R.I. Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

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Contact: Elliot Krieger, media relations. 222-4600 ext. 2182

School Performance Categories
Background Information

Introduction

The Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (RIDE) is releasing today its second annual list of school performance categories. The list places each of the state's public schools in one of three categories: high performing, moderately performing, or low performing. In addition, the list notes whether each school is improving.

The school performance categories are based on the past three years of data from state assessments (2000-2002). The indications of improvement are based on the past five years of state assessments (1998-2002).

By placing schools in categories, RIDE can determine which schools are in greatest need of support. RIDE staff members will continue the series of "face-to-face meetings" with all districts that have low-performing schools.

The Board of Regents of Elementary and Secondary Education have set high standards in both mathematics and the English language arts. The goal is to ensure that all students meet these standards. Under the new federal law ("No Child Left Behind," January 8, 2002), schools that fail to make adequate yearly progress toward the goal of 100 percent proficiency will be subject to increasing degrees of state intervention.

New This Year: Learning Support Indicators

New on the list this year is another set of data called "learning support indicators." These indicators are a set of numeric scores (0-100) which give information about various aspects of school quality. The indicators are supplementary data; they have no bearing on a school's performance category.

Three of the indicators are derived from data supplied through the annual SALT Survey, the Department's survey of all educators, parents, and students in all public schools. The three indicators are: Instruction, Parent Engagement and Involvement, and School Climate. Each of the scores for these three indicators is an "index score" of 0-100. Each score is calculated based on the responses to numerous questions that appear on the SALT Survey. The calculations were done by the National Center on Public Education and Social Policy, at the University of Rhode Island, which designs and administers the survey.

A fourth indicator represents the percent of students who achieved proficiency on the state's 2002 assessment in health.

The fifth indicator is "time lost from school," data derived from annual attendance reports each school files. This calculation shows time lost from school because of illness, out-of-school suspensions, truancy, and other absences.

High schools have a sixth indicator: the dropout rate.

The Background

The school performance categories are part of a school reform process that began a decade ago. Some key dates in that process:

- 1996: RIDE publishes "All Kids, All Schools: The Rhode Island Comprehensive Education Strategy." This document sets out an agenda for school reform. It requires that high standards be set in mathematics and the English language arts, that students should be assessed regularly to determine if they have met the standards, and that legislation be revised to ensure that school committees and RIDE can make sure that all schools are making progress.
- 1997: Article 31 is signed into law. This law, "The Rhode Island Student Investment Initiative," among other things requires all school districts to develop "strategic plans" to improve student performance in mathematics, reading, and writing. The plans must include annual "performance targets." The Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education must "adopt and publish statewide standards of performance" in several subject areas and it must develop strategies to support schools that have not met the state standards.
- 1998: All public schools begin administering the New Standards Reference Exams in grades 4, 8, and 10. These tests show how many students in each grade and in each subgroup (by gender, race, poverty level, etc.) have met state standards. The results are published by RIDE and URI in *Information Works!*
- 2000: RIDE releases "Progressive Support and Intervention: Next Steps for Improving Rhode Island's Low-Performing Schools." This document confirms the principles set forth in Article 31 and the Department's program of School Accountability for Learning and Teaching (SALT): RIDE will offer progressive support and, ultimately, intervention in low performing schools by examining and affecting budget, personnel, and program decisions to ensure change and improvement of student performance. Article 31 anticipates that intervention may become more intensive over time if a school fails to improve. RIDE enters into agreements to support two districts: Central Falls and Providence.
- 2001: Congress passes the federal law that will require testing of all students in grades 3 through 8. The law, "No Child Left Behind," requires that all states set performance standards in mathematics and reading, that they identify low-performing schools and create plans to help the schools achieve state standards, and that timetables be established to ensure that all students in all schools meet state standards within 12 years.
- February 2002: With four years of data on hand, RIDE places schools in either low, moderately, or high performing categories and determines which schools are making progress. Procedures are established to offer assistance to low performing schools.

- December 2002: The second set of school performance categories is released, based on the past five years of data. This release includes an additional set of supplementary information: Learning Support Indicators.

The Tests

The school performance categories are based on data from the annual state assessments.

Here is a list of the tests:

- Mathematics: Skills (New Standards Reference Exam)
- Mathematics: Concepts (New Standards Reference Exam)
- Mathematics: Problem Solving (New Standards Reference Exam)
- Reading: Basic Understanding (New Standards Reference Exam)
- Reading: Analysis and Interpretation (New Standards Reference Exam)
- Writing: Effectiveness (New Standards Reference Exam)
- Writing: Conventions (New Standards Reference Exam)
- Rhode Island Writing Assessment

(Note: Another test, the Rhode Island Health Assessment, yields one of the learning-support indicators.)

