



# Learning, Equity & Accelerated Pathways (LEAP) Task Force Report



**RIDE** Rhode Island  
Department  
of Education

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## Letter from the Commissioner

Dear Rhode Island,

Over the last year of our lives, we have all watched the nature of education shift rapidly in the face of unprecedented circumstances. Here in Rhode Island, we have led the way both in pivoting to distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic and in returning our students to in-person learning in September 2020, when the rest of the nation was still learning remotely. Those changes would never have been possible without the hard work of our teachers, administrators, nurses, maintenance staff, parents, and countless others who invested their time and energy into giving our students the best education possible. Despite our combined efforts, it has become clear over the last year that not every student is receiving the same educational opportunities.

We knew from the start of the pandemic that we would need a clear understanding of how it has affected our students. Over the past school year, we've used assessments to help determine which groups would need the most support in getting back up to speed. We found that while COVID-19 presented a barrier to all of our students, the pandemic magnified the existing inequities in Rhode Island's educational system. The historically marginalized students—Black and Latino students, multilingual learners, differently-abled students, and students living in poverty—have suffered the most.

We stand now at a crossroads for the future of education in Rhode Island. We can rebuild our educational system as it was before, knowing that there are cracks in the foundation, into which our most vulnerable students' futures disappear. This might be easier, cheaper, more politically expedient. Or we can rise to the challenge before us and create a new and better system—one that gives every student the support and opportunities they need in order to succeed, no matter their circumstance. We have chosen the latter, and we are ready to do whatever it takes to provide the children of Rhode Island with equal access to meaningful and rigorous educational opportunities. We are building a system that will meet students where they are and propel them forward.

We know that this “from the ground up” rebuilding of education in Rhode Island is not purely an academic exercise; creating a more equitable system can only be done in partnership with communities that share the lived experience of moving through an archaic system. To ensure that this process was led by the people it was meant to serve, we recruited parents, state and local leaders, and community members from across the state. Then, we engaged some of the most forward-thinking education experts in the country to help support the community in their discussions and to provide a framework for this herculean effort. We called this group, one of the first accelerated learning task forces in the nation, LEAP: Learning, Equity & Accelerated Pathways.

Over the last two months of meetings, filled with robust discussions and passionate advocacy for how to best serve our students in need, we created an equitable pathway crafted by the people it impacts most. Contained in this report are the final recommendations of the LEAP Task Force, which will serve as our guiding principles as we work to accelerate learning opportunities and to create a more equitable and enriching educational environment in Rhode Island. This report, the product of countless hours of labor, is a crucial tool in what will be a tremendous and, if successful, historic effort—our compass as we leave behind the failed efforts of the past and search for new and better ways to serve our students. Our most disenfranchised communities have been in crisis, and the time is now to reimagine and reframe our work and our future.

Thank you again to every community member and expert who contributed to the task force over the last two months, and thank you, reader, in joining us in this work. Together, we signed up to provide every one of our students with the high-quality education that they deserve.

Sincerely,



*Angélica Infante-Green, Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education*

# Executive Summary

## LEAP Task Force Report: Leveraging a Crisis to Accelerate Student Learning and Create the High-Quality Educational System that All Rhode Island Students Deserve

On March 1, 2020, the first case of coronavirus was discovered in Rhode Island, which led the governor to declare a state of emergency and set mitigations to help prevent the virus’s spread. Two weeks after the first confirmed case, the governor, Education Commissioner Angélica Infante-Green, and their teams analyzed the science and data from the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) and the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Together, they made the difficult decision to transition all Rhode Island students to distance learning, eventually making the shift permanent for the remainder of the 2019/20 academic year, to ensure students’ and teachers’ health and safety as the pandemic began.

In Rhode Island, unlike many states, leaders buckled down. The Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) and other state agencies stayed the course through diligent planning and cross-collaboration that allowed them to support school leaders’ and students’ needs in a timely, responsive, and equitable way. We made the decision to stop in-person learning and to take the time to plan in order to make the difficult transition. Once that decision was made, we shifted gears to improving day-to-day in-person instruction, with a close eye on returning to in-person school as soon as we could. The entire Rhode Island education community stepped up to make distance learning a success, on extremely short notice, for more than 140,000 students. Every district worked with a designated RIDE point of contact who helped troubleshoot any number of issues. In collaboration with a local nonprofit, RIDE set up a “hotline” or help desk so that there was a centralized way for teachers, students, and families to receive tech support. To address the barriers to Wi-Fi coverage and access to the internet—especially in low-income communities—RIDE worked to secure student laptops, free Wi-Fi hotspots, and cell phone service from the four most common providers in the state. State leaders and school communities worked around the clock during summer 2020 to implement layers of safety to ensure that students could return to learning and that school staff could provide educational opportunities for all students.

Rhode Island public schools had the opportunity to expand upon teaching and learning for their students through face-to-face summer camps and the Summer Academy for Interactive Learning (SAIL) program. The SAIL program provided more than 14,000 Rhode Island students with access to a range of academic and enrichment opportunities, along with project-based learning and student-led seminars. The state made tremendous progress by implementing distance learning—yet, the data shows, and students and families reinforced, that students’ educational outcomes, social-emotional health, and well-being are optimized when students can learn in-person. The state recognized that, in the current context, a single approach to reopening schools would not serve all students equitably—schools and districts prepared plans for in-person options with risk mitigations in place to ensure safety, and high-quality virtual options for parents and families to choose for their child.

To support in-person learning, in partnership with RIDOH, on June 19, 2020, RIDE released *Back to School RI: Health and Safety Guidance to Reopen Rhode Island’s Elementary and Secondary Schools*,<sup>1</sup> which provided guidance on the requirements that school systems would use to plan for reopening. The document outlined the four reopening scenarios (full in-person for all, partial in-person, limited in-person, and full distance learning), guidance on class and group size limits, and cleanliness protocols. The state recognized that testing and contact tracing would be critical in reopening schools in-person safely and announced the Education Operations Center’s creation. The center was staffed by RIDE, RIDOH, the Rhode Island Emergency Management Agency, the Rhode Island Public Transit Authority, and the Rhode Island National Guard (to deploy to schools during an outbreak and to support rapid testing and contact tracing).

<sup>1</sup> Visit <https://www.ride.ri.gov/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/COVID19/HealthandSafetyReopeningGuidance.pdf?ver=2020-08-31-171305-347> to access the guidance document.



RIDE's commitment to in-person learning continued as some schools reopened this past fall and others opted to reopen for the start of 2021; Rhode Island was one of only a select few states that reopened schools at full capacity, based on guidance. This was achieved through continued collaboration, robust testing, layered mitigation, and flexibility from school leaders, teachers, students, and families.

## Moving Forward: Creating the Learning, Equity & Accelerated Pathways Task Force

Throughout the past year, Rhode Island school communities worked diligently to provide quality curriculum and world-class instruction—both in-person and virtually—and prioritized students' and staff's health and safety above all else. Rhode Islanders did not allow a global pandemic to stand in the way of learning. Yet, students' academic achievement and growth, as well as their mental health, have been impacted dramatically. This is especially true in low-income communities and for the most at-risk and vulnerable students—students of color, differently-abled students, and multilingual learners—who were already facing disparities that have now been exacerbated.

As a response, in February 2021, RIDE launched the Learning, Equity & Accelerated Pathways (LEAP) Task Force, a diverse committee of 36 parents, state and local leaders, education experts, and community members, who, over two months, engaged in an evidence-based process relying on data and the knowledge of national education experts. Commissioner Infante-Green chaired the LEAP Task Force with co-chairs Deputy Commissioner of Instructional Programs Ana Riley, and 2021 Rhode Island Superintendent of the Year from Exeter-West Greenwich James Erinakes. This inclusive process also included critical voices from the Rhode Island Student Advisory Council and the Rhode Island Educators of Color Committee; both the council and committee served as sounding boards and provided feedback.

Commissioner Infante-Green urged the task force to think beyond addressing learning loss due to the pandemic, and to instead focus on accelerating learning for all students and addressing educational inequities statewide. The task force's goal was to help state and local leaders better understand the academic, social-emotional, and wrap-around services the state's school communities need in order to ensure a high-quality education for every single student in Rhode Island and to present recommendations to the Commissioner for her review and implementation.

To help ground the task force's work, the state interim assessment, enrollment, and attendance data from fall 2020 were presented and analyzed. This included Curriculum Associates data (i-Ready) and Renaissance Learning data (STAR). The task force members also relied on national data, research, and expertise to challenge their thinking on how to be innovative to accelerate learning. The following experts were critical to this work:

- **Dr. John King, 10th U.S. Secretary of Education:** The former U.S. Secretary of Education, also an educator, provided remarks on how to center students' and families' voices and focus on equity.
- **Dr. Jennifer McCombs, RAND Corporation:** A Senior Policy Researcher and Director of the Behavioral and Policy Sciences Department at RAND focused on combining evaluations using implementation and outcome data to provide guidance to practitioners and policymakers.
- **Dr. Matthew Kraft, Brown University:** An Associate Professor of Education and Economics at Brown University focused on improving educator and organizational effectiveness in kindergarten through grade twelve urban public schools.
- **Dr. Marc Brackett, Yale University:** The Founder and Director of the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence and a professor in the Yale Child Study Center focused on the role of emotions and emotional intelligence in learning, decision-making, creativity, relationships, health, and performance.



