



## Pathways to Understanding, Supporting, and Increasing Educator Autonomy in Rhode Island



*Recommendations from the Educator Autonomy Working Group*

**August 2014**





It is the Educator Autonomy Working Group's mission to support efforts under way in Rhode Island to create a world-class education system by working with all stakeholders to present recommendations to Governor Chafee to improve student achievement through increased local autonomy.



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**Recommendation 1:**

**Increase awareness of the existing autonomies at the district and school level in Rhode Island.**

**Recommendation 2:**

**Provide the training, support, and resources to educational leaders necessary to carry out effective and successful practices in an autonomous structure.**

**Recommendation 3:**

**Create a clear path for existing local education authorities and their schools to put autonomy into practice in areas such as, but not limited to, budget, curriculum, instruction and assessment, governance, staffing, and scheduling.**

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August 2014

The Honorable Lincoln D. Chafee  
Office of the Governor, State Capitol  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, RI 02903-1196

The Rhode Island Educator Autonomy Working Group, which you commissioned in December 2013, has engaged in an intensive exploration of the issues facing educators in exercising autonomy in their districts, schools, and classrooms. Our process has been informative and has led to a set of actionable recommendations that are delineated in our report, *Pathways to Understanding, Supporting and Increasing Educator Autonomy in Rhode Island*.

These recommendations are designed to advance our collective objective of promoting student success by allowing decisions about education to be made as close to the student level as is practical and effective. Equally important, these recommendations are rooted in the premise that educators are professionals and should be given the latitude and associated responsibility for making decisions that affect their students - our future workforce. It is our hope that the recommendations set forth in this report will have a transformative impact on education in our state and beyond.

The membership of the Working Group represents a cross-section of academic, industry and community stakeholders. These recognized professionals engaged in extensive primary and secondary research to identify sustainable models of autonomy on a school, district, and state-wide level, which informed the recommendations and suggested implementation framework presented for your consideration.

As your appointed co-chairs and long-time educators who are passionate about student learning and success, our collective efforts served as a vibrant forum for intensive professional dialogue amongst the members of the group. We are very proud of the dedication, respect and commitment that each individual gave to this work. We thank you for this opportunity to identify and address the importance of educator autonomy in Rhode Island. We look forward to working together to make the recommendations a reality.

Respectfully submitted,

  
Patricia M. Page  
2014 RI Teacher of the Year

  
Yanaiza Gallant  
2012 Milken Award Winner

## **Members of the Educator Autonomy Working Group**

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# Introduction to the Educator Autonomy Working Group Mission and Process

## Context and Mission

Significant school improvement efforts are already under way in Rhode Island – but these efforts alone are not enough to create a system of world-class learning environments for Rhode Island students, who are the future of our state. In December 2013, as a next step in transforming education in Rhode Island, Governor Lincoln D. Chafee established the Educator Autonomy Working Group, charged with developing specific recommendations on how to increase autonomy for Rhode Island districts, schools, and educators.

Research has shown that the most critical factor in determining student achievement is the effectiveness of the classroom teacher. The most recent education efforts (Common Core State Standards and new assessments, educator-evaluation systems, beginning-teacher induction programs, for example) have involved teachers in their development, yet these initiatives have emanated from the state level. As these latest efforts become ingrained in the educational system, we need to begin to focus on to how to unleash innovation in the classroom through more autonomy and collaboration at the educator level and through the enhancement of teaching as a profession.

The mission of the Educator Autonomy Working Group is to support efforts under way in Rhode Island to create a world-class education system by working with all stakeholders to present recommendations to Governor Chafee to improve student achievement through increased local autonomy and innovation.

## Core Principles

Three core principles guided the design and execution of the Educator Autonomy Working Group project. We believe these principles are key to our deliberations on educator autonomy:

- Student learning and success is paramount;
- Educators want what is best for students; and
- Decisions should be made as close to the student as is practical and effective.

We developed these during our first work session. We included these principles on every agenda and reviewed them at every session to ensure that our work reflected these principles in all that we discussed and decided.

## Stakeholder and Expert Participation

To create the most robust set of recommendations for increasing local autonomy we ensured that the process had broad input and that the process was highly transparent. Governor Chafee thoughtfully selected the group members to ensure that all stakeholders would have a voice in the process. Stakeholder groups represented included students, parents, teachers, principals, superintendents, teachers unions, the Board of Education, postsecondary education, school committees, the business community, and the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE). Within this group of stakeholders, the objective was to select diverse members in regard to geography, size of district, gender, and race. At various junctures in the process, members were specifically asked to reach out to those they represented for input or feedback. Given the educator focus, the leadership of the working group was intentionally placed in the hands of two award-winning teachers: Yanaiza Gallant, Principal Intern at the Burrillville Middle School and the 2012 Rhode Island Milken Educator Award Winner, and Patricia Page, an East Greenwich teacher and the 2014 Rhode Island Teacher of the Year.

To draw on expertise outside of the group members, we conducted a literary scan of current research and a round of interviews with external experts. Guest speakers also shared their experiences regarding educator autonomy. The Education Autonomy Research Summary in Appendix A and the External Interview Summary in Appendix B provide further information on the results of these efforts.

We maintained a firm belief that all work sessions and materials should be open to the public so that the process would be not only participatory but also transparent. All work session dates and locations were posted, and all meetings were open to the public. Each work session had approximately 7 – 20 members of the public present. In addition, we maintained a publicly available website (<http://edtonomy.weebly.com>) with up-to-date materials.

### **Phases of Work and Areas Explored**

We accomplished our work through monthly in-person sessions from December 2013 through July 2014. Additionally, members of the group completed assignments in between work sessions. Graph 1 depicts the approach of the Educator Autonomy Working Group (EAWG) to phases of work.

# Educator Autonomy Working Group: Phases of Work

Planning Phase Sept. – Nov.	Phase 1: Build Common Understanding Dec. – Feb.	Phase 2: Determine Areas of Recommendations March - April	Phase 3: Develop Specific Recommendations May - July
<b>Key Questions:</b>			
What information do EAWG members need to have productive sessions and develop a robust set of actionable recommendations? What process would ensure full and open discussion leading to consensus?	How will we work together to reach recommendations? What barriers to effective/innovative teaching and learning exist in RI? How have others resolved these barriers?	What changes would allow for more effective/innovative teaching and learning? How could barriers to effective teaching and learning be removed or mitigated?	How could proposed recommendations be crafted to be clear & actionable? How can we strengthen autonomy in RI and ensure quality and effectiveness?
<b>Process:</b>			
Provide appropriate pre-reading materials and meet with WG members to ensure questions are answered and expectations are clear	Review existing research & external experts interviews Explore one specific area (curriculum and instruction) as it relates to autonomy	Gain understanding of how autonomy operates through deep dives into other state’s autonomy approach & guest speakers with relevant experience	Identify straw recommendations Work in small groups to revise & build consensus on straw recommendations
Work with Co-Chairs to design process and resources needed	Build consensus around key questions and issue	Understand different models of educator autonomy	Craft set of recommendations

A planning team conducted the initial phase, which took place from September through November, as well as the work-session preparation and facilitation. The team included the working group co-chairs, RIDE staff members, and a parent who is a community volunteer.<sup>1</sup> The objective of the planning phase was to ensure that the working group members were prepared with appropriate expectations and adequate background material<sup>2</sup> and to conduct research to support robust and informed discussions that would lead to effective recommendations. The planning team also designed the content and process of work sessions, using feedback from each work session. The planning process resulted in the following three phases of work:

## Phase 1: Understanding Autonomy

The Educator Autonomy Working Group explored the meaning of autonomy in education in general, both domestically and internationally, and autonomy specifically as it relates to curriculum and instruction.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Members included Kathy Bendheim, parent; Mary-Beth Fafard, Race to the Top Coordinator and Strategic Planner, RIDE; Deborah A. Gist, Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education, RIDE; Jessica Waters, 2013 Rhode Island Teacher of the Year; Patricia Page, 2014 Rhode Island Teacher of the Year; Yanaiza Gallant, 2012 Milken Educator Award winner; and Abby Swienton, Office of the Governor.

<sup>2</sup> Please see **Appendix C Brief Background of Rhode Island Public Education.**

<sup>3</sup> Please see **Appendix D Exploring Autonomy in Education.**

It became clear that autonomy in education has a wide variety of interpretations, approaches, and levels of success. For our work as a group, we defined autonomy as **the freedom to make professional decisions in an educational setting**.<sup>4</sup> Even within Rhode Island, although educators have a general understanding of autonomy, members of the working group had different understandings about who made specific educational decisions even within their own school district.

