Rhode Island's Race to the Top

Five Years of Transforming Education

2010-2015

Report to the United States Department of Education

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RIDE Rhode Island Department of Education

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The Rhode Island Race to the Top: 2010-2014

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

I. **The Rhode Island Vision and Approach to Transforming Education**

The Rhode Island comprehensive strategic plan, *Transforming Education in Rhode Island, 2010-2015,* laid out a single, powerful vision for our state: Create an education system that prepares all Rhode Island students for success in college, careers, and life. Attaining the goals of our strategic plan has been challenging. This challenge has brought Rhode Islanders together to improve the prospects for our children, the health of our communities, and the success and economic sustainability of our state. We at the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) included a "star chart" in our strategic plan to help Rhode Islanders envision what it takes to transform education:
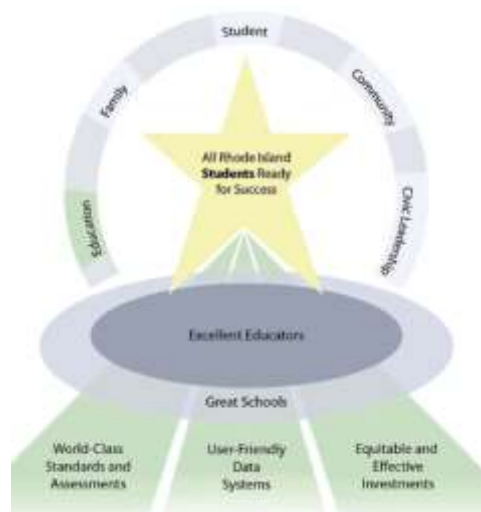
The Race to the Top grant provided us with the opportunity and funding to strengthen our engagement with policy leaders, educators, and community members. Together, we put our ambitious strategic plan into action. We focused on ensuring educator excellence, accelerating all schools toward greatness, establishing rigorous standards and assessments, using data systems to improve learning, and investing our resources wisely. To reach our ambitious goal of providing a high-quality education for all students, we developed this theory of action, which guided our entire Race to the Top initiative:

1. All students will achieve at high levels when we have an effective teacher in every classroom and an effective leader in every school; and,
2. Our teachers and school leaders will be more effective when they receive consistent and effective support and resources within a system of policies based on student needs.

In our initial grant application, we emphasized that Race to the Top funds would accelerate our ability to build state and district-level capacity for a cohesive and aligned educational system that would make a substantial

difference in improving students' learning. Because there was a natural alignment between our goals as a state agency and the goals of the Local Education Agencies (LEAs) in Rhode Island, we were able to agree on policy issues and establish a cohesive strategy to put our strategic plan into action – at both the state and local levels. Every LEA in Rhode Island joined as a participant in our Race to the Top initiative.

Thus, over the four years of the Race to the Top grant, we used a unified statewide approach in our work on the Race to the Top four core education-reform areas. RIDE and the 52 participating and involved LEAs worked together to build and implement a statewide system to benefit all students and educators: not 52 systems but one unified theory of action. This unified approach meant that all participating and involved LEAs addressed the needs and strategies that we set forth in our Scopes of Work. We believed that, with our unified approach, Rhode Island would build a strong foundation for educator effectiveness, develop rigorous curriculum and assessments, promote powerful use of data, and accelerate school performance – and that we would sustain this transformation beyond the grant period.

This Executive Summary provides highlights of what we accomplished over the four years of implementation, what we have learned in the process of implementation, and what lies ahead.

II. Building State and Local Capacity

Shared Commitments
From the time we won our Race to the Top grant, we agreed to move toward our goals by adhering to a set of shared commitments: (a) being accountable to one another on mutually agreed-upon goals; (b) working together in partnership to accelerate student achievement; (c) being honest about our abilities, capacities, and needs; (d) forming partnerships to empower change and to find creative solutions; and (e) engaging in regular cycles of reflection and monitoring of results. These five shared commitments were the underpinnings for implementing these five statewide systems of support: (1) Standards and Curriculum, (2) Instructional Improvement, (3) Educator Effectiveness, (4) Human Capital Development; and (5) School Transformation and Innovation. To ensure fidelity of implementation over the four years, we established four interconnected processes:
- establishing rigorous oversight of RIDE and LEA Scopes of Work;
- designing and implementing a robust system of performance management and progress monitoring with LEAs;
- developing and carrying out multi-year communication and outreach strategies; and
- establishing and applying fiscal controls and accountability of funds.