- **Dr. Madeline Mavrogordato, Michigan State University:** An Associate Professor of Educational Administration at Michigan State University focused on investigating how education policies shape outcomes for underserved student populations, particularly immigrants and multilingual learners.
- **Dr. Nathan Jones, Boston University:** An Associate Professor of Special Education and a founding member of the Boston University Faculty of Computing and Data Sciences focused on researching teacher quality, teacher development, and school improvement, with a specific emphasis on conceptualizing and measuring teaching effectiveness.
- **Dr. Kenneth Wong, Brown University:** The Walter and Leonore Annenberg Chair for Education policy and professor of political science, public policy, and urban studies at Brown University, as well as professor of political science, public policy, and urban studies, focused on extensive research in the politics of education, federalism, policy innovation, outcome-based accountability, and governance redesign.
- **Prof. Paul Reville, Harvard University:** The Francis Keppel Professor of Practice of Educational Policy and Administration at the Harvard Graduate School of Education focused on economy and education, educational equity, urban schooling, and politics of school structure and governance.
- **Ian Rosenblum, Acting Assistant Secretary of Education:** The Acting Assistant Secretary of Education for the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Elementary and Secondary Education focused on his experiences as part of the New York and Pennsylvania governors' administrations.
- **Dr. Pedro Noguera, University of Southern California:** The Emery Stoops and Joyce King Stoops Dean of the USC Rossier School of Education focused on the ways in which schools are influenced by social and economic conditions, as well as by demographic trends in local, regional, and global contexts.

## Laying the Foundation

### Four LEAP Systemic Enabling Conditions

The task force understood and underscored the urgency of this moment, and, in order to best achieve the recommendations, goals, and beliefs laid out by the task force, certain enabling conditions that must be met across systems to be successful in this work were defined.

1. Address systemic racial inequities in Rhode Island's educational system.
2. Center the voices of students and families in all of our work, across the entire system.
3. Prioritize cross-sector partnerships and intentionally collaborate across Rhode Island's entire education system—between pre-kindergarten through grade 12 and institutes of higher education (IHEs), between local education agencies (LEAs) and community-based organizations (CBOs), and between municipalities, mayors, and the state—to implement collective impact approaches.
4. Codify collective action and shared accountability across all systems.



## Paving the Way

### Five LEAP Absolute Priorities

Within the context of those enabling conditions, the task force outlined the following absolute priorities that will accelerate student learning and move our pre-kindergarten through grade 12 system forward. This work must elevate and center the needs of Rhode Island students who are multilingual, who are differently-abled, or who live in the urban core, through an explicitly anti-racist, equity-focused lens.

1. Energize our school communities—students and educators—by launching a statewide back-to-school campaign, with particular attention to the chronically absent and the overaged-undercredited students.
2. Ensure that all students have access to high-quality and personalized support from adults, through extended learning, before-/after-school partnerships, and summer learning opportunities.
3. Universally screen all students and align resources to need.
4. Improve and support student transitions across grades and systems.
5. Close the digital divide.

## Taking Action

### RIDE's Next Steps to Building a High-Quality Educational System

Based on the recommendations from the LEAP Task Force, RIDE is committed to the following next steps and initiatives:

- Reflect the task force recommendations in the fiscal guidance and application for federal stimulus dollars—Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER) II and ESSER III—and support a streamlined application process aligned to LEAP recommendations and the community's needs.
- Establish transparent and public-facing metrics for success, related to LEAP's absolute priorities.
- Fully connect LEAP's work to RIDE's strategic plan and operationalize these recommendations internally across divisions and departments while communicating priorities to our school communities.
- Align improvement efforts in low-performing schools and districts to the task force recommendations.
- Ensure that schools and districts share their priority Rhode Island Core Standards for the 2021/22 school year with CBOs.
- Design and begin to launch a statewide communications campaign and toolkit to help encourage continued learning and to support school communities with messaging.
- Prioritize professional development and continued growth by supporting the social-emotional needs of students, educators, and school staff.
- Promote summer educational and enrichment opportunities for families and students through [www.EnrollRI.org](http://www.EnrollRI.org).
- Finalize and launch a racial equity decision-making tool, for both RIDE and our school communities, to help center equity in decision-making.



## Staying Connected

### Activating Our Entire School Community to Move Us Forward

**Visit:** [www.ride.ri.gov/InsideRIDE/AdditionalInformation/LEAPTaskForce.aspx](http://www.ride.ri.gov/InsideRIDE/AdditionalInformation/LEAPTaskForce.aspx)

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## Introduction

On March 13, 2020, Rhode Island made the difficult but necessary decision to close school buildings across the state in light of the growing spread of COVID-19. Rhode Islanders came together to serve students at a distance and through a variety of hybrid options, ultimately using layered mitigation efforts and relying on the science and data from the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH) and the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to inform all decisions to return safely back to school buildings. It is a notable success story and a worthy point of pride that Rhode Islanders collaborated, and together—teachers and principals, families and students, superintendents and state policy leaders—forged a path to reopen our schools thoughtfully and to safely begin in-person learning again.

In order to support schools and districts, the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (RIDE) took a leadership role in various aspects of safely reopening—from statewide distribution of personal protective equipment, to providing documents focused on transportation and reopening buildings or the physical plants, to supporting districts with walk-throughs from the Department of Business Regulation as well as air quality readiness assessments from Arden Engineering, to leveraging stimulus funds to purchase high-efficiency particulate air filtration units, in bulk, for every school.

Despite our successes, the truth remains that over the past year, COVID-19 has laid bare many of the systemic disparities that have plagued education for decades. Among those systemic disparities are the historical shortcomings in our ability to serve our students with the most significant needs—among them, students of color, multilingual learners, and differently-abled students. These disparities were exacerbated by COVID-19. And while our state and our nation continue to wage war against this public health crisis, we cannot lose sight of the unique opportunity this moment presents to let go of outdated and ineffective policies and practices—the agrarian calendar, monolingual classrooms, ability groupings, exclusionary disciplinary



practices, and more—that were never designed to serve our students well. There is no need for us to be stuck in old patterns any longer; this is our opportunity to redesign and transform our educational system.

Subsequent to these challenges, in February 2021, the Rhode Island Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education, Angélica Infante-Green, appointed and convened education stakeholders for the Learning, Equity & Accelerated Pathways (LEAP) Task Force. The LEAP Task Force was chaired by Commissioner Infante-Green, and co-chaired by Deputy Commissioner for Instructional Programs Ana Riley, and 2021 Rhode Island Superintendent of the Year from Exeter–West Greenwich James Erinakes. The work of the task force was guided by Deputy Commissioner for System Transformation, Dr. Kelvin Roldán, and supported by a policy team composed of RIDE staff. The LEAP Task Force is composed of 36 diverse education stakeholders, policy leaders, community members, and advocacy organization staff, who are positioned to play a key role in statewide support for redesigning the system and accelerating learning across Rhode Island. Additionally, the Rhode Island Student Advisory Council and the Rhode Island Educators of Color Committee provided cycles of feedback for this work.

The LEAP Task Force members participated in a series of meetings, facilitated by RIDE senior leadership, which involved national researchers and subject-matter experts, such as the 10th U.S. Secretary of Education, Dr. John King, regarding various aspects of accelerated learning and in order to share evidence and support ongoing discussion. It was important for Rhode Island to include many diverse perspectives to help identify a path forward. Every voice was critical, from knowledge about the latest research and data from national experts, to the lived experience and needs of the community through parents, students, and community-based organizations (CBOs), to the challenges of implementation at the school and district levels with superintendents, principals, and teachers. The recommendations generated by the 36-member task force reinforced the importance of accelerating learning, supporting students, and setting the strategic direction of the educational pathways work in Rhode Island.

Fundamentally, the LEAP Task Force worked to chart a new course forward for education in Rhode Island, in light of the historic nature of the moment. And for Rhode Island, this work means confronting the systemic racism and bias that are embedded in our system’s very design. While COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted communities of color, our educational system has been disproportionately impacting students of color for generations. This stark, inequitable reality can no longer be swept under the rug.

This report details the process undertaken—including a list of the participants and expert speakers—the outcomes of this work, and, most importantly, the task force’s recommendations to RIDE and the commissioner for a path forward. As a state, we have a once-in-a-generation opportunity—coupled with historic federal investments—to shift our system to be more responsive to the needs and differences of our students, conscious of the culture and biases we all carry, explicitly anti-racist in its priorities and policies, and, ultimately, more equitable in its outcomes. The task force identified critical levers and values to guide us through uncharted waters. Our collective work has never been more timely or more urgent.

For far too long, the home of the Industrial Revolution has chosen—at least with its schools—merely to tinker with change. Plainly, this has not worked. Rhode Island, with the hope for which it is known, is no longer satisfied with continuing the tired, old approaches that have not worked in the past. Rhode Island should not desire to return to pre-pandemic outcomes; the performance of schools and communities pre-pandemic was deeply indicative of historic inequities and also, frankly, not desirable for any student. This is why the LEAP Task Force is not talking about remediation or recovery or loss; instead, the task force has focused its attention on acceleration, transforming outcomes for students, and using data to drive decisions and to determine appropriate supports.