Our research showed that all over the world, countries, states, and districts are experimenting with ways in which educators can make decisions closer to the student level while improving the quality and consistency of academic outcomes. Researchers have found, however, that increasing local autonomy does not immediately translate to improved student success; schools and districts must create autonomy through a thoughtful process that involves building trust, providing appropriate training and accountability measures, and ensuring a degree of insulation from policy and leadership changes that may affect levels of autonomy.<sup>5</sup>

There was clear alignment among the members of the working group that educator quality is the most important school-based factor in student success and that those closest to the students are the ones most aware of the students' specific needs. During our in-depth exploration of the extent of educator autonomy over curriculum and assessment, the key barriers we identified to moving autonomy closer to the student level were a lack of adequate and flexible time for educators (i.e., teachers and principals) to collaborate and conduct research, lack of funding to support training or additional time, and lack of organizational support that would provide teachers with the latitude to differentiate curriculum and assessment to meet students' learning needs.

The working group completed this research phase of the project, having spent significant time gaining a better understanding of the both the definition and the nuances of autonomy, with a belief that we must understand how different approaches operate before making recommendations.

## **Phase 2: Exploring Models of Autonomy**

During Phase 2 of our work, we studied several models of autonomy (Fulton County Georgia, Massachusetts, and Los Angeles Unified School District) and we brought in three guest speakers from Massachusetts to share their experiences at the state, district, and school level. Discussions ranged from the differing philosophical approaches to how those approaches translated to activities in the classroom.

General themes included the notion that autonomy is complex, but that autonomy holds promise if implemented well, and that leadership and training matter. Additionally, we agreed that there is not one "right" approach to autonomy; however, certain conditions exist in which autonomy is most successful: trust, collaboration and clear accountability.

## **Phase 3: Developing Recommendations**

In the final phase of our work, we integrated the outside research, work-session discussions, and local context to craft a set of interrelated recommendations to move autonomy as close to the student level as is practical and effective in Rhode Island. We developed a glossary<sup>6</sup> for specific terms used in shaping the

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<sup>4</sup>Please see **Appendix E Glossary** for additional terms defined.

<sup>5</sup>Please see **Appendix A Education Autonomy Research Summary** and **Appendix B External Interview Summary**.

<sup>6</sup>Please see **Appendix E Glossary**.

recommendations, and we agreed on a set of conditions<sup>7</sup> necessary to support autonomous practices and decision-making. The process of developing recommendations included the drafting of straw recommendations and conducting work in small groups to discuss, debate, and develop these straw recommendations into final recommendations. The final piece of work that the Educator Autonomy Working Group undertook was to develop a strategy for how to best position our recommendations for implementation.

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<sup>7</sup>Please see **Appendix F Conditions Required for Effective Autonomy**.

## **Recommendations for understanding, supporting, and increasing educator autonomy in Rhode Island**

The Educator Autonomy Working Group created three interrelated recommendations that we believe, if fully implemented, will significantly improve student success.

Our first recommendation addresses an essential step for thoughtfully increasing educator autonomy in Rhode Island. The Educator Autonomy Working Group recommends that autonomy at all levels (state, district, and school) must be clearly understood and documented. A system must also be in place to ensure that, as autonomy shifts, those changes are captured, documented, and shared with all stakeholders. This process will allow educators at all levels to take advantage of existing autonomy in ways that at present may be unclear.

Our second recommendation calls for fiscal support for two key elements of an effective system of autonomy: appropriate training and additional time for collaboration. Training should be specific for each type of educator so as to prepare them to make decisions knowledgeably, within the context of their education environment. Further, time to collaborate is essential for implementing autonomous strategies well. Research indicated that both time and training will ensure that existing autonomy is implemented effectively.

Our third recommendation identifies how to use this clearly identified foundation of existing, effective autonomy so as to move decision-making, in both broad and specific ways, closer to the student. This recommendation involves additional research to be done by a new group, which will identify statutory and regulatory changes that may be needed to allow for more autonomy for all schools in Rhode Island, as well as potentially identifying a clear path that an individual school could follow in order to become more autonomous.

### **Recommendation One:**

#### **Increase awareness of the existing autonomies at the district<sup>8</sup> and school level in Rhode Island.**

This process can be accomplished by: (a) communicating and reaching out to educators and policymakers; (b) developing a series of forums co-hosted by key stakeholders; (c) identifying and documenting existing autonomies; and (d) sharing findings and continuous revisions to ensure that all are aware of current opportunities for autonomy.

This process is necessary because there are varying degrees of understanding of what levels of autonomy educators already have in Rhode Island, and educators need a baseline understanding of current autonomy opportunities in order to assess the possibilities for further development of educator autonomy. The actual autonomy given to principals and teachers varies tremendously across the state. Our discussions revealed that in Rhode Island there are varying degrees of acceptance, delegation, and implementation of autonomy on a school and district level.

In putting forth this recommendation, we hope that all levels of the education system will engage in serious dialogue around developing a deep understanding of the autonomy that currently exists within the Rhode Island educational system. We also hope to see further examination of the barriers that prevent

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<sup>8</sup>“Districts” includes charter public schools.

autonomous practices from being implemented. The suggested ideas for accomplishing this recommendation go beyond merely producing a pamphlet or guidance document; rather, the various suggested ideas require all stakeholders to participate in developing venues that increase awareness of opportunities for autonomy.

### **Recommendation Two**

**Provide the training, support, and resources to educational leaders (including teachers) necessary to carry out effective and successful practices in an autonomous structure.**

This may be accomplished by: (a) defining the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of educational leaders in an autonomous setting, as indicated by a needs-assessment analysis of effective practices; (b) developing formal professional development forums; (c) partnering with organizations including, but not limited to, postsecondary education in order to prepare educational leaders on developing and implementing autonomous practices; and (d) securing sustainable fiscal investments to support autonomy.

We believe this process is necessary because research, interviews with experts, and experiences of practitioners carrying out autonomy practices showed a need for pre- and in-service training and support. In our work session with Massachusetts educators who had been engaged in various autonomy models and practices for more than 10 years, the educators emphasized that training, support, and resources were essential to success.

In putting forth this recommendation, we believe that all stakeholders at every level of the educational system must invest in the needed professional development required to implement autonomous practices effectively. This process will require a re-examination of fiscal resources that currently exist at the state, district, and school level to see if education systems can realign these resources to support strengthening educator autonomy. Further, stakeholders will need to work together to seek additional private and public funding to support educator autonomy.

### **Recommendation Three**

**Create a clear path for existing local education authorities and their schools to put autonomy into practice in areas such as, but not limited to, budget, curriculum, instruction and assessment, governance, staffing, and scheduling.**

This process can be accomplished by: (a) creating a workgroup that includes district, state, and union leaders to examine existing legislation and regulatory state frameworks to identify areas that foster or inhibit autonomy; (b) incorporating findings from Recommendations One and Two in the development of an action plan to remove or lower identified barriers to autonomy; and, (c) exploring the development of a specific pathway that individual schools can follow to become more autonomous.

We believe this process is necessary because, in other states, both legislation and regulations have successfully provided a foundation for autonomous decision-making to be supported at the state, district, and school level. The time-frame and the composition of the Educator Autonomy Working Group was insufficient for conducting a thorough legislative and regulatory review and for drafting either new legislation or making recommendations regarding existing regulations. Also, both our research and our interviews with various experts across the country indicated the benefit of having a strong legislative framework for supporting autonomous decision-making that is as close to the student level as practical.

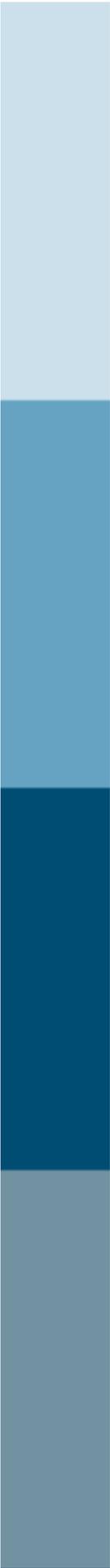
We encourage individuals who may be involved in the next phase of this work to include deep and wide-ranging dialogue among all stakeholders to foster innovative ideas for autonomy. When a future working group considers a potential legislative or regulatory framework, there will be a unique opportunity to take a broad look at how we might create conditions to encourage innovation in the classroom and throughout our education system.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, the Educator Autonomy Working Group firmly believes that these three recommendations will create the opportunity for educators to become more innovative and effective through increased autonomy at a level that is closer to the student. We believe that our recommendations will clarify, support, and increase autonomy at all levels within the Rhode Island educational system, resulting in significant improvements in the necessary conditions for student success.

