

Learning, Equity & Accelerated Pathways Task Force Report

April 2021



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 in both 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 in living 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 which gives every student the support and opportunity they need 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 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 the community who 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. 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 2020 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 Elementary and Secondary Education (RIDE), and other state agencies stayed the course through diligent planning and cross-collaboration that allowed us 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 response, RIDE, in collaboration with a local non-profit 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 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. It provided over 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 optimal when students can learn in-person. The state recognized that this time around, one 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 the RIDOH, on June 19, 2020, RIDE released *Back to School RI: Health and Safety Guidance to Reopen Rhode Island's Elementary and Secondary Schools* 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 R.I. Emergency Management Agency, Rhode Island Public Transit Authority, and the R.I. National Guard to deploy to schools during an outbreak and support rapid testing and contact tracing.

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 that, 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 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 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 that our school communities need 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 data from fall 2020 was presented and analyzed. This included Curriculum Associates data (iReady), Renaissance Learning data (STAR), as well as enrollment and attendance data. The task force 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:

- **10th U.S. Secretary of Education, Dr. John King:** The former U.S. Secretary of Education and 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 practitioners and policymakers guidance.
- **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 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, 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 focused on his experiences as part of the New York and Pennsylvania governors' administrations.

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 were defined that must be met across systems to be successful in this work.

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), 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

The task force outlined the following absolute priorities that will accelerate student learning and move our pre-kindergarten through grade twelve system forward. This work must elevate and center the needs of Rhode Island students who are multilingual, 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 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 Step 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 (ESSER II, 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 schools and districts share their priority Rhode Island Core Standards for the 2021-2022 school year with CBOs.
- Design and begin to launch a state-wide 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
- 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

Join the conversation: #LEAPRI

Follow: @RIDeptEd or [Facebook.com/RIDeptEd](https://www.facebook.com/RIDeptEd)



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 returning safely back to school buildings 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. 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 plant; 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 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 comprised of 36 diverse education stakeholders, policy leaders, community members, and advocacy organizations 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, like 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. From knowledge about the latest research and data from national experts; to the lived experience and needs of the community through parents, students, and CBOs; to the challenges of implementation at the school and district level with superintendents, principals, and teachers; every voice was critical. 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 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 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 the uncharted waters ahead. Our collective work has never been more timely nor 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, and the hope for which it is known, is no longer satisfied with continuing the tired, old approaches that have not worked in the past. The pre-pandemic outcomes are not a place where Rhode Island should desire to return; the performance of schools and communities pre-pandemic was deeply indicative of historic inequities and also, frankly, not in a place we desire 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 attention on acceleration and transforming outcomes for students and using data to drive decisions and determine appropriate supports.

Rather than tinkering around the edges of change, Rhode Island will continue to lead in this moment, with students at the center. We encourage you to take this charge seriously, and join us in this essential work during this critical moment.

From knowledge about the latest research and data from national experts; to the lived experience and needs of the community through parents, students, and CBOs; to the challenges of implementation at the school and district level with superintendents, principals, and teachers; every voice was critical.



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 impact 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 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. Jonathon 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

Jim Erinakes,
Exeter-West Greenwich School
Department



Angelo Garcia,
Segue Institute for Learning

Angélica Infante-Green,
Commissioner

Dr. Soljane Martinez,
Brown University, Annenberg Institute

Hon. 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

Dr. Kelvin Roldán,
Deputy Commissioner for System
Transformation

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

Charmaine Webster,
Parent, Woonsocket

Dr. Kenneth Wong,
Brown University, Department of
Education

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 this urgent challenge, and align our local thinking to equitable yet innovative recommendations to accelerate learning. Knowing that this COVID 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 the experts below, Governor Daniel McKee and Council of 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
2/11, 11:45am	Task Force Launch Session	Remarks from the Commissioner, the Governor-designate, Chair Cottam, and a keynote address from the 10 th U.S. Secretary of Education Dr. John King Jr.
2/16 8:30am	Understanding Root Causes	Academic and non-academic data along with key analytic insights with Curriculum Associates, Renaissance Learning, and Scott Gausland.
2/23 8:30am	Drawing Upon National Expertise	Expanded learning opportunities with Dr. Jennifer McCombs, RAND & Dr. Matthew Kraft, Brown University.
3/2 8:30am	Drawing Upon National Expertise	Serving the needs of diverse populations with Dr. Marc Brackett, Yale University; Dr. Madeline Mavrogordato, MSU; and Dr. Nathan Jones, Boston U.
3/9 2:00pm	Drawing Upon National Expertise	Thinking through a whole-of-system response via an equity lens with Dr. Kenneth Wong, Brown; & Prof. Paul Reville, Harvard.
3/16 8:30am	Recommendations	Deliver draft recommendations of task force to the Commissioner.
3/23 8:30am	Recommendations	Finalize revised draft recommendations of the task force to the Commissioner with U.S. Department of Education Acting Assistant Secretary Ian Rosenblum.

