Rhode Island Educator Evaluations

Improving Teaching and Learning

Year One Report │ September 2013

RIDE Rhode Island Department of Education

Lincoln D. Chafee
Governor

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

September 19, 2013

Dear Rhode Island Educators:

We all know that teachers and principals are the cornerstone of a child's education. The skills, values, and life lessons you impart are critical to fostering excitement and a passion for learning in Rhode Island students. I still remember my teachers' and principals' names from elementary through high school. Undoubtedly, you also will have a lasting impact on the lives of your students.

Several improvements have been made to the teacher and building administrator evaluation systems based on feedback from Rhode Island educators following the first year of full implementation. The results of the surveys of educators about their experience with the evaluation process in the first year as well as results statewide of teachers and principals on the evaluations are contained in the following report.

Congratulations are in order for all Rhode Island educators, who successfully implemented the new, more rigorous teacher and building administrator evaluation systems. While we still have work to do, it is appropriate to pause and celebrate our achievements. The shared commitment to improving the quality of education we are providing Rhode Island's youth is instrumental to the future of our state. Thank you for your continued hard work to prepare students for success in college, careers, and well beyond.

Let's continue to work together to provide the best education possible to our young Rhode Islanders.

Sincerely,

Lincoln D. Chafee
Governor

A NOTE FROM THE COMMISSIONER

Dear Friends of Education,

Our teachers and building administrators do their best work when they have the support and resources they need to help all students learn. That is why a meaningful evaluation process is so vital to helping our schools achieve greatness. When all educators receive regular observations and constructive feedback, they can grow professionally every year throughout their careers and, in turn, help all students succeed. Visiting schools throughout the past year, I have been inspired by the incredible effort that our teachers, administrators, and district leaders have put into our new and more robust evaluation process. Change at this scale is challenging, but despite how far we still have to go, it is clear that we are on the right pathway:
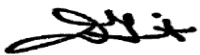
- **Superintendents and assistant superintendents see improvements in teaching and school leadership.** 84% agree that teachers' practice improved as a result of the evaluation process, and 78% agree that building-administrator leadership improved as a result of the evaluation process.[1]

- **Building administrators are invested in the Student Learning Objective process.** 70.1% agree that the process is useful for setting academic goals that will increase student achievement.

- **Many teachers are gaining confidence setting Student Learning Objectives – and optimistic it will be more effective next year.** 44.9% were more comfortable creating SLOs this year, and 40.7% believe that the process will improve next year.

Last year we focused on the enormous task of refining and putting into action new teacher and building administrator evaluation systems statewide. We knew that it would not be perfect on day one, which is why we committed to improving the design and process based on feedback from the field. We have been encouraged by our experience, yet the final ratings also show that we still have work to do to make sure that the systems offer teachers and building administrators the accurate and useful feedback they deserve, while also providing schools and districts information to help them make strategic decisions to advance teaching and learning.

In the coming year, we will continue to listen carefully to educators in the field to learn what's working and what we can do better. I value the diverse viewpoints in the feedback we have collected along the way. All of us understand that our schools – and our children – represent the future of Rhode Island. As you will see in this report, there is nothing we cannot accomplish when we work together and set our minds and hearts to the task.

Sincerely,

Deborah A. Gist
Education Commissioner

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[1] These statistics and all of the teacher, building administrator, and central office administrator perception data cited throughout the report are from the mid-year and end-of-year surveys about educator evaluations in Rhode Island. Approximately 4,450 teachers, 400 building administrators, and 55 central office administrators completed the mid-year educator evaluation survey; and approximately 1070 teachers, 200 building administrators, and 45 central office administrators completed the end-of-year educator evaluation survey.

EDUCATOR EVALUATION OVERVIEW

The full implementation of educator evaluations last year represented one of the most significant education reform efforts ever launched at the state level in Rhode Island. Based on the belief that implementing fair, accurate, and meaningful educator evaluations will help improve teaching and learning, the state's renewed focus on improving its educator evaluation systems began in spring 2009 with the adoption of the Rhode Island Educator Evaluation System Standards by the Rhode Island Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education. The standards established common expectations for the quality of educator evaluations in all districts and public charter schools, and paved the way for the design of the new teacher and building administrator evaluation systems now being implemented in Rhode Island.