Given the upcoming changes in political leadership, we believe there are two immediate steps that will set a positive foundation for our recommendations. First, wide dissemination of this report, its findings, and recommendations will be critical to building a broad understanding of the opportunity for increased student success that could result from implementation of these recommendations on educator autonomy. Each member of our working group has committed to sharing the findings and recommendations with their specific constituencies, as well as with others, in order to build an appetite for implementation. Additionally, the Educator Autonomy Working Group will ensure that current members of the General Assembly, political leaders, and candidates for office will understand the background, rationale for, and potential of these recommendations. Second, a legislative review of existing laws, regulations, and policies that affect educator autonomy would be a logical and important next step to set the stage for moving these recommendations forward.

The Educator Autonomy Working Group strongly encourages Governor Chafee and the entire Rhode Island education system to act swiftly and decisively to implement these recommendations. The students of Rhode Island cannot afford to wait.



## **Appendices**

Appendix A: Educator Autonomy Research Summary

Appendix B: External Interview Summary

Appendix C: Brief Background on Rhode Island Public Education

Appendix D: Exploring Autonomy in Education

Appendix E: Glossary

Appendix F: Conditions Required for Effective Autonomy

**Appendix A**  
**Educator Autonomy Research Summary**

**Educational Autonomy Research**  
**Sources and Summaries**

*This list has been gathered from a variety of sources and is meant to represent a variety of perspectives. The ideas represented here are not endorsed by the Educator Autonomy Group.*

Title	Author, Publisher, Date	Summary
<i>Assessing What Really Matters in Schools</i>	Newell, Ronald and Ryzin, Van Mark J., R&L Education, 2009 128 pages	The Hope Study was created to discover whether a different learning environment would achieve different outcomes. In detailing the outcome of the Hope Study, <i>Assessing What Really Matters in Schools</i> gives hope to innovative and progressive schools, to new and different accountability systems, while changing the conversation from an achievement discourse to a human development discourse.
<b><i>The Autonomy Gap: Barriers to Effective School Leadership</i></b>	Adamowski, Steven, Theriault, Susan Bowles, Cavanna, Anthony, Thomas B. Fordham Institute, post 2006 61 pages	Findings from in-depth interviews of school leaders to determine how real barriers are to effective leadership and, if so, which barriers are the greatest impediments and where do they come from.
<b><i>Can Teachers Run Their Own Schools?</i></b>	Kerchner, Charles Taylor, Claremont Graduate University, 2010	Links characteristics of successful teacher-run schools to public policy implications.
<b><i>Catching up: Learning from the best school systems in East Asia</i></b>	Jensen, Ben, The Grattan Institute, 2012 126 pages	This study takes an in-depth look at what drives success at four of the highest-performing systems (Hong Kong, Singapore, Korea, and Shanghai). The study identifies six education policies critical to system success and explores in-depth how each one is implemented.
<i>Drive: The Surprising Truth about What Motivates Us</i>	Pink, Daniel, Riverhead Books, 2011 272 pages	Daniel Pink asserts that the secret to high performance and satisfaction - at work, at school, and at home—is the deeply human need to direct our own lives, to learn and create new things, and to do better by ourselves and our world.
<i>Education Governance for the Twenty-First Century</i>	Manna, Paul and McGuinn, Patrick, Brookings Institute Press, 2013 423 pages	There is no silver bullet for the structure of education governance. This book includes chapters that describe and analyze the aspects of mayoral control, the governance system in Canada, and decision-making structures internationally. It also describes in detail the history and issues with our current governance system and several options for paths forward.

Title	Author, Publisher, Date	Summary
<i>Finnish Lessons</i>	Sahlberg, Pasi, Teachers College, Columbia University, 2011 165 pages	This is a personal account of Pasi Sahlberg, who was educated in the Finnish system, was a teacher in Finland, and now works with the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture. It shows how education reforms in Finland focus on professionalizing teachers' work, developing instructional leadership in schools, and enhancing trust in teachers and schools. This book concludes that Finnish success is a result of these five attributes: equal education opportunity for all; teaching is a well-respected and coveted profession; accountability is created through shared responsibility for student outcomes – assessment is through classroom based assessments and a test required for graduation rather than annual standardized testing; people trust schools; and the education system has sustainable leadership and political stability.
The Finnish Phenomenon,	Wagner, Tony, film, 2012	The key driver of Finnish success is trust. Trust is critical throughout the system: the national education administration provides standards that are very basic and they trust the towns to create curriculum to teach it; the local administration trusts the teachers to teach the students well (there is no testing to gauge the effectiveness of the teachers); and the teachers trust the students to do the work (no standardized testing until they leave secondary school).
<b>Fulton County Schools</b>	<a href="http://portal.fultonschools.org/departments/Strategy_Innovation/cssg/Pages/default.aspx">http://portal.fultonschools.org/departments/Strategy_Innovation/cssg/Pages/default.aspx</a>	The innovation section of this website includes a Concept Paper and a School Autonomy Guidebook along with the information their school system uses to grant autonomy and monitor accountability.
<b><i>How the World's Most Improved School Systems Keep Getting Better</i></b>	Mourshed, Mona, McKinsey & Co., 2010 126 pages	Twenty school systems that have registered significant, sustained, and widespread student gains from different parts of the world are researched and analyzed to determine why they have improved. They classified the systems into five performance stages and analyzed how the systems progressed from one stage to the next. They found that system leaders must integrate three aspects to create a successful improvement journey: understand the performance stage they are in currently; determine an appropriate set of interventions; and take context into consideration to determine the appropriate way in which to implement the interventions.

Title	Author, Publisher, Date	Summary
<b><i>In the Quest to Improve Schools, Have Teachers Been Stripped of Their Autonomy?</i></b>	Boser, Ulrich and Hanna, Robert, 2014, Center for American Progress	A review of data regarding teacher autonomy and job satisfaction indicating that teachers are more autonomous and more satisfied than is commonly believed.
<b><i>Lessons from PISA for the United States</i></b>	OECD, 2011 259 pages	Covers specific areas related to the United States, plus chapter-length profiles on Ontario, Canada, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Finland, Japan, Singapore, Brazil, Germany, England, and Poland, and makes recommendations. The recommendation (based on both PISA scores and country profiles) related to autonomy is: "Provide a work organization in which teachers can use their potential: management, accountability and knowledge management."
<b><i>Lessons Learned: How Good Policies Produce Better Schools</i></b>	Whelan, Fenton, 2009	Discusses seven themes of successful systems. Characteristics of successful structure are: empowers people to perform their roles effectively and innovate where necessary; holds people accountable for performance; and encourages the spread of good practice and effective leadership.
<b><i>Making Schools Work</i></b>	Ouchi, William G., Simon & Schuster, 2003 284 pages	These researchers analyze several school districts (Houston, NYC, Los Angeles, Chicago, Seattle, and Edmonton, Cal., and the three largest Catholic systems in the United States). They also studied six independent schools, at least 5 percent of the schools in each district, and spent time at each of the district offices. Their conclusion was that great systems and schools are possible by following seven specific strategies: every principal is an entrepreneur; every school controls its own budget; everyone is accountable for student performance and budgets; everyone delegates authority to those below; there is a burning focus on student achievement; every school is a community of learners; and, families have real choices between a variety of schools.
<b><i>Myth of Markets in School Education, The</i></b>	Ben Jensen, The Grattan Institute, 2013 71 pages	This is a study of Australian school systems and the effect of 20 years of increased competition and autonomy on outcomes. Findings include that empowering school leaders is about much more than autonomy. It requires the capacity in schools to effectively appraise, develop, and provide meaningful feedback to teachers. Too often, schools are being granted autonomy with insufficient capacity-building and an incomplete strategy for improvement.