Rather than continuing to tinker around the edges of change, Rhode Island will lead in this moment, centering students in all decisions. We encourage you, the reader, to take this charge seriously, and join us in this essential work during this critical moment.



## Task Force Participants and Experts

The LEAP Task Force engaged in a participatory, evidence-informed, data-driven process to understand the academic and social-emotional impacts of COVID-19, in partnership with practitioners, parents, students, community leaders, experts, and a variety of stakeholders across the State of Rhode Island. RIDE is leveraging this process to develop recommendations that inform strategy (short- and long-term) and to align resources to achieve coherence.

### Commissioner Infante-Green announced the following individuals to serve as members of the LEAP Task Force:

**Ashley Adamson**, *RI Teacher of the Year, Portsmouth*

**Marcela Betancur**, *Latino Policy Institute*

**Dr. Khechara Bradford**, *Providence Public Schools*

**Andrew Bramson**, *College Crusade of Rhode Island*

**Dr. Jonathan Brice**, *Bristol-Warren Regional School Department*

**Mario Bueno**, *Progreso Latino*

**Hon. Sandra Cano**, *Rhode Island Senate*

**Victor Capellan**, *Senior Advisor to the Commissioner*

**Jeremy Chiappetta**, *Blackstone Valley Prep  
Mayoral Academy*

**Paige Clausius-Parks**, *Rhode Island Kids Count*

**Sean Doyle**, *RIFTHP Member, Teacher in West Warwick*

**James Erinakes**, *Exeter-West Greenwich School Department*

**Angelo Garcia**, *Segue Institute for Learning*

**Angélica Infante-Green**, *Commissioner, RIDE*

**Dr. Soljane Martinez**, *Brown University, Annenberg Institute*

**Joseph McNamara**, *Rhode Island House of Representatives*

**Alex Molina**, *City Year*

**Juanita Montes de Oca**, *Generation Citizen*

**Dr. Renee Palazzo**, *Ponaganset High School, Scituate*

**Juan Carlos Payero**, *Portsmouth School Committee*

**Dr. Julia Rafal-Baer**, *Chiefs for Change*

**Ana Riley**, *Deputy Commissioner for Instructional  
Programs, RIDE*

**Dr. Kelvin Roldán**, *Deputy Commissioner for System  
Transformation, RIDE*

**Dr. Anthony Rolle**, *University of Rhode Island,  
College of Education*

**Sam Salganick**, *Rhode Island Parent Information Network*

**Hillary Salmons**, *Providence After School Alliance*

**Ramona Santos Torres**, *Parent, Providence*

**Dr. Nathaniel Schwartz**, *Brown University, Annenberg Institute*

**Neil Steinberg**, *Rhode Island Foundation*

**Jim Vincent**, *Providence NAACP*

**Sue Warburton**, *NEA-RI Member, Teacher in North Kingstown*

**Larry Warner**, *United Way of Rhode Island*



**Tammy Warner**, *RI Office of Postsecondary Commissioner*

**Dr. Kenneth Wong**, *Brown University, Department of Education*

**Charmaine Webster**, *Parent, Woonsocket*

**Jennifer Wood**, *Rhode Island Center for Justice*

## LEAP Task Force Meeting Cadence and National Experts

In laying a path forward, the LEAP Task Force wanted to ground itself in national data, research, and expertise about the urgent challenge, and align our local thinking to equitable, yet innovative, recommendations to accelerate learning. Knowing that this COVID-19 moment is both crucial and uncharted, the task force desired broad national expertise—to supplement local knowledge and experience—in order to identify key strategies with an evidence base of changing outcomes for students. To that end, the evidence briefs provided by Dr. Matthew Kraft, Dr. Madeline Mavrogordato, and Dr. Nathan Jones through the EdResearch for Recovery project jointly led by the Annenberg Institute at Brown University and Results for America were critical. Finally, in addition to these national experts, Governor Daniel McKee and Council on Elementary and Secondary Education Chairwoman Barbara Cottam were part of launching this task force’s work, including attending the first meeting and helping to establish the vision for this work.

Cadence	Purpose	Topics Addressed
<b>2/11, 11:45am</b>	Task Force Launch Session	Remarks from the Commissioner, the Governor-designate, Chairwoman Cottam, and a keynote address from the 10th U.S. Secretary of Education, Dr. John King.
<b>2/16, 8:30am</b>	Understanding Root Causes	Academic and non-academic data along with key analytic insights with Curriculum Associates, Renaissance Learning, and Scott Gausland.
<b>2/23, 8:30am</b>	Drawing Upon National Expertise	Expanded learning opportunities with Dr. Jennifer McCombs, RAND, and Dr. Matthew Kraft, Brown University.
<b>3/2, 8:30am</b>	Drawing Upon National Expertise	Serving the needs of diverse populations with Dr. Marc Brackett, Yale University; Dr. Madeline Mavrogordato, Michigan State University; and Dr. Nathan Jones, Boston University.
<b>3/9, 2:00pm</b>	Drawing Upon National Expertise	Thinking through a whole-of-system response via an equity lens with Dr. Kenneth Wong, Brown, and Prof. Paul Reville, Harvard.
<b>3/16, 8:30am</b>	Recommendations	Deliver draft recommendations of task force to the Commissioner.
<b>3/23, 8:30am</b>	Recommendations	Finalize revised draft recommendations of the task force and deliver them to the Commissioner with the U.S. Department of Education Acting Assistant Secretary Ian Rosenblum.



- **Dr. John King, 10th U.S. Secretary of Education:** Prior to serving as U.S. Secretary of Education, Dr. King served as Deputy Secretary of Education and as the New York State Education Commissioner. A former educator, Dr. King [encouraged the task force](#) to center the voices of students and families in this work, focus on equity, and realize that deep, affirming relationships with children would be necessary as we navigate the path forward.
- **Dr. Jennifer McCombs, RAND Corporation:** As Senior Policy Researcher and Director of the Behavioral and Policy Sciences Department at RAND, Dr. McCombs focuses on combining evaluations using implementation and outcome data to provide practitioners and policymakers guidance on how to improve programs and promote positive outcomes for children and youth. She [shared with the task force](#) recent findings from the National Summer Learning Project regarding characteristics of effective, high-quality summer learning programs that blend academic and enrichment opportunities for youth.
- **Dr. Matthew Kraft, Brown University:** As an Associate Professor of Education and Economics at Brown University, Dr. Kraft's primary work focuses on efforts to improve educator and organizational effectiveness in kindergarten through grade twelve urban public schools. Dr. Kraft [shared with the task force](#) his recent work around the power of affirming adult relationships and high-dosage tutoring. He reminded us that consistent tutoring and mentoring experiences hold specific benefits, but having every child be known and have their needs met also holds powerful, and yet untapped, benefits.
- **Dr. Marc Brackett, Yale University:** As the Founder and Director of the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence and a professor in the Yale Child Study Center, Dr. Brackett focuses on the role of emotions and emotional intelligence in learning. He [discussed the emotional impact of COVID-19](#) on students and educators and how that has disrupted attention, memory and learning, decision-making, health, and performance and creativity. He provided concrete strategies for teaching social-emotional skills and for supporting the emotional health of students.
- **Dr. Madeline Mavrogordato, Michigan State University:** As an Associate Professor of Educational Administration at Michigan State University, Dr. Mavrogordato investigates how education policies shape outcomes for underserved student populations, particularly immigrants and multilingual learners. She [presented the task force with several key strategies](#) for expanding multilingual learner equity: optimizing student attendance, maximizing learning through time and grouping strategies, taking advantage of family linguistic and cultural resources, and collaboration between educators.
- **Dr. Nathan Jones, Boston University:** As an Associate Professor of Special Education and a founding member of the Boston University Faculty of Computing and Data Sciences, Dr. Jones's research focuses on teacher quality, teacher development, and school improvement, with a specific emphasis on conceptualizing and measuring teaching effectiveness. He [presented the task force with recommendations for serving differently-abled students](#) through universal screening, targeted intervention supported by routine progress monitoring, and deploying personnel appropriately.
- **Dr. Pedro Noguera, University of Southern California:** As the Emery Stoops and Joyce King Stoops Dean of the USC Rossier School of Education, and a sociologist by training, Dr. Noguera focuses on the ways in which schools are influenced by social and economic conditions, as well as by demographic trends in local, regional, and global contexts. Recently, he was appointed as the special advisor to the Governor of New Mexico on education policy. An author of more than 15 books and 250 articles, Dr. Noguera [presented the task force with considerations about how RIDE can best position itself to support local education agencies \(LEAs\)](#). He argued for centering equity first and foremost, and focusing on capacity-building approaches that use data to align systems to need, achieving coherence for children and communities through trust and collaboration.
- **Dr. Kenneth Wong, Brown University:** As the Walter and Leonore Annenberg Chair for Education policy and professor of political science, public policy, and urban studies at Brown University, Dr. Wong's extensive research focuses on the politics



of education, federalism, policy innovation, outcome-based accountability, and governance redesign. Dr. Wong [shared with the task force his recent work around how state agencies and LEAs can work together effectively](#) to accelerate learning with equity in the center; focus funding for multilingual learners, differently-abled students, and students of color; build capacity for implementation fidelity with equity; and activate purposeful community engagement.