During the 2012-13 school year, four different teacher evaluation systems and two different building administrator evaluation systems were implemented after receiving approval from the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE). All of the approved evaluation systems emphasize the importance of collaboration and support, and use multiple measures to determine overall educator effectiveness, including an educator's impact on student learning. While the measures of student learning were consistent across all of the systems, the rubrics used to measure an educator's professional practice and professional responsibilities differed from system to system.

> **All of the evaluation systems emphasize the importance of collaboration and support, and use multiple measures to determine overall educator effectiveness, including an educator's impact on student learning.**

While each of these systems takes a slightly different approach to educator evaluation, they all share common language and expectations aligned with the Rhode Island Standards for Teaching and Educational Leadership, and the Rhode Island Code of Professional Responsibilities. Additionally, each system follows a common process for calculating an educator's Final Effectiveness Rating of *Highly Effective*, *Effective*, *Developing*, or *Ineffective*.

The table below identifies the four teacher evaluation systems and the two building administrator evaluation systems implemented in Rhode Island during the 2012-13 school year.

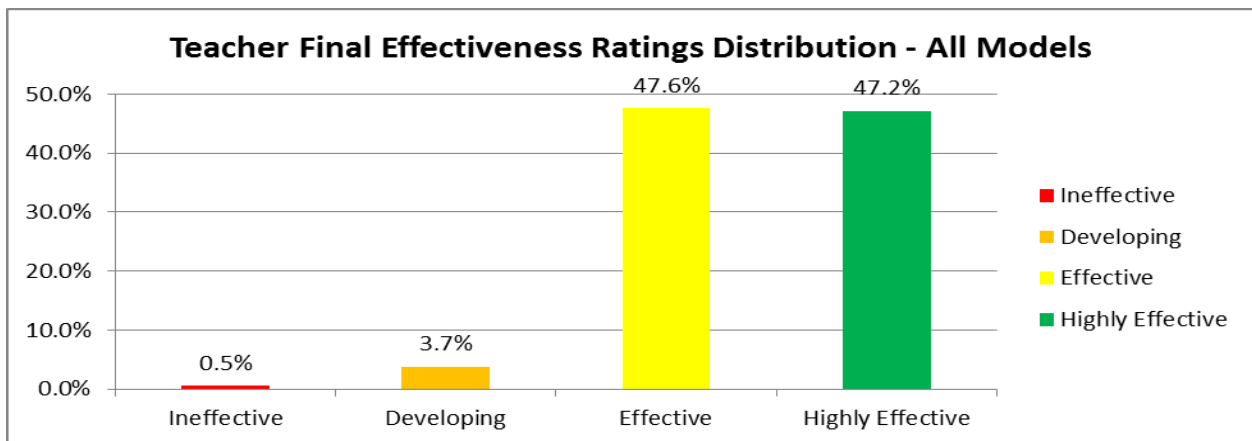| Teacher Evaluation Systems	Building Administrator Evaluation Systems
1. Coventry Teacher Evaluation System 2. Learning Community Teacher Evaluation System (The Learning Community Charter School) 3. RI Innovation Consortium Teacher Evaluation and Development System (Central Falls, Cranston, Pawtucket, Providence, West Warwick, and Woonsocket) 4. RI Model Teacher Evaluation and Support System (used by 46 LEAs)	1. Coventry Building Administrator Evaluation System 2. RI Model Building Administrator Evaluation System (used by 53 LEAs)

STATEWIDE RESULTS

Providing Rhode Island educators with more useful and honest performance evaluations is a long-term project, and this is our first report on statewide results. The ultimate goal of a more rigorous evaluation process is to foster a culture of excellence in our schools by encouraging educators to spend more time collaborating, setting goals, seeking feedback, and reflecting on ways to grow professionally to help improve student achievement for all. By establishing high expectations and a common vocabulary around excellent teaching and school leadership, we can encourage student-focused conversations that can help educators make improvements in real-time – not just at the end of the school year. If the results accurately reflect the quality of teaching in our classrooms, and leadership in our schools, then schools and districts can use the findings to make smart human capital decisions, including the alignment of professional development with the strengths and growth areas of individual educators.

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Yet in the absence of accurate performance data, LEAs lack the information they need to wisely invest their professional development resources. Naturally, teachers and building administrators share responsibility for faithfully completing the evaluation process and using the results to improve over time. In the following pages, we will take a close look at statewide results for both the teacher and building administrator evaluation systems.

