

# Creating Pathways to Opportunity in Rhode Island

*A Companion Guide to Rhode Island's State Plan for the  
Every Student Succeeds Act*



Rhode Island Department of Elementary & Secondary Education

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**RIDE** Rhode Island  
Department  
of Education

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# Background and Introduction

In December 2015, President Obama signed the [Every Student Succeeds Act](#) (ESSA) into law. ESSA is the seventh reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, a 1965 civil rights law. The Every Student Succeeds Act replaces the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). ESSA gives states additional flexibility and encourages states and schools to innovate, while maintaining an emphasis on ensuring equal opportunity and civil rights for *every student* - particularly groups of students who have historically been underserved.

Individual students, as well as Rhode Island collectively, will be better off when those closest to students are empowered to do what is best for **every student**, and when **every voice** is leveraged to help shape the path forward. To ensure that every student can be supported to meet high expectations, personalized student-centered learning requires that the system in which it operates be unified in four important ways:

1. That there is guaranteed and viable curriculum aligned to standards to ensure that students have a series of learning experiences that are planned and cohesive;
2. That high-quality materials and resources that are culturally relevant are used in support of the curriculum;
3. That districts and schools are committed to ongoing and relevant professional learning so that teachers know the content and instructional practices necessary to implement the curriculum; and
4. That there are protocols in place to continuously improve practice and curriculum based on reviews of student work, assessment data, and classroom observations.

Rhode Island aims to utilize the opportunity afforded by the ESSA state planning process to build on and actualize the [2020 Vision for Education in Rhode Island: Rhode Island's strategic plan for PK-12 education](#), and to refine our systems to enable all of us to share in the responsibility of educating every student in accordance with the concepts listed here.

This document outlines how the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (RIDE) will support our schools, educators, and students, and describes how the ESSA State Plan<sup>1</sup> reinforces and supports our strategic direction.

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<sup>1</sup> The ESSA State Plan will be in draft form until September 2017.

# Rhode Island’s Vision for Students and Schools

The 2020 Vision for Education in Rhode Island was developed with guidance from over 11,000 Rhode Islanders who completed surveys and attended feedback sessions. Multiple iterations were written and led by 28 community members, who worked together for six months to clarify the vision, values, and priorities for education in Rhode Island. Since the Rhode Island Council for Elementary and Secondary Education approved the plan, RIDE has worked to develop policy, guidance, tools, and resources to support Rhode Island educators and community members to meet the plan’s vision and goals.

Rhode Island’s vision for our graduates:

***A Rhode Island graduate is one who is well prepared for postsecondary education, work, and life. He or she can think critically and collaboratively and can act as a creative, self-motivated, culturally competent learner and citizen.***

We have had success in moving toward the state's vision for our students. Rhode Island’s graduation rate is at an all-time high of 85 percent. Our students are scoring at the national level on the [National Assessment of Educational Progress \(NAEP\)](#) for the first time, and we have one of the five highest rates of growth in Advanced Placement participation in the country. We have improved policies to ensure that a diploma demonstrates that a student is prepared.

**Our standard for success:**  
*Supporting anything that helps teachers teach and students learn. An investment in them is an investment in our future, because a highly-skilled workforce, a growing economy, and vibrant communities are all anchored in education.*

Students have increasing opportunities to engage in advanced coursework. Our standards have never been more demanding. Schools have new empowerment options to foster innovation and creativity and to establish models to guide continuous improvement efforts. In light of our successes and with the knowledge that there is more work to do, this is a moment to set our sights higher, to stretch our timeline further, and to dedicate ourselves to the specific accomplishments we set forth in our ESSA plan, as well as in this document.

Rhode Island’s long-term aspirations are directed at the year 2025, which aligns to two full strategic planning cycles. These goals are thoughtfully framed based on what we believe can be accomplished when the entire education system is aligned and working to support every student. The goals are differentiated and require a heavier lift for groups of students who are historically underserved so that we will make strides in closing opportunity gaps.



