

# SPHERE

Social Policy Hub for Equity Research in Education  
*Feinstein School of Education and Human Development*



RHODE ISLAND COLLEGE

2020

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## RHODE ISLAND EDUCATION

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*Policy Primer*

# FOREWORD

Rhode Island is at a crossroads. State leaders will soon announce how each of Rhode Island's public school districts will approach learning for the fall. The implications of this decision are huge, affecting over 140,000 children and their families. No matter what is decided, of one thing we can be certain: equity challenges will remain. Understanding equity challenges in education policy is critical to our ability to advocate effectively for future reforms. This primer is an attempt to aid in that understanding.

The introduction to this primer highlights the long-standing inequities in this state, inequities that have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The challenges that emerged during this pandemic were vast and complex: job instability; housing and food insecurity; lack of access to child care; physical isolation; and social unrest as a result of state violence against Black Americans. Rhode Island was commended for its commitment to continue distance learning throughout the end of the 2019-2020 school year, but for many families, expectations for teaching and learning in the midst of so much upheaval were unrealistic. As we look ahead to the upcoming school year and beyond, there are important conversations for us to have. How might our institutions of higher education prepare teachers for a schooling environment so unlike the one that we used to know? How can we make sure that public schools receive adequate and equitable funding, even if wealthier families funnel resources into learning pods for their children? What are the appropriate metrics for achievement and accountability that attend to equity and justice for all youth in the state?

I finished writing this primer in early 2020, before most people knew anything about COVID-19. Although the content does not address schooling in light of this new reality, I believe it provides a foundation for us to understand education policy broadly, and gives us a basis from which to imagine greater possibilities for schooling in the future. I hope that it proves to be a useful resource for stakeholders throughout the state.

Adrienne C. Goss  
August 2020

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## ■ TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface: About this Primer	Page 2
1. Introduction: The Origins of Public Education in Rhode Island	Page 3
2. At a Glance	Page 4
3. Accountability	Page 5
4. Assessment	Page 11
5. Choices in Education	Page 15
6. Curriculum and Standards	Page 21
7. Finance and Funding	Page 25
8. Governance and Policymaking	Page 31
9. Student Achievement	Page 36
10. Teacher Workforce	Page 42
Moving Forward	Page 50

## ■ ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## ■ ABOUT SPHERE

The mission of the Social Policy Hub for Equity Research in Education (SPHERE) is to engage Rhode Island College students and faculty, in partnership with Rhode Island community members, in conducting and disseminating research for equitable educational and social policies. SPHERE endeavors to help Rhode Islanders understand, and become more involved in education policy decisions.

SPHERE aspires to be a leading education and social policy institute in Rhode Island. As a policy hub, SPHERE connects with Rhode Island's education stakeholders in multiple spheres of influence by linking research, policy, and practice.

## ■ ABOUT THIS PRIMER

SPHERE is committed to linking research, policy, and practice for all of Rhode Island's education stakeholders. SPHERE envisions that this primer will be a tool to help Rhode Islanders understand, and become more involved in education policy decisions.

Each chapter of this primer can stand alone, but together the chapters provide an overview of how public education operates in Rhode Island. The Introduction offers context on the inequitable origins of Rhode Island's public school system, as well as the role that activism has played in expanding educational opportunities. The At a Glance section provides a quick look at public school enrollment in Rhode Island--a helpful reference point for the information in the rest of the primer.

The remaining chapters discuss enduring topics in education policy. A quick definition or overview of each issue is provided, along with historical or foundational information when applicable. Following are details about how these areas are addressed in Rhode Island. Each chapter ends with Equity Policy Considerations. These considerations are written to help policymakers and stakeholders consider how these policy issues might unduly affect nonwhite, Hispanic, low-income, and emergent bilingual students, and students with disabilities. These considerations are neither exhaustive nor conclusive, but rather serve as a basis for further dialogue and study. Footnotes are included throughout in an easy-to-read format for those interested in further study.