Each test is scored on a scale of 1 to 5:

- 5: Achieved the Standard with Honors
- 4: Achieved the Standard
- 3: Nearly Achieved the Standard
- 2: Below the Standard
- 1: Little Evidence of Achievement
- No score (Students should have taken the test but did not)

Placing Schools in Categories: High, Moderate, or Low?

A school is high performing if at least half of its students have achieved the standard. Here's how that's calculated:

For each of the eight tests, over the past three years, we total the number of students who have achieved the standard (scores 4 or 5). Then, we total the number of students who took or should have taken each of the eight tests. We divide the number of students who achieved the standard by the total number who took or should have taken the test. If the result is 50 percent or higher, the school is high performing.

A school is low performing if more than a third of its students are significantly below the standard or did not take the test. Here's how that's calculated:

For each of the eight tests, over the past three years, we total the number of students who fall significantly below the standard (scores 1 or 2). Then, we total the number of students who took or should have taken each of the eight tests. We divide the number of students who fell significantly below the standard or did not take the test by the total

number who took or should have taken the test. If the result is 33 percent or greater, the school is low performing.

All other schools are moderately performing.

Are schools making progress?

Our list of school performance categories also notes which schools are making progress toward their goals.

RIDE has set as a minimum target an improvement rate of 3 percentage points—for both the high-performing students and the low-performing students. That is, to show improvement schools must move students into the highest groups and they must move students out of the lowest groups. They must:

- Raise by 3 points the percentage of students who meet the standard (scores 4 or 5)
- Lower by 3 points the percentage of students who fall significantly below the standard (scores 1 or 2 + no score).

We consider schools to be improving if they have made progress in either the English language arts, mathematics, or both.

Here's how that's calculated:

A school is improving in mathematics if it has moved 3 percent of its students into proficiency in 2 of the 3 mathematics tests and if it has moved 3 percent of its students out of the lowest groups in 2 of the 3 mathematics tests.

A school is improving in the English-language arts if it has moved 3 percent of its students into proficiency in 3 of the 4 New Standards Reference Exam reading/writing tests and if it has moved 3 percent of its students out of the lowest groups in 3 of the 4 New Standards Reference Exam reading/writing tests. The R.I. Writing Assessment may be substituted for one of the New Standards writing tests in making this calculation.

Calculations are based on five years of data. The comparison points are the combined scores from 1998-2000 compared with the combined scores from 2001 and 2002.

Regents' Commended Schools

Beginning this year, schools that have been improving for two years in a row in both English language arts and mathematics will be honored as Regents' Commended Schools. Each commended school will submit a brief report to the Board of Regents explaining how they achieved their success. These reports will be made available to the public. Commended schools will be honored at a ceremony later in the school year.

The RIDE Response: What Happens Next?

The Department continues to focus on the low performing schools. Districts with these schools will be required to meet with RIDE staff members to develop a plan for improvement. RIDE staff and representatives of the district will review a detailed list of topics to see where resources can be directed; RIDE will monitor the progress or try to arrange for the low-performing schools to work in partnership with another agency, such as a school-reform institute at a university.

By law, all school districts must submit an annual plan to RIDE by May 1st. All districts must consider the school performance categories as part of their annual plan.

After the release of the first set of school performance categories, in February 2002, RIDE began a series of "face-to-face meetings" with the 20 districts that had low performing schools. Particular emphasis was placed on the seven districts that had more than 40 percent of their schools in the low-performing category. Teams were set up to work with each of these districts, and the work will continue through the school year on an ongoing basis. Though these face-to-face meetings do not fall under the provisions of the Open Meetings Law, we are considering requests from the media to open these meetings to interested observers, upon agreement of both parties.

Compliance with the No Child Left Behind Act

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was signed into law in January 2002. The complex law (about 1,200 pages!) has numerous provisions that affect many aspects of public education. It will require us to expand our assessment program over the next three years; eventually we will test every student in grades 3 through 8, plus one high school grade, and we will add a science assessment.

The NCLB mandates that each state identify "schools in need of improvement." We have defined these as the schools that are low performing and not improving.

The law mandates the steps that must be taken each time a school has been identified as in need of improvement. A school in its second year "in need of improvement" must be subject to "school choice" for the following school year. A school in its third year in need of improvement must offer "supplemental services" during the next school year.

Under school choice, schools notify parents that they have the right to transfer their child to any other school within the district, space permitting. Under supplemental services, the district must use some of its federal funds to provide extra services—tutoring, summer school, and after school sessions—to its children.

A further complication: The NCLB applies only to Title I schools—roughly defined as schools in which 40 percent of the children are living in poverty. In Rhode Island, we have yet to resolve whether the school choice and supplemental services provisions of the law will apply to *all* public schools in the state or only to high-poverty schools.

We are in discussions with the U.S. Department of Education as to exactly which of our low performing schools will fall under the school-choice and supplemental services provisions and when those provisions would take effect. We will release information on school choice and supplemental services as the outstanding issues are resolved.