- 10th U.S. Secretary of Education, Dr. John King** - Prior to serving as U.S. Secretary of Education, Dr. King served as Deputy Secretary of Education and 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 every child being known and having 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 has focused 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' 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 over 15 books and 250 articles, Dr. Noguera [presented the task force with considerations about how RIDE can best position itself to support 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 at Brown University, as well as professor of political science, public policy, and urban studies, 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 can 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.
- **Professor Paul Reville, Harvard University** - As the Francis Keppel Professor of Practice of Educational Policy and Administration at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, some of Professor Reville's areas of expertise are economy and education, educational equity, urban schooling, politics of school structure and governance. He [shared with the task force](#) the importance of personalization 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, 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 this 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 the schools and the 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.”

Jim 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 role is to empower districts, support conditions for success, and hold districts accountable.

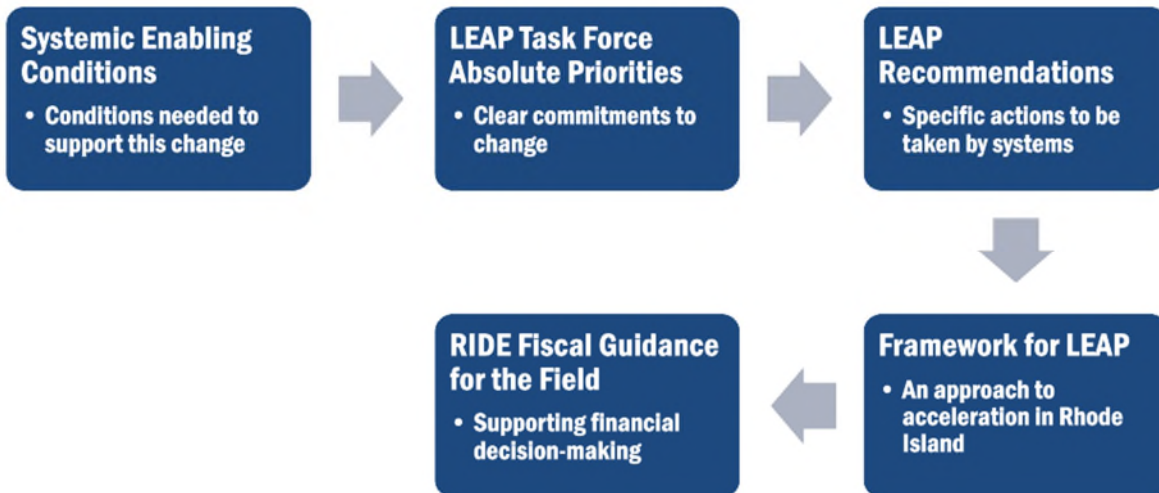
In order to achieve the aforementioned goals, the LEAP Task Force codified the following theory of action:

If RIDE...	Then Rhode Island will...
<p>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 students populations</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>2. Grounds its strategy in data, research, or evidence-based best practices</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>3. Identifies, communicates, and supports targeted high-priority standards and models for accelerating learning</p>	<p>Focus our energies on collectively implementing a few high-value activities that will quickly accelerate student learning.</p>
<p>4. Creates the conditions and structures that enable LEAs to collectively accelerate student learning</p>	<p>Ensure our 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 also 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, like 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* related to the strategic usage of stimulus resources from the federal government—ESSER II/CRRSAA and ESSER III/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 impact 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 non-school locations



Enrollment and Attendance Data¹

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, RIDE data show that overall enrollment has decreased from the 2019/20 school year to 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.²

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 from 2019/20 to 2020/21. Schools with the highest poverty levels show the highest proportion 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 schooldays