# ■ INTRODUCTION

## The Origins of Public Education In Rhode Island

Inequities in Rhode Island’s public education system can be traced to the system’s origins. Records of education in Rhode Island show the establishment of schools as early as 1640 in Newport, 1652 in Warwick, and 1663 in Providence. An early attempt to institute publicly funded education “for all the white inhabitants” of any given town was legislated in 1800, but later repealed. By 1828, every town in the state had a school, but only Newport and Providence were still supporting free public schools, and the education of nonwhite students was given little, if any, consideration. Thus, opportunities for children to receive a quality education were uneven. In 1828, the General Assembly took steps to address some inequities by establishing permanent state funding to support public schools. Each town could appropriate additional funds needed to run a school. By 1831, each town in the state had at least two public schools, and the total number of children receiving a publicly-funded education increased from less than 1,400 in 1828, to more than ten times that number.<sup>1</sup> The amount of state funding was still insufficient, and racial segregation and exclusion persisted. Until 1831, Black children could only attend school if they were able to pay tuition to some private schools, or a few town-owned schools. As a result of advocacy by Black leaders, The Old Brick School House on Meeting Street was established as the first school for Black children in the state of Rhode Island in 1831.<sup>2</sup> In 1866, the General Assembly passed a statute to prohibit race as a basis for school admittance.

Nearly 200 years later, as a result of activism from individuals and organizations, Rhode Island has made considerable strides in improving educational opportunities for its residents. Yet, the state continues to struggle with providing opportunities equitably. Specifically, Rhode Island’s students from low-income households, emergent bilingual students,<sup>3</sup> students with disabilities, and students from certain racial/ethnic backgrounds (i.e. American Indian/Alaska Native, Black, Hispanic, Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander, Southeast Asian, and multiracial) do not perform as well on standardized assessments, and they graduate high school at lower rates than their peers in the state. This primer offers details not just on student performance, but on the systems, structures, and policies that influence how Rhode Island’s students experience school. SPHERE hopes that this primer will be a valuable tool for understanding the condition of education in Rhode Island, and that it will equip each stakeholder with the information necessary to promote equitable policies for every child in the state.

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1 Charles Carroll estimates that the public school population by 1831 was 14,500 students. See Charles Carroll. Public education in Rhode Island. E. L. Freeman Company: Providence, 1918.

2 See Myron O. Stachiw. Historic structure report phase I: The old brick school house. Prepared for the Providence Preservation Society, 2014. <http://ppsri.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/OBSH-HSR-Final-Report-PDF-NEW.pdf>

3 Throughout this text, the term emergent bilingual is used instead of English language learner (ELL) or Limited English Proficient (LEP). The term emergent bilingual is based on the work of Dr. Ofelia García, and it emphasizes the linguistic assets that students have instead of focusing on any perceived lack.

## ■ AT A GLANCE

This section provides a quick glance at public school enrollment in Rhode Island. The data offer context and serve as a point of reference for the rest of the primer.

### Rhode Island Public School Enrollment Numbers, 2019-2020

Total Enrollment (Grades Pre-K through 12)  
143,557

#### Public School Enrollment by Race/ Ethnicity

Race/ Ethnicity	Number	Percentage of Enrollment
Native American	1,221	1%
Asian Pacific	4,905	3%
Black	12,660	9%
White	79,308	55%
Hispanic <sup>4</sup>	38,843	27%
Multi-Race	6,620	5%

#### Public Pre-K Enrollment

Full Day: 942    Half Day: 2,066

#### Emergent Bilingual<sup>5</sup> Enrollment

15,377 | 11%

#### Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL)<sup>6</sup> Enrollment

68,408 | 48%

#### Individualized Education Program (IEP)<sup>7</sup> Enrollment

22,517 | 16%

*Source of Enrollment Data: Rhode Island Department of Education. October Enrollment, 2019-20.*

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<sup>4</sup> Hispanic refers to students of any racial background without being duplicate counts of Black and white students.