# Rhode Island's Aspirations for 2025

## 3 of 4 third graders are proficient readers

- Fundamental to a strong academic foundation for every student, reading on grade level by third grade makes it far more likely a student will successfully graduate from high school.

## 3 of 4 eighth graders are proficient in STEM

- A solid understanding of math and science by eighth grade prepares students to succeed through the transition to more abstract content in high school and beyond.

## 100% of graduates earn added credentials

- Students who earn post-secondary credentials and credits while in high school are more likely to persist and succeed in post-secondary education and work.

## 75% of students earn the Commissioner's Seal

- Students whose math and literacy skills earn them the Commissioner's Seal signal to colleges and employers that they have achieved accomplishments beyond the diploma requirements

## 20% of students score at the highest level of proficiency

- Rhode Island's Strategic Plan for 2015-2020 sets forth our commitment to academic excellence, one measure of which is students achieving the highest levels of proficiency on statewide assessments.

## 95% of students graduate high school in four, five, or six years

- As the diploma becomes more valuable, a record number of students must graduate from high school to pursue the post-secondary training they will need to participate in a 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce.

## Opportunity gaps closed by half

- Every student's success is critical to Rhode Island's future. Different and intensified efforts for groups of students who have historically been underserved are needed to ensure every student has access to rigorous and relevant learning opportunities.

## Significant increase in diversity of educators

- All students deserve access to high-quality educators who celebrate and reflect the diversity of Rhode Island's communities.



# Rhode Island's Approach to the ESSA State Plan

Every Student. Every Voice.

## Guiding Principles for Our ESSA State Plan

We *all* have a stake in the outcomes for every Rhode Islander. As a community, we must support **every student** to be successful in school and encourage **every voice** from all aspects of our state to contribute to, participate in, and guide our public schools. Our state ESSA plan will align with the following guiding principles that are derived from our strategic plan, public input, and our leaders' direction, and reflect the aspirations we hold for every Rhode Island student.

### *Re-imagined Schools*

We must place the student at the center of education. We must continue to develop student-centered pathways, and help schools and classrooms evolve to include innovative learning experiences designed to help students achieve proficiency in a broad set of standards in a sequence and format best suited for the student. At the same time, we must make available various learning opportunities that allow students to explore and learn deeply in topics that are of interest to them and through which students can set and meet ambitious personal learning goals.

### *High Expectations*

We must set the same high expectations for every student. Students must be exposed to and gain proficiency in a broad base of content standards that prepare them for college, career, and life. We must specifically ensure a path forward that provides equity of opportunity for every student to achieve our high standards, especially students of color, English learners, transient students, and students with disabilities.

### *Empowerment*

Our system must empower students, and those closest to them, to make the most timely and effective decisions for teaching and learning. We must increase the capacity and authority of our educators and school leaders to create conditions that will best support the students and families they serve.



## Shared Responsibility

We must ensure that our state education system works on behalf of every student. We must move from compliant accountability to a coherent system of shared responsibility, in which a larger ecosystem of districts, schools, community members, organizations, institutions of higher education, and businesses are dedicated to our students. Entire communities must surround students with the support they need to achieve their goals, and every stakeholder will be part of a continuous improvement cycle.

## Leveraging Every Voice for Our Students

Acting on the idea that every voice can be leveraged to serve every student in our state, RIDE has undergone a deliberate and iterative process to engage stakeholders from all across Rhode Island in the development of our ESSA State Plan. More than 800 Rhode Islanders – including educators, students, parents, community members, business leaders, and policy makers – have taken part in one or more of the opportunities available to give input and feedback on the plan. RIDE is incredibly grateful for and strongly values the particular expertise and perspectives of our partners in education across the state and has used all of the input to inform our State Plan.