Teacher Evaluation System Results

The Final Effectiveness Ratings from the first year show that approximately 95% of teachers were rated *Effective* or *Highly Effective*, directly contradicting any initial implementation concerns that it would be impossible to earn high ratings in the new systems. The results also show that our efforts to ensure that all teachers consistently receive the honest feedback they need to grow as professionals remain in the earliest stages. Changing evaluation policies and systems can happen relatively quickly; changing practices, behavior and culture is a longer term proposition that will require continual focus and persistence.

Teacher Final Effectiveness Ratings Distribution - All Models

- Ineffective: 0.5%
- Developing: 3.7%
- Effective: 47.6%
- Highly Effective: 47.2%

The Student Learning scores and the combined Professional Practice and Professional Foundations/Responsibilities scores that led to the Final Effectiveness Ratings provide a more detailed view of the results from the first year of full implementation. The scores show considerable consistency between the measures with neither measure disproportionally inflating or deflating the Final Effectiveness Ratings.
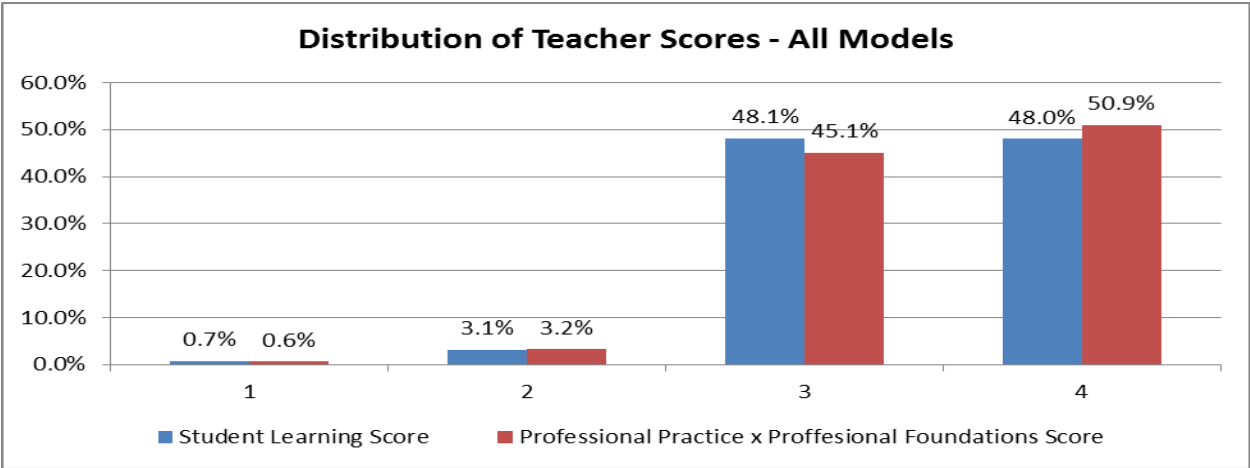
Looking at the percentages within the Final Effectiveness Ratings Matrix shows how the Student Learning scores and the scores for Professional Practice and Professional Foundations/Responsibilities were combined to produce the Final Effectiveness Ratings.