<sup>5</sup> Throughout this text, the term emergent bilingual is used instead of English language learner (ELL) or Limited English Proficient (LEP). The term emergent bilingual is based on the work of Dr. Ofelia García, and it emphasizes the linguistic assets that students have instead of focusing on any perceived lack.

<sup>6</sup> Children in households with incomes at or below 130% of the federal poverty level qualify for free school meals. Children in households with incomes between 130-185% of the federal poverty level are eligible for reduced price meals. See Food Research & Action Center. <https://frac.org/school-meal-eligibility-reimbursements>. Free and Reduced Lunch enrollment is often used as a proxy for economically disadvantaged students.

<sup>7</sup> An IEP is a document developed for every student who qualifies for special education.

## ■ ACCOUNTABILITY

*Accountability refers to how students, educators, schools, and districts are held responsible for achieving certain goals.<sup>8</sup> Accountability systems may include incentives to encourage achievement, and consequences for failing to meet certain expectations.*

In 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) into law. As a part of Johnson's War on Poverty, ESEA was intended primarily to support the educational achievement of children from low-income families. ESEA continues to serve as a critical piece of federal legislation addressing equity issues in the nation's schools. With each congressional reauthorization, ESEA undergoes some modifications. In 2001, ESEA was reauthorized as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), and with it came an intense focus on accountability for student performance. Most recently in 2015, ESEA was reauthorized as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

In exchange for federal funding, each state must have a plan for how it will comply with the requirements outlined in ESSA. Rhode Island's ESSA plan includes a detailed accountability system designed with the intention of supporting the lowest performing schools in the state. There are five indicators that the state will use to measure school performance:

- Academic Achievement;
- Growth;
- English Language Proficiency;
- Graduation Rate; and
- School Quality and Student Success (SQSS).

**Academic Achievement** and **Growth** are measured by student performance on standardized assessments of English language arts (ELA) and math. **English Language Proficiency** is measured on the ACCESS 2.0 exam. The state plans to include measures of science proficiency in 2021. Table 3.1 provides more details on the assessments used for these measures.

**Table 3.1 Rhode Island's Assessments to Measure Academic Performance**

Indicator	Assessments <sup>9</sup>	Students Assessed
Achievement	RICAS, DLM, SAT	Grades 3-8, 11
Growth	RICAS, PSAT/SAT	Grades 3-8, 10-11
English language proficiency	ACCESS 2.0	Students receiving English learner supports
Science proficiency	RI NGSA	Grades 5, 8, 11

<sup>8</sup> Editorial Projects in Education Research Center. Accountability. Education Week, August 3, 2004.

<sup>9</sup> See the chapter on Assessment for more information about each of these assessments.

The high school **Graduation Rate** is a composite graduation rate, a calculation that allows for the inclusion of students who complete high school within 4, 5, or 6 years.<sup>10</sup> **School Quality and Student Success (SQSS)** includes Diploma Plus, along with a number of indicators that Rhode Island uses to assess school climate. These indicators include student absenteeism, teacher absenteeism, suspension rates, and the percentage of students with high levels of performance on state assessments. Diploma Plus is granted to students who earn the Commissioner’s Seal, or a postsecondary credential. The Commissioner’s Seal recognizes students with high levels of proficiency in ELA and mathematics. Postsecondary credentials may include completion of a Career and Technical Education (CTE) credential, International Baccalaureate credit, college credit from dual/concurrent enrollment, or credit earned from passing Advanced Placement (AP) exams.

Schools are given a star rating based on how well they meet the indicators in each of these broad categories (see Table 3.2).

**Table 3.2 Rhode Island’s School Star Rating**

Star Rating	Means a school has
5 Stars	Strong performance on all indicators
4 Stars	Generally strong performance
3 Stars	Some areas of weakness
2 Stars	Weaknesses at the overall school level
1 Star	The lowest performance in terms of achievement and growth or graduation

A school must meet or exceed expectations for a given star rating in each performance category. For instance, a 3-star high school would have earned, at minimum, 7 points combined in Achievement and Growth, 2 points for English language proficiency, 3 points for Graduation Rate, 3 points for Diploma Plus, and 7 points for the remaining SQSS factors. If an indicator does not apply (e.g. graduation rate in an elementary school), that category is not counted against the school. Even if this school earned the maximum number of points for achievement, it will not receive a 5-star rating unless it also performs at a 5-star level in each of the remaining categories. Table 3.3 provides additional details on how the performance levels are assessed.