- **Prof. Paul Reville, Harvard University:** As the Francis Keppel Professor of Practice of Educational Policy and Administration at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, Prof. Reville focuses on economy and education, educational equity, urban schooling, and politics of school structure and governance. He [shared with the task force](#) the importance of a personalized experience for every student, engaging city officials as part of an entire service ecosystem focused on collective impact, and building systems that center the voices and needs of families and students.
- **Ian Rosenblum, Acting Assistant Secretary of Education:** As Acting Assistant Secretary of Education for the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. Prior to assuming his role as Acting Assistant Secretary, Mr. Rosenblum previously served as the founding executive director of the Education Trust—New York and served in the administrations of governors in New York and Pennsylvania. In his remarks to the task force, he emphasized the importance of social-emotional learning (SEL) supports and mental health connections in his work. He also noted how Rhode Island’s efforts fit within the broader national initiatives to respond to the COVID-19 education crisis.

## LEAP Task Force Goals

At the outset, the LEAP Task Force members and RIDE senior leadership identified four key goals:

1. Assess the impact of COVID-19 upon schools and communities across Rhode Island.
2. Analyze Rhode Island—specific academic and non-academic data.
3. Identify areas of focus and engage with national experts in each of those areas.
4. Provide field guidance and align stimulus funding to instructional priorities driven by the data.

## LEAP Task Force Theory of Action

**“As we forward plan, we need to be strategic about how we increase fidelity, intensity, and urgency so that we actually move learning forward/accelerate learning.”**

— JAMES ERINAKES, EXETER-WEST GREENWICH SCHOOL DEPARTMENT

LEAs are best positioned—in collaboration with their community stakeholders—to accelerate student learning and meaningfully support students, families, and educators by sharing data and opportunities. Therefore, RIDE’s roles are to empower districts, support conditions for success, and hold districts accountable.



In order to achieve the aforementioned goals, the LEAP Task Force codified the following theory of action:

If RIDE . . .	Then Rhode Island will . . .
<p><b>1. Engages in a collaborative, solutions-oriented process focused on collectively accelerating student learning for the state with a strategic focus on the most impacted student populations</b></p>	<p>Form solutions-oriented partnerships and realize economies of scale to create impactful, efficient solutions that serve Rhode Island students where they attend school, live, and play.</p>
<p><b>2. Grounds its strategy in data, research, and evidence-based best practices</b></p>	<p>Invest resources strategically in a limited set of solutions that have a track record of success in supporting and transforming outcomes for students.</p>
<p><b>3. Identifies, communicates, and supports targeted high-priority standards and models for accelerating learning</b></p>	<p>Focus its energies on collectively implementing a few high-value activities that will quickly accelerate student learning.</p>
<p><b>4. Creates the conditions and structures that enable LEAs to collectively accelerate student learning</b></p>	<p>Ensure that the entire system moves in coordination and with intentionality to respond to the clear and present needs of students, families, and educators while accelerating learning.</p>

## The Work of the LEAP Task Force



The LEAP Task Force’s work falls into five categories. First, the task force identified *systemic enabling conditions*, or foundational conditions that must occur in order to support sustainable change. Then, within the context of those enabling conditions, the task force identified five absolute priorities, or clear commitments to change.

In addition to these two items, the task force identified specific *recommendations* related to meeting diverse needs, serving multilingual learners and differently-abled students, and addressing social-emotional wellness. Additionally, recommendations were included for expanded learning programs, including summer and after-school programs, tutoring, mentoring, and small group support.

To support role differentiation across the whole system, governance recommendations were also provided for RIDE, its constituent LEAs, and partner organizations, such as CBOs.

Finally, RIDE worked to support the LEAP Task Force by drafting a framework for acceleration in Rhode Island, as well as producing *fiscal guidance for the field* in relation to the strategic use of stimulus resources from the federal government—Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER)/Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSAA) and ESSER III/American Rescue Plan (ARP)—aligned to the LEAP recommendations.

## Understanding Root Causes: Academic and Non-Academic Data

RIDE recognizes that this moment is crucial in addressing the disproportionate impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on students of color, students in high-poverty schools and communities, differently-abled students, and multilingual learners. The enrollment, attendance, and achievement data across Rhode Island schools in 2020/21 demonstrate the need for targeted strategies that will accelerate student learning. As reflected in the theory of action, using data to ground the recommendations will help RIDE and Rhode Island’s LEAs to invest strategically in research-based practices that demonstrate success in improving outcomes.

### Key Terms:

**Chronic absenteeism:** missing 10 percent or more of the school year (18 or more days for a 180-day school year)

**In-person assessment:** occurs when students take assessments at school

**Remote assessment:** occurs when students take assessments at home or in non-school locations



## Enrollment and Attendance Data<sup>2</sup>

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, RIDE data show that overall enrollment has decreased between the 2019/20 school year and the 2020/21 school year, with the early grades reflecting the greatest impact.

For the 2020/21 school year, enrollment in Rhode Island public schools has decreased by 3.1 percent, or about 4,000 students. Pre-kindergarten and kindergarten have experienced the largest decreases in enrollment (26 percent and 9 percent, respectively). Enrollment in most other grades decreased by 3 to 4 percent, with the exception of slight increases in enrollment in grades 11 and 12. With federal and state funding tied to student enrollment, district budgets are adversely affected by decreases in enrollment.<sup>3</sup>

Absences have increased by almost 50 percent across Rhode Island schools, with greater percentages of chronic absenteeism in high-poverty schools, compared to low-poverty schools.

Along with the increase in total number of absences, the percentage of students who are chronically, excessively, or mostly absent (see figure 1) has also increased from 19 to 26 percent between 2019/20 and 2020/21. Schools with the highest poverty levels show the highest proportions of chronically absent students. Across the board, students of color, multilingual learners, and differently-abled students were more chronically absent, compared to their peers, especially when they were enrolled in high-poverty schools.

### Absence Rate Categories:

**Low:** absent fewer than 5 percent of school days

**Moderate:** absent between 5 percent and 10 percent of school days

**Chronic:** absent between 10 percent and 20 percent of school days

**Excessive:** absent between 20 percent and 50 percent of school days

**Mostly absent:** absent more than 50 percent of school days

<sup>2</sup> Enrollment and attendance data generated by RIDE represent a snapshot from the data available on February 11, 2021. Data is likely to change and should be interpreted with caution.

<sup>3</sup> Lee, V., Gutierrez, E., & Blagg, K. (2020, October 6). *Declining school enrollment spells trouble for education funding*. The Urban Institute. <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/declining-school-enrollment-spells-trouble-education-funding>



**Figure 1. Students attending high-poverty schools were more chronically absent, compared to their peers in low-poverty schools.**

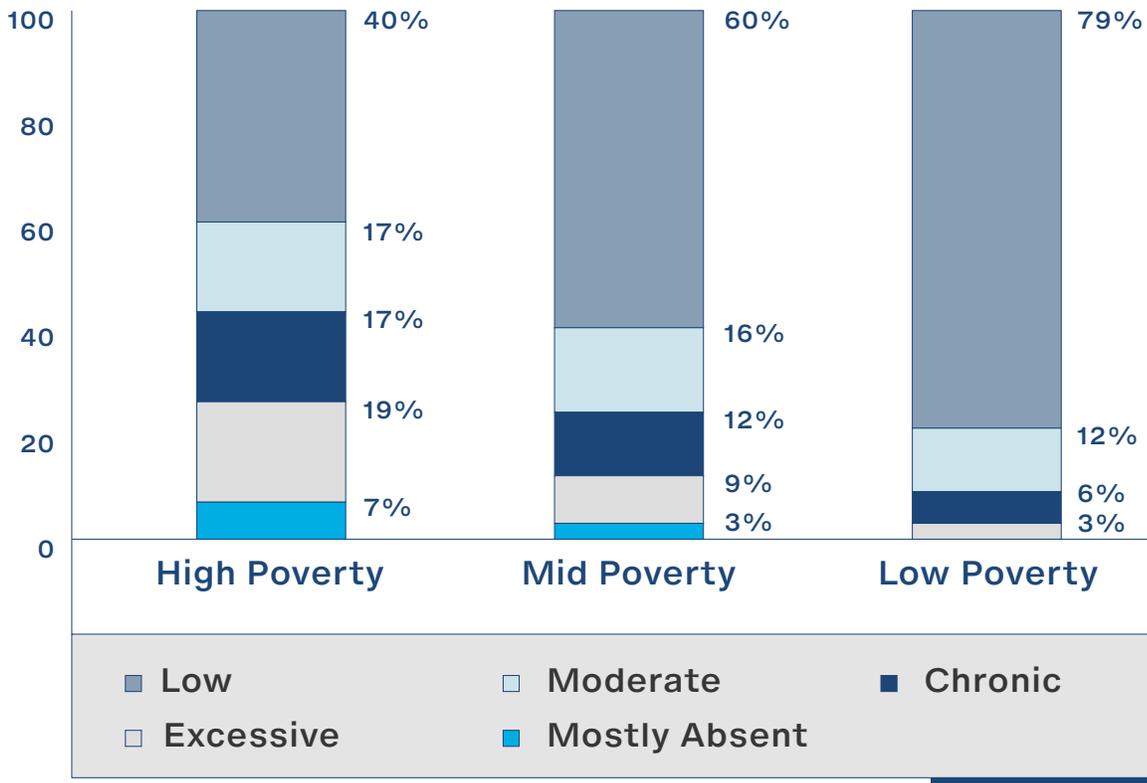


Image Description

*Note: High-poverty schools are those where 60 percent or more of the student population receives free or reduced-price lunch. Low-poverty schools are those where 20 percent or fewer receive free or reduced-price lunch. Data is a snapshot from February 11, 2021, and is likely to change. (Source: RIDE State Enrollment Census Core, 2021)<sup>4</sup>*

### Achievement Data

During the COVID-19 pandemic, RIDE has relied on interim assessments to track student performance during school closures and reopenings. The achievement data presented here comes from two interim assessments, provided by Curriculum Associates and Renaissance Learning. It is important to note that the populations of students who participated in these two assessments and the methodologies for analysis differ. The information presented should not be viewed as a complete picture of Rhode Island students’ performance, but rather should be viewed as evidence of emerging patterns and trends that need to be addressed. The recommendations in this report are designed to address these needs and to support learning acceleration.