*96% of 2017 spring forum participants feel that they can be part of achieving Rhode Island's vision for education, and **all** of them would encourage others to attend similar forums.*

## Who We Engaged

- **Committee of Practitioners:** A consistent group of 26 diverse community members that gathered monthly to give input on high-level questions concerning ESSA, to serve as liaisons to the community at large regarding our planning process, and to weigh in on multiple drafts of the ESSA State Plan.
- **Community Members:** Parents, students, community members, educators, and business leaders were invited on multiple occasions to weigh in on the ESSA State Plan, including input and feedback forums, online surveys, and a public comment period. Community engagement opportunities were offered in English and Spanish.
- **Critical Stakeholder Groups:** Affinity groups across the state were consulted at various points throughout the ESSA State Plan development process on specific topics that



pertain to them through individual engagements, group meetings, and web-based communication.

- **Policy Makers:** Elected and appointed officials at the state level were kept informed of the input from constituents across the state and asked to weigh in on a variety of topics throughout the planning process.

## *By the Numbers: An Iterative Planning Process*

### **Phase 1: Seeking Input on Key Questions** (Aug. '16 - Jan. '17)

- 5 public forums with 200+ participants
- Online input survey with 75+ participants
- 15+ stakeholder input meetings
- Monthly Committee of Practitioners meetings to give input on all topics

### **Phase 2: Gathering Feedback on Initial Recommendations** (Feb. '17 - May '17)

- Public feedback survey on initial recommendations with 400+ responses
- 6 public forums with 85+ participants
- 15+ stakeholder group feedback meetings
- Monthly Committee of Practitioners meetings to discuss recommendations
- Meetings with the Rhode Island General Assembly

### **Phase 3: Attaining Approval on Full State Plan Draft** (Jun. '17 - Aug. '17)

- 30 day open public comment period
- 30 day Governor's approval period
- Council on Elementary and Secondary Education review
- Committee of Practitioners suggest edits on full plan

### **Phase 4: Submit and Plan for Implementation** (Sep. '17 - Nov. '17)

- Submit plan to U.S. Department of Education by September 18, 2017
- Work with field to implement
- Develop tools and guidance for implementation



# Our Work Now and Beyond: Actualizing Our Guiding Principles

The work of the Strategic Plan is ongoing, and ESSA gives us a chance to elaborate on how we will create systems to realize our vision and aspirations. In each of the four areas described above, there is work that is well underway, as well as initiatives that are just beginning. The following pages highlight the key policies, initiatives, programs, and resources that RIDE has developed within each of these four principles, as well as decisions made in the ESSA State Plan that will help us realize them<sup>2</sup>.

## Reimagining Schools

At the heart of a reimagined school is the notion that the school should be organized to meet the teaching and learning needs of its students and educators, including challenging learning opportunities for all students; hands-on activities that leverage problem-solving and technology and are aligned to interests and career pathways; and empowered students, families, and educators. Student-centered or personalized learning is an approach to teaching and learning in which instruction is aligned to rigorous college- and career-ready standards and customized to allow each student to take ownership over their learning experience. According to the landmark report *How Students Learn*, published by the National Academy of Sciences (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 1999; National Research Council, 2005), personalized learning practices should include (1) engaging with students related to their prior knowledge, (2) working with them to set goals, (3) organizing learning focused on application beyond the classroom, and (4) supporting students to manage and choose their learning strategies, tactics, and goals. Emerging research by the RAND Corporation finds, "...overall positive and large student achievement gains from personalized learning exposure. These results are robust to most of our sensitivity analyses, especially for mathematics. The results are substantially heterogeneous across schools" (Pane, Steiner, Baird, & Hamilton, 2015, p. 36).

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<sup>2</sup> The ESSA State Plan will be in draft form until September 2017.

## Every Voice: What Rhode Islanders Are Saying

Stakeholders across the state have voiced their support for reimagined learning environments for every student. Many reiterated the need to bolster the use of the Individualized Learning Plan in schools to ensure that students had planned and ongoing opportunities to set goals and determine how they would achieve them. Stakeholders were primarily concerned with school and system capacity to utilize these plans across grade spans and across districts, particularly for transient students. Further, stakeholders stressed the need for a well-rounded curriculum, including the arts, STEM, environmental education, and industry training, and particularly a curriculum that is culturally relevant to students.