Working Together to Manage Performance and Ensure Success
Together, these four processes contributed to strengthening state and local capacity for implementing complex reforms. These processes led us to establish mechanisms that required continuous feedback internally and externally on what changes were taking place in education across the state. Before Race to the Top, the common approach was for each LEA to design its own plan for educational improvement, with RIDE serving primarily in a compliance-monitoring role. Race to the Top led to a culture shift, as we moved from a compliance-oriented approach to a performance-management approach that emphasizes systematic reflection, collaboration, problem-solving, and ongoing communication between RIDE and the LEAs. We believe that the State Education Agency should do only what the LEAs cannot do, or cannot do as well. Our goal, therefore, has been to build systems and tools that the LEAs can access and use to manage performance and ensure success. Thanks to this new approach, over the four years of the grant we:
- completed nearly all of our projects on time and within budget;
- hired 22 RIDE staff to support implementation at the local level;
- acquired 23 vendors to provide expertise in the complex reform areas;
- participated in four on-site U.S. Department of Education stock-taking reviews;

- produced 40 monthly reports that documented progress and challenges;
- conducted 21 EdStat sessions with project teams to address the four reform areas;
- engaged 52 LEAs in 92 quarterly Collaborative Learning for Outcomes meetings;
- analyzed and reviewed 566 LEA quarterly program reports;
- prepared 104 individual stock-taking reports for the 52 LEAs, documenting the progress made in Years 1 through 3;
- created a blog that captures LEA success stories, http://ri-rttsuccessstories.blogspot.com/ ,to promote a sharing of practices and progress;
- engaged 30 diverse stakeholders in the Race to the Top Steering Committee quarterly meetings for four years so as to build understanding of the impact of Race to the Top in Rhode Island; and
- developed more than 80 communication reports, guidance, and tools to support implementation of all of our initiatives http://www.ride.ri.gov/InsideRIDE/AdditionalInformation/RacetotheTop.aspx.

Systems Developed and Lessons Learned

We developed two new performance-management systems that proved effective in monitoring the progress and quality of the RIDE Scope of Work and the LEA Scopes of Work: (1) the EdStat process for the RIDE Scope of Work implementation and (2) the Collaborative Learning for Outcomes (CLO) process for LEA implementation. Before Race to the Top, we did not have a cohesive system of performance management at either the state or local level. Rather, each program established its own methods for assessing progress and success. Our two new management systems required new skills, strategies, and preparation by project staff and LEA participants. The lessons learned in implementing these two new systems have enhanced our capacity to engage in continuous improvement with RIDE staff, with educational leaders in the LEAs, and with external stakeholders. The changes in systems and practices we experienced are:

- EdStat was a new practice that enabled us to adopt a disciplined method for tracking performance and identifying solutions;
- the EdStat practice embedded data-driven decision-making throughout RIDE and assisted staff members in focusing on actions needed to resolve issues and reach benchmarks;
- EdStat deepened our understanding of the technical tasks, status, successes, and risks of every major Race to the Top initiative;
- CLO processes established a new relationship between us and our LEAs, allowing for joint ownership of problems and solutions at the state, district, and school levels;
- CLO processes encouraged and stimulated more authentic dialogue about implementation, sharing of effective practices, and reflections on progress data; and
- engagement and communication strategies increased throughout implementation; LEAs acknowledged that clarity of expectations about project implementation, budget processes, and availability of technical supports made implementation successful in a compressed time period.

These primary changes in our approach to implementing complex policy reforms created new expectations internally and externally for how we assess program effectiveness, how RIDE can work together with LEAs, and how we can improve communications and engagement.

Looking ahead

Strong performance management, continuous communication and engagement, and collaborative approaches to problem-solving remain a priority for Rhode Island. To carry forward the policy reforms attained over the past four years, RIDE will:

- engage Rhode Island citizens in the development of a new five-year strategic plan (2015-2020) using many feedback and engagement loops to reflect on the progress made and to identify our shared priorities for the future;
- build formal and informal processes to identify and address communications and implementation problems at their earliest possible manifestation so as to improve the likelihood of program success;
- assess with our LEAs ways we can sustain the foundations built to support various complex policy areas; and,
- oversee the Scope of Work for Year 5 as RIDE and the participating LEAs carry out the no-cost extension.

III. **Establishing and Implementing World-Class Standards, Assessments, and STEM**

We used three strategies to support statewide the transition to more rigorous standards, aligned curriculum, and robust assessments: (1) supporting educators to help them understand the new *Common Core State Standards (*CCSS), (2) providing intensive support for curriculum alignment and resource development connected to the CCSS and aligned with Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) as appropriate, and (3) building an understanding of a comprehensive assessment system and practices for use at the school and classroom level. We integrated these three strategies across a set of five projects: (a) Study of the Standards, (b) Intensive Curriculum Alignment, (c) Project-Based Learning; (d) Formative Assessments, and (e) Interim Assessments. We have highlighted the key accomplishments over the four years of Race to the Top below.

To help Rhode Island educators' transition to the Common Core State Standards, RIDE:
- engaged more than 5,800 educators (representing 46 percent of Rhode Island teachers) in study of the Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics sessions in all 52 LEAs;
- prepared an additional 1,800 educators, especially educators working with special populations (e.g., students with disabilities, English learners);
- created and disseminated online professional development modules on ELA and mathematics to support understanding at the district level; and
- created the Common Core Ambassadors program that used a core of experienced Rhode Island educators, knowledgeable about the expectations and benefits of the Common Core, to provide information to community members and parents in more than 30 community events.

