of education equity, innovation, school autonomy, revisions to the funding formula, Governor Raimondo and Commissioner Wagner have shown a commitment to closing opportunity gaps and providing necessary resources to schools to serve all students.” – **Anna Cano-Morales, Director, Latino Policy Institute at Roger Williams University**

“The membership for the Rhode Island Association of School Committees is committed to high standards, budget transparency, and equity for Rhode Island taxpayers. We are pleased to see these principles upheld in Commissioner Wagner's education agenda and in Governor Raimondo's budget, including additional funding for school districts with high charter enrollments and new funds for high-cost programs such as the instruction of English learners.” – **Tim Duffy, Executive Director, Rhode Island Association of School Committees**

“We need to support the great teachers and teacher-leaders in all of our schools in order to provide equal educational opportunity for all Rhode Island students. I commend Commissioner Wagner for his commitment to support for struggling schools, and I am pleased that Governor Raimondo's budget includes additional funds for professional development and for free student access to PSAT and SAT assessments.” – **Jorge Elorza, Mayor, Providence**

“I thank Ken for his leadership, and applaud these initiatives to expand opportunities and enable our schools to make decisions according to what's best for students. I continue to think we should look to Massachusetts for model policies and practices; Ken's proposals are clearly informed by what Massachusetts has done.” – **Daniel McKee, Lieutenant Governor, State of Rhode Island**

“Through initiatives that engage people statewide, such as the development of the 2015-2020 strategic plan for education, Governor Raimondo and Commissioner Wagner have shown their commitment to improving education for all Rhode Islanders. We look forward to our continued partnership this year, working to engage the public on critical education issues like making sure all students are reading on grade-level and have access to the supports they need to be successful.” – **Anthony Maione, President and CEO, United Way of RI**

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School and Family Empowerment:

“Every child in my community, city and state should have the same quality of education because it will give them the support to move beyond their economic limitations. The best gift a parent can give their child is a well-rounded education. By empowering parents to choose where their child can go to school through open enrollment, and by supporting school-centered teams of educators, counselors, and community resources to make the best decisions for their students, this gift of education is a powerful opportunity for students; education is the way to freedom. We are our children’s biggest cheerleaders and our voices are the best possible advocate for our children’s future.” – **Yaneli Arias, Parent, Providence**

“Commissioner Wagner’s Empowerment Schools initiative will help us focus on how the whole community—parents, businesses and nonprofits agencies--can support great teaching and how to prepare our students to meet the needs of our growing economy.” – **Bernie Beaudreau, Executive Director, ServeRI**

“The Empowerment Package that Governor Raimondo and Commissioner Wagner have developed offers the opportunity for much great community and family involvement in school design and for more personalized learning, including options such as dual-language instruction. As members of the Rhode Island Latino community know, facility in more than one language is an asset and skill that will prepare Rhode Island students to succeed in college and in their careers. We are hopeful that the Governor and Commissioner will focus more attention on the needs of students with English language barriers and other needs. As the plan suggests, leadership should be community driven in order to address the specific needs of students and families and we share that vision.” – **Mario Bueno, Executive Director, Progreso Latino, Inc.**

“As a Rhode Island teacher, I now feel included in the conversation about empowering schools and families in our state. I applaud Commissioner Wagner’s inclusion of teacher-leaders in the conversation as he moves forward with instructional innovations at both the state and school levels.” – **Phil Capaldi, Teacher, Jamestown; Fuse Fellow**

“Parents need support and need access to the right information so we can make decisions about what school programs best fit our children’s needs. Many parents don’t have this, or don’t know what options are out there. Commissioner Wagner’s empowerment initiative will give schools and parents more ways to ensure parents and students have the knowledge and opportunities they need.” – **Monica Cortes, Parent, Central Falls**

“Thanks to his outreach to teachers and school leaders, Commissioner Wagner has the opportunity to bring all friends of public education together to change the education culture across our state. I support his Empowerment act, which would be a great step toward providing the educational innovations that our students want and deserve.” – **Michael Crudale, Principal, Cranston**