*“[What I want for my son is a] school that assists students in identifying goals and crafts a path for success in partnership with the parent and student.”*  
– Fall ESSA Forum participant

Finally, stakeholders supported the development of “Pathway Endorsements” – a construct that would indicate that a student has been supported to pursue an area of individual interest through their academic coursework and career connected learning experiences. Pathway Endorsements were seen as a culminating indicator of whether personalized learning has taken hold in a school system. However, some stakeholders voiced concern about equity of access to the opportunities needed to earn a Pathway Endorsement.

## Every Student: What Rhode Islanders Deserve

Rhode Island is currently working on a number of initiatives that support reimagined schools and have included incentives for such in our ESSA plan:

- Enhancing the **Individual Learning Plan** process to ensure that every student has an opportunity to express their goals and to plan a path to meet them with the support of a responsible adult
- Recognizing students for pursuing pathway opportunities aligned with their passions, interests, and unique abilities, as well as holding schools accountable for helping students receive **Pathway Endorsements**
- Allowing high school students to earn college credit through **dual-enrollment or concurrent enrollment** courses
- Increasing funding for **English learners and dual language programs** that promote 21<sup>st</sup> century multi-literacy skills for all students



- Celebrating language diversity by including the **Seal of Biliteracy** in the state’s accountability index
- Extending access for middle and high school students across the state to a broader, more challenging curriculum through **Advanced Placement courses and the Advanced Course Network**
- Expanding **work-based learning opportunities**, including more than 130 career-focused programs that are aligned with economic trends, through PrepareRI powered by the New Skills for Youth Grant
- Adding more **P-TECH** programs that graduate students with a high school diploma, associate’s degree, and a first-in-line job opportunity
- Integrating blended, project-based, and proficiency-based approaches to coursework, and creating flexibility for these courses to be applied to **graduation requirements**
- Bringing computer science and coding training to every school through the **Computer Science for Rhode Island (CS4RI)** initiative
- Extending learning beyond the school day with high quality **after-school and summer programming**, including through 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Center grants
- Providing supports for all students to **graduate from high school** in four, five, or six years, or earn credentials through adult education opportunities
- Leveraging **federal funds** to support well-rounded education; safe, healthy, and supportive schools; and more effective use of technology in schools
- Innovative **school improvement redesign models** that address student needs and support student achievement.

### *Reimagined Schools in Action:*

#### **Advanced Course Network**

Rhode Island strives to connect each student with opportunities tailored to their needs, interests, and ambitions. To push past the limits of any single building’s offerings, RIDE has established the Advanced Course Network, a partnership which allows students across Rhode Island to enroll in advanced courses which would otherwise be unavailable. Through partnerships with higher education institutions, many of these offerings allow for dual or concurrent enrollment and the simultaneous earning of college credit. Beginning in sixth grade, parents and students can sign up directly, and partner providers and districts will work to accommodate the offering into the student’s schedule. This empowers students and their families to craft their own path through school.



## High Expectations

Not every student will attend college, but each student should be prepared to have that option, if they so choose. To prepare every student for the opportunities available to them, we must hold each one to the same rigorous standards and support them in any way they need to meet those expectations. We have long known that teachers who set high expectations for their students positively influence their performance (Rosenthal & Jacobsen, 1968). In a 2016 report, the Center on Education and the Economy also found that the world's top-performing education systems "have well-developed, highly coherent and very demanding instructional systems for all students (Tucker, 2016, p. 5). From the individual to the system level, setting high expectations will best prepare our students for their future.

*Make no mistake.  
Rhode Island's commitment  
to raising the achievement of  
its most vulnerable students  
is front and center.*

### *Every Voice: What Rhode Islanders Are Saying*

Rhode Islanders fervently believe that every student can and should reach high expectations in our school system. To accomplish that, a wide range of individuals spoke passionately and effectively about the unique needs of particular groups of students, and the majority agree that serving the most vulnerable among our student population will improve our system overall.