To develop curriculum aligned with the Common Core State Standards and STEM, RIDE:
- developed 14 model curricula (i.e., three in ELA, six in mathematics, four in science, and one in social studies) that more than 450 educators from 17 LEAs wrote over the course of four years;
- disseminated all curricula models through our SharePoint site to enable access by all LEAs;
- created a common design process for curriculum development that enabled educators to share their work using a common language and deep understanding of standards; and
- supported the use of Project-Based Learning strategies with more than 40 educators in two Providence high schools (Providence Career and Technical Academy and Central High School), which resulted in greater integration of content areas with technical subject areas and in more effective use of common planning time.

To implement robust assessments, formative and interim, RIDE:
- developed an online formative-assessment course, entitled *Linking Learning and Assessment,* that supported all Rhode Island educators in developing a consistent understanding of classroom formative-assessment practices;

- provided orientation sessions for more than 300 educators representing 38 LEAs to help them design and plan formative-assessment professional development for their schools and districts;
- created two forms of interim assessments, fixed-form assessments and test-construction tools, that selected LEAs piloted;
- developed a high-quality item bank with a total of 8,121 test questions in four content areas;
- developed a test-construction tool that allows teachers to build their own tests by selecting questions from the item bank; and
- developed interim fixed-form assessments in ELA and mathematics, which 17 LEAs and 52 schools administered in 2012-13 and 2013-14.

Systems Developed and Lessons Learned
Our work toward developing and implementing world-class standards and assessments has strengthened our ability to provide a guaranteed and viable curriculum and a comprehensive statewide assessment system. We have built long-lasting resources and tools for Rhode Island educators http://www.ride.ri.gov/InsideRIDE/AdditionalInformation/RacetotheTop.aspx. Today, there is evidence that educators have gained a greater understanding of the Common Core and its implication for curriculum and instruction, that more educators are applying formative-assessment practices within their schools and classrooms, and that LEAs have access to curriculum in English Language Arts, mathematics, social studies, and science. Changes in practice and lessons learned are highlighted below:

- In the past, most LEAs developed curriculum alone; today, more LEAs have indicated that they are using a collaborative approach, based on the processes we used throughout the Race to the Top initiative, to develop, revise, and create curriculum and assessments together.
- Based on post-interviews on intensive curriculum alignment, educators report that they make better use of educational resources and that they select resources based on standards rather than on textbooks and materials.
- LEAs now accept integrating curriculum writing and professional development as a key feature in applying for curriculum grants.
- Long-term curriculum-revision plans that include continuing collaborative inter-district relationships and teacher teams are now happening.
- More than 90 percent of teachers who completed formative-assessment training modules expressed a general understanding of the core concepts; more than 80 percent of educators who completed the modules know how to use formative data to understand learning progressions; more than 97 percent of educators report incorporating elements of formative assessment into unit and lesson planning.
- LEAs have documented, in our Race to the Top Success Story Blog [http://ri-rttsuccessstories.blogspot.com/], in CLO quarterly reports, and in individual interviews with LEA leaders that the foundation for rigorous standards, curriculum, and formative-assessment practices is a prime benefit of our Race to the Top work.

Looking Ahead
As a fundamental requirement of our Basic Education Program [BEP regulations, G-13-1], RIDE will continue providing ongoing support for implementing a guaranteed and viable curriculum and for implementing a rigorous and comprehensive assessment system statewide by engaging with Rhode Island LEAs to:
- use the Math Science Partnership Grants (Title IIA) to support in-depth study of mathematics and science practices with eight LEAs by engaging in intensive workshops and developing online professional development modules for use by all Rhode Island educators;
- implement the "Assessment Project" that includes internal, statewide, and targeted LEA efforts to address the quality and quantity of testing in Rhode Island;

- provide ongoing professional development sessions to educators that focus on key content areas and the instructional shifts in preparation for PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers) assessments;
- expand and increase the use of current Common Core online modules by converting resources into interactive e-learning modules;
- offer mini-grants to LEAs to support work in using the interim-assessment tools;
- complete the Year 5 Scope of Work tasks for interim assessments, including completing and testing the report functionality and working with LEAs to increase the use of the new Instructional Support System platform;
- migrate all of the professional development modules created under Race to the Top to the professional development platform on the Instructional Support System;
- promote the use of project-based learning strategies by planning and holding a third conference on Project-Based Learning, in March 2015; and
- conduct monthly District Networking Meetings with assistant superintendents, curriculum directors, and heads of charter public schools to continue the dialogue on curriculum and assessment systems aligned with the Common Core and PARCC.