Moderate: absent between 5 percent and 10 percent of schooldays

Chronic: absent between 10 percent and 20 percent of schooldays

Excessive: absent between 20 percent and 50 percent of schooldays

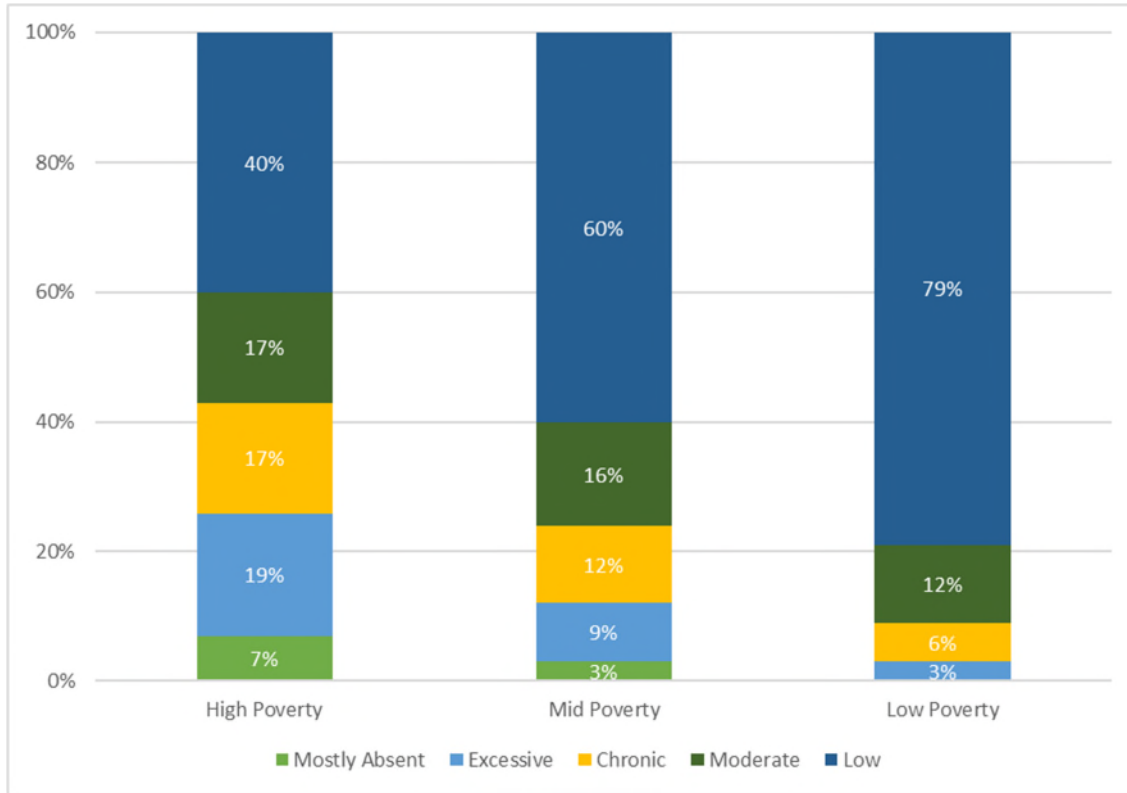
Mostly absent: absent more than 50 percent of schooldays

¹ 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.

² 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.



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)

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 as evidence of emerging patterns and trends that need to be addressed. The recommendations in this report are designed to address these needs and support learning acceleration.



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). Across a sample of kindergarten through grade 12 students, 40 percent were assessed in school and 30 percent were assessed remotely (Renaissance Learning, 2020).³