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<sup>10</sup> See RIDE’s 2019 School Accountability Technical Report at <https://www.eride.ri.gov/eRIDETableau/TechnicalManual.pdf> for more details on how the composite graduation rate is calculated.

**Table 3.3 Rhode Island’s School Star Rating Performance Levels**

					School Quality & Student Success		
Star Rating	Achievement	Growth	English Language Proficiency	Graduation Rate	Diploma Plus	Absenteeism, Suspension, & Exceeds Expectations	Number of Low Performing Subgroups
*****	6-8 pts	4-6 pts	3-4 pts	4-5 pts	5-6 pts	12-15 pts	None
****	5-6 pts		2 pts		4 pts	10-11 pts	1
***	7-11 pts			3 pts	3-4 pts	7-9 pts	2+
**	5-6 pts		1 pt	2 pts	2 pts	5-6 pts	
*	2 pts	2 pts		1 pt			

Source: 2019 RI School Accountability Technical Report, November 8, 2019. For details on how RIDE will allocate points in each category, see Rhode Island’s Every Student Succeeds Act State Plan.

### RHODE ISLAND’S LOW PERFORMANCE DESIGNATIONS

ESSA requires the identification of schools that are low performing according to the state’s accountability system. Rhode Island determines low performance according to subgroup, and overall school performance.

The major racial and ethnic subgroups in Rhode Island are American Indian or Alaska Native; Asian; Black or African American; Hispanic or Latino; Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander; Two or more races; and White. Additional subgroups include students with disabilities, emergent bilingual students, and students who are economically disadvantaged. The minimum number of students in a subgroup for accountability purposes is 20.<sup>11</sup>

Below are the criteria used to determine the level of support offered to low performing subgroups, and low performing schools overall.

#### Low Performance by a Subgroup

Targeted Support & Improvement	A subgroup performs at a 1-star level
Additional Targeted Support & Improvement	A subgroup is at the same level as the bottom 5% of all schools in achievement and growth; has a graduation rate of less than 67%; or has low scores across all indicators

#### Low Performance by a School

Comprehensive Support & Improvement	<p>Academic achievement and growth in the bottom 5% of both measures</p> <p>Graduation rate is less than 67%</p> <p>Low performance across all indicators</p> <p>A subgroup is identified for additional targeted support and improvement for 4 consecutive years</p>
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<sup>11</sup> “Rhode Island’s Every Student Succeeds Act State Plan.” Rhode Island Department of Education, March 29, 2018. [http://www.ride.ri.gov/InformationAccountability/EveryStudentSucceedsAct\(ESSA\).aspx](http://www.ride.ri.gov/InformationAccountability/EveryStudentSucceedsAct(ESSA).aspx)

Schools that are identified as needing comprehensive support and improvement will have four years to meet exit criteria.<sup>12</sup> Schools that fail to meet expectations within four years will be required to undergo School Redesign.

**Table 3.4 Rhode Island’s School Redesign Models**

Empowerment	In accordance with Rhode Island’s School and Families Empowerment Act, schools will operate with greater site-based autonomy and flexibility.
Restart	A charter management organization (CMO), educational management organization (EMO), or other state approved managing entity will reopen the school.
Small Schools of Choice	The school is reorganized into one or more “small schools” with about 100 students per grade.
Local Education Agency (LEA) Proposed Redesign	An LEA-designed alternative, which must include a high-quality school leader; a new school model; and significant school autonomy.
Closure	The school ceases operations; students are relocated to a school not identified as in need of comprehensive support and improvement.