Teacher Final Effectiveness Rating Matrix Percentages – All Models

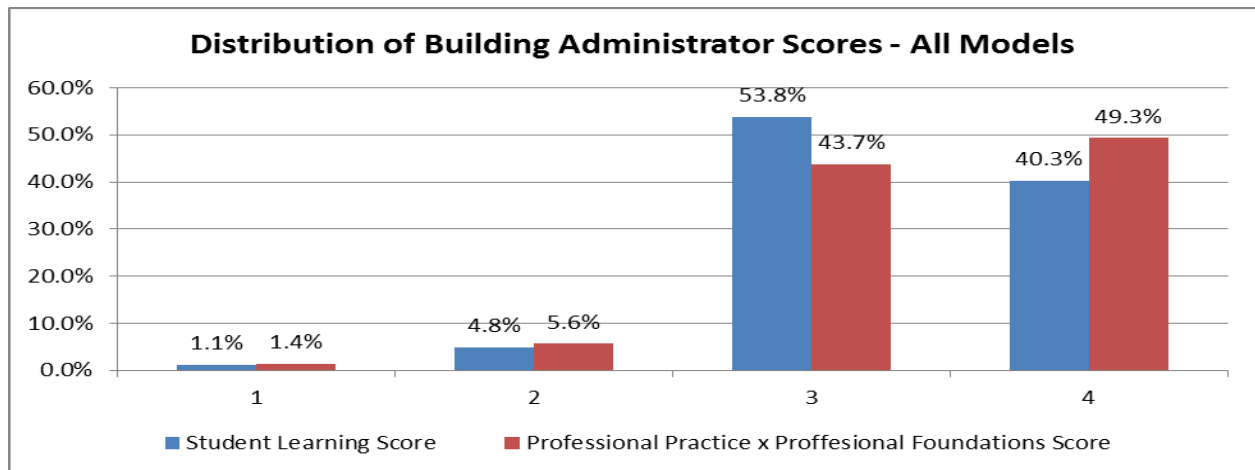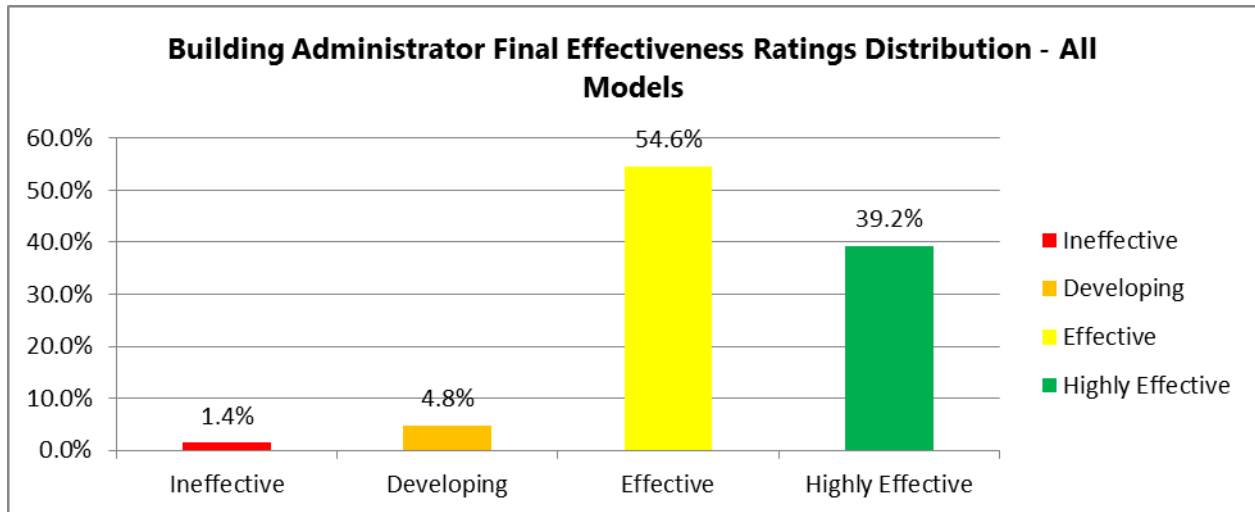|		STUDENT LEARNING			
		4	3	2	1
PP x PR	4	31.5%	18.8%	0.6%	0.0%
	3	15.7%	27.2%	1.9%	0.3%
	2	0.8%	1.6%	0.5%	0.3%
	1	0.0%	0.4%	0.1%	0.1%

Key
- Highly Effective
- Effective
- Developing
- Ineffective

While the ratings are more nuanced than in the past, when teachers were often simply rated as "satisfactory" or "unsatisfactory", survey results from both teachers and evaluators give us reason to doubt the accuracy of these ratings. Fewer than half (41.9%) of teachers agreed that evaluations at their school are accurate reflections of effectiveness. The lack of confidence in the data is supported by feedback from two-thirds of building administrators (66.4%) who responded to an end-of-year survey that they had assigned a higher rating to a teacher than they believed was warranted. These results serve as a powerful reminder of the strong cultural forces that may make it uncomfortable for evaluators to assign honest ratings and the need for on-going training.

Ultimately, the lack of faith in the accuracy of the scores and ratings undermines the ability of evaluators to help teachers improve. With so many teachers rated in the top two categories, it is hard for evaluators to differentiate support based on teachers' actual strengths and areas for growth. It is unsurprising, then, that only 27.3% of teachers said that an aspect of their teaching had improved as a result of working with their evaluator. We view this as a critical issue that must be addressed with urgency in order to realize the aspirations of better evaluations in Rhode Island that set the stage for professional development tailored to the needs of our educators – and great instruction for our students.