IV.   Developing User-Friendly Data Systems

As part of our Race to the Top initiative, we created a statewide instructional-support system to provide educators with access to an array of data, tools for analysis, assessments, and instructional tools. We designed this system to support educators as they implemented the Common Core State Standards, rigorous new curriculum, and aligned assessments. We believe that a unified system of data, technology, and professional supports will help teachers, schools, and districts in their work toward improving educator practice and student achievement. Given the small size of our state and the significant investments we have made in data infrastructure and training, we believe that a statewide instructional support system will benefit all participating LEAs and will be fiscally efficient. Over the four years of implementation, RIDE engaged in two strategies for developing and using data systems to improve instruction: (1) building statewide data platforms for instruction, early warning indicators, educator-evaluation support, and educator certification; and, (2) providing intensive professional development to school teams on using data to improve instruction. We integrated these two strategies across a set of four projects: (a) Instructional Management System Data Platform, now identified as the Instructional Support System; (b) Early Warning System; (c) Evaluation and Certification Redesign; and (d) Using Data Professional Development. The key accomplishments over the four years of implementation of this work are highlighted below.

To create new data systems and platforms, RIDE:
- designed an Instructional Management System in 2012-13 that had potential to support LEAs with curriculum and assessment tools, although functionality issues led us to launch a redesigned and improved Instructional Support System in 2013-14;
- piloted the new system to ensure that we had addressed all functionality issues;
- developed early-warning indicators (e.g., attendance, discipline, state-assessment scores) and Early Warning System online platform that provides educators with access to individual and aggregate data on students;
- redesigned the educator-licensure platform, eCert, that provides educators with 24/7 access to their certification information and allows educators to renew certification online; and
- developed the Educator Performance and Support System technology platform that assists LEAs with data for educator evaluations.

To support the use of data at the school level, RIDE:
- developed and executed the *Using Data Professional Development Series*, made up of four components to help educators use data effectively;

- prepared 1,226 educators from 289 schools through a year-long tiered professional development series that helps educators analyze student data to inform educational decisions;
- created and posted on our website a series of training materials, modules, and guidance documents for all Rhode Island educators; and
- designed and awarded to 15 LEAS (to date) a Race to the Top competitive mini-grant (in 2014-15) that emphasizes using the new technology platforms and using data to improve instruction.

Systems Developed and Lessons Learned

These data systems and the professional development that RIDE provided to school leadership teams have fostered a culture of data use to promote continuous improvement. We experienced several technical challenges in developing the system platforms, but the creation of these data systems engaged state and local leaders in conversations on how we can best use the data we collect to improve instructional practice and student outcomes. The Race to the Top investment made it possible for us to advance our technology tools to support educator certification, the processes for educator evaluation, and early warning systems to identify students at risk. Further, the professional development RIDE provided to 289 school leadership teams set the foundation for establishing data routines within classrooms and schools. Changes in practice and lessons learned are highlighted below:
- The Educator Performance and Support System (EPSS) platform transformed the way schools and districts conduct educator evaluations. Before Race to the Top, our LEAs completed evaluations on paper; educators rarely received feedback in written form. Today, teachers, principals, and their evaluators use the EPSS to conduct all evaluation activities.
- The new eCert system provides educators and LEAs with better access to critical licensure information. Educators are now accustomed to accessing information electronically.
- The Early Warning System tool has helped schools to identify students who are at some risk of not graduating on time so that they can provide the appropriate interventions for these students.
- The newly constructed Instructional Support System has ease of access, provides historical data that is helpful to LEAs when educators are looking at trends, and provides educators with a central place to access relevant information to improve classroom instruction.
- Both the former Instructional Management System and the current Instructional Support System work have compelled many districts to accelerate and refine their data-collection policies and practices. Teacher-Course-Student data are necessary for the system to function, and, over time, we have observed that data quality and the timeliness of data submissions have substantially improved.
- Through our data-use professional development series, we have established a common language and process for using data across Rhode Island schools. This professional development has helped teachers see the connections between data collection and date use to drive decisions and improve instruction.

Looking Ahead

Rhode Island is committed to creating a data-driven culture of education decision-making at all levels of the educational system. Our Race to the Top investment in data systems jump-started our work toward development of user-friendly data systems, our work with LEA leaders and practitioners on advancing the use of data to inform instruction, and our intensive training on data-use for school teams. Building the culture of data use has started; our continued work will be a major component in our next strategic plan. As we move forward on building a data-use culture, the following actions will take place:
- As part of our approved no-cost extension, RIDE will complete the final phases of the Instructional Support System, which will include interim-assessment functionality and reporting, the Teacher Resource Library, the professional development modules, migration of the Early Warning System to the Instructional Support System, and mini-grants to LEAs to help school and district leaders use the Instructional Support System.

- RIDE will continue to provide professional development for a range of stakeholders (e.g., postsecondary-education professionals, school and district administrators, related-service providers) on the application and potential use of the Instructional Support System for improving educational practice.
- RIDE will continue to gather feedback from LEAs and postsecondary-education institutions on potential improvements and enhancements to the eCert system and the Educator Performance and Support System.