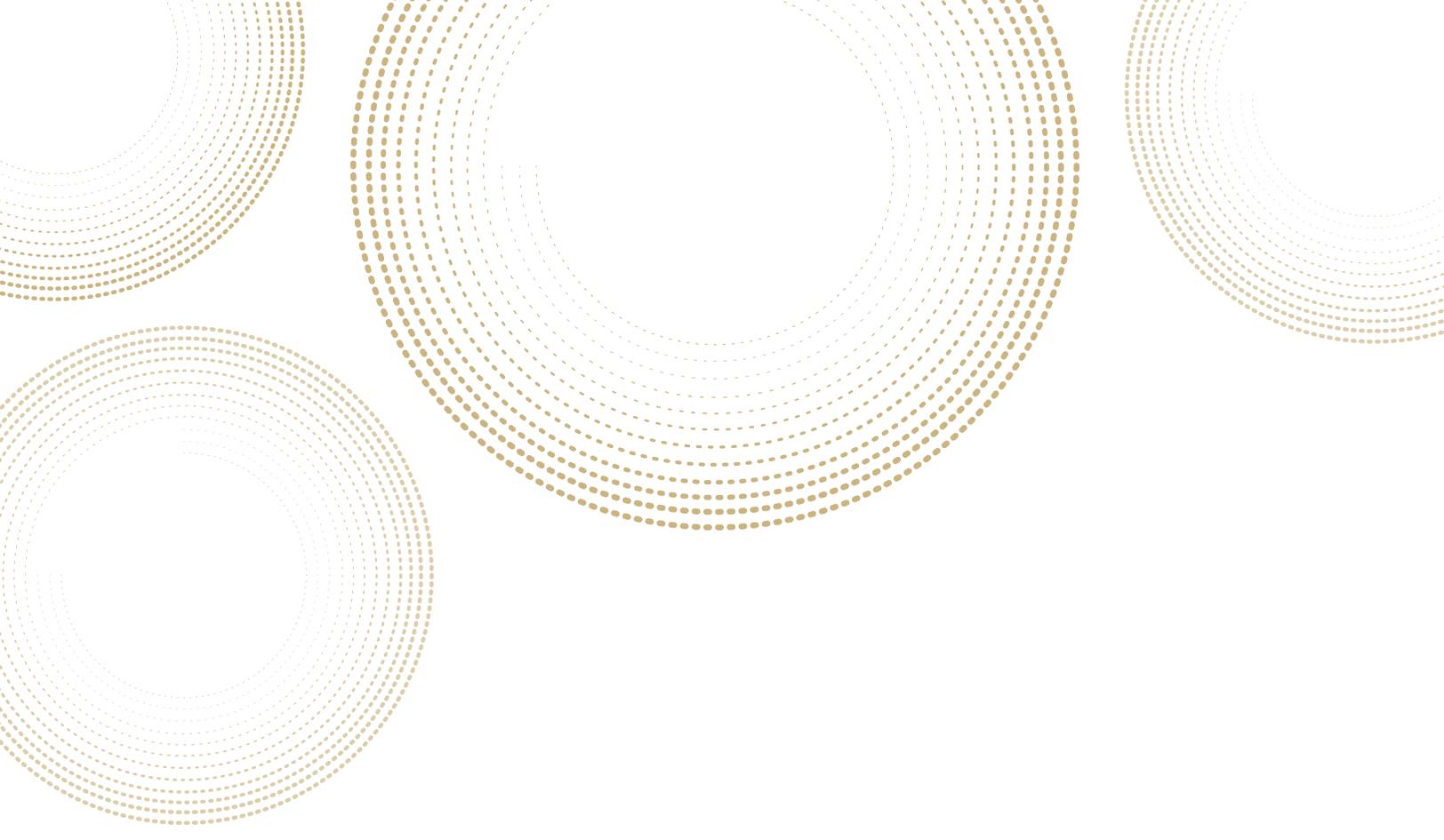
Source: *Rhode Island’s Every Student Succeeds Act State Plan, Rhode Island Department of Education, 2018.*

RIDE is developing a “School Improvement Resource Hub,”<sup>13</sup> a working document to include research for school leaders seeking the best interventions and supports for their schools; tools and resources to select, implement, and assess strategies and other initiatives; and third-party organizations that have a proven record of enhancing student achievement in collaboration with LEAs.