Building Administrator Evaluation Results

Likewise, building administrator Final Effectiveness Ratings distribution produced similar results, with approximately 94% of building administrators receiving ratings in the top two categories. Despite the fact that over three-quarters of building administrators who responded to the end-of-year survey agreed that their evaluator accurately assessed their performance, the results indicate that our efforts to ensure that all building administrators consistently receive the honest feedback they need to grow as professionals also remains in the earliest stages.

Building Administrator Final Effectiveness Rating Matrix Percentages – All Models

		STUDENT LEARNING			
		4	3	2	1
PP x PR	4	25.5%	22.4%	1.4%	0.0%
	3	13.7%	28.3%	1.7%	0.0%
	2	1.1%	2.8%	1.4%	0.3%
	1	0.0%	0.3%	0.3%	0.8%

Key

- Highly Effective
- Effective
- Developing
- Ineffective

Overall Results

While we applaud teachers, building administrators, and district leaders for their diligent efforts in implementing these new and more rigorous evaluation systems, results from this first year also indicate that as a state we have more work to do to ensure that educator evaluations reflect the true spectrum of educator performance in our schools. While there was concern in the early stages of training and implementation that few educators would be able to receive high scores under the new systems, results suggest that the vast majority of educators are being rated *Effective* or *Highly Effective*. Yet when we consider the educator ratings alongside other data such as student achievement, student growth, or school accountability, there appears to be a discrepancy. This gap is cause for concern and requires a closer examination.

> **As we move beyond simply completing the evaluation process toward more accurate ratings, we will be able to use this information to tailor professional development opportunities for all educators – novices and veterans alike – and help more students learn.**

Research continues to find considerable variability in educator effectiveness.[2] For educator evaluations to meaningfully inform human capital decisions, including professional development, and lead to gains in student achievement, it is critical that teachers, building administrators, and district leaders have access to credible performance data. If the results of any new system only recognize performance in the top two categories, districts are still clearly lacking the rich information they need to identify and support all educators, especially those who struggle to make gains with students. This limits their ability to provide the feedback and support they need to improve performance – and student achievement.

Looking ahead, one of our top priorities will be improving implementation of educator evaluation systems to continue to focus on quality school leadership, instruction, and student achievement, while also fulfilling our goal of meaningfully differentiating between our highest performing educators and those who may be struggling to help students. As we move beyond simply completing the evaluation process toward more actionable feedback and accurate ratings, we will be able to use this information to tailor professional development opportunities for all educators – novices and veterans alike – and help more students learn.

FEEDBACK FROM THE FIELD

> **Even now during the second year of statewide implementation, RIDE is listening carefully to learn what's working – and what can be improved – based on the real experiences of teachers and school leaders.**

From the beginning, improvements to the evaluation systems have been shaped by the voices of educators. Even now during the second year of statewide implementation, RIDE is listening carefully to learn what's working – and what can be improved – based on the real experiences of teachers and school leaders. The Rhode Island Model in particular benefited from the experience of pilot districts that implemented the model early. Educators and leaders in these districts offered valuable feedback based on their real experiences in schools. This input, combined with the feedback from the rest of the state's gradual implementation year, informed several key changes for the 2012-13 school year, including streamlined rubrics, clearer expectations, and greater flexibility to customize aspects of the evaluation process to meet local needs.

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[2] Thomas J. Kane, Eric S. Taylor, John H. Tyler, and Amy L. Wooten. 2011. "Identifying Effective Classroom Practices Using Student Achievement Data" *The Journal of Human Resources* 46-3.

Educator voices continue to play an important role in shaping the systems this year. Thousands of teachers, building administrators, and central office administrators participated in surveys and focus groups to help us identify how we can improve evaluations in the future. Here are a few of the most important findings:

- **Teachers are concerned about the specificity and usefulness of the feedback that they receive from evaluators.** While the vast majority (84%) of building administrators indicate that they provided teachers with more specific feedback during the evaluation process, just over half (51.8%) of teachers felt the same way.

- **Teachers are increasingly comfortable with the Student Learning Objective process – and optimistic it will be more effective next year.** When asked about a variety of aspects of the evaluation system, the greatest percent (44.9%) were more comfortable creating Student Learning Objectives last year and a relatively large percentage (40.7%) believe that the process will be implemented more efficiently this year.