For example, many stakeholders were highly supportive of the idea that students in foster care, students experiencing homelessness, and other transient students would benefit greatly from the normalcy that comes with staying in their school of origin. Many stakeholders strongly encouraged partnerships between state and local agencies to ensure that transient students' educational needs would be actively considered in placement decisions.

*"Rhode Island needs to make sure that  
we are really looking at EVERY student  
in our implementation of ESSA."  
– Spring Feedback Survey Participant*

Further, many Rhode Island stakeholders emphasized the need for us, as a state, to celebrate and support those who can communicate in more than one language and those who are learning English. Suggestions for this kind of recognition included integrating the Seal of Biliteracy and English proficiency progress into the school accountability system.



Finally, stakeholders often noted that the expectations for academic proficiency need to be expanded to include cross-curricular applied learning skills and additional subject areas. A majority of stakeholders also believe that students should be supported to finish high school graduation requirements in whatever timeframe or path is best for them so that they may earn a diploma.

## *Every Student: What Rhode Islanders Deserve*

Rhode Island is currently working on a number of initiatives that support every student to meet high expectations. This issue is given significant weight in our ESSA State Plan in multiple ways:

- Expanding strong **early childhood education** with statewide full-day kindergarten and additional pre-K classrooms
- Taking action to meet Governor Raimondo’s **Third Grade Reading Challenge** of having 3 out of 4 Rhode Island third graders reading proficiently by 2025
- Putting strategies in place to close the achievement gap for **4th grade math students with disabilities** – one of the largest gaps
- Supporting teachers to equitably deliver **guaranteed and viable curriculum** and high quality instruction
- Aligning all instruction, materials, and assessments with Common Core State Standards in ELA and math, Next Generation Science Standards, and other state-adopted, nationally-recognized **standards that ensure students are prepared for college and career**

### *High Expectations in Action:*

#### **Celebrating Language Diversity in Rhode Island**

Rhode Island's students reflect an increasingly diverse population. RIDE recognizes that speaking, reading, writing, and understanding multiple languages are important 21st century skills that our students will need for an increasingly global society. The benefits of knowing two languages are many and carry with them educational, economic, cognitive, and socio-cultural advantages. As a result, RIDE has established the Seal of Biliteracy which recognizes students for mastering two languages, as well as encouraged the expansion of Dual Language Programs, in which students are taught literacy and content in two languages. RIDE will also be including growth in English proficiency in its accountability system for the first time to ensure that English learners are staying on track to being college and career ready. Finally, RIDE is developing incentives for more teachers and potential teachers to be trained in strategies for teaching English learners.



- Transitioning to the Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS) for students in grades 3-8 and administering the PSAT and SAT to students in high school to further **align state testing** with measures that are meaningful to students and that are trusted indicators of post-secondary readiness
- Centering graduation eligibility around **proficiency-based expectations** in the core content areas and applied learning skills
- Gathering educators from around the state as Learning Champions to develop a **common set of proficiency expectations** for Rhode Island graduates and articulate performance indicators for all students PK-12
- Recognizing student proficiency in math and literacy through the **Commissioner’s Seal**, and holding schools accountable for student accomplishments
- Reporting on the distribution of inexperienced, ineffective, or out-of-field teachers between communities and among student subgroups, and working to **improve inequities in teacher access**
- Partnering closely with state agencies to ensure that students who are homeless or in foster care experience **fewer educational transitions**
- Publicizing the achievement of all students and disaggregating by **subgroup categories** to inform the public of areas of need and support
- Recognizing **student graduation** at 4, 5, and 6 years within the accountability index, and reviewing an additional measure following students 18 months after graduation

## Empowerment

Educators are our state’s most critical resource in education. We need to give principals and teachers more opportunities and pathways to meet the needs of their students since they know them best. We need to build a robust talent management system to increase the capacity of our teachers and leaders; create systems that harness the power of shared leadership in our schools; and change the rules on how those closest to the students can make decisions on behalf of learning.