All schools identified as in need of comprehensive support and improvement are required to form a Community Advisory Board (CAB). CABs serve in an advisory role to LEAs and are to be representative of a broad range of stakeholders in that school’s community.

<sup>12</sup> Schools identified as “Priority” during 2017-18 under No Child Left Behind classifications have 2 years to meet exit criteria.

<sup>13</sup> “The Rhode Island Continuous School Improvement Hub.” Rhode Island Department of Education. [https://www.ride.ri.gov/InformationAccountability/EveryStudentSucceedsAct\(ESSA\)/ResourceHub.aspx](https://www.ride.ri.gov/InformationAccountability/EveryStudentSucceedsAct(ESSA)/ResourceHub.aspx)



## SCHOOL DISTRICT TAKEOVER

Rhode Island's ESSA plan explains what happens when individual schools fail to meet expectations, but also notes that the state may take additional action for LEAs with a significant number of schools in need of comprehensive support and improvement. This additional action falls under Rhode Island General Law § 16-7.1-5, also known as the Crowley Act. The Crowley Act requires that the Rhode Island Board of Education provide three years of support to schools and LEAs that fall short of performance goals, according to district strategic plans. This support includes:

- technical assistance in planning, curriculum alignment, student assessment, instruction, and family and community involvement;
- policy support;
- resource oversight; and
- creating supportive partnerships with education institutions, business, governmental, or other appropriate nonprofit agencies.

The Rhode Island Board of Education will develop what it determines to be objective criteria to measure improvement. If improvement has not been shown after three years of support, the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education can begin to take progressive levels of control over the school and/or LEA's budget, program, and/or personnel.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Title 16: Education. The Paul W. Crowley Rhode Island Student Investment Initiative. [See Title 16 Chapter 97-- The Rhode Island Board of Education Act]. <http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/Statutes/TITLE16/16-7.1/16-7.1-5.HTM>

## EQUITY POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

NCLB was commended for bringing to light the disparities in achievement by student subgroup, but its use of sanctions for underperforming schools was controversial. Research shows that in some cases, students who were forced to attend a new school due to a school closure performed better on standardized exams, but in others students were hurt academically.<sup>15</sup> Students who moved to higher performing schools were more likely to see gains, but nonwhite students and low performing students are less likely to end up at such schools.<sup>16</sup> Less than half of students affected by a school closure land in a better school.<sup>17</sup> School closures are disruptive to communities and relationships. Between 2006-2012, 1,522 schools—including traditional and charter schools—have closed in 26 states.<sup>18</sup> Regardless of whether the school was located in an urban, suburban, or rural area, overall, school closures disproportionately affect low-income and nonwhite students.<sup>19</sup> School and district takeovers also disproportionately affect low-income and nonwhite students. Nationally, nearly 85% of school districts that have been taken over have had majority Black or Latino populations.<sup>20</sup> In these ways, accountability measures too often become tools to punish under-resourced schools simply because they are under-resourced. Macroeconomic policies often exacerbate poverty, and outweigh the effects of education policies; therefore, investing in programs that mitigate the effects of poverty is the most important thing that can be done to improve achievement for low-income students.<sup>21</sup> Under ESSA, states are still required to hold schools accountable for performance. As stakeholders work to improve schools, it is imperative to invest in social supports that have been proven to help low-income children and communities progress in school.

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15 Matt Barnum. “Five Things We’ve Learned from a Decade of Research on School Closures.” Chalkbeat, February 5, 2019.

16 Ibid.

17 Chunping Han, Margaret E. Raymond, James L. Woodworth, Yohannes Negassi, W. Payton Richardson, & Will Snow. “Lights Off: Practice and Impact of Closing Low-Performing Schools.” CREDO, 2017.

18 Matt Barnum. “17 Studies That Tell Us Something About How School Closures Affect Students.” Chalkbeat, February 5, 2019.