V. Ensuring Educator Excellence

At the heart of our original Race to the Top application was the belief that educator excellence drives improved student learning. Our Basic Education Program addresses the need for a human-capital management system. The Race to the Top grant provided us with the opportunity to strengthen our human-capital management system and to engage LEAs in developing the knowledge and skills to improve their human-capital decisions and their professional practices. Over the four years of implementation of Race to the Top and of our strategic plan, we have engaged in the following strategies: (1) promoting alternative pathways for certification, especially in high-need content areas; (2) developing a fair and transparent evaluation process that provides effectiveness data; (3) using evaluation data and other sources of information to support human-capital decisions; (4) strengthening educator-preparation programs; and (5) providing effective, data-informed job-embedded professional development as well supports that assist school leaders and beginning teachers. These five strategies address educator excellence across a continuum – from preparation to induction to evaluation to professional support. We carried out these strategies through seven projects: (i) Alternative-Route Certification with TNTP and Teach for America; (ii) Educator Evaluation; (iii) Compensation Reform; (iv) State-wide Recruitment Platform; (v) Educator Preparation Effectiveness and Quality Professional Development; (vi) New Teacher Induction; and (vii) Academy of Transformative Leadership. The key accomplishments over the four years of this work are highlighted below.

To improve educator preparation, RIDE:
- doubled the number of alternative-route completers through a partnership with Teach for America (100 candidates) and TNTP (79 candidates) that provided LEAs with hard-to-staff schools with additional qualified teachers;
- created new standards for all educator-preparation programs;
- developed the Rhode Island Preparation Index, which provides data to the preparation programs, LEAs, and the public regarding preparation, certification, and employment of beginning teachers; and
- developed an online professional development platform that allows educators to access high-quality professional development aligned with evaluation feedback, school-improvement goals, and other LEA priorities.

To improve educator evaluations, RIDE:
- developed a statewide model for educator evaluation, the Rhode Island Model for Educator Evaluation for Teachers, Principals, and Support Professionals, that 40 LEAs implemented over three years;
- approved four other evaluation models and provided ongoing support to the LEAs using these models;
- developed, in partnership with support professionals (e.g., speech and language teachers, school psychologists, social workers, guidance counselors), an evaluation model unique to their roles;
- provided extensive face-to-face training to district teams and to more than 800 evaluators on a yearly basis to prepare all LEAs to implement educator evaluations;
- developed and deployed a cohort of approximately 15 Intermediary Service Providers, who delivered ongoing support for conducting evaluations in districts;

- conducted sessions with LEA teams to support calibration regarding Student Learning Objective development and scoring of professional practices;
- developed online modules, guidance documents, and toolkits that LEAs can access at any time to support the evaluation process;
- conducted and analyzed annual statewide surveys throughout implementation and used the feedback to make adjustments to the evaluation models; and
- released and distributed to all LEAs the results of the final effectiveness ratings and convened groups of LEAs to reflect on the implications of the results.

To provide educator supports and opportunities, RIDE:
- launched two compensation pilot projects that explored innovation in compensation to increase leadership opportunities for teachers;
- supported the use of an online recruitment platform, SchoolSpring, that the majority of participating LEAs use to reach a wider pool of potential candidates;
- developed and supported a statewide approach to providing instructional supports to beginning teachers by partnering with the New Teacher Center;
- trained 28 coaches over a three-year period and supported 872 beginning teachers;
- developed an Academy of Transformative Leadership that provided intensive training and coaching to nearly 90 school leaders in 11 LEAs, affecting the lives of 15,000 students; and
- created a set of online professional development modules for school and district administrators and building-based leadership teams to advance knowledge and practices to help struggling schools and to provide educational equity for all students.

Systems Developed and Lessons Learned
Ensuring educator excellence is the number one priority in our *Strategic Plan.* Because our human-capital management systems needed to improve in all LEAs, this initiative engaged Rhode Island state and local policy leaders and educators in intensive professional development on how to carry out these improvements, to build capacity among educators, and to improve professional practice. We encountered resistance, however, at both the state and local levels, as we endeavored to implement rigorous evaluations based in part on student achievement and growth. Based on regular feedback, we adjusted our evaluation process, and we acknowledge that we have merely laid the foundation for an evaluation system that will drive school improvement. That said, we are confident that the seven projects in this area have changed practice at various levels of the system with respect to educator preparation, evaluation, and supports. Through our work toward increasing educator excellence, RIDE:
- changed the discourse on educator preparation to include a focus on diversity, by including alternative providers in discussions with traditional postsecondary-education providers;
- focused educator-preparation program providers on improving partnerships with LEAs;
- created a new expectation that all educators will be evaluated, that all educators deserve feedback about their practice and effect on student learning, and that student learning will be part of educators' evaluations;
- moved the entire state away from a minimal check-list for evaluating professionals toward models focused on student learning, observation, professional practice;
- witnessed a desire by principals to provide more targeted, helpful feedback to educators through a disciplined and timely cycle of observations and reports;
- changed the discussion in LEAs regarding student learning so that teachers and principals are using data when talking about student achievement and learning and so that school leaders and teachers are aligning individual goals for student learning with school-wide goals for student learning;
- increased the demand for high-quality professional development that educators can access through online systems (which means that educators can spend more time with their students);