<sup>4</sup> <https://datacenter.ride.ri.gov/Data/Enrollment>

## Where are Rhode Island students being assessed?

Data show variation in where students are taking tests. Across a sample of 14 out of 64 Rhode Island LEAs, 29 percent of students in kindergarten through grade eight were assessed in school, 61 percent were assessed remotely, and 10 percent were assessed in a blended environment (Curriculum Associates 2020).<sup>5</sup> Across a sample of kindergarten through grade 12 students, 40 percent were assessed in school and 30 percent were assessed remotely (Renaissance Learning 2020).<sup>6</sup>

## Preliminary analyses show that, in the aggregate, students are not falling further behind projections of academic achievement, but they are also not catching up to or surpassing these projections.

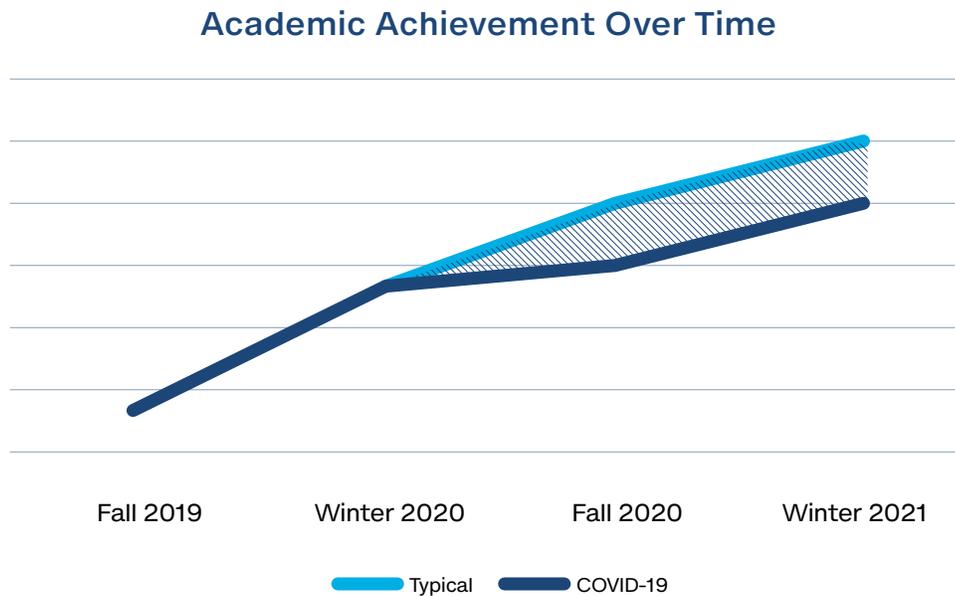
Trends in assessment data show that academic achievement initially slowed in the winter of 2020 but is projected to stabilize. These projections show that performance is still below what would typically be expected (see figure 2).

Figure 2 offers a visual approximation of how academic achievement during the pandemic fell below what is typically expected for students. Two lines show the difference in academic achievement during a typical school year (lighter blue), and during COVID (darker blue). Starting at fall 2019, the data show an identical upward trend for academic achievement during a typical year and during COVID. However, at winter 2020, academic achievement began to fall below what would be expected during a typical school year. Academic achievement from fall 2020 through winter 2021 stayed consistently below what would be typically expected. In Figure 2, the gap between the two lines is filled in to illustrate the resulting academic achievement gap.

<sup>5</sup> Curriculum Associates. (2020). *State-funded interim assessments* (Unpublished).

<sup>6</sup> Renaissance Learning. (2020). *State-funded interim assessments* (Unpublished).



**Figure 2. Academic achievement during the pandemic is below what is typically expected for students.**

*Note: This figure is illustrative of early analysis of trends in student performance. It does not represent specific Rhode Island data. (Source: Renaissance Learning, 2021)<sup>7</sup>*

### Assessment data also showed that students' math performance was more negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic than their reading performance.

Students in late elementary grades were more likely to be academically impacted by COVID-19, compared to students in middle and high school grades. These impacts were greatest for math performance. On average, students in grades 3 through 5 fell two to three months behind in math and one to two months behind in reading (Renaissance Learning, 2021).<sup>8</sup>

### Assessment data indicate that, while all students have been affected by the pandemic, reading and math performance for students of color, differently-abled students, multilingual learners, and students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch have been most impacted by the pandemic.

Across kindergarten through grade eight in a sample of 14 LEAs, higher percentages of students of color, differently-abled students, multilingual learners, and students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch were behind in reading and math, compared to their white peers. The existing performance gaps for these populations—which were already significant—have grown larger during the pandemic (figure 3 and appendix B; Curriculum Associates, 2021).<sup>9</sup> Given that these student groups were already behind before the pandemic, this finding is particularly troubling.

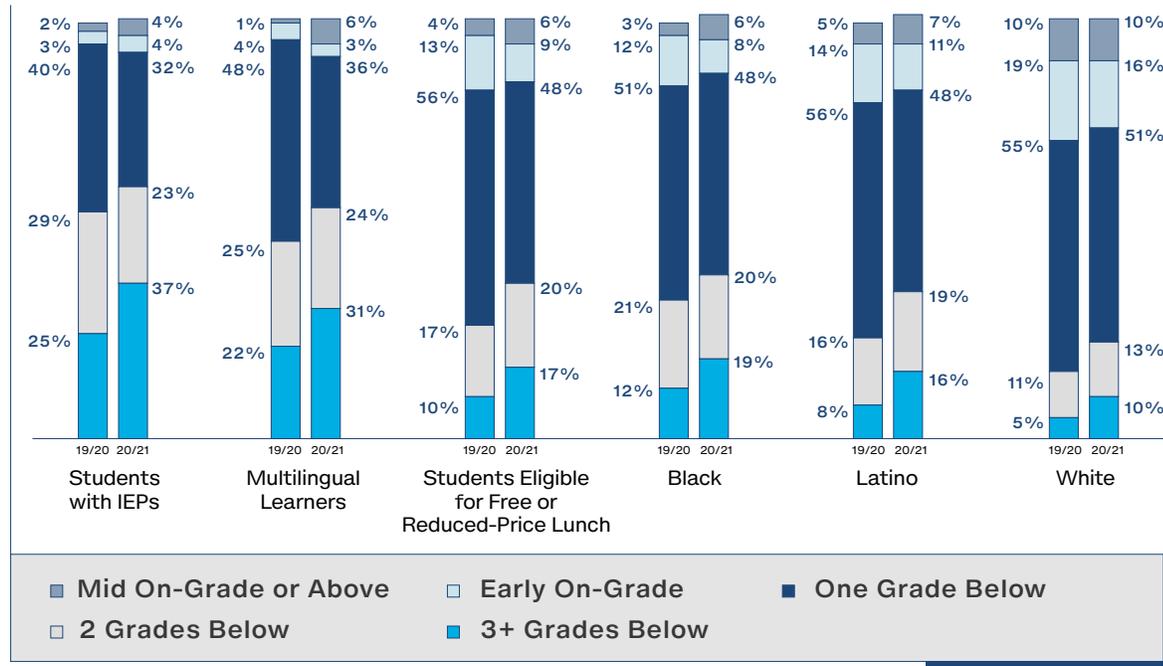
<sup>7</sup> Renaissance Learning. (2021). *State-funded interim assessments* (Unpublished).

<sup>8</sup> Renaissance Learning. (2021). *State-funded interim assessments* (Unpublished).

<sup>9</sup> Curriculum Associates. (2021). *State-funded interim assessments* (Unpublished).



**Figure 3. Students’ math performance was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, with higher percentages of students performing one or more grade levels below in math during the 2020/21 school year, as compared to grade-level performance the previous school year (2019/20).**



[Image Description](#)

*Note: Data is based on assessments delivered in the fall of each school year and is aggregated for grades kindergarten through eight. For more information on sample sizes for each student group and a similar chart for reading performance, see appendix B. (Source: Curriculum Associates, 2019-2021)<sup>10</sup>*

Additional analysis needs to be done to fully understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students. Task force members raised concerns that chronically absent students were likely not included in the data and that this may affect the overall picture of academic performance in Rhode Island. But one thing is clear: With evidence of high rates of chronic absenteeism and lower performance, strategies for accelerating student learning should prioritize the needs of students who are part of underserved populations and/or who attend high-poverty schools.