19 Alexandra Tilsley. *Subtracting Schools from Communities*. Urban Institute, March 23, 2017.

20 Domingo Morel. *Takeover: Race, Education, and American Democracy*. New York: Oxford University, 2018; See also Matt Barnum. “When states take over school districts, they say it’s about academics. This political scientist says it’s about race and power.” Chalkbeat, June 12, 2018.

21 Jean Anyon. What “counts” as educational policy? Notes toward a new paradigm. *Harvard Educational Review*, 2005. Vol. 75(1), 65-88.

## ■ ASSESSMENT

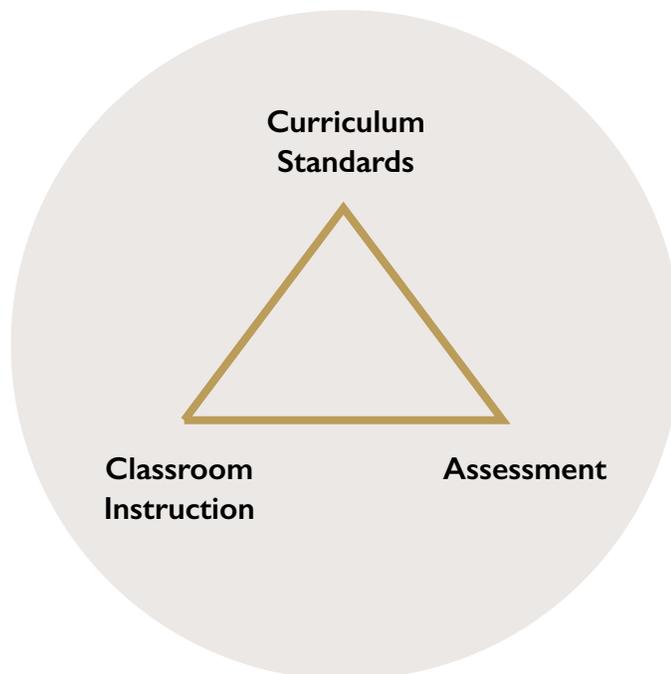
A comprehensive assessment system is a “coordinated plan for monitoring the academic achievement of students from Pre-Kindergarten through Grade 12” in the core content areas.<sup>22</sup> Formative, interim, and summative assessments are included in this system. Rhode Island’s Basic Education Program<sup>23</sup> requires that all local education agencies (LEAs) establish comprehensive curriculum, instruction, and assessment standards that are internationally benchmarked.

Assessments are a critical component of teaching and learning. Formative assessments are used to inform instructional decisions. Teachers may use the results of a formative assessment to determine whether or not a student is ready to learn a new topic, or to determine the need to reteach a particular concept. Formative assessments tend to be brief and frequent, such as questioning students in class or administering a lesson quiz. Summative assessments are typically used to summarize how well students met the objectives of a particular unit or course of study. They are often used to make a final evaluation, or for accountability purposes, and can take the form of classroom unit exams or state standardized tests. Interim assessments can be administered at the classroom or district level. Interim assessments serve a variety of purposes, including monitoring progress toward meeting overall goals.<sup>24</sup>

### Alignment

Assessments are most useful when they clearly align with classroom instruction and curriculum standards (see Figure 4.1). For instance, if there is no alignment, or “match,” between classroom instruction and an assessment, students are not being prepared in class to do well on that assessment. If there is no alignment between curriculum standards and an assessment, the exam is not a good measure of how well students are learning the curriculum standards.

**Figure 4.1 Curriculum-Instruction-Assessment Alignment**



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22 “Comprehensive Assessment System: Rhode Island Criteria & Guidance.” Rhode Island Department of Education.

23 The Basic Education Program (BEP) is a set of regulations crafted by the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education.

24 “Comprehensive Assessment System: Rhode Island Criteria & Guidance.” Rhode Island Department of Education.

Rhode Island’s accountability system uses assessments to inform students, teachers, parents, policymakers, and other stakeholders on student performance. Table 4.1 lists the assessments in Rhode Island’s accountability system.