Title	Author, Publisher, Date	Summary
<b><i>PISA 2012 Results: What Makes Schools Successful? Resources, Policies and Practices (Volume IV)</i></b>	OECD, 2013 546 pages	This in-depth analysis of PISA 2012 scores covers how resources, policies, and practices are related to education outcomes. Specific policies and practices covered include school governance, assessments, accountability, level of resources, competition, selecting and grouping students, and school learning environment among other items.
<b><i>Redefining the School District in Tennessee</i></b>	Nelson Smith, Thomas Fordham Institute, April 2013	Update on new governance structure pursued in Tennessee, the Achievement School District. This structure specifically allows for autonomy over resources and selection of providers for lower-performing schools.
<b><i>School autonomy and accountability: Are they related to student performance?</i></b>	OECD, October 2011 4 pages	Based on 2009 PISA findings, this report takes specific autonomy and accountability activities and correlates the results. Findings suggest that autonomy and accountability go together: Greater autonomy in decisions relating to curricula, assessments and resource allocation tend to be associated with better student performance, particularly when schools operate within a culture of accountability.
<b><i>Standing on the Shoulders of Giants: An Agenda for American Education Reform</i></b> (Based on research in <i>Surpassing Shanghai</i> by Marc Tucker)	Tucker, Marc, National Center on Education and the Economy, March 2011	Based on OECD research, Tucker identifies seven initiatives to be adopted by the U.S. in order to create exceptional education for all in the U.S.: 1) aggressive international benchmarking; 2) high-quality teaching force; 3) aligned instructional systems and external examinations that measure complex thinking skills; 4) belief that all students must meet those standards; 5) professional systems of work organization instead of blue-collar models; 6) funding systems that put the most funds behind the students who are hardest to educate, and; 7) coherence of the design of the overall education system itself, in all of its particulars.
<b><i>Strong Performers and Successful Reformers in Education: A video series profiling policies and practices of education systems that demonstrate high or improving performance in the PISA tests</i></b>	Video Series, Pearson Foundation, 2011	Analyzes 12 countries in which PISA scores are particularly high. Autonomy is very high in many of the locations. Each video is about 20 minutes long.

Title	Author, Publisher, Date	Summary
<p><i>Surpassing Shanghai</i> (Very similar to <i>Standing on the Shoulders of Giants</i> by Marc Tucker)</p>	<p>Tucker, Marc S., 2012</p>	<p>Belief in shifting more decision-making to schools as a part of “professionalizing” teaching, yet the author did not make a clear statement that any specific structure was a primary driver of student performance. Consists of chapters on highly successful countries and what drives their success. Resulting findings for what the U.S. needs to do are: benchmark the best; design for quality; design for equity; and, design for productivity.</p>
<p><b><i>Teacher Cooperatives: What Happens When Teachers Run the Schools?</i></b></p>	<p>Hawkins, Beth, Education Next, Spring 2009</p>	<p>This article analyzes two groups of teacher-led schools (EdVisions and those in Milwaukee). While student achievement is mixed, the authors found improved conditions, collaboration, and relationships with students.</p>
<p><b><i>Teacher Leadership: Leading the Way to Effective Teaching and Learning</i></b></p>	<p>Berry, Barnett, Saughtrey, Alesha, Wieder, Alan, Center for Teacher Quality, 2010 12 pages</p>	<p>This policy brief considers the ways in which teacher leadership is key to present-day teaching effectiveness and to a healthy future for the teaching profession. Findings are based on surveys and interviews of teachers in urban, high-needs schools as well as on broader research literature to demonstrate that when teachers are empowered as instructional leaders and decision-makers, students and the public schools they attend will benefit.</p>
<p><i>Teacherpreneurs: Innovative Teachers who Lead but don't Leave</i></p>	<p>Berry, Barnett, Jossey-Bass, 2013</p>	<p>This book follows a small group of “teacherpreneurs” (highly accomplished classroom teachers who blur the lines of distinction between those who teach in schools and those who lead them) in their effort to determine what it means to define and execute the concept of “teacherpreneurism” in the face of tough demands and resistant organizational structures.</p>
<p><i>Trusting Teachers with School Success: What Happens When Teachers Call the Shots</i></p>	<p>Farris-Berg, Kim, R&amp;L Education, 2012</p>	<p>This in-depth look at teacher-led schools posits that when teachers have decision-making authority in the classroom as well as in the school design, they innovate, accept accountability, and make efficient use of resources.</p>
<p><i>Urban School System of the Future, The</i></p>	<p>Smarick, Andy, Rowman and Littlefield Education, 2012</p>	<p>A portfolio approach to school governance: all schools would hold a contract with an entity that has the authority to authorize schools - including charter, private, and traditional public schools in a way that allows for poor performers to close, new schools to be created, and strong performers to grow in order to create the highest-performing, equitable school system.</p>

**Bolded items are available online**

## Appendix B External Interview Summary

### Overview

In the fall of 2013, Rhode Island Governor, Lincoln D. Chafee appointed 17 members to serve on an Educator Autonomy Working Group (EAWG). The mission of the EAWG is to support efforts under way in Rhode Island to create a world-class education system by working with all stakeholders to present recommendations to Governor Chafee to improve student achievement through increased local autonomy and innovation.

To provide input for the EAWG, the planning team, including the working groups' co-chairs, RIDE staff members, and a parent who is a community volunteer, conducted a series of interviews with 19 educational leaders, including both practitioners and academics (see below for a list of interviewees).

This summary represents the findings from these interviews and is being provided to the EAWG as input as they prepare to craft recommendations to Governor Chafee.

### Interview Process

To ensure consistency in the interview process, the following format was followed for each interview:

- Initial contact of each interviewee was made through Education Commissioner Deborah A. Gist. Commissioner Gist explained the Educator Autonomy Project and the role the interviews would have in examining autonomy issues. As well, potential interviewees were made aware that their information would be shared in summary only and information would not be attributed to specific individuals.
- Once the interviewee agreed to the interview, background information on Rhode Island and the list of interview questions below were sent to provide context for the interview.
- Interviews were generally 30 – 45 minute phone calls with the interviewee. One or more members of the planning team were present for each of the interviews calls.

### Interviewees included:

Darling-Hammond, Linda	Faculty, Graduate School of Education, Stanford University
Deasy, John	Superintendent, Los Angeles Public Schools, California
Farris-Berg, Kim	Author, <i>Trusting Teachers with School Success-What Happens When Teachers Call the Shots</i>
Grier, Terry	Superintendent, Houston Independent School District, Texas
Hanushek, Eric	Senior Fellow, Hoover Institute, Stanford University
Hess, Rick (Fredrick)	Resident Scholar and Director of Education Policy Studies, American Enterprise Institute
Jackson, Dean	Educator, New Zealand Public Schools
Jensen, Ben	Author, <i>The Myth of Markets in School Education</i>
Meier, Deborah	Senior Scholar, New York University Steinhardt School and Founder of The Mission Hill School
Kingsland, Neerav	CEO, New Schools for New Orleans, Louisiana
Lee, Saeyun	Policy Director, Executive Office of Education, Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Lusi, Susan	Superintendent, Providence Public School District
McGrath, Daniel	Chief, International Activities Branch National Center for Education Statistics, United States Department of Education

Moffit, Andy	Contributor to <i>How the World's Best Performing School Systems Come Out on Top</i> and co-author, <i>Deliverology 101, A Field Guide for Educational Leaders</i>
Mourshed, Mona	Author, <i>How the World's Most Improved School Systems Keep Getting Better</i>
Petrilli, Michael	Executive Vice President, Fordham Institute
Ripley, Amanda	Author, <i>The Smartest Kids in the World</i>
Smarick, Andrew	Author, <i>The Urban School System of the Future</i>
Wong, Kenneth	Director of Urban Education Policy, Brown University

## Interview Questions

1. If you could change three things in a school or school system such as Rhode Island's to create the best student outcomes, what would they be and why?
2. Assuming teacher and instructional quality is the biggest driver of student achievement, what three things would you do to ensure the highest teacher and instructional quality and why?
3. What do you think of our hypothesis?
  - a. What types of autonomy (staffing, budget, curriculum, schedule, etc.) drive the highest return for students?
4. How would you ensure the smoothest transition for changes in governance?
  - a. What is the best path to change?
5. If you don't believe a change in governance/autonomy is important for improving student achievement, what do you think would be and why?
6. What recommendations do you have for our Working Group?
  - a. Other experts to interview, questions to ask, recommendations for change?
  - b. From your experience, what mistakes should we avoid?

## **Understanding Educational Autonomy and its Potential Application in Rhode Island A Summary of External Interviews**

### **Background**

The state of Rhode Island has undertaken many reforms including adopting the Common Core State Standards, implementing an educator-evaluation system, and raising standards for those wishing to enter the teaching profession. As these more centralized reforms are taking hold, Governor Chafee and the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) believed that, to continue to improve student success, it would be necessary to identify ways in which additional decision-making might be vested as closely as possible and practical to the student. As part of our information-gathering on educational autonomy, we undertook a series of interviews with approximately twenty education practitioners (see list of interviewees on pages 20 and 21) and academics on this topic so as to identify – for a place like Rhode Island – what types of autonomy<sup>9</sup> are best vested closest to the student and how should these types of autonomy be implemented?

Autonomy is an intensely debated topic in today’s education circles, both nationally and internationally. There are those who strongly believe that a district or state office can best manage many decisions by centralizing research and best practices and disseminating them through consistent standards, professional development and policies across districts and schools. Others firmly believe that the teachers, who are closest to students, should be able to make professional decisions regarding what is best for each student. The vast majority of education systems, however, operate in between the two extremes without a clear answer as to what the optimal allocation of decision-making should be. In fact, we found that all over the world, countries, states, and districts are experimenting with ways in which decision-making can be made closer to the student while improving the quality and consistency of academic outcomes.