<sup>10</sup> Curriculum Associates. (2019-2021). State-funded interim assessments (Unpublished).

## LEAP Systemic Enabling Conditions

**“This is an opportunity to think about system transformation and call out racism and structural barriers. We need to think about a strategic approach and exercising all of the levers to change. I hope we can leverage this momentum to continue to move forward.”**

— LARRY WARNER, UNITED WAY OF RHODE ISLAND

In order to meet the urgency of this moment and achieve the recommendations, goals, and beliefs laid out by the LEAP Task Force, certain enabling conditions must be met at the systems level.

1. Address systemic racial inequities in Rhode Island’s educational system.
2. Center the voices of students and families in all of our work, across the entire system.
3. Prioritize cross-sector partnerships and intentionally collaborate across Rhode Island’s entire education system—between pre-kindergarten through grade 12 and institutes of higher education (IHEs), and among LEAs and CBOs, between municipalities, mayors, and the state—to implement collective impact approaches.
4. Codify collective action, metrics, and shared accountability across all systems.

## LEAP Absolute Priorities

**“I don’t think the message for recovery is that schools/educators should just try to do better at what they already know is good practice. I think the message is instead something like: systems tend not to be set up to allow for the kinds of individualized supplemental (not substitutive) support that students particularly need right now. And resetting systems to deliver this kind of support is going to take rethinking personnel, funding, etc.”**

— DR. NATHANIEL SCHWARTZ, ANNENBERG INSTITUTE

The LEAP Task Force believes that the following absolute priorities will accelerate student learning and move our pre-kindergarten through grade 12 system forward. This work must elevate and center the needs of Rhode Island students who are multilingual, who are differently-abled, or who live in the urban core through an explicitly anti-racist, equity-focused lens.

1. **Energize our school communities—students and educators—by launching a statewide back-to-school campaign, with particular attention to the chronically absent and the overaged-undercredited students.**
  - a. Launch a targeted whole-of-state campaign and a communications toolkit in multiple languages to reengage our school communities about returning to school safely.



- b. Reengage and empower chronically absent youth and youth who are overaged-undercredited, as well as the students who have fallen out of our state systems.
- c. Highlight the importance of student participation in summer programming and extended learning offerings, including before- and after-school and out-of-school-time opportunities.
- d. Elevate the power of coming together for common, shared experiences on social-emotional wellness.
- e. Explicitly use summer programming as an opportunity to uplift youth voice and reengage youth and their families in the schooling experience.

**2. Ensure that all students have access to high-quality and personalized support from adults, through extended learning, before-/after-school partnerships, and summer learning opportunities that are all undergirded by high-quality materials and resources.**

- a. Commit to every child and every family having access to at least one high-quality extended learning opportunity this summer.
- b. Ensure that every urban student, multilingual learner, and differently-abled student in Rhode Island is enrolled and engaged in quality summer learning opportunities that, ideally, are designed specifically to serve them and their specific needs.
- c. Recruit and expand staff to provide in-school and expanded learning opportunities, with a focus on activating adults within local communities.
- d. Prioritize student-centered design and the values of voice and choice, flexibility, and access in planning for expanded learning programming.
- e. Forge intentional partnerships between LEAs and CBOs, recognizing their respective strengths, sharing unique expertise, and collaborating to ensure more fluid data sharing and seamless post-summer transitions.

**3. Universally screen all students and align resources to need.**

- a. Universally screen all students, both academically and socially-emotionally, and target resources based on need and urgency in the coming year.
- b. Plan and allocate resources with a clear and focused priority for supports and staffing related to every urban student, multilingual learner, and differently-abled student in Rhode Island.
- c. Root all solutions in high-quality instructional materials, professional learning for educators, and positive, productive relationships with students.
- d. Center all actions from an orientation of cultural responsiveness and anti-racism that promotes SEL and wellness.
- e. Focus on building and sustaining adult capacity to work in teams to support students holistically through a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) lens.



#### 4. Improve and support student transitions across grades and systems.

- a. Create stronger partnerships to support educational transitions between grades and across state and local systems (e.g., education, housing, health, social services, mental health).
- b. Provide targeted family engagement and resources for outreach and support to communities around the pre-kindergarten and postsecondary transitions.
- c. Articulate clearer pathways to college, career, and workforce, that respond to student and community voice.

#### 5. Close the digital divide.

- a. Prioritize achieving equity across the state by resolving any remaining challenges that students, families, or communities face in relation to accessing high-quality internet and technology devices.
- b. Ensure that students, families, and communities have access to digital literacy programming and broadband that is capable of supporting learning.
- c. Identify areas of improvement for remote or distance learning instruction and implement digital inclusion policies, programs, and tools—with a particular focus on distance learning during inclement weather.

## Considerations for Serving the Needs of Diverse Populations

- Prioritize meaningful in-person academic and enrichment experiences for multilingual learners and differently-abled students this summer.
- Intentionally plan out the two subsequent summers when planning for this summer.
- Leverage this opportunity to realign, or redesign, data systems to support improving outcomes across and within student groups.
- Conduct universal screening for all students in their home language, particularly differently-abled students and students identified as multilingual learners.
- Implement SurveyWorks collection to gauge school climate and student and educator experience.
- Implement Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS), PSAT, SAT, and ACCESS 2.0 assessments, disaggregated for student subgroups.
- Collect attendance and enrollment data and disaggregate it for student subgroups.
- Intentionally communicate and engage with families and communities around local priorities for student groups.

**“Promoting SEL, instruction for multilingual learners, and instruction for differently abled students do not need to work at cross purposes. Some instructional practices. . . [are] beneficial across student subgroups.”**

— DR. NATHAN JONES, BOSTON UNIVERSITY



## Multilingual Learners

The LEAP Task Force recommends the following four major multilingual learner priorities for LEAs and CBOs to consider in their collaborative and coordinated planning for multilingual learners over the coming three summers and two school years:

- Intentional Grouping of Multilingual Learners—strategically group students in both heterogeneous and homogeneous groups, based on needs.
- Learning Time for Students and Educators—provide professional learning time for educators and enrichment opportunities for students.
- Expanding Dual Language Programs—prioritize expanding, scaling, and growing dual language programs for multilingual learners in each LEA.
- Honoring and Elevating Assets—provide instruction and supports in multilingual learners’ home languages.
- The LEAP Task Force affirms the principle that the [Rhode Island Blueprint for Multilingual Learner Success](#) serves as the overarching guide to prioritizing the urgent needs of this student population.

## Differently-Abled Students

The LEAP Task Force believes that what is best practice for all students, coming out of COVID-19, will be best practice for differently-abled students.

- Further, the task force believes that differently-abled students deserve access to all opportunities provided to general education students, including all tier one instruction. If this is done well and thoughtfully, most students will have their needs met.
- Additionally, differently-abled students should be supported by special educators in order to access all available general education opportunities.
- Universal screening will be necessary for all students; the task force underscores that this will be particularly important for differently-abled students.
- For those differently-abled students identified as needing additional support, LEAs must prioritize targeted, and/or intensive intervention as appropriate.
- That targeted intervention must be research-based and supported with routine progress monitoring.
- Finally, the task force strongly encourages LEAs to be relentless and creative in deploying available personnel to meet the needs of differently-abled students—be that through special educators or through well-trained, well-supported, and supervised paraprofessionals or teaching assistants.



## Social-Emotional Wellness

The LEAP Task Force believes RIDE should focus on the social-emotional wellness of our students and educators.

- Adopt new approaches to social-emotional work that acknowledge emotions, including anxiety, trauma, and grief of students and teachers, and that encourage LEA and school leaders to lead from the place of that acknowledgment.
- Additionally, encourage LEAs to develop an integrated strategy to address the racial dimensions of SEL work, as well as the pandemic's disproportional impacts along racial dimensions.
  - LEAs should consider scaling available programming and resources for developing SEL knowledge.
- Continue to promote the Rhode Island SEL standards and indicators, and support the SEL Committee of Practitioners.
- Build state-level capacity with the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) state collaboration on SEL and MTSS.
  - Leverage CASEL signature practices and resources.
- Continue to develop SEL courses on the [Bridge RI website](#).
  - Continue to provide the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence course free to all Rhode Island educators.
- Provide professional development for district teams through the forthcoming Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence Leadership Training, as well as the wellness offerings provided by Pure Edge.

**“SEL is harder than ‘hard skills.’ They are life skills, not ‘soft skills.’ If we continue to do interventions, the number of new cases coming in doesn’t decrease. SEL is often thrown into the system, not integrated into it. We need to change that.”**

— DR. MARC BRACKETT, YALE UNIVERSITY



## Considerations for Expanded Learning

**“Centering relationships is key. That may seem pithy and overly simple, but it really is simple. There is a huge body of research that demonstrates that youth who benefit from caring relationships with non-parental adults are substantially more likely to persist and succeed in school.”**

— DR. MATTHEW KRAFT, BROWN UNIVERSITY

All extended learning opportunities should begin from the place of providing a safe and supportive environment for students. In creating those opportunities, LEAs are encouraged to focus on:

- Giving students opportunities to create sustained supportive relationships with adults.
- Bringing diverse groups of students together for common experiences.
- Ensuring consistent mentors, tutors, or teachers who look like the students they serve.
- Ensuring that programming complements and enriches classroom instruction and standards.