*In a recent survey of Rhode Island educators, more than 1,600 teachers surveyed characterized their professional development as irrelevant, ineffective, and “not connected to their core work of helping students learn.”*



Research has found that selecting and retaining highly effective principals positively impacts schools and boosts growth in student achievement (Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2013). Further, research has found that when teachers are part of a school's decision-making process in a meaningful way, it has a positive effect on student achievement (Eells, 2011). Empowering our educators and school leaders will create conditions that will best support the students and families they serve.

RIDE will continue our commitment to ensuring every student has access to excellent educators through the creation and revision of our talent management policies and allocation of resources to support continued, career-long professional learning. Various studies have shown that the kind of sustained, content-rich, and practice-focused professional learning, which leads to better student outcomes, is not typical in U.S. schools and districts (Wei, Darling-Hammond, & Adamson, 2010), and Rhode Island is no exception. RIDE will lead and coordinate statewide partners to support and enhance site-based professional learning and leadership development that is relevant, personalized, and job-embedded. These opportunities will support teachers and school leaders to learn and apply new skills to ensure implementation that is aligned with research on effective practice.

### *Every Voice: What Rhode Islanders Are Saying*

Rhode Islanders strongly believe in the power of a quality teacher and school leader to transform the educational experience of a student. When asked to weigh in on what would make our teaching force stronger, stakeholders across the state most frequently cited the need for Rhode Island to elevate the profession; attract more diversity into education; ensure more

***“We need to support people excited about being educators.”***

*– Spring ESSA Forum Participant*

practice-based experiences during preparation; implement strong hiring practices; embed coaching, feedback loops, and more personalized learning opportunities for educators into local professional learning systems; and establish career pathways and strong leadership opportunities. Stakeholders also

voiced a strong desire to support teacher and leader capacity in effectively addressing the various needs of the student body. In particular, stakeholders wanted to support the cultural competence of all educators and ensure that there are sufficient trained adults within each school system to provide holistic support for our most vulnerable students. Finally, many stakeholders acknowledged Rhode Island’s early work in implementing new evaluation systems and supports for new educators, and want to ensure that the talent management system goes beyond initiatives already in place to include ongoing support and development for teachers throughout their career.



## Every Student: What Rhode Islanders Deserve

Rhode Island is currently working on creating systems to empower our schools with the very best educators and leaders in place for every student, including:

- Creating **policies that empower** students, community members, teachers, schools, and districts with autonomy to design their own communities
- Improving **recruitment practices** to identify educators who are culturally diverse, willing to teach in hard-to-staff subject areas, and eager to work in our most challenging schools
- Creating a **Pathway Endorsement in Teaching** to recognize high school students who engage in aligned coursework, apply their learning, and investigate careers in teaching
- Forging stronger paths for educators who want to pursue or excel in leadership positions, and adopting systems for **shared leadership** in schools
- Designing relevant, ongoing **professional learning** opportunities to support educators at every level
- Recruiting **Learning Champions** from across the state to put teachers at the center of instructional decision-making
- Cultivating strong teaching skills from the start of their career by strengthening our **teacher preparation** programs
- Convening a state-wide **Leadership Advisory Council** comprised of superintendents, principals, preparation

### *Empowerment in Action:*

#### **Empowering Leaders**

In response to the vision of the Strategic Plan, RIDE, with support from the Partnership for Rhode Island – a group of business leaders – has committed resources to develop the skills and knowledge of current and aspiring school and district leaders. A multi-year system of support is underway that provides coordinated growth and development opportunities to education leaders. An outgrowth of this work will cultivate instructional excellence, establish sustainable structures for leadership supports, foster site-based professional learning, develop models of distributed leadership, develop new strategies to engage and empower the educational community, and engage and leverage new roles of school-wide improvement. Rhode Island business leaders are also committing to deepen opportunities for principal leadership training. Several principals will have the opportunity to participate in the CVS Executive Leadership Program, and others will receive support from Bank of America, Hasbro, and other Rhode Island business leaders.



