



Ensuring Equitable Access to Excellent Educators: Summary of Implementation of Rhode Island's Equity Plan, 2015-16 July 15, 2016

In September 2015, the U.S. Department of Education approved Rhode Island's Equity Plan aimed at ensuring that all students have equitable access to excellent educators. In light of a new strategic plan, a new Commissioner, and new priorities for the agency, RIDE took a step back during the 2015-16 school year to think about how its equitable access work complements other areas of work and, given limited capacity, how to adjust its plan. In the past year, RIDE has taken steps to better understand root causes and has taken some preliminary actions to address these root causes identified in our plan. This document highlights some of RIDE's action steps to date.

Educator Preparation and Certification

Root Cause 1: Lack of Specific Preparation to Work in High Poverty and High Minority Schools

Actions Taken:

- **Collected research on best practice of practicum and clinical experiences.** The Center for Great Teachers and Leaders, a national technical assistance center, provided RIDE with a research brief that identified best practices and designs related to clinical experience design, developing data literacy, preparing culturally responsive educators, and measuring impact of candidates on student learning. RIDE shared parts of this brief with preparation providers and districts and will continue to discuss the brief in future meetings.
- **Facilitated ongoing learning related to educator preparation standards and components.** RIDE staff met quarterly with preparation providers. In each meeting, providers engaged in an instructional rounds protocol focused on components within the [PREP-RI performance rubric](#). During a human resource director meeting in January 2016 and during a district network meeting in April 2016, providers reviewed preparation standards with district staff in order to build a common language and understanding of expectations for programs and districts related to educator preparation.
- **Coordinated opportunities for LEAs and programs to meet and build partnerships.** In January, preparation providers attended a human resource director meeting at RIDE. During the meeting, providers talked about their programs, sought input from districts, and listened to information about district needs. Sample steps taken after the meeting included districts connecting teachers with professional learning through a local preparation provider, meeting with a provider to establish a new partnership, sharing



job postings with providers, and rethinking the student teacher selection process. In April, providers and assistant superintendents met at a district network meeting to review research and discuss best practices related to clinical experiences.

- **Facilitated development/adaptation of program completer and employer surveys.** The PREP-RI standards expect programs to annually survey program completers as well as employers of recent program completers. In April, RIDE shared survey examples with providers at a quarterly meeting. Assistant superintendents and preparation providers also worked together to discuss employer survey content and administration at the April district network meeting.

Root Cause 2: Confusing/Hard-to-Meet Certification Requirements

- **Conducted a focus group on the certification website.** RIDE conducted a focus group with students from a local college to get feedback on how RIDE can increase the clarity of the certification website. Based on the information given, RIDE will make some improvements to the website's design in the coming months.
- **Provided certification support in highest poverty and highest minority districts.** In response to a request from Providence School Department and in an effort to increase understanding of certification requirements, RIDE staff facilitated a session providing an overview of certification requirements on May 5, 2016. In addition, RIDE offered an Express Certification Renewal opportunity for educators in Central Falls, Cranston, East Providence, Pawtucket, and Providence on May 25, 2016. During this after-hours event, approximately 30 educators received on-site support from RIDE staff and received expedited processing of their renewal.

Root Cause 3: Lack of a Diverse Cohort of Educators and Candidates

Root Cause 8: Lack of Competitive Compensation

- **Convened a task force focused on recruiting and retaining educators in hard-to-staff fields.** Governor Raimondo, RIDE, and the Office of Postsecondary Education [convened a working group](#) to plan for policy improvements specific to increasing the diversity of the workforce and the number of STEM teachers in RI. The work was supported by a grant from the National Governor's Association. The committee engaged in a root cause analysis of issues that impede recruitment and retention of STEM educators and educators from diverse backgrounds, identified promising strategies, and developed group recommendations and individual action plans. The project resulted in three key recommendations to policymakers to improve the engagement of STEM and educators from diverse backgrounds: pursue strategies that close pay gaps, open opportunities for innovative compensation models, and normalize the social security payroll tax; pursue opportunities for competitive grants; and define and support shared research questions.