### **Alignment in Key Areas**

There was alignment among the interviewees in several key areas. There was clear consensus that the key driver to improved student success was instructional quality and that, therefore, increasing the professionalization of teaching was of utmost importance. Ensuring high-quality instruction required several interrelated systems, including a pipeline of high-quality, well-trained candidates, a high-quality induction and mentoring program, structured collaboration, and a comprehensive evaluation and professional development system. Interviewees firmly believed that improving opportunities for professional growth for educators at every step was critical.

Because of this alignment around high-quality instruction driving student success, there was also general agreement that autonomy over the broad area of staffing (staffing patterns, selection, role, professional development, etc.) is the most important area in which there should be local autonomy. Local decision-making over staff-related decisions would allow for school leaders to build cohesive teams that together held the comprehensive set of skills needed to meet their students’ needs. Several interviewees believed that an increased level of local decision-making would also attract more qualified candidates into teaching and administrative positions. In addition, a school-based definition of educator roles would allow for collaboration and assistance to colleagues in improving educator practice as necessary, based on the specific needs of each school.

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<sup>9</sup>For purposes of this paper, autonomy is defined as “the freedom to make decisions in an educational setting.”

There was also a common belief that increased local autonomy had the potential to yield improved outcomes for students, but only in the context of additional measures. Increasing local autonomy did not immediately translate to improved student success; autonomy must be created through a thoughtful process that involved building trust, appropriate training and accountability measures, and a secure long-term outlook. As decision-making shifts, appropriate training must occur to properly prepare those now making decisions. Additionally, many interviewees believed that decision-making was often taken on more often by experienced school leaders and educators who know how to “work the system” and less often by newer ones, because newer educators were unclear about where the lines of authority lie. Therefore, in all cases, there should be clarity around where decision-making is vested in each area. Further, the majority of interviewees believed that schools should have clear metrics, standards, time-based goals, and processes for addressing poor performance. Interviewees in general also believed that any increased decision-making should be granted through a system that could be insulated from specific personalities or political changes. In order to make hard decisions with the long-term success of students in mind, the holders of this new decision-making authority need to be confident that their authority will be upheld as long as their performance meets agreed upon goals. Finally, there was also a shared belief among interviewees that the basis of successful local decision-making was an atmosphere of trust among participants in the education system at all levels.

### **Implementing Autonomy Practices: Three basic approaches**

While there was alignment on many of the aspects of autonomy discussed above, there was a variety of ways in which interviewees believed it was best to implement that autonomy. Our research identified three basic theories regarding when increased autonomy is most effective, leading to three different approaches to allocating autonomy between local and centralized operations: (1) opt-in autonomy, (2) earned autonomy, and (3) tight/loose autonomy.

Opt-in autonomy is based on the theory that higher levels of decision-making are most effective and appropriate for those who desire them. This is based on the premise that schools or districts are at different levels of readiness for increased decision-making and that they recognize when they are ready. Opt-in autonomy is the option for a school or a district to apply to the district or state education agency for increased autonomy in specific areas or as a whole. An example of opt-in autonomy is the Massachusetts Innovation Schools, in which existing schools or a group of educators, parents, or non-profits can apply to their local district to become an Innovation School. Innovation Schools are community-based and propose increased autonomy over one or more of six clearly defined areas of school governance. Although the Innovation Schools program was developed at the state level, Innovation Schools require the approval of the local school committee. In this way, the district can ensure that school leadership is prepared for their additional autonomy and that clear metrics, goals, and timelines are spelled out in the Innovation Schools agreement. Through this process, Massachusetts has created a roadmap for those educators who desire increased autonomy while ensuring accountability.

The idea behind earned autonomy is that when schools or districts are performing well, they are prepared to undertake additional decision-making responsibility. This approach grants increased decision-making to high-performing schools and requires less oversight by the next level of authority (district or state). The theory is that a school or district that is successful under the current construct has the experience and expertise to operate with fewer oversights. This approach to autonomy is supported by the findings in the McKinsey & Co. report *How the Best Performing School Systems Keep Improving*. In this report, McKinsey classifies 20 continually improving systems into several categories (poor, fair, good, and great) and analyzes the interventions undertaken to improve from one category to the

next. In their analysis, they find that in systems on the lower end of the performance continuum more areas of autonomy are centralized and, as they improve, more autonomy is moved closer to the student.

An example of earned autonomy is the Los Angeles Autonomy Zone. The Los Angeles County Office of Education believes that decision-making is best when closest to the student in successful schools, but that struggling schools need an increased level of district oversight. Therefore, schools that perform in the upper two performance categories can automatically become part of the autonomy zone if they so wish. Schools in the third performance category must apply to become part of the Autonomy Zone, and those in the lowest performance category may not apply. This model is actually a hybrid, including both opt-in and earned autonomy. The risk of this approach is that the existing system may not allow the flexibilities to be successful in some cases. In those cases, a school may not become high performing enough to earn the autonomy needed to become successful.

An interesting counterpoint to the autonomy earned for good performance is increased autonomy granted to improve lower-performing schools. The underlying theory is that poorly performing schools need more autonomy to operate differently in order to improve. An example of this type of earned autonomy is the receivership of Lawrence, Massachusetts. Lawrence had been a poorly performing district for many years and was placed into receivership in 2011. The district improvement plan included increased local autonomy for all schools, along with clear goals and timelines for outcomes. Although it is still early in this process, results to date show dramatic improvement. In fact, the highest growth in academic success in Massachusetts in 2013 was in Lawrence.

The third approach to the allocation of decision-making in education is what educators referred to as “*tight/loose*”. This approach is based on the theory that intrinsically some decisions are best made at a centralized level and some are best made at a local level for all schools or districts, regardless of interest or performance. Houston Independent School District (HISD) is an example of this approach. Where the district feels that a standard needs to be upheld, they impose a tight level of autonomy, and where they believe that local knowledge would improve decision-making, they allow for looser autonomy. For example, HISD holds tight to standards for the number of Advanced Placement courses. In HISD, each and every high school is required to offer a minimum of 15 AP courses; however, HISD allows each school to set its own start and end time based on the needs of its students – this is a loose area of autonomy. In hiring, HISD allows its schools to hire anyone they like (loose) as long as the candidate comes from a centrally approved pool (tight). HISD upholds basic standards of instructor quality and allows the schools to determine which candidates best fit their school’s needs and culture. There is also clear recognition that which areas require tight autonomy and which require loose autonomy may evolve over time. The risk of this approach is that the decision-making authority over which areas are tight and which are loose is in the hands of those furthest from the student.

### **Autonomy and Student Results**

Although there are numerous anecdotal success stories, there are no conclusive results correlating student success with specific methods of allocating decision-making authority. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is the sole international comparison of student outcomes that also correlates outcomes with autonomy. PISA surveys principals on autonomy levels in two areas -- Resource Management (hiring and firing of teachers, budgeting of other expenses) and Curriculum and Assessment – and then determines whether there is a correlation between levels of autonomy and student achievement. Results show three positive correlations in order of strength:

- resource autonomy in the presence of collaboration between teachers and principals;
- local control over curriculum and assessment; and
- resource autonomy in the presence of public posting of academic outcomes

These findings, however, are given in the context of several caveats. The data are from a survey of principals. The degree of variability within countries is suspicious and may reflect differences in how much autonomy principals perceive they have rather than how much autonomy they have by virtue of policy. Additionally, it is difficult to tailor the questions well because each system is different. What we think of as a local school board may go by a different name in another country. Further, the titles of levels of authority can be interpreted differently in different languages and in different countries.

### **Implications for Rhode Island**

Interviewees had many ideas for recommendations for Rhode Island. Most commended the steps already taken to improve education in Rhode Island and believe that Rhode Island is ready to move toward increased autonomy at the local level. Many interviewees believed that Rhode Island should continue to push on current changes being implemented – specifically, those that improve the professionalization of the teaching profession, including standards for incoming teacher candidates, induction and mentoring programs, and professional development.

Several mentioned that Rhode Island should ensure that there is clarity at the educator, school-leader, district-leader, school committee, and state-leader levels regarding where current decision-making lies in each area of autonomy. Several interviewees also thought Rhode Island should consider collaboratively developing a roadmap to increased local autonomy with state, district, and union representatives (i.e., a playbook). There was clear consensus that, with any changes in autonomy, appropriate training and accountability must be in place and that changes are developed and implemented in a collaborative and trust-building manner.