program leaders, teacher leaders, and union representatives to review national leadership standards and create Rhode Island Leadership Competencies

- Updating our **certification system** to support educators’ continuous improvement
- Learning together with the members of the **Partnership for Rhode Island**, including CVS, Bank of America, and Hasbro, and applying their leadership development strategies to the education community
- Offering every principal a scholarship to participate in a **year-long advanced study program on leadership**, funded by partner and state funds
- Revising the process for districts to access federal funds to allow greater flexibility and **stronger ties between goals and resources**
- Providing **leadership development mini-grants** to fund principals to engage in national coursework for principal leadership through a partnership between RIDE and the state’s Principal Association (RIASP)
- Ensuring all families and students can participate in **quality educational opportunities of their choice** – inclusive of early childhood education, charter schools, advanced courses, and adult education providers.

## Shared Responsibility

We are all dependent on the outcomes of our students. Therefore, we must create an environment where every voice has the opportunity to contribute and where we all have the responsibility to make our schools the best possible learning environment for every student. That environment needs to include transparency of information, purposeful engagement with a broad community of stakeholders, shared aspirational goals, and an expectation of continuous improvement.

In a large-scale leadership study, Seashore, Leithwood, Walstrom, and Anderson (2010) highlight that state and district leaders must find ways to work creatively and collaboratively to encourage authentic adherence to a direction and strategy. Their findings outline that distributed leadership has “among the most significant” effect on student achievement (p. 282). In other words, when many leaders take responsibility for the system, student achievement

*To continuously improve our schools, we must move from a system of compliant accountability to one of shared responsibility.*



*Our communities must be fully engaged in continuous improvement through an ongoing review process that is public and transparent.*

rises. Further, one 2017 report (CCSSO & Results for America, 2017) took a closer look at leveraging a continuous improvement mindset to improve student outcomes. The report identifies the best practice of engaging stakeholders on an ongoing basis to analyze data, collect and understand feedback, reflect on outcomes, and identify challenges and solutions to pressing educational problems. RIDE, building off the input of our community, has built our ESSA plan to enable

this kind of shared responsibility for continuous improvement in all schools, and particularly those schools that have been identified as not serving all students well.

Rhode Island's accountability system prioritizes transparency, supports shared responsibility, and focuses on long-term investments that are aligned with aspirational educational goals. The new accountability system will provide a range of information - including financial expenditure data, school learning environment survey information, and indicators that highlight the state of our school buildings - to round-out the profiles of our schools so that community involvement and continuous improvement is supported. Three components form this system: a set of measures, five levels of classification, and report cards for schools, districts, and the state. Each component, along with our strategies for school improvement, will be configured to support our communities in being collectively responsible for results.

### *Every Voice: What Rhode Islanders Are Saying*

The majority of stakeholders expressed strong support for developing systems to incorporate the input and participation of a wider variety of community members when schools make decisions. Further, stakeholders overwhelmingly agree that our accountability system needs to account for data beyond state assessment results and recognize various aspects of what makes a strong school. They also voiced support for the idea that a wide array of data should be available to the public via the report cards. Data from student, parent, and teacher surveys were frequently mentioned as critical to make available to the public, along with expenditure data on specific assets, such as student support personnel, school facilities improvements, and instructional materials. Finally, stakeholders were not supportive of an accountability system that places undue judgement on schools. Specifically, many stakeholders noted that school classification labels

*“Supporting schools to continually improve is an ongoing conversation and journey [that requires] the right inspiration to want to meet kids’ needs, build on their strengths, and engage the community in a meaningful way.”*  
– Fall ESSA Forum Participant



should use non-judgmental language, should be transparently calculated, account for student growth, and be accompanied by differentiated support for schools.