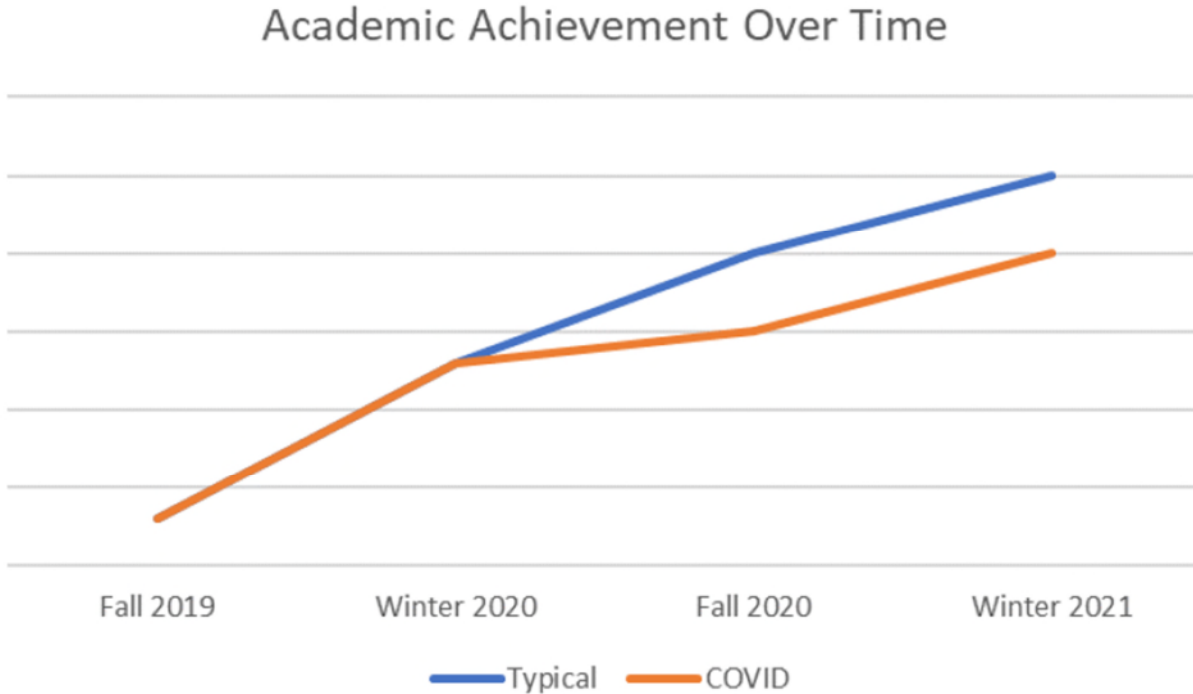
Preliminary analyses show that, in the aggregate, students are not falling further behind projections of academic achievement, but they are also not catching up or surpassing these projections.

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

³ The data presented in this section group in-person and remote assessment results and, in some cases, exclude assessment results. For data provided by Renaissance Learning, 9,364 students took the Star early literacy test, 54,802 took the Star reading test, and 57,502 took the Star math test.



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)

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

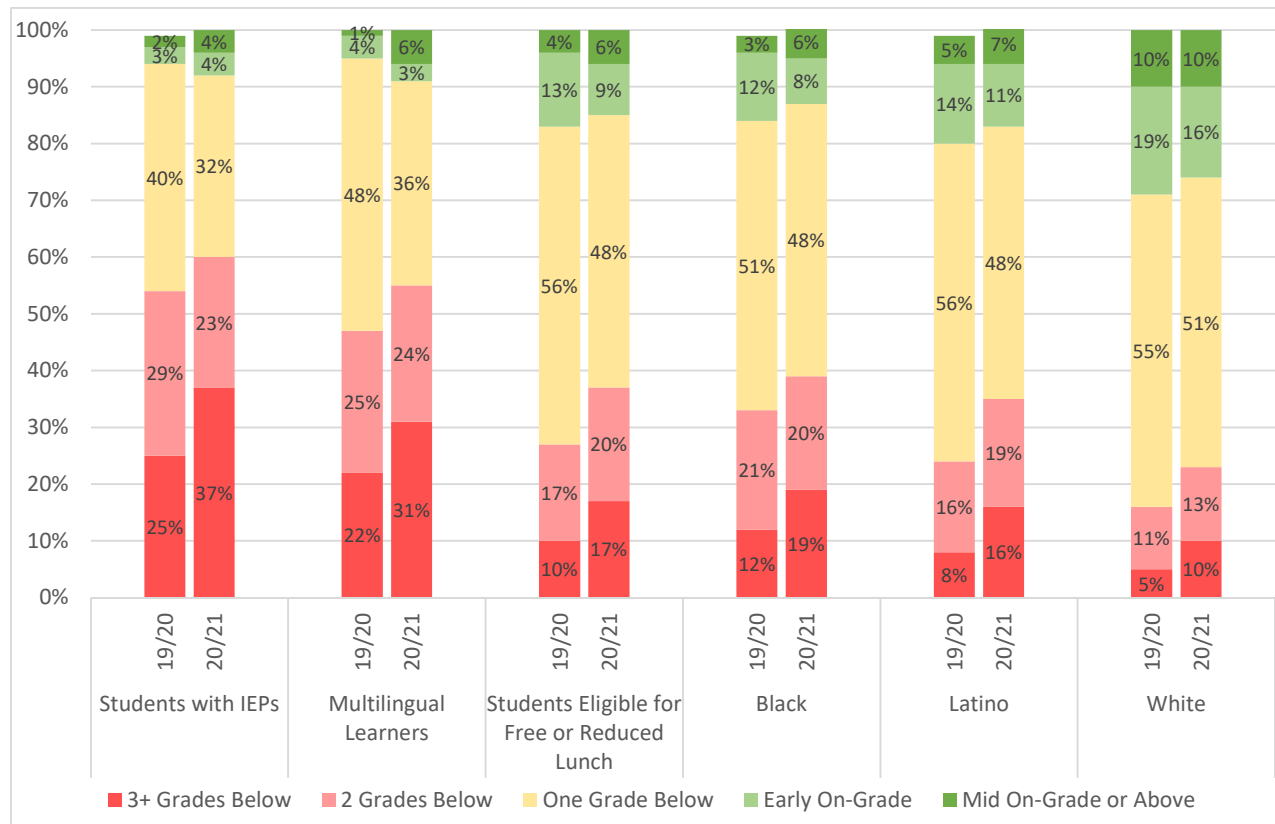
Students in late elementary grades were more likely to be academically impacted by COVID-19 compared to students in middle and high school grades. These impacts were greatest for math performance. On average, students in grades 3 through 5 fell two to three months behind in math and one to two months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