An additional recommendation that several interviewees suggested was to consider consolidating certain functions of the education system to create cost savings that could then be reallocated to the classroom. This recommendation was based on a general belief that a state structure of 36 school districts for 143,000 students was not efficient or effective.

Finally, interviewees challenged us to consider three additional questions. Two questions focused on the financial impact of increased autonomy. Interviewees encouraged us to consider how to best encourage increased local autonomy and whether a shift to more local autonomy would increase or decrease costs over the long term. In addition, a final central question raised by interviewees was how to view the various roles of the central office with regard to autonomy, including the degree to which the central office plays more of a support versus an oversight role.

### **Conclusion**

In summary, there are many areas in which interviewees agreed, most notably the importance of the quality of instruction to student success. This premise drives the overriding belief that the most important local autonomies are those over staffing decisions. There was strong agreement that increased local autonomy was not the silver bullet for improving student success, but that several additional components are necessary, including a clearly defined system of autonomy accompanied by appropriate training, accountability systems, a guarantee that those autonomies will continue as long as accountability measures are met, and an atmosphere of trust among all those involved.



Although there is alignment around these aspects of autonomy, there were a variety of approaches regarding how interviewees and those around the world are operationally increasing autonomy at a local level, including three identified approaches: opt-in autonomy, earned autonomy and tight/loose autonomy. Although there are many examples of student success under different structures of decision-making, there is no conclusive evidence that points to a specific structure or system of autonomy that would definitively improve student outcomes.

Interviewees suggested several recommendations for Rhode Island. In general, they believed that increasing autonomy under appropriate conditions would improve student success. Recommendations focused on clarifying and supporting existing autonomy and on ways in which to increase local autonomy through a collaborative process.

## **Appendix C**

### **Brief Background of Rhode Island Public Education**

#### **Summary**

Rhode Island is a small, fairly low-mobility state with a struggling economy and moderately diverse population. Rhode Island is also a solidly Democratic state, with traditionally strong unions. The Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education is the leader for K-12 schools, as well as for early-learning programs and for adult education, and she reports to an 17-member Board of Education appointed by the Governor for three year terms.

Although student achievement has been improving, Rhode Island ranks 20th to 29th in student achievement, with significant achievement gaps between whites and minorities and between economically disadvantaged students and other students, particularly students with disabilities. This performance is despite the fact that Rhode Island is consistently one of the top ten states in spending on education.

Education Commissioner Deborah A. Gist came to Rhode Island in 2009 and developed a multi-faceted strategic plan. In 2010 and 2011, Rhode Island won two competitive Race to the Top federal grants to help put the plan into action. Although Rhode Island has achieved many significant changes, such as an equitable funding formula, a new teacher induction program, an Academy for Transformative Leadership, and transition to Common Core State Standards, among other accomplishments, advocates for reform have also faced resistance on several fronts – in particular, the abolishment of seniority as the sole basis for personnel decisions, the use of student achievement as a key element in educator evaluations, and the use of state assessments as part of the Rhode Island Diploma System.

Many of the current initiatives have emanated from the state level; in order to reach the next level of student achievement, Rhode Island education leaders are searching for strategies that will result in more autonomy and decision-making at the school and classroom level.

#### **Demographics**

Rhode Island is geographically the smallest state in the United States, with a land area of 1,034 square miles (2,678 square kilometers). [i]

With 1,052,000 residents, Rhode Island ranks 43rd among the 50 states in regard to population [ii]. Three of the 39 cities and towns in the state account for approximately one-third of the population; the largest city is Providence, with a population of 178,000. [iii]

Rhode Island is a moderately diverse state, with a population that is 76 percent white, 13 percent Hispanic, 7 percent African American, and 3 percent Asian. Thirteen percent of Rhode Islanders are foreign-born. [iv]

#### **Economy**

Rhode Island was hit particularly hard by the 2008 recession and continues to have the 3rd-highest unemployment rate in the United States, at 8.9 percent as of July 2013, compared with 7.4 percent for the nation as a whole. [v] Forty-six percent of Rhode Island public-school students qualify for the reduced-price school-lunch program.

In the past, Rhode Island had a vibrant textile and jewelry design and manufacturing economy; however, as jobs in these industries have moved overseas, the state has struggled economically. Currently, the largest employers in Rhode Island are in the health-care, government, private-education, finance and insurance, and retail-trade industries.

The median household income, \$49,033, is virtually the same as that of the nation, which stands at \$50,054; however, the median Rhode Island income is decreasing while the U.S. median income is increasing (Rhode Island is down from \$53,736 in 2006 and the U.S. is up from \$48,201). [vi]

### **Political Landscape**

Rhode Island is a solidly Democratic state. President Obama garnered 63 percent of the popular vote in November 2012. [vii] Both United States Senators and United States Representatives are Democrats, and both the Rhode Island Senate and Assembly have consistently had overwhelmingly Democratic majorities.

### **Education Governance**

The Rhode Island education state-level operations are governed by a 17-member Board of Education that the Governor appoints. This Board is responsible for all public education, from prekindergarten through elementary and secondary and including postsecondary education and adult education.

The Board of Education hires and evaluates the Commissioner and approves any changes to the Basic Education Program (BEP) – the outline of requirements for all schools and districts. This regulation was greatly streamlined in 2008, moving from a very detailed document to a 40-page one that provides a great deal of flexibility to districts.

The R.I. Department of Education, led by the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education, is responsible for implementing the BEP and for monitoring district and school compliance.

### **K – 12 Education System**

The Rhode Island public-school system educates approximately 143,000 students in 300 schools that are located within 36 local districts. Approximately 4,700 of these students attend one of the states 19 charter public schools. There are approximately 14,275 teachers in the state. [viii]

The student population is more diverse than the general population. The public-school student population is 63 percent white, 22 percent Hispanic, 8 percent African American, 3 percent each Asian and multi-racial, and 1 percent Native American. Approximately 15 percent of students are provided special education services.

### **Performance**

Results of the New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP) and the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) highlight the relative achievement of Rhode Island students.

Through the 2013-14 school year, NECAP has been administered annually to all students in grades 3 through 8 plus grade 11. The 2011 percentage of students at or above proficient has increased since 2009 (ranging from one to seven percentage points) or remained the same in all categories of both reading and mathematics with the exception of 3rd-grade reading and mathematics, which decreased by 2 percentage points each. [x]

The NECAP has also been administered in New Hampshire, Vermont, and Maine. Although of the percentage of Rhode Island students who have scored proficient or better has increased since 2009, Rhode Island generally ranks 3rd or 4th among the NECAP states, with a proficiency gap between Rhode Island and the highest-performing NECAP state remaining virtually the same since 2009 (seven percentage points in reading and 12 percentage points in mathematics). [xi]

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is administered in all states every other year to 4th- and 8th-grade students in reading and mathematics. The NAEP science and writing assessments are administered at varying intervals. The percentage of Rhode Island students at or above proficient in 2011 NAEP assessments ranged from a high of 43 percent in 4th-grade mathematics to a low of 31 percent in 8th-grade science. These scores are an improvement from 2009 (in a range of four to six percentage points) in all tested subjects and grades, with the exception of 4th-grade reading, which decreased by one percentage point. The 2011 Rhode Island NAEP scores rank the state generally in the mid-range of states, with rankings ranging from 20th to 29th.[xii]

Rhode Island has significant achievement gaps, although these gaps are consistent with the national averages. 2011 NECAP results show a gap in the percentage of students scoring at or above proficient between white students and black students of 20 to 33 percentage points and gaps for Hispanic students of 27 and 32 percentage points. The gap is also large between those who are and those who are not eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (between 26 and 31 percentage points) as well as for urban versus suburban students. [xiii]

Attendance in Rhode Island overall is approximately 94 percent, although high-school attendance is 91 percent.

The four-year high school graduation rate is 77 percent, making RI the 29th-highest state. [xiv] Approximately 75 percent of those with a high-school diploma who enter the Community College of Rhode Island, however, have required remediation in order to be ready for college-level courses.

### **Postsecondary Education System**

Rhode Island has a diverse set of postsecondary education institutions, including three public and nine private colleges or universities. The vast majority of Rhode Island public-school teachers are graduates of Rhode Island College or the University of Rhode Island.

Rhode Island public institutions of postsecondary education include:

- Community College of Rhode Island, serving 18,000 students, with courses toward an associate degree;
- Rhode Island College, serving approximately 9,000 students in undergraduate and graduate programs; and
- The University of Rhode Island, which serves approximately 16,000 students in graduate and undergraduate programs and is the state's primary research institution.