**Table 4.1 Rhode Island’s Assessments**

Assessment	Description	Grade Level and Subject Area
WIDA (World-class Instructional Design and Assessment) ACCESS 2.0 for ELLs	An annual measurement of English language proficiency of English language learners (ELL). ACCESS assesses the language domains of listening, reading, speaking, and writing. All ELL students are expected to take the ACCESS assessment. <sup>25</sup>	1-12
Alternate ACCESS for ELLs	An annual measurement of English language proficiency of English language learners with significant cognitive disabilities. All ELL students are expected to take the ACCESS assessment. <sup>26</sup>	1-12
Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM)	First administered in 2018. Designed for students with significant cognitive disabilities, about 1% of the student population. At the high school level, administered as an alternative to the SAT School Day. <sup>27</sup>	3-8, 11 English language arts (ELA) & Math 5, 8, 11 Science
PSAT 10	Starting in 2017-18, administered to all 10 <sup>th</sup> grade students.	10, Reading, Writing, & Math
SAT School Day	Starting in 2017-18, administered to all 11 <sup>th</sup> grade students.	11, Reading, Writing, & Math
Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS)	First administered in 2018. Aligned to the Common Core State Standards.	3-8 ELA & Math
Rhode Island Next Generation Science Assessment (RI NGSA)	First administered in May 2018. Aligned to the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS).	5, 8, & 11 Science

Source: Rhode Island Department of Education

25 Rhode Island Accessibility and Accommodations Policies: 2018-2019. Rhode Island Department of Education.

26 Ibid.

27 There is no alternate assessment for the PSAT 10. Tenth grade students who would participate in an alternate assessment will not take a state test. See Rhode Island Department of Education. Assessment: PSAT10 and SAT School Day. <http://ride.ri.gov/InstructionAssessment/Assessment.aspx>

## Performance Assessments

Performance assessments are designed to determine students' ability to think critically and creatively. Performance assessments are considered “authentic” when they resemble the type of work done in real-world contexts.<sup>28</sup> Performance assessments can be formative, interim, or summative. Rhode Island requires completion of one performance-based diploma assessment in order to graduate high school. The assessment allows students to demonstrate deep content knowledge in one or more subject areas, and application of their learning.

## College Entrance Exams

At the high school level, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) gives states flexibility to use nationally recognized college entrance exams as their English language arts (ELA) and mathematics assessments.<sup>29</sup> Rhode Island is one of 25 states that require high school students to participate in the SAT or ACT exam, although not all states use the tests for accountability purposes.<sup>30</sup> Some argue that when the SAT or ACT are used for the state's accountability measures, teachers may be tempted to let the test drive classroom instruction. This is especially problematic wherever the state standards and the test content do not align.<sup>31</sup> Proponents embrace use of the SAT and ACT to reduce the number of tests high school students take, and to encourage pursuit of higher education.<sup>32</sup>

## EQUITY POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Assessments are important for student learning, but many assessments do not provide feedback to improve student learning. Importantly, standardized assessments have been shown repeatedly to favor white students and students from more affluent families. Tying high-stakes decisions, such as high school graduation or school closures, to standardized test scores unduly punishes students in under-resourced communities. The validity of standardized tests is such a concern that the College Board—the organization which manages the SAT exam—proposed adding an “adversity score” to account for the potential disadvantage students might have on the exam.<sup>33</sup> After considerable backlash, the College Board later withdrew this proposal, leaving the decision to consider adversity factors up to individual colleges and universities. Notably, many colleges and universities recognize that test scores are not the best predictor of academic potential, and therefore do not require the SAT (or ACT) for admission.

Under ESSA, there are opportunities for states to change the future of assessment. At least one state has piloted an assessment system that combines traditional, standardized testing with

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28 “What is Performance-Based Assessment?” School Redesign Network at Stanford University, 2008.

29 Scott Marion. “What’s Wrong with High School Testing and What Can We Do About It?” Center for Assessment, April 2018.