Task force participants also proposed how they could impact this work in their own organizations. Sample examples of project proposals include offering a graduate course in culturally responsive teaching for in-service STEM teachers, creating an advanced training focused on cultural/linguistic responsiveness, supporting a peer-to-peer learning network of diverse educational leaders of color, and creating mentorships for students with experts in STEM-related industries.

Teacher and Leader Support

Root Cause 4: Insufficient Professional Learning, Induction, and Coaching

- **Provided job-embedded coaching related to educator evaluation through the principal partnership.** In 2015-16, RIDE provided job-embedded coaching to evaluators in six schools, including three of our highest poverty and highest minority schools. Although the sample size was small, results of surveys indicated strongly that principals felt supported by RIDE staff and that participating in the principal partnership was a valuable experience.
- **Drafted an educator evaluation self-audit tool.** Given the critical importance of ensuring all educators receive meaningful feedback on their practice, RIDE created an educator evaluation self-audit tool that districts can use to identify strengths and areas for improvement related to the implementation of educator evaluation. RIDE intends to pilot the tool with a few districts during the 2016-17 school year.

Human Resource Policies and Practices

Root Cause 5: Ineffective Recruitment, Hiring, and Staff Management Policies

- **Developed a district talent management self-assessment tool.** RIDE developed a Talent Management Self-Assessment Checklist for School Districts that was revised by the Equitable Access Support Network. School districts can use the tool to evaluate how effective their talent management strategies are in helping ensure equitable access to effective educators and make changes that they think are appropriate in the areas of recruitment, hiring, placement, and support. RIDE will share the tool with districts in the coming year.
- **Pursued data sharing agreement with retirement board.** RIDE has sent the retirement board a request for a data sharing agreement that would provide RIDE with the exact hire and retirement dates of educators. If granted, this agreement would improve the quality of data available and enable RIDE to identify hiring and leaving trends within across LEAs.



Teaching and Learning Conditions and Supports

Root Cause 6: Unfavorable Perceptions of High Poverty and High Minority Schools

- **Shared brief accounts of amazing work under way in RI schools.** In the January 29, 2016 field memo sent to all districts in Rhode Island, RIDE encouraged leaders to send RIDE e-mails and videos profiling the great work happening in RI schools with the intent of sharing this information with community groups, business leaders, elected officials, and people in the education field. This information is shared on the [RIDE website](#).

Root Cause 7: Limited Career Paths and Leadership Opportunities

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- **Convened Leadership Committee.** In May 2016, RIDE convened a group of superintendents, principals, and teachers to focus on improving supports and opportunities for aspiring principals, current principals, and teacher leaders. This committee will continue to meet over the next year.
- **Announced Educator Leadership and Professional Development as one of the Commissioner's Focus Initiatives for 2016-17.** During the 2016-17 school year, RIDE will focus on improving opportunities and support for leaders, exploring the possibility of establishing standards for PD, conducting new professional development pilot programs, and exploring micro-credentialing.

Root Cause 9: Poor Teaching Conditions and Insufficient Resources

- **Worked toward selecting a vendor to administer a survey of teaching and learning conditions.** In Fall 2015, RIDE submitted a Request for Proposals for a survey. RIDE began the process of securing a vendor to reestablish a state-wide survey around a variety of topics. In the coming year, RIDE will work to add questions to this survey to better understand teaching and learning conditions in RI schools.
- **Helped LEAs analyze and improve teaching and learning conditions.** RIDE attended working sessions on March 22, 2016 and June 2, 2016 focused on improving teaching conditions with teams from Providence Public Schools and Woonsocket School District. As part of this work, RIDE helped Providence create a survey, which Providence administered to teachers who were new to the district in the 2014-2015 or 2015-16 school years, related to management of student conduct and teacher leadership. In addition, RIDE helped Woonsocket develop a teacher survey to help the district better understand teachers' professional development needs and will be supporting the district next year in developing and analyzing data about perceptions of school leadership to help understand the impact of new leadership on teaching and learning conditions.

Other

- **Created an equitable access blog on the RIDE website.** Currently there are [two blog posts](#) (dated April 21, 2016 and June 22, 2016, respectively) that focus on RIDE's commitment to equitable access. The first blog post provides an overview of equitable access work and the second focuses on teacher and student attendance. Over the next year, RIDE will add additional posts to the RIDE website to increase awareness of the issues that affect students' access to excellent educators.