- **Building administrators are invested in the Student Learning Objective process – and they are eager for more tools and guidance.** The majority of Building Administrators (70.1%) agree that the Student Learning Objective process is useful for setting academic goals that will lead to increased student achievement, and more than two-thirds (67.4%) specified Student Learning Objective-related trainings as the most helpful.

LESSONS FROM YEAR ONE

The first year of full implementation of new educator evaluations is a monumental step forward for the quality of instruction and school leadership in Rhode Island, yet if we are to achieve our goal of providing educators with the feedback they need to help improve student achievement for all, it is critical that we take steps now to support and improve the accuracy and usefulness of each component of the system. Based on first year results – and feedback from educators in the field – RIDE will be drawing from three key lessons in the year ahead.

Local district ownership of the evaluation process and system is critical.

The success of educator evaluation depends upon districts' commitment to its success, which is why every district should have a near-term plan *and* a long-term plan for making sure the evaluation systems are implemented with fidelity and that the results are trusted, valued, and lead to meaningful personnel decisions and supports.

The Rhode Island Model for teachers and building administrators will be refined at the state level over time to make it more precise, useful, and user-friendly – potentially spurring improvements and innovations in other systems. But districts are responsible for monitoring the quality of system implementation and how it connects to important human capital policies and practices. It is the ongoing job of each district to assess how its systems are working and to make any changes necessary to ensure that all regulations are met and that the evaluation process can accomplish its goals of helping teachers and building administrators develop while providing district leaders with the performance assessment data that they need to make smart human capital decisions. By proactively monitoring implementation efforts throughout the year, districts can identify areas for improvement and opportunities to customize the systems – and adjust accordingly.

District-level training and support will help improve the quality of evaluations.

As part of their increased ownership over the evaluation process, districts must ensure that evaluators are properly trained to observe practice and provide quality feedback, approve and score Student Learning Objectives, and analyze and use evaluation data. Just as important, districts must ensure that educators are fully apprised of the system, the components relevant to their role, and their responsibilities throughout the year.

Starting in the 2013-14 school year, districts need to supplement state-level training and support for educators and evaluators based on their specific needs. One promising area to improve the implementation of evaluations is to capitalize on educators' increased comfort with the SLO process by conducting ongoing SLO approval and scoring calibration exercises. Other useful trainings will highlight the district's local decisions and help ensure that the system is implemented fairly and accurately. Looking ahead, districts should connect training with professional development in order to help educators see the connections between accurate evaluation, honest feedback, and professional growth – not just as an annual measure of performance.

Districts should encourage a cultural shift by embracing the process of professional growth.

As evaluators become more skilled and comfortable with their ability to evaluate and support educators – it's possible that educators will earn lower scores and ratings. For teachers who have always been told that they were *Effective* or *Highly Effective*, this may be challenging to understand. Yet, ongoing professional growth is part of the normal trajectory of development in all professions – and it should be no different in the field of education. Professional development is not solely for struggling teachers – it can also help good teachers become great, and great teachers become beacons of excellent instruction in their buildings. District leaders can support this process by encouraging a cultural shift in their schools that embraces the process of ongoing reflection and feedback so that all educators understand the connection between the evaluation process and professional growth.

WHAT COMES NEXT

Improved educator evaluation is one of Rhode Island's highest priorities, and these new policies are here to stay. Moving beyond completion of evaluations to accurate and meaningful evaluations will require ongoing changes in the way teachers and building administrators work together – spending more time collaborating, setting goals, seeking feedback, and reflecting on what they can do to improve their practice.

RIDE will continue to support this work and make refinements over time. We have been listening to teachers' concerns about measuring student learning, and are committed to working together to make making all systems as fair and accurate as possible – and we have faith that collectively, we can meet that goal. Additional information about the changes to the current versions of the Rhode Island Model for teachers and building administrators and the measures of student learning that are used across all of the systems, can be found in the updated guidebooks and guidebook addenda available on the RIDE website at: www.ride.ri.gov/EdEval-RIModel-GuidesForms.

Improved educator evaluations are just one key to transforming Rhode Island schools into centers of excellence. We look forward to continuing to work with educators to make progress toward our number one priority: improving student achievement for all.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

If you have questions or feedback about this report – or any other aspect of Rhode Island's educator evaluation initiative – contact: EdEval@ride.ri.gov, or visit the educator evaluation section of the RIDE website at: www.ride.ri.gov/EdEval.