- increased the availability of pools of candidates for teaching positions, through the use of a statewide common job-posting platform;
- increased the capacity at the state and local level to support school leaders working in challenging environments; and
- demonstrated that beginning teachers improved instruction and had faster growth in teaching practices when they participated in a strong induction program that provides 90 minutes each week of coaching.

Looking Ahead

We are committed to improving educator excellence as one of the priorities in our strategic plan. As a fundamental requirement of the Basic Education Program [BEP regulations, G-15-2.2], RIDE will continue providing ongoing support to Rhode Island LEAs on implementing and monitoring human-capital management systems that connect to strategies for improving education. Some of the specific projects that we began during the Race to the Top grant period will end, however, RIDE will engage with Rhode Island LEAs and preparation providers to strengthen preparation, evaluation, and supports for educators through:

- expanding our data collection with educator-preparation providers and improving our analysis and use of data, as part of the process of program approval;
- monitoring the implementation of all approved evaluation systems and obtaining feedback from LEAs and from an advisory committee regarding how to improve these evaluation systems;
- providing ongoing coaching and professional development to graduates of the Academy for Transformative Leadership, as part of our no-cost extension;
- promoting the use of the online professional development modules that support educator evaluation, school leaders, and school-based improvement teams; and
- seeking additional funding to support innovation and sustainability for beginning-teacher induction, for developing aspiring turnaround leaders, and for establishing multiple pathways for preparing educators.

VI. Accelerating All Schools toward Greatness

We established this ambitious goal for accelerating all schools toward greatness in our strategic plan: *By 2015, all schools and programs will be high performing and provide multiple pathways for student success* [page12]. Our Race to the Top work supported this goal by creating interventions for the persistently lowest-achieving schools, building the capacity of teachers and leaders to transform schools, expanding the availability of high-performing charter public schools, and providing online learning opportunities in mathematics to prepare high-school students for college and careers. We have not accelerated the performance of every school in Rhode Island, but over the four years of the Race to the Top initiative we have substantially improved the conditions that help to create excellent learning environments for students. We have supported school improvement in our Priority and Focus schools through developing leadership and by strengthening the capacity of school districts to manage school transformation. We have continued to support new and expanded charter public schools, and we have provided opportunities for high-school students who are struggling with mathematics to participate in online learning. To accelerate all schools toward greatness, RIDE has engaged in several projects: turning around low-achieving schools, expanding charter-school opportunities, and developing multiple pathways toward graduation.

Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools

Three major initiatives structured the work RIDE engaged in with six LEAs (i.e., Central Falls, East Providence, Newport, Pawtucket, Providence, and the Rhode Island School for the Deaf) toward turning around low-achieving schools: (1) identification of low-achieving schools, developing school-transformation plans, accountability, and monitoring; (2) building the capacity of teachers and leaders to transform schools; and (3) investing in specific intervention supports in the persistently lowest-achieving schools. Through investments in and commitment to each of these initiatives RIDE:

- developed a more sophisticated [diagnostic screen and accountability framework](#) that allows for enhanced monitoring of the 31 low-achieving schools and that led to robust discussion with school teams and with the LEAs on lagging indicators, leading indicators, and short-cycle indicators of the quality of implementation;
- developed a robust [school reform planning and quarterly monitoring process](#) that shifted transformation work from a system of task-level compliance monitoring to a system that focuses on the essential processes of intervention implementation, allows for frequent adjustments to implementation based on locally relevant data, and develops and documents a shared understanding of school progress and mutual accountability among the schools, the districts, and RIDE;
- provided individual coaching for principals of 14 identified schools and intensive professional development (i.e., three summer institutes and eight after-school sessions) for their leadership teams;
- created a turnaround principal corps for 13 aspiring principals, through the establishment of a year-long residency program;
- developed and implemented a series of in-person professional development opportunities through six [online professional development modules](#) that are available statewide;
- designed two types of intervention supports for implementing plans for school transformation: School Achievement Specialists and Educator Evaluation Implementation Specialists; and
- helped four of our lowest-achieving schools make significant progress toward exiting Focus or Priority status.