“A great education and support system were my keys to shattering glass ceilings and defying insurmountable odds. It is my hope that education leaders and policy makers would consider the future of my children and families in cities with low-performing school systems by effectively supporting vibrant options for school choice.” – **Michelle Davidson, Parent, Providence**

“We need to focus our efforts toward ensuring that all students are meeting the expectations for their grade level, and the Empowerment Schools initiative will enable us to re-imagine our schools from the ground up. I look forward to having some schools in Pawtucket take full advantage of this opportunity.” – **Patti DiCenso, Superintendent, Pawtucket**

“Commissioner Wagner’s proposal for schools to open their doors, on a voluntary basis, to accept enrollment from students across Rhode Island is a great way to provide students and families with more educational options and opportunities – as can be seen by Massachusetts’ success with its own inter-district school choice program. This proposal will also enable districts facing declining enrollment to fill empty seats with students eager to attend their schools.” – **Louis DiPalma, Senator, RI General Assembly**

“As the CEO of Rhode Island Mayoral Academies (RIMA), I am most excited about the Commissioner's vision to empower families and schools. All RI school leaders should have the autonomy and flexibility to design what their schools look like in order to best meet the needs of students. I know that for mayoral academies, these freedoms are at the core of what's enabled them to be successful. More families should also be empowered to choose the public school that best meets the needs of their child, without being limited by the resources they may have or their community of residence.” – **Elsa Dure, CEO, RI Mayoral Academies**

“In regards to students in state care or the foster system: education may be the only stronghold that they have. Continuity of education through open-enrollment in public schools would allow stability for students who are in otherwise uncertain and sometimes precarious circumstances.” – **Kathryn Dusel, Teacher, Newport**

“Partnerships and strong communications between families and schools are essential to improving education. As president of the Rhode Island PTA, I am pleased that Governor Raimondo and Commissioner Wagner have made family engagement a central component of the strategic plan for education.” – **Hilary Fournier, President, RI Parent Teacher Association**

“Having worked in a site based managed school I was able to experience the difference that staff buy-in and empowerment make to move a school forward. When given the chance to make their own decisions, the opportunity to carry them through, and the personal responsibility for the results, teachers do great work.” – **Jean Friend, Principal, Pawtucket**

“In Pawtucket, we have made great strides toward improving graduation rates along with creating an alternative high school with a pathway to a career in the arts. Commissioner Wagner’s Empowerment initiative focuses on the importance of strong, building-based leadership. This initiative supports our positive momentum to provide access to high quality education for all of Pawtucket’s children.” – **Don Grebien, Mayor, Pawtucket**

“As a member of the business community and as an advocate on behalf of public education, I recognize the potential advantages of freeing our schools from burdensome regulations. I support Commissioner Wagner’s Empowerment Schools initiative, which will help our teachers prepare students for college and for challenging careers.” – **Jock Hayes, East Bay Newspapers**

“I strongly believe in the importance of empowering teachers and teacher leaders to make key decisions about classroom instruction. The Empowerment initiative recognizes and supports the important role that teachers must play as we re-imagine our public schools.” – **Tracy Lafreniere, 2016 Teacher of the Year**

“For too long, instructional and budgetary decisions have been made by individuals who are not directly in front of students. By empowering schools, the true needs of students can be prioritized in a way that uses our resources more efficiently. Budgets are priorities. Different schools have different needs and by allowing for a transparent budget process to be influenced by schools, allows for the differentiation needed to advance ALL schools.” – **Alex Lucini, Teacher, Providence**

“Effective and sustainable school culture change happens when the stakeholders closest to the school are empowered and have the ability to act. This process is less bureaucratic and more democratic with accountability from within to each other.” – **Jason Masterson, Principal, Cumberland**

“School empowerment creates a leadership culture where all people collaborate and share responsibility for every aspect of the school's function and operation. This collaborative culture leads to a true shared vision that is evident in the decisions and actions of the collaborate culture which ultimately leads to excellence.” – **Cheryl McWilliams, Principal, Pawtucket**