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). Given that these student groups were already behind pre-pandemic, this finding is particularly troubling.

Figure 3: Students’ math performance was impacted by the pandemic, with higher percentages of students performing one or more grade levels below in the 2020/21 school year compared to the previous school year.



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)



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.



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 partnership and intentional collaboration across Rhode Island's entire education system—between pre-kindergarten through grade 12 and IHEs, between 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 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, 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 students who are chronically absent and overaged-undercredited.

- a. Launch a targeted whole-of-state campaign and 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 participating 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 all students have access to high-quality instruction as well as personalized support from adults, through extended learning, partnerships for before and after school, and summer learning opportunities that are 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. In planning for any expanded learning programming, prioritize student-centered design and the values of voice and choice, flexibility, and access.
 - 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. In the coming year, universally screen all students both academically and social-emotionally, and target resources based on need and urgency.
 - 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 (i.e., 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 post-secondary 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 students, families, or communities face related to accessing high-quality internet and technology devices.
- b. Ensure 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.
- In planning for this summer, intentionally plan out the two subsequent summers, as well.
- 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 students identified as multilingual learners and differently-abled students.
- Implement SurveyWorks collection to gauge school climate and student or 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 the community 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... 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 homogenous 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 in each LEA for multilingual learners.
- Honoring and Elevating Assets – provide instruction and supports in the home language.
- 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 what is best practice for all students coming out of COVID will be best practice for differently-abled students as well.

- 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, intensive intervention.
- 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 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 acknowledges emotions, including anxiety, trauma, and grief of students and teachers, and encourages LEA and school leaders to lead from the place of that acknowledgement.
- Additionally, encourage LEAs to develop an integrated strategy to address the racial dimensions of SEL work, as well as the pandemic's disproportional impact 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 the opportunity to create sustained supportive relationships with adults
- Bringing diverse groups of students together for common experiences
- Ensuring consistency across mentors, tutors, or teachers who look like the students they serve
- Ensuring 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. Summer opportunities should aspire and plan 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 data on student need is shared
- Intentional, equitable outreach and offerings that respond to student voice and expressed student or family demand
- A duration that is 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 are 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, for expanded learning, as well as an important and necessary part 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 week-long small group programs



- Personnel—with adequate training and support, adults who have varied backgrounds can support all students
- Measurement—tailoring instruction to meet evolving need by supporting data usage and ongoing formative assessment coupled with goal-setting
- Relationships—ensuring 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 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 RIDE, LEAs, and CBOs must, when able, work together to create coordination and coherence, while also recognizing 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 pre-existing systems, partnerships, and initiatives—between 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 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 LEAP absolute priority statements, CBOs should...

- Provide programming that promotes academic growth and social-emotional well-being and also meets student demand, ensures 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 the 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, the agency is committing to take action. In alignment with this commitment, the following 11 next steps are RIDE's commitment to the work ahead, to be completed by the end of June, 2021.

Action Step
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 LEA community need.
4. Establish 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 internally across divisions and departments while communicating priorities externally.
6. Align improvement efforts in low-performing schools and districts to the LEAP recommendations.
7. Distribute priority Rhode Island Core Standards bundles publicly for SY2021-2022; intentionally share this information with CBOs as well.
8. Design and begin to launch a state-wide 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.