Expanding Charter Public Schools
Building in-state capacity to expand and support high-quality charter public schools is one strategy for incubating new approaches to learning and fostering a culture of innovation. The aim of the High-Performing Charter School expansion was to issue four planning grants to stimulate the development of new charters or to expand existing high-quality charters. Demand is high for charter public schools in Rhode Island. In spring 2014, our charter public schools received approximately 9,500 applications for 850 available seats. Race to the Top provided funding for two start-up grants to groups with promising charter-school proposals and for two expansion grants to existing high-performing charter public schools. By the time all of these charter public schools fully implement their approved programs, the Race to the Top investment will have supported an additional 1,544 high-quality charter seats for students. The accomplishments and lessons learned from each of the charters are:
- Village Green Virtual Charter School opened in fall 2013 and is our first high school based on a fully blended-learning model. In its first year, 243 students applied to attend. Race to the Top funds supported program-specific and resource-intensive start-up needs, including extensive technological infrastructure, investments in a social worker who provided parent engagement and mental health resources, and systems for financial reporting. We learned that these up-front investments were essential to execute a blended learning model.
- Achievement First Providence Mayoral Academy, a nonprofit charter-management organization (CMO) based in New Haven, Connecticut, is the first school in Rhode Island that is a replication of a high-performing charter-school model that an out-of-state CMO manages. The school opened in the fall of 2013 to serve 176 students in kindergarten and first grade. The school is authorized to grow into two elementary schools serving 920 students. Race to the Top funds supported facility-development planning, community outreach, operations and recruitment functions, and partial support for a principal-in-residency program. We learned that, in supporting an out-of-state CMO, we need to refine our charter-school authorization to include a review of management contracts and a more extensive evaluation of any proposed essential partners.
- The Paul Cuffee School opened in 2000 and now serves students from Providence in grades kindergarten through 12. Before adding high-school grades, Cuffee was a high-performing kindergarten through grade 8 school of choice serving Providence students. The first cohort of seniors graduated in 2013; 95 percent of the senior cohort (60 students) graduated in four years, with higher

attendance and lower mobility than statewide averages. Race to the Top funds supported student-use materials, equipment, and professional development as well as supports for beginning teachers. Specifically, the funds made possible a student-use library and technology infrastructure, preparation for a collaborative model of co-teaching, support for Advanced Placement coursework, and the development of arts, choral, and instrumental-music programs. We learned to refine our evaluation process for approval of the expansion of existing charters by identifying ahead of time the necessary organizational components for successful grade expansion.

- The International Charter School (ICS) opened in 2001, serves a statewide population of students in grades kindergarten through 5, and offers a unique dual-language program in which students enroll in either an English-Spanish pathway or an English-Portuguese pathway. ICS expansion goals included offering its dual-language model to students in grades kindergarten through 8 and developing an International Baccalaureate (IB) program. Race to the Top funds supported facility-development planning and significant professional development for ICS leaders and staff members, especially on completing the rigorous IB certification and training program. To date, the school has not expanded to serve beyond grade five because of the challenge of finding an appropriate facility to accommodate the approved growth. ICS is on the path to complete its IB certification within one year. We have learned that addressing facility challenges remains a barrier to growth.

Providing Multiple Pathways

RIDE developed a suite of web-based mathematics learning modules that focus on supporting our high-school students who are struggling in mathematics. The creation of the Virtual Learning Math Modules (VLMM) was a statewide initiative to benefit students and to provide teachers with professional development on using online interventions. VLMM began as an innovative way to assist students at a time when few online options were available in high schools. Through developing an online intervention, RIDE:

- completed the design, development, and pilot of the VLMM in 2012; by spring 2013, 2,700 students enrolled in the system;
- provided technical assistance and support to high-school principals and the designated coordinators in 13 high schools who actively used the modules;
- developed a video and online guidebook to enhance the professional development of educators who use the modules;
- tracked overall use of the modules over time, noting that, by the end of 2013, only 441 students in 13 high schools were active users; expanded the use of the VLMM with three adult education programs in the spring and summer of 2013;
- migrated the VLMM to the RIDE website and extended its use beyond the grant period; and
- learned that LEAs now have access to many more open educational resources to support students' mathematics development; our role is to help create the conditions that encourage and support the use of blended learning in districts and schools.

Looking Ahead

Accelerating all schools toward greatness remains a priority for Rhode Island. Transforming the lowest-achieving schools, creating high-quality charter public school options, and stimulating a culture of innovation for blended learning will continue as RIDE:

- engages with our LEA leaders in reflection on the transformation process and on areas for development under our approved ESEA flexibility waiver;
- sustains our professional support for our aspiring principals through continued coaching in Year 5 of Race to the Top and expand the use of our online modules on transformative leadership;
- nurtures strong partnerships that demonstrate innovations under way in charter public schools, in traditional schools, and in virtual learning environments;

- works with executive and legislative leadership to improve the policy landscape and the conditions for removing some of the obstacles to school improvement (e.g., facilities, planning resources, technology infrastructure); and
- forms partnerships with local and national organizations to encourage and support the use of blended learning in all Rhode Island Schools, through networking, and through holding our annual *Innovation Powered by Technology Conference.*

VII. Looking Ahead and Summary

Rhode Island has benefitted from an amazing Race to the Top experience. Working with our district leaders, principals, teachers, community members, public officials, families, and students, we have established a solid foundation for strengthening educator excellence, upholding rigorous standards, creating aligned curricula and comprehensive assessments, using data to improve learning, providing intensive supports to beginning teachers and to school teams in the lowest-achieving schools, stimulating growth in charter public schools, and welcoming opportunities for blended learning.