Private institutions include Brown University (8,700 students); the Rhode Island School of Design (2,400 students) one of the most prestigious art schools in the country; Johnson & Wales University (11,000 students), specializing in Hospitality Management; and the Naval War College along with Bryant University, Providence College, Salve Regina University, and New England Institute of Technology.

## **Recent Happenings**

### *New Board of Education*

In December 2012, the Board of Governors (responsible for higher education) and the Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education (responsible for early learning, K-12 education, and adult education) were dissolved and a new Board of Education was created, with responsibility for all education. Because the State Senate had not yet confirmed any of the new Board of Education members, no governing body existed from January 2013 to March 2013, when the new members were confirmed.

### *New Commissioner's Contract*

Prior to the current Commissioner, the Commissioner of Education (K-12) was Peter McWalters for nearly 18 years. Commissioner Gist has initiated many new reforms since her tenure began in 2009. Rhode Island is now in the third year of implementing a 5-year strategic plan, Transforming Education in Rhode Island. This plan focuses on:

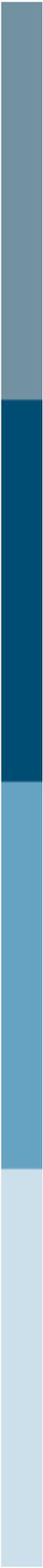
- educator excellence (initiated new educator induction program, principal training program, and comprehensive educator evaluation systems);
- great schools (transforming failing schools, supporting multiple pathways and charter public schools);
- world-class standards (adopting Common Core standards and aligned curriculum and assessments);
- user-friendly data (creating an accessible, timely data system, with necessary training, to improve instruction); and
- wise investments (ensuring equitable funding including adoption of a new funding formula that allows funding to follow the child with adjustments for special needs and poverty rates).

Rhode Island was one of only 12 states to win a competitive federal grant (\$75 million), Race to the Top, and one of only 6 to also receive the Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge (\$50 million), both of which are being used for implementation of the strategic plan.

Although many of these changes have been well received, several have been difficult. A multi-stakeholder group developed one of the most commonly used educator evaluation system; however, there has been significant resistance to full implementation of evaluations. Additionally, using state assessments as part of the Diploma System has also resulted in significant resistance.

The result is a sometimes-challenging relationship between Commissioner Gist and the teachers' unions. The Board of Education recently renewed Commissioner Gist's contract, extending her tenure through July 2015.

- [i] "State and County Quickfacts." *Census*. United States Census Bureau. n.d. Web. 19 Aug. 2013.
- [ii] "State Rankings – Statistical Abstract of the United States." *United States Census Bureau*. United States Census Bureau. n. d. Web. 19 Aug. 2013.
- [iii] "Rhode Island City & Town Resident Population from Census 2010." *Labor Market Information*. RI Department of Labor and Training. 14 Feb. 2013. Web. 19 Aug. 2013.
- [iv] "State and County Quickfacts." *Census*. United States Census Bureau. n.d. Web. 19 Aug. 2013.
- [v] "Local Area Unemployment Statistics." *Bureau of Labor Statistics*. United States Department of Labor. 19 Aug. 2013. Web. 19 Aug. 2013.
- [vi] "Median Household Income by State – Single-Year Estimates." *United States Census Bureau*. United States Department of Commerce. n.d. Web. 19 Aug. 2013.
- [vii] "2012 General Election." *Rhode Island Board of Elections*. State of Rhode Island. n.d. Web. 19 Aug. 2013
- [viii] infoworks.ride.ri.gov/state/ri, accessed 08152013
- [ix] Results: Education in Rhode Island 2011, RIPEC.org; Uniform Chart of Accounts, R.I. Department of Education, 2011-12 Data, Total Per Pupil Expenditure Chart, ride.ri.gov
- [x] Rhode Island Department of Education. *Rhode Island's NECAP Math, Reading, and Writing Results for Grades 3-8 & 11: October 2012 Test Administration*. RIDE, V.03.12.13. Web. 18 Aug. 13
- [xi] Ibid.
- [xii] *National Center for Education Statistics*. U.S. Department of Education. n.d. Web. 20 Aug. 2013
- [xiii] Ibid.
- [xiv] "Regulatory Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate, All Students: 2010-11". *ED Data Express*. U.S. Department of Education. n.d. 20 Aug. 2013.



**Appendix D**  
**Exploring Autonomy in Education**

# Exploring Autonomy in Education

Educator Autonomy Working Group

February 11, 2014

# Exploring autonomy in education

- International benchmarking
  - PISA Results
    - Singapore and Hong Kong
    - New Zealand
  - Massachusetts' efforts to increase autonomy
  - Autonomy as it relates to stage of system development
  - Summary

# Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA): Research on autonomy

- The PISA is administered every three years by the The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to a sample of 15 year-olds in approximately 65 – 70 countries
  - Consists of a two hour assessment in math, reading and science and an in-depth survey for students and principals on students' backgrounds, schools and learning experiences and the broader school system and learning environment
- Two areas of autonomy are studied as they correlate with academic performance:
  - Curriculum and assessment (student assessment policies, courses offered, content of those courses and textbooks)
  - Allocation of resources (selecting teachers for hire, dismissing teachers, establishing teachers' starting salaries, determining teacher salary increases, formulating the school budget, and deciding on budget allocations within the school)

# **PISA 2012 Findings**

Involved 510,000 15 year-olds representing 28 million students in 65 economies

## **Autonomy-related Findings**

- Positive correlation between academic results and increasing levels of autonomy over curriculum and assessment
- No relationship between academic results and level of autonomy over resources overall, however positive correlation exists in the presence of:
  - increasing levels of teacher/principal collaboration
  - public posting of student achievement

## **Caveats**

- Correlations are not strong
- Degree of variability within countries is higher than expected and may reflect differences in how much autonomy principals perceive they have or how much autonomy they actually use
- Difficult to ensure consistency of understanding of questions between countries

# Exploring autonomy in education

- International benchmarking
  - PISA Results
  - Singapore and Hong Kong
  - New Zealand
- Massachusetts' efforts to increase autonomy
- Autonomy as it relates to stage of system development
- Summary

# Autonomy alone does not drive academic achievement: Singapore and Hong Kong comparison

	Singapore	Hong Kong
Both strong academic performers	2012 - #2 in math and #3 in reading 2009 - # 2 in math and #5 in reading	2012 - #3 in math and #2 in reading 2009 - # 3 in math and #4 in reading
Staffing	Central office hires, trains, evaluates and places teachers	Schools hire, train and evaluate their own teachers
Curriculum	Developed by central office until recently; now based on central office curriculum	Developed by school based on high-level standards
Financial resources	Spend lower per student but higher salaries as a percentage of GDP for teachers than US	Spend lower per student but higher salaries as a percentage of GDP for teachers than US
Additional policies	Often used, clear system to remove underperforming teachers or address school failure	92% of students are in privately-operated, yet government-funded schools
	High level of school choice	High level of school choice
	At least 10% of schools are designated “autonomous” and are exempt from many rules and regulations	

# Exploring autonomy in education

- International benchmarking
  - PISA Results
  - Singapore and Hong Kong
  - New Zealand
- Massachusetts' efforts to increase autonomy
- Autonomy as it relates to stage of system development
- Summary

# New Zealand's Tomorrow's Schools: Autonomy requires training and preparation

Prior to 1989

Tomorrow's Schools

Highly centralized and controlled from national department of education	Overnight the national department of education ceased to exist and was replaced by a much smaller entity with a focus only on school review and standards
Pressure from parents and ethnic groups that curriculum did not meet their needs	Each school accountable to its own local board
Costly central office	Schools now had full autonomy over budget and staffing
Performance was stagnant to declining	Results were mixed for first decade Many were not prepared for new responsibility After significant efforts in retraining, especially in budget management, performance improved
	Consistently in top tier of PISA results since 2000