Acknowledgements

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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 communicate 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)



- [Reducing Student Absenteeism in the Early Grades by Targeting Parental Beliefs](#) (Robinson, Lee, Dearing, & Rogers, 2018)

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.
- 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.

Resources 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 system-wide 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 provide opportunities to 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)

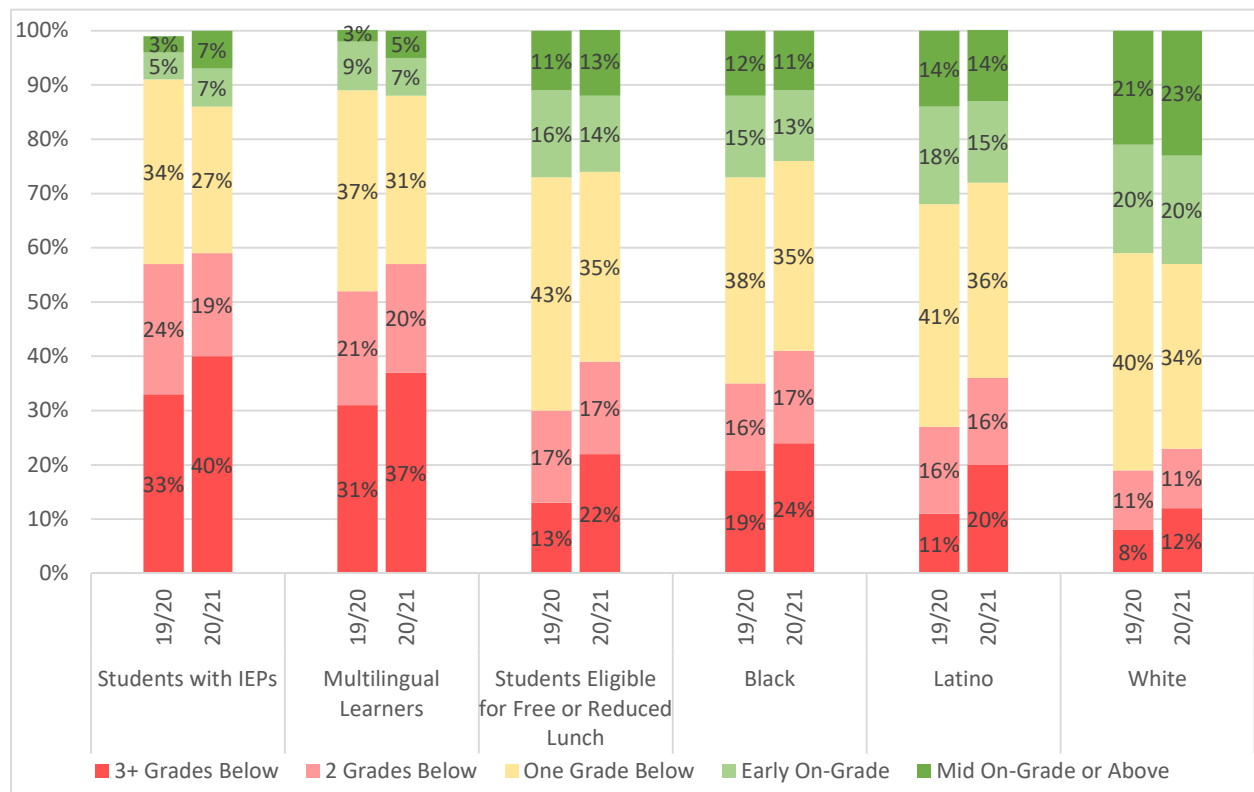
[Evidence-based Considerations for COVID-19 Reopening and Recovery Planning: Summer Learning with Academic and Non-Academic Activities](#) (The Wallace Foundation, 2020)



Appendix B. Supplemental Data Analysis

This appendix provides additional information about the impact of the pandemic on reading performance as well as the sample of students who participated in the iReady assessments provided by Curriculum Associates.

Figure 1. Students' reading performance was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, with higher percentages of students performing one or more grade levels below in the 2020/21 school year compared to the previous school year.



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 1. Number 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 sub-group.

Student Group	Math (2019/20)	Math (2020/21)	Reading (2019/20)	Reading (2020/21)
Students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs)	1609	2889	1366	2832
Multilingual Learners	290	1370	239	1367
Students Eligible for Free or Reduced-price Lunch	3344	8185	3033	8081
Black	442	2269	423	2246
Latino	1152	3204	1029	3158
White	8254	12485	6973	12248