Early in the process, we set forth bold and specific benchmarks for our Race to the Top initiative. By 2015, we said:

- ➢ 90 percent of students entering fourth grade and eighth grade will be proficient in reading, as measured by the state assessment.
- ➢ 90 percent of students entering fourth grade and 75percent of students entering eighth grade will be proficient in mathematics, as measured by the state assessment.
- ➢ Achievement gaps will be cut in half, as measured by the state assessment.
- ➢ 85 percent of students will graduate from high school.
- ➢ 77 percent of students who graduate from high school will enroll in postsecondary education within 16 months.
- ➢ 70 percent of high-school students who enroll in postsecondary education within 16 months of graduation will complete their first year.
- ➢ 55 percent of students entering fourth grade and eighth grade will be proficient in reading and mathematics on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), and achievement gaps will be cut in half on the NAEP.

From the outset, we knew that these were ambitious and aspirational goals – meant in part to set forth the urgency of the task before us and to inspire our work. Over the course of the Race to the Top initiative, we have reported regularly to the Rhode Island public regarding the progress we have made toward achieving these goals. Our most recent February 2014 report shows that we have exceeded one goal, we have made progress toward 18 goals (including all of our grade 11 reading goals), and have not met 14 goals, with particular challenges in grade 8 reading.

Over the four-year course of the grant, we have seen continued improvement in student achievement on measures beyond our state assessments, most notably on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Our eighth grade mathematics progress provides one indication that our systemic effort to build a coherent education program for Rhode Island students is taking hold. In 2009, Grade 8 NAEP mathematics scores showed students performing significantly below the Northeast Region and the nation. Our 2013 results show that, for the first time ever, Rhode Island students stand above the national average (based on percent of students achieving proficiency or better) in both mathematics and reading. Reports on Rhode Island's NAEP data are available on the RIDE website.

On our state assessments, the New England Comprehensive Assessment Program (NECAP), from 2009 to 2013 show significant improvements in grades 4, 6, 8, and 11 and significant improvements in mathematics in grades 7, 8, and 11. Improvements in high school have been particularly strong, up 8 percentage points in

both reading and mathematics. Black and Hispanic students have each improved by 4 percentage points in both reading and mathematics since 2009. Additionally, our four-year graduation rate has improved by 4 points (to 80 percent) over the past four years, including dramatic gains in two of our highest-poverty districts: Central Falls (up 20 points to 74 percent) and Pawtucket (up 16 points to 75 percent). These improvements are encouraging, but we know that we still have work to do. Our most significant concern remains the low performance of students of color, students living in poverty, and students with disabilities. There are small pockets of growth (e.g., economically disadvantaged Grade 11 students have narrowed the performance difference by almost 10 percentage points on the NECAP assessments); however, we must focus on our lowest-achieving schools before we see statewide achievement at the ambitious but attainable levels that we developed as part of our original application.

Throughout our Race to the Top work, we have learned that implementing complex policy reforms requires a clear focus, problem-solving partnerships among the LEAs and RIDE, and meaningful communication and engagement throughout the education system. Many challenges are still before us, yet, thanks to the Race to the Top initiative, we remain committed to our essential vision: preparing all Rhode Island students for success in college, careers, and life. As we develop our next five-year strategic plan, we will engage Rhode Islanders, asking them to reflect on the progress we have made and to identify our priorities for the future. As we articulate the key areas of focus for the next five years, RIDE will engage in the following initiatives to improve student achievement and to close achievement gaps:

- working with LEAs to improve our accountability system;
- focusing on improving early childhood programming and services;
- identifying specific performance targets for closing the achievement gaps for students with disabilities; and,
- supporting LEAs through ongoing technical assistance on educator evaluations, Common Core implementation, implementation of assessments, and using data.

Specific Work Planned for Year 5
Rhode Island received a no-cost extension to finish specific Scope of Work tasks that we did not complete within the initial four-year grant period. Specifically, in Year 5, RIDE will:

- launch the Instructional Support System;
- develop scoring and reporting systems for interim assessments;
- support LEAs through mini-grants on the use of data through the Instructional Support System, the Educator Performance Support System, and the Early Warning System;
- launch a statewide professional development platform as part of the Instructional Support System; and
- provide professional development and coaching to school-turnaround leaders and to aspiring principals.

You can find all Rhode Island information, progress updates, resources, and tools created under Race to the Top at: http://www.ride.ri.gov/InsideRIDE/AdditionalInformation/RacetotheTop.aspx.