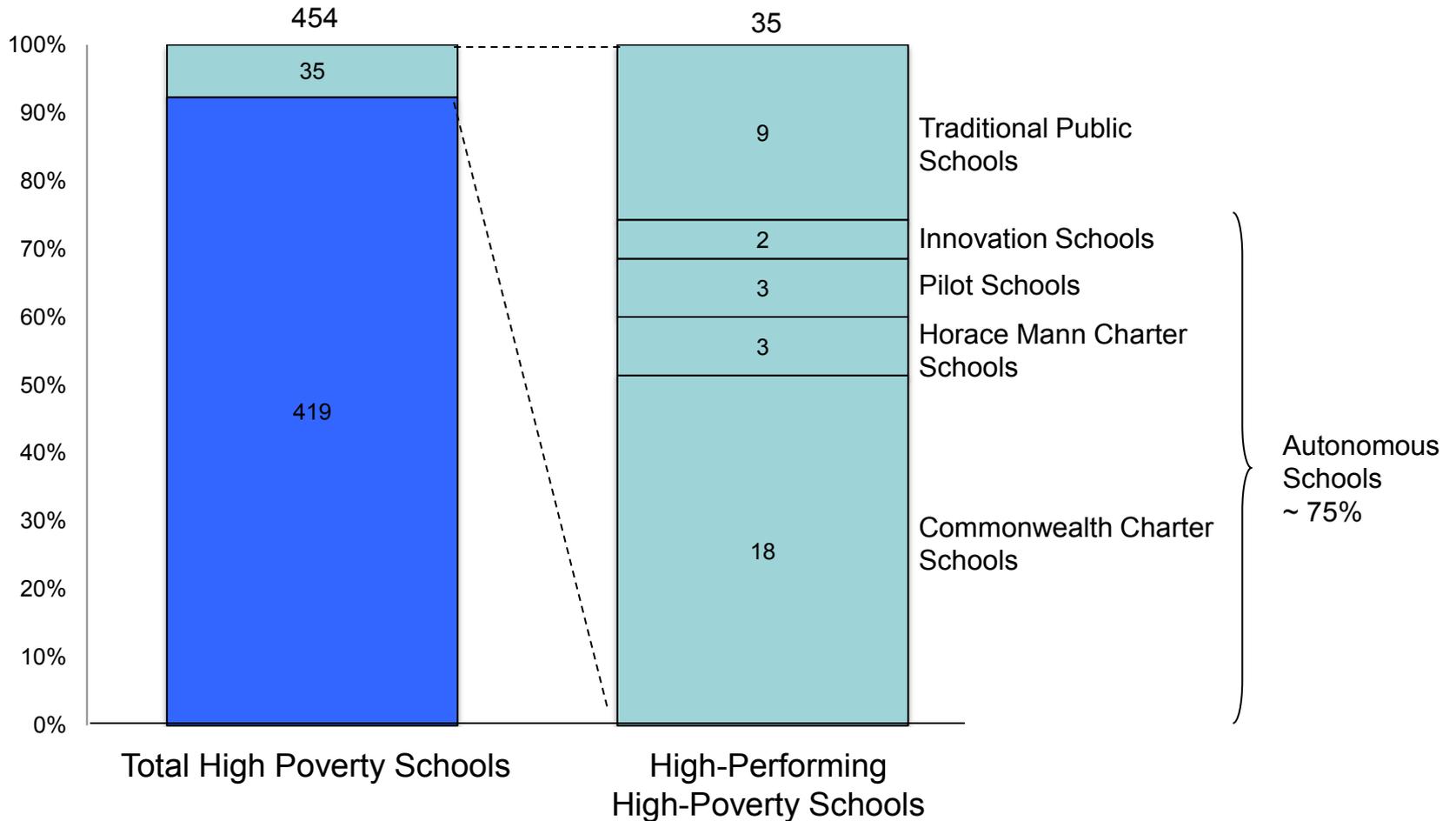
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# Massachusetts's Autonomous Schools - Overview

	Pilot	Innovation	Horace Mann Charter	Commonwealth Charter
# Location	21 Boston	27 MA	10 MA	71 MA
Reports to:	Boston School Committee	District School Committee	Independent Board	Independent Board
Authorized by:	Superintendent and School Committee	Superintendent, School Committee and Teacher's Union	State Board of Ed., School Committee and Teacher's Union	State Board of Ed.
Authority over:	Staffing, budget, curriculum and assessment, governance and policies, school calendar – subject to local union contract	Can apply for specific autonomy over curriculum, budget, schedule, staffing, professional development district policies	Staffing, budget, curriculum and assessment, schedule –subject to local union contract	Staffing, budgeting, curriculum and assessment, governance and policies, schedule

# The majority of high-performing, high-poverty schools in Massachusetts have increased autonomy



High poverty defined as those schools with => 60% of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch  
 High performing defined as => 90% reading MCAS in high schools and => 70% for all other schools  
 Source: doe.mass.edu.

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# In improving education systems, local autonomy increases as the system improves

## Background:

McKinsey & Co. studied 20 school systems that have registered significant, sustained and widespread student gains from different parts of the world to determine what drove their improvement

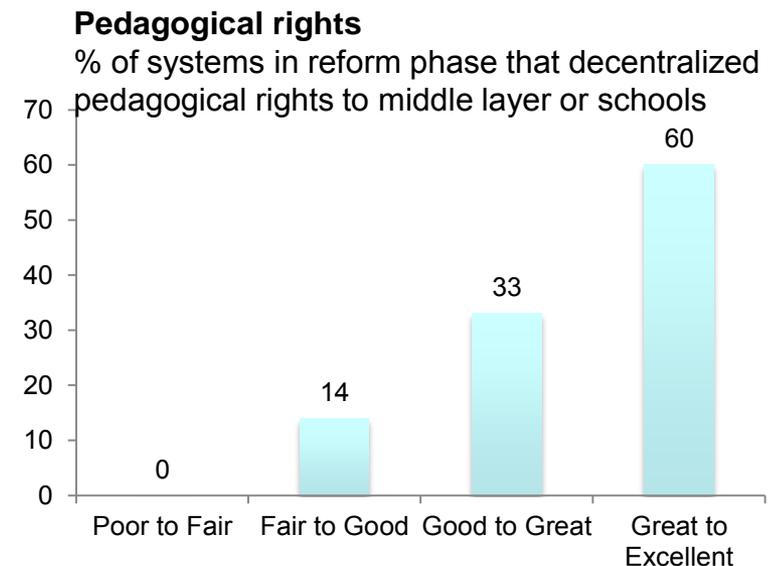
They identified four performance stages of education system development:

- poor to fair - achieving basics in literacy and numeracy
- fair to good - getting the foundations in place
- good to great - shaping the professional
- great to excellent - improving through peers and innovation

## Findings on autonomy:

“Striking correlation between a system’s performance level and the tightness of the central control exerted on schools”

“There are examples in our sample in which the school system has given more attention to scripting its lo-performing schools while providing more flexibility to the higher performing ones.”



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# Exploring autonomy in education - summary

- International assessments show that autonomy over curriculum and assessment correlates positively with higher academic results and under certain conditions, autonomy over resources can also correlate positively with higher academic results.
- However, the correlation is not strong and there are examples of both highly centralized and highly decentralized countries that are high performers
- New Zealand's experience indicates that higher levels of autonomy are better granted after sufficient training and preparation.
- States and districts across the nation are experimenting with types of autonomy. In Massachusetts, the majority of high-performing schools serving high-poverty students are schools with higher levels of autonomy than traditional district schools.
- Looking at improving systems internationally, there is a shift toward more local autonomy as the system improves and improving systems often vary levels of local autonomy within the system based on performance.

## **Appendix E**

### **Glossary**

**Autonomy** – *The freedom to make professional decisions in an educational setting.*

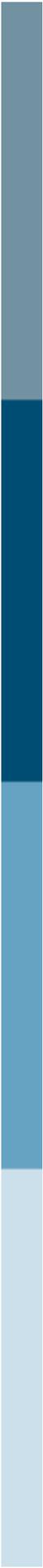
**District** – *An administrative agency that is recognized by the State as having the legal authority for its public elementary or secondary schools, including typical Local Education Agency, charter schools, and state schools.*

**Education System** – *The aligned and interconnected structures and processes that exist from the state to the district, from the district to the school, and from the school to classroom that ensures that all Rhode Island students are adequately prepared for life beyond secondary education.*

**Education Leader** – *An educator who has a decision-making role within the education system, or one who influences the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of a significant number of individuals they interact with to improve student learning and success.*

**Stakeholders** – *A person or group invested in the success of the education system. For our purposes this would include students, parents, teachers, principals, superintendents and other education leaders, the higher education system, employers, local and state policy-makers, and community members.*

**Systems and Supports** – *A group of interacting and interrelated functions that is necessary for K-12 public education to operate in Rhode Island. These include: human resources, professional development, educator preparation, finance, budgeting, and purchasing, curriculum and assessment selection.*



## **Appendix F**

### **Conditions Required for Effective Autonomy**

The Educator Autonomy Working Group believes that in order for autonomous practices and decision-making to take hold the following conditions are necessary:

- Trust is needed among and across all level of the educational system.
- A collaborative culture focused on fostering student success is necessary.
- Clarity regarding where authority to make decisions resides is key.
- Value must be placed on educational professionals at all levels of the education system.
- Systems and supports that are responsive to autonomous practices need to exist.



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