All extended learning opportunities should begin with the equity principle of targeting the students who need these opportunities the most, with specific attention to and flexibility for:

- Differently-abled students, multilingual learners, and students of color
- Students who travel back to their home countries during breaks from school, or who need to be able to work
- Students whose families may not be comfortable with sending their children back to in-person school

### Summer Learning Opportunities

To the greatest extent possible, options for summer programming should be provided to families in-person. LEAs should aspire and plan for summer opportunities to meet as many of the following characteristics as possible:

- A delivery model that partners LEAs with intermediary organizations, community groups, or other external partners
  - Strong connections between LEAs and CBOs to ensure that data on student need is shared
- Intentional, equitable outreach and offerings that respond to student voice and expressed student or family demand
- Durations that are significant—for at least five to six weeks
  - Clear focus on attendance and engagement
- A dual purpose—a focus on quality instruction in both academics and enrichment opportunities, including in English and in the home language, where possible
  - Hiring certified instructors or instructors qualified in specific content areas
- Relatively small classes of 15 or fewer students



- Meals, snacks, and transportation included
- A strong focus on relationships for positive site climate, with the support of additional mental health or behavioral staff
- Communicating with, and including, families

## Mentoring, Tutoring, and Small Group Support

To meet the needs of students who are differently-abled or multilingual learners, as well as to reengage students in schooling and the learning process, mentoring, tutoring, relationship building, and various kinds of small group supports are critical tools at our disposal.

These activities are viable for the summer and for expanded learning, as well as important and necessary parts of an LEA's planning during the academic year; this is not an "either/or," but should be approached as an "and/both."

- Prioritization—targeting students most in need of this opportunity, or taking a universal approach to anyone in need
- Frequency—three or more sessions per week, or intensive weeklong small group programs
- Personnel—with adequate training and support, adults who have varied backgrounds can support all students
- Measurement—tailoring instruction to meet evolving needs by supporting data usage and ongoing formative assessment coupled with goal-setting
- Relationships—ensuring that students have a consistent adult in their life and access to mentorship over an extended period of time
- Curriculum—using high-quality instructional materials that are culturally responsive and aligned to Rhode Island Core Standards
- Scheduling—after school, during summer, or during the school day; the latter option demonstrates strong evidence of academic impact

## LEAP Governance Expectations

**“We need to be clear about how we will sustain efforts after the stimulus funds are gone. This has to be part of the strategic planning process.”**

— TASK FORCE MEMBER

The LEAP Task Force believes that RIDE, LEAs, and CBOs must, when able, work together to create coordination and coherence, while it also recognizes the unique vantage points, policy levers, and expertise each sector brings to the challenge at hand.



In support of the LEAP absolute priority statements, RIDE should:

- Seize this opportunity to tackle structural educational inequities across the state through anti-racist and anti-bias policies and practices.
- Elevate LEAP absolute priorities to support these recommendations with the power of policy and regulation.
- Create alignment across preexisting systems, partnerships, and initiatives—among the Executive Office of Health and Human Services; the Department of Health; the Department of Children, Youth, and Families; RIDE; and others.
- Launch statewide summer 2021 work and begin planning programming to lead a statewide program in summer 2022 using ESSER III funds, elevating student interest for programming that both responds to and is designed around engagement.
- Advance RIDE’s shift from compliance toward support by aligning ESSER I, ESSER II, and ESSER III stimulus funds and supporting LEAs with making strategic decisions.
- Provide public transparency for ESSER I, ESSER II, and ESSER III spending and outcomes.

In support of the LEAP absolute priority statements, LEAs should:

- Tailor time and energy to provide targeted, progressive supports to those students most in need, paying particular attention to those who have been historically marginalized.
- Untether learning from seat time and reimagine what mastery looks like.
- Focus on bundles of high-priority standards for additional emphasis, while using high-quality instructional materials, including during summer and other extended learning time opportunities.
- Leverage community partners to provide additional instruction, enrichment, and extended learning opportunities, and summer learning programs.
- Remove barriers to collaboration, including the sharing of data, to allow students to be well served and have their needs met.
- Reconfigure human capital to support the reorientation of LEAs toward urgent student support.

In support of the LEAP absolute priority statements, CBOs should:

- Provide programming that promotes academic growth and social-emotional well-being and also meets student demand, ensures that students attend, and keeps students highly engaged.
- Leverage existing relationships with students and families to engage students in extended or enriched learning opportunities; provide students the opportunity to know and grow alongside the same adults.
- Intentionally partner with municipalities, parent organizations, and school systems for program design and recruitment.
- Create intentional engagement with and alignment to LEAs, for many reasons, including: (a) equitably identifying students most at need for programs; (b) staffing or aligning content, where appropriate; (c) coordinating and using facilities; and (d) creating formal opportunities for feedback and sharing FERPA-compliant data and student information with school systems to bridge gaps.
- Engage in professional learning to be able to serve multilingual learners and differently-abled students better.



## Taking Action: Next Steps

Based on the draft recommendations of the LEAP Task Force, RIDE is committing to take action. In alignment with this commitment, the following 11 next steps are the agency's commitment to the work ahead, to be completed by the end of summer 2021.

### Action Steps

1. Present final LEAP Task Force recommendations to the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education; task force members are invited to attend.
2. Release final LEAP Task Force report to the public.
3. Reflect LEAP recommendations in ESSER II and ESSER III applications, as well as LEA fiscal guidance, to support a streamlined application process aligned to both LEAP recommendations and the community's needs.
4. Establish transparent and public-facing metrics for success, related to LEAP's absolute priorities.
5. Identify internal RIDE agency implications, connect this work to the RIDE strategic plan, and operationalize these recommendations internally across divisions and departments while communicating priorities to our school communities.
6. Align improvement efforts in low-performing schools and districts to the task force recommendations.
7. Distribute priority Rhode Island Core Standards bundles publicly for SY2021/22; intentionally share this information with CBOs as well.
8. Design and begin to launch a statewide communications campaign and toolkit.
9. Continue to prioritize professional learning to support the social-emotional needs of educators and students.
10. RIDE has already released the All Course Network (ACN) and SAIL RFP; there will be community engagement opportunities and ongoing, broad sharing of these offerings with families through a communications plan.
11. Release a racial equity decision-making tool, both internally and externally.



## Acknowledgments

The LEAP Task Force and RIDE would like to acknowledge the following individuals, without whom neither this task force nor this final report would have been possible.

First and foremost, this report would not have been possible without the tireless support and guidance of Georgia Bock (Region 2 Comprehensive Center), Nicole Breslow (Region 2 Comprehensive Center), Anna Sullivan (Region 2 Comprehensive Center), and Dr. Sarah Barzee (Director, Region 2 Comprehensive Center).

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# Appendix A. Evidence-Based Practices to Support Student Learning

As part of the LEAP Task Force process, RIDE engaged several experts to share evidence-based strategies for accelerating student learning. This section summarizes the research and evidence that grounded the task force in developing the recommendations presented in this report.

## Meeting Needs of Diverse Populations

Research indicates that multilingual learners benefit from the following strategies:

- Provide opportunities for extended learning time that use assessment data to tailor instruction to student needs. Extended learning time should take cultural calendars into consideration to accommodate families' schedules.
- Leverage families' cultural and linguistic resources to build trust and engagement. Research has shown that strengthening literacy and comprehension skills in a student's home language can translate to success in other languages.
- Communicate and provide supports (such as SEL resources) to families in their home language. Research has shown that this strategy can improve family-school connections.
- Strengthen educator collaboration between general education teachers and multilingual learner specialists, and provide opportunities for continuous professional development.
- Monitor student attendance and provide families with information about student attendance and academic development. Research shows that utilizing mailers to inform families about student absences was almost twice as effective for multilingual learners, compared to their peers.

Resources for more information:

- [Supports for Students Who Are English Learners](#) (Mavrogordato, Callahan, DeMathews, & Izquierdo, 2021)<sup>11</sup>
- [Reducing Student Absenteeism in the Early Grades by Targeting Parental Beliefs](#) (Robinson, Lee, Dearing, & Rogers, 2018)<sup>12</sup>

Research indicates that differently-abled students benefit from the following strategies:

- Provide opportunities for targeted intervention time that focuses on foundational academic skills as well as behavior and mental health.
- Provide opportunities for frequent small group or one-on-one instruction.
- Monitor progress to ensure effectiveness of interventions, and use data to inform instructional decisions.

<sup>11</sup> Mavrogordato, M., Callahan, R., DeMathews, D., & Izquierdo, E. (2021, February). *Supports for students who are English learners*. Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University. [https://annenberg.brown.edu/sites/default/files/EdResearch\\_for\\_Recovery\\_Brief\\_15.pdf](https://annenberg.brown.edu/sites/default/files/EdResearch_for_Recovery_Brief_15.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> Mavrogordato, M., Callahan, R., DeMathews, D., & Izquierdo, E. (2021, February). *Supports for students who are English learners*. Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University. [https://annenberg.brown.edu/sites/default/files/EdResearch\\_for\\_Recovery\\_Brief\\_15.pdf](https://annenberg.brown.edu/sites/default/files/EdResearch_for_Recovery_Brief_15.pdf)



- Screen students early on and in a student’s home language to prevent achievement gaps from widening. Research shows academic benefits for differently-abled students who receive interventions at an earlier age, compared to those who receive interventions later.