## *Every Student: What Rhode Islanders Deserve*

To promote and value shared responsibility for continuous improvement, RIDE and our partners across the state have made positive progress on a number of initiatives, including:

- **Coordinating supports** for all, especially our most vulnerable students, by utilizing the power of multiple state and local agencies to ensure every student has what they need
- Supporting low-performing schools by allowing **districts to lead the school improvement process**, in partnership with the community
- Compiling and making available evidence-based tools, resources, and ideas to schools and communities for school improvement through RIDE’s “**school improvement hub**”
- Revising Rhode Island’s school **accountability index** to include a small number of metrics that are easily understood by our communities, and removing the unclear index score
- Removing judgmental language from the **classification system** and providing descriptors of schools in all five categories that give stakeholders a sense of the school’s performance at a glance
- Providing a wide-ranging set of data in an accessible format for school, district, and state **report cards**

### *Shared Responsibility in Action:*

#### **SurveyWorks**

To increase family engagement and elevate the voices of students, parents, and the broader community, RIDE embarked on a campaign in 2017 to drive more schools and families to participate in the SurveyWorks school culture survey. Schools encouraged participation with creative efforts, including a principal who penned a rap to encourage parents to fill out the survey. With the help of the Parent Outreach Design Team and leadership at the district and school levels, participation numbers rose. More than 85,200 students, 15,500 parents, and 10,300 staff completed SurveyWorks – over 110,000 responses overall. This survey will provide valuable information to help provide school teams, parents, and the community with a 360-degree view of critical areas for school success. Results will be featured in school report cards coming soon. The success of this year’s campaign was highlighted in a national webinar hosted by Education Week.



- Including measures on the state and district report cards that inform the public of how each is progressing on their **unique responsibilities**
- Setting **clear aspirational goals** with a variety of milestones to ensure everyone is included in our vision for 2025
- Promoting **meaningful family partnerships** by utilizing SurveyWorks to learn about family impressions of schools
- Encouraging partnerships between districts and schools through “**Dissemination Grants**” that allow districts that are excelling in a particular area to partner with those that are struggling in that area
- Requiring all districts with schools identified as in need of comprehensive support and improvement to assemble a **Community Advisory Board** to ensure that more stakeholders are able to give input on key improvement decisions
- Prioritizing **partnerships between after-school providers and schools** that serve the same students through the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Center grants
- Balancing student **academic growth and proficiency** when identifying schools in need of improvement
- Including information on **school facilities** and the capacity of cities to improve them on school and district report cards



# Looking Forward

This is an exciting time for education in Rhode Island. ESSA provides an opportunity for our state to set ambitious goals, implement thoughtful policy, and establish a clear vision for the future that includes the perspectives and priorities of Rhode Island students, educators, and the community-at-large. Through our ESSA State Plan, Rhode Island can align its accountability system, goals, and resources around a common vision and theory of action; develop new models of supports for our most vulnerable students; and put the state on a path of continuous improvement so that we achieve our bold 2025 aspirations. ESSA also offers a chance for Rhode Island to be more creative and strategic in ensuring that federal funding advances our state’s equity agenda. Every student matters; every voice matters.

RIDE is creating a cohesive system of support to achieve our aspirational goals and ensure equitable access to the promised opportunities and outcomes for all students. Rhode Island’s entire system of education, from State House to classroom, needs to work in ways that are nimble, responsive, data-informed, and well-communicated. Great individual efforts will not have the impact imagined in this plan if each acts independently and is uninformed about other strong programs and strategies. A coordinated state education system uses supportive and clear policy; resources that are student-centered and outcome-driven; and effective and efficient guidance and facilitation to ensure equity throughout the state. Central to developing this cohesive system of support is improved communications and networking across levels of the education system – two key concepts within Rhode Island’s implementation framework.

By staying the course on core principles – reimagining schools, setting high expectations, empowering educators and students, and sharing responsibility – Rhode Island will see achievement levels rise, students succeed, and the economy expand. Rhode Island’s accountability plan will incentivize these core principles within the guardrails of equity and opportunity, and ensure that every Rhode Island graduate is well prepared for postsecondary education, work, and life.



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