“As a parent, I want the best for my child – I want my child to be able to go to a school that has the programs that best fit my child’s needs and interests. As parents, we need the power to choose where our children get their education so that they stay in school and are well prepared for what they want to do after graduation. The Commissioner’s inter-district school choice program gives parents options to do this that are within the public system.” – **Soraida Morales, Parent, Providence**

“We can promote student success by allowing those closest to the student level to make key decisions about education, whenever practical and effective. The proposal from Commissioner Wagner for school empowerment creates a pathway to put autonomy into practice in schools across Rhode Island.” – **Patricia Page, 2014 RI Teacher of the Year, East Greenwich**

“At their core, schools and their communities need to both understand and articulate their mission. And what is that mission? To serve as welcoming institutions of deep learning, for both students and staff, grounded in the moment but with an eye on the future. The initiatives proposed by the Commissioner highlight ways for all of us to be empowered to do what is important: preparing our students to be the best they can be.” – **Katrina Pillay, Principal, Cranston**

“I am thrilled just imagining how awesome would it be if we had autonomy in our schools – able to do what we have to do for the children that we know and understand. Educating our students is not a cookie cutter exercise. Children differ within families, so one can only imagine the diversity within classrooms, schools, and districts. Those who know the children in our classrooms best and are best fit to make decisions on their needs are their teachers and administrators. Accountability is a must but we can't be held accountable for student results when our hands are tied as it relates to resources, what to use, and who needs what. Let teachers assess, evaluate, analyze, and reflect so that we can decide what is best and will work for our students.” – **Debra Scarpelli, Teacher, Pawtucket**

“As a member of the Ambassador Design Team who crafted Rhode Island’s first community-developed Strategic Plan for Education, I am pleased to see that Commissioner Wagner has put forward a proposal

to empower local school leaders and classroom teachers to exercise their professional responsibilities and do what is best for children. In coordination with the development of talented school leaders, and strong parent and community engagement this initiative will build on the vision Rhode Islanders have for education, and will continue to accelerate Rhode Island schools toward greatness.” – **Lisa Tomasso, Providence Center**

“As a former school teacher, the concept of providing autonomy and accountability to principals is the important start point. A principal's ability to lead and inspire teachers and students is essential to positive educational outcomes. When classrooms are exciting and vibrant places for learning and when students engage in coursework that is relevant to their lives, they will succeed in school and be ready to success in college and the world of work. Teachers and principals are the ones who work most closely with our children and who know our students best, so I support Commissioner Wagner’s proposal to grant more autonomy to teachers, teacher leaders, and principals.” – **Michael Van Leesten, CEO, Opportunities Industrialization Center (OIC) of Rhode Island**

“Innovation, partnerships, and empowerment create the opportunities for educators to truly personalize learning for their students. We need principals and teacher-leaders who are supported and have the autonomy and flexibility to redesign what their school looks like to best meet their students’ interests and needs. I support the Commissioner’s vision for empowering schools so that all Rhode Island students can have high quality options for public education.” – **Jessica Waters, RI Mayoral Academies**

Building Skills:

“I believe that students should have access to advanced coursework and the option to attend schools with programs that really spark their interest. Their diploma needs to be meaningful to them. They also need to have multiple methods to prove that they should earn a diploma and demonstrate their progress toward college and career opportunities after graduation.” – **Natalie Bautista, Student, Central Falls**

“Governor Raimondo and Commissioner Wagner recognize the vital need to support the many English learners in Rhode Island public schools. Through such innovations as strong partnerships between the traditional and charter sectors and by providing the needed funds education aid, we can improve outcomes for English learners and for all students in Central Falls and across the state. In particular, I support their commitment to advanced coursework for all students, which can include dual-language instruction and AP classes in world languages – opening up new pathways for our students.” – **Victor Capellan, Superintendent, Central Falls**

“Early math and science achievement really matters in this day and age. STEAM opportunities that provide computation and scientific thinking practice, all across K-12, will better prepare our children for awesome careers. STEAM is a great way for students to experience real world learning; Commissioner Wagner’s advanced coursework initiative can help us increase STEAM proficiency and career readiness statewide.” – **Michael Cullen, Parent / STEAM Advocate, STEAM Academy**

“I am pleased to see that Governor Raimondo’s budget for aid to education includes new funding of \$2.5 million to support instruction for English learners. This commitment recognizes the urgent need to serve this growing population and to prepare all students, including those newly arrived in our country, with the skills they will need to succeed in school and to contribute to the Rhode Island economy.” – **Grace Diaz, Representative, General Assembly**

“I support Commissioner Wagner’s commitment to providing access to advanced coursework for all students, and I would particularly embrace programs that provide dual-language instruction and access to advanced coursework in world languages. In Central Falls, we know that diversity of languages and cultures is a great community asset, and I would like to see students in my city and across Rhode Island have more opportunities to become global citizens.” – **James Diossa, Mayor, Central Falls**

“Computer science is a fast-growing industry where opportunities for innovation abound. The more students across our state have access to computer science and advanced coursework opportunities throughout their K-12 education, the more prepared they will be to excel after graduation and pursue a career that they enjoy. I am excited that the Commissioner has expressed such strong support for innovative learning experiences, increasing computer science education, and expanding advanced coursework opportunities.” – **Damian Ewens, Project Director, Opportunity@Work**

“As a principal for 17 years, I have seen the evolution of the RI Diploma System which requires students to pass high level course work and complete rigorous proficiency based requirements, and I can say confidently that we are producing stronger graduates who are better prepared for college and the global marketplace. We can continue to do this through more advanced coursework opportunities and by enhancing personalization in education – personalization is not always so much about programs or new initiatives as much as it is about the positive relationships that adults form with students.” – **Joseph Goho, Principal, North Providence**

“Our schools and school leaders have to focus on closing the achievement gaps that separate English learners and other underserved students from their peers. The education agenda that Governor Raimondo and Commissioner Wagner have proposed recognizes this need, as well as the need to provide accommodations as necessary to fully recognize the achievement levels of students learning English.” – **Julie Motta, Educator of ELLS, All Things Language, Inc.**

“Commissioner Wagner’s education agenda calls for reimagining schools by providing all students with opportunities for advanced coursework, such as high-quality career-and-technical education and credit-bearing college courses. I am pleased to see that Governor Raimondo has supported these proposals through funding in her Fiscal Year 2017 budget. We plan to use these resources to provide more advanced-coursework and career and technical education opportunities for students in Cranston.” – **Jeannine Nota-Masse, Superintendent, Cranston**

“The International Charter School is proud to have been working for the past 15 years to prepare a next generation of global citizens—a priority in the Rhode Island’s strategic plan for education. We accomplish this with a strong focus on the development of social and emotional skills, multilingualism, and cultural competence. We champion advanced coursework opportunities, as this year we became a candidate school for the International Baccalaureate program. Recently, we have begun working directly with teachers and schools across the state to help them implement dual language programs, and are eager to extend our work by sharing what we have learned to enrich the teaching and learning in schools statewide.” – **Julie Nora, Director, International Charter School**

“Career & Technical education is the future, right now! It allows students to reach "critical mass" with the combination of theory and authentic hands-on learning, to provide them with options as life-long learners, and build skills that will help them succeed in their chosen field.” – **Edd Spidell, Teacher, Cranston Area Career & Technical Education Center**

“Cumberland High School is a natural location for an Advanced Placement (AP) Academy, given our consistent increases in both the number of AP courses offered and the number of students earning college credit with their scores. The Academy model would satisfy Rhode Island parents and students who seek an exceptional academic challenge. But just as important, it would allow Cumberland High School to incubate successful AP practice, the lessons of which we would share freely with other schools for the benefit of all Rhode Island students.” – **Alan Tenreiro, 2016 National Principal of the Year, Cumberland**

“The Rhode Island economy is on the move, and the business community has pointed to the heightened need for a workforce that is well prepared for the challenges of the global economy. Governor Raimondo and Commissioner Wagner have shown a serious commitment to advancing career and technical education with a focus on our fastest-growing industry sectors. Today’s graduates will help grow tomorrow’s economy.” – **Laurie White, President, Greater Providence Chamber of Commerce**

Reimagining Schools:

“The members of the Rhode Island Student Advisory Council have consistently spoken of the need for more personalized instruction and for the availability of more innovative methods with which every student can meet state graduation requirements. I am pleased that Commissioner Wagner’s education initiatives support these goals and values.” – **Colby Anderson, RI Student Advisory Council; Student, East Greenwich**

“Highlander Institute welcomes the focus of our state on meeting the individualized needs of our students in the digital age through personalized learning. As a community partner working alongside schools and districts across Rhode Island, we are witnessing the power and potential of personalized learning everyday. We are eager to grow this work and appreciate the commitment of the RI Department of Education in making this a reality.” – **Dana Borrelli-Murray, Executive Director, Highlander Institute**

“I truly believe that we have to reimagine school at all levels, but particularly high school, so that all students experience authentic project- and problem-based learning opportunities that provide them with the skills they need to succeed in the real world. By implementing best practices from successful personalized learning models, we can differentiate for all learners, and best utilize precious ‘in school’ time to develop critical thinking skills. I think that the initiatives Commissioner Wagner has outlined will help us expand our thinking in how we approach education for our children.” – **Maryellen Butke, Impact for Education**

“With more than 10,000 students in Rhode Island on charter school waiting lists, families in our state are clamoring for choice. Both the Advanced Course Network and the inter-district school choice program provide opportunities for students who, otherwise, would not have such access to different schools or advanced courses.” – **Jeremy Chiappetta, Executive Director, Blackstone Valley Prep Mayoral Academy**

“All of us want our children to succeed. We need to respect our students enough to challenge them with real work that will reveal real learning and result in real opportunity. When a student becomes

disengaged from school because he or she does not see any relevance to the daily work of schools, it is our responsibility. We must hold ourselves accountable to meet all students where they are and provide them with the kind of personalized instruction and other supports that will help them succeed in school - and beyond.” – **Rob DeBlois, Director, UCAP**

“Commissioner Wagner's vision sees possibilities not problems. Only when you can imagine what can be will you have a plan with any chance of succeeding. By addressing what it will take to move education in Rhode Island forward, problems will be faced with multiple solutions. Principals, teachers and the families of each educational community in the state will be able to boldly go where no one has dared go before. His vision will provide the autonomy needed for each school to address the unique and specific needs of their community. In a word, his vision is inspiring!” – **Cindy Gould, Teacher, Scituate**

“Innovation in how schools deliver for all Rhode Island youth is an equity strategy we must bring to every district and school throughout the state. School empowerment and educator autonomy are important strategies for the growth and renewal of our schools enabling students to thrive in the 21st century. Our Student Experience Lab at the Business Innovation Factory (BIF) stands ready to support this inspiring initiative.” – **Saul Kaplan, Founder and Chief Catalyst, Business Innovation Factory (BIF)**

“We cannot effectively educate our youth without the tools necessary to excel in a competitive 21st century teaching force. Personalization is so important when students are able to have their needs addressed and strengths strengthened, all while working at their own pace. The Commissioner's empowerment and personalized learning initiatives recognize the kinds of opportunities and support teachers and students need to realize this goal.” – **Holland Landy, Teacher, Providence**

“RI-CAN remains dedicated to Rhode Island's students, and we applaud Governor Raimondo’s strong commitment to education, particularly her administration's focus on expanding access for all students, from pre-K to early college course availability. We are committed to working in partnership with RIDE and Commissioner Wagner on educational initiatives that will support our students, teachers and families as we reimagine education in our state.” – **Christine Lopes Metcalfe, Executive Director, RI-CAN**

“The Rhode Island Foundation is committed to the educational success of all students in Rhode Island. We look forward to continuing working with many stakeholders, including the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, in ensuring that Rhode Island students have the supports and opportunities necessary for success in school and beyond.” – **Toby Shepherd, RI Foundation**