Resource for more information:

- [Academic Supports for Students with Disabilities](#) (Jones, Vaughn, & Fuchs, 2020)

## Social-Emotional Wellness

Research shows that all students, particularly students from diverse populations, benefit from the following strategies:

- Rather than employing a one-size-fits-all model, tailor SEL strategies to student needs.
- Use a systemwide strategy that aligns school and district priorities with students’ social-emotional needs.
- Leverage culturally responsive and trauma-informed practices to support student well-being. Research has shown that SEL and culturally responsive and trauma-informed practices can mutually reinforce safe and supportive learning environments.
- Diversify the workforce to ensure that educators/providers share cultural backgrounds with their students and can provide programming in home languages.

Resources for more information:

- [Evidence-Based Practices for Assessing Students’ Social and Emotional Well-Being](#) (Hough, Witte, Wang, & Calhoun, 2021)
- [SEL and Racial Equity](#) (Committee for Children, 2021)

## Expanded Learning

Research shows that students benefit the most from expanded learning opportunities when the following strategies are used:

- Tutoring should include high-quality instructional materials that are linked to academic content, prioritize sustained relationships between students and instructors, and occur frequently and regularly.
- Summer learning opportunities should integrate academics and enrichment activities that align with student interests, last for five to six weeks, and aim for class sizes of 15 or fewer students.

Resources for more information:

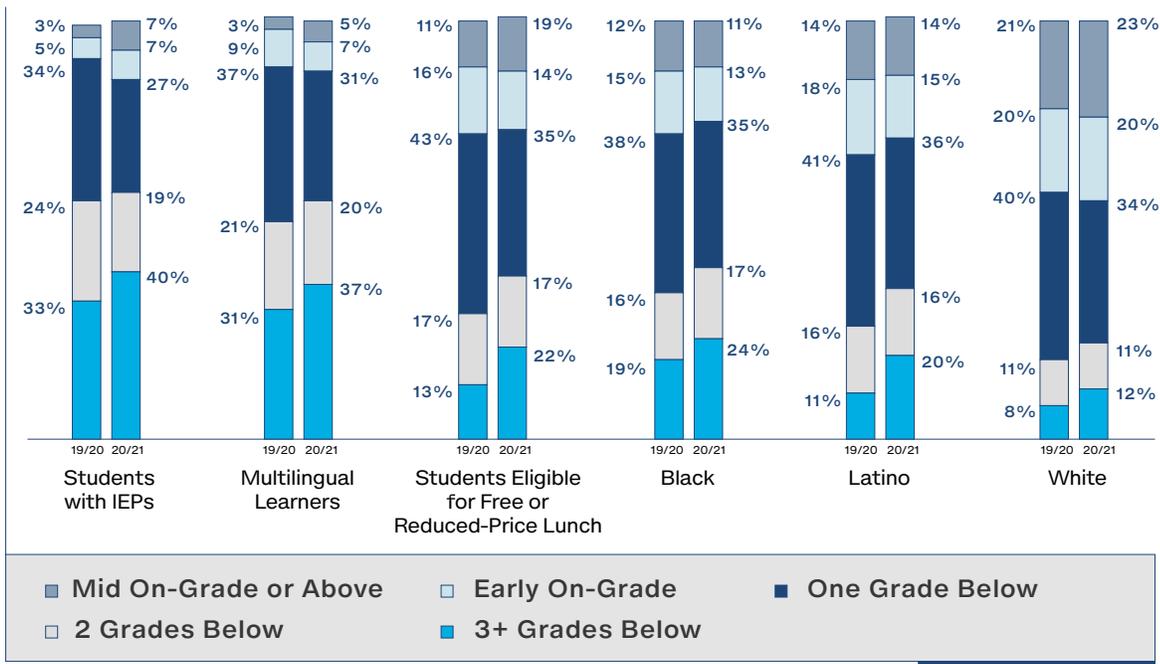
- [Accelerating Student Learning with High-Dosage Tutoring](#) (Robinson, Kraft, Loeb, & Schueler, 2021)
- [Evidence-based Considerations for COVID-19 Reopening and Recovery Planning: Summer Learning with Academic and Non-Academic Activities](#) (The Wallace Foundation, 2020)



## Appendix B. Supplemental Data Analysis

This appendix provides additional information about the impacts of the pandemic on reading performance, as well as the sample of students who participated in the i-Ready assessments provided by Curriculum Associates.

**Figure B1. Students’ reading performance was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, with higher percentages of students performing one or more grade levels below in reading during the 2020/21 school year, as compared to grade level performance the previous school year (2019/20).**



[Image Description](#)

*Note: Data is based on assessments delivered in the fall of each school year and is aggregated for kindergarten through grade eight. For more information on sample sizes for each student group, see table 1. (Source: Curriculum Associates, 2019—2021)*



**Table B1. Numbers of students in kindergarten through grade eight who took an i-Ready math or reading assessment in the fall of school years 2019/20 and 2020/21, by student group.**

<b>Student Group</b>	<b>Math (2019/20)</b>	<b>Math (2020/21)</b>	<b>Reading (2019/20)</b>	<b>Reading (2020/21)</b>
<b>Students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs)</b>	1,609	2,889	1,366	2,832
<b>Multilingual Learners</b>	290	1,370	239	1,367
<b>Students Eligible for Free or Reduced-Price Lunch</b>	3,344	8,185	3,033	8,081
<b>Black</b>	442	2,269	423	2,246
<b>Latino</b>	1,152	3,204	1,029	3,158
<b>White</b>	8,254	12,485	6,973	12,248



## Appendix C. Descriptions of Figures

### Figure 1

**Overview:** A stacked bar chart shows absentee rates for students of high-, mid-, and low-poverty schools. The chart shows that students attending high-poverty schools were more chronically absent compared to their peers in low-poverty schools.

**Values:** Numerical values presented on the image:

	High-Poverty	Mid-Poverty	Low-Poverty
<b>Low</b>	40%	60%	79%
<b>Moderate</b>	17%	16%	12%
<b>Excessive</b>	19%	9%	3%
<b>Mostly Absent</b>	7%	3%	0%
<b>Chronic</b>	17%	12%	6%



### Figure 3

**Overview:** A stacked bar chart compares students’ math performance during the 2019/20 school year to that of the 2020/21 school year. The data for students is broken into multiple demographic categories. The chart shows that math performance was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, with higher percentages of students performing one or more grade levels below in math during the 2020/21 school year, as compared to grade level performance the previous school year (2019/20).

**Values:** Numerical values presented on the image:

**Table 1: 2019–2020 School Year**

	Students with IEPs	Multilingual Learners	Students Eligible for Free or Reduced Lunch	Black	Latino	White
Mid On-Grade or Above	2%	1%	4%	3%	5%	10%
Early On-Grade	3%	13%	13%	12%	14%	19%
One Grade Below	40%	48%	56%	51%	56%	55%
2 Grades Below	29%	25%	17%	21%	16%	11%
3+ Grades Below	25%	22%	10%	12%	8%	5%

**Table 2: 2020–2021 School Year**

	Students with IEPs	Multilingual Learners	Students Eligible for Free or Reduced Lunch	Black	Latino	White
Mid On-Grade or Above	4%	6%	6%	6%	7%	10%
Early On-Grade	4%	3%	9%	8%	11%	16%
One Grade Below	32%	36%	48%	48%	48%	51%
2 Grades Below	23%	24%	20%	20%	19%	13%
3+ Grades Below	37%	31%	17%	19%	16%	10%

## Figure B1

**Overview:** A stacked bar chart compares students’ reading performance during the 2019/20 school year to that of the 2020/21 school year. The data for students is broken into multiple demographic categories. The chart shows that reading performance was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, with higher percentages of students performing one or more grade levels below in reading during the 2020/21 school year, as compared to grade level performance the previous school year (2019/20).

**Values:** Numerical values presented on the image:

**Table 1: 2019–2020 School Year**

	Students with IEPs	Multilingual Learners	Students Eligible for Free or Reduced Lunch	Black	Latino	White
Mid On-Grade or Above	3%	3%	11%	12%	14%	21%
Early On-Grade	5%	9%	16%	15%	18%	20%
One Grade Below	34%	37%	43%	38%	41%	40%
2 Grades Below	24%	21%	17%	16%	16%	11%
3+ Grades Below	33%	31%	13%	19%	11%	8%

**Table 2: 2020–2021 School Year**

	Students with IEPs	Multilingual Learners	Students Eligible for Free or Reduced Lunch	Black	Latino	White
Mid On-Grade or Above	7%	5%	19%	11%	14%	23%
Early On-Grade	7%	7%	14%	13%	15%	20%
One Grade Below	27%	31%	35%	35%	36%	34%
2 Grades Below	19%	20%	17%	17%	16%	11%
3+ Grades Below	40%	37%	22%	24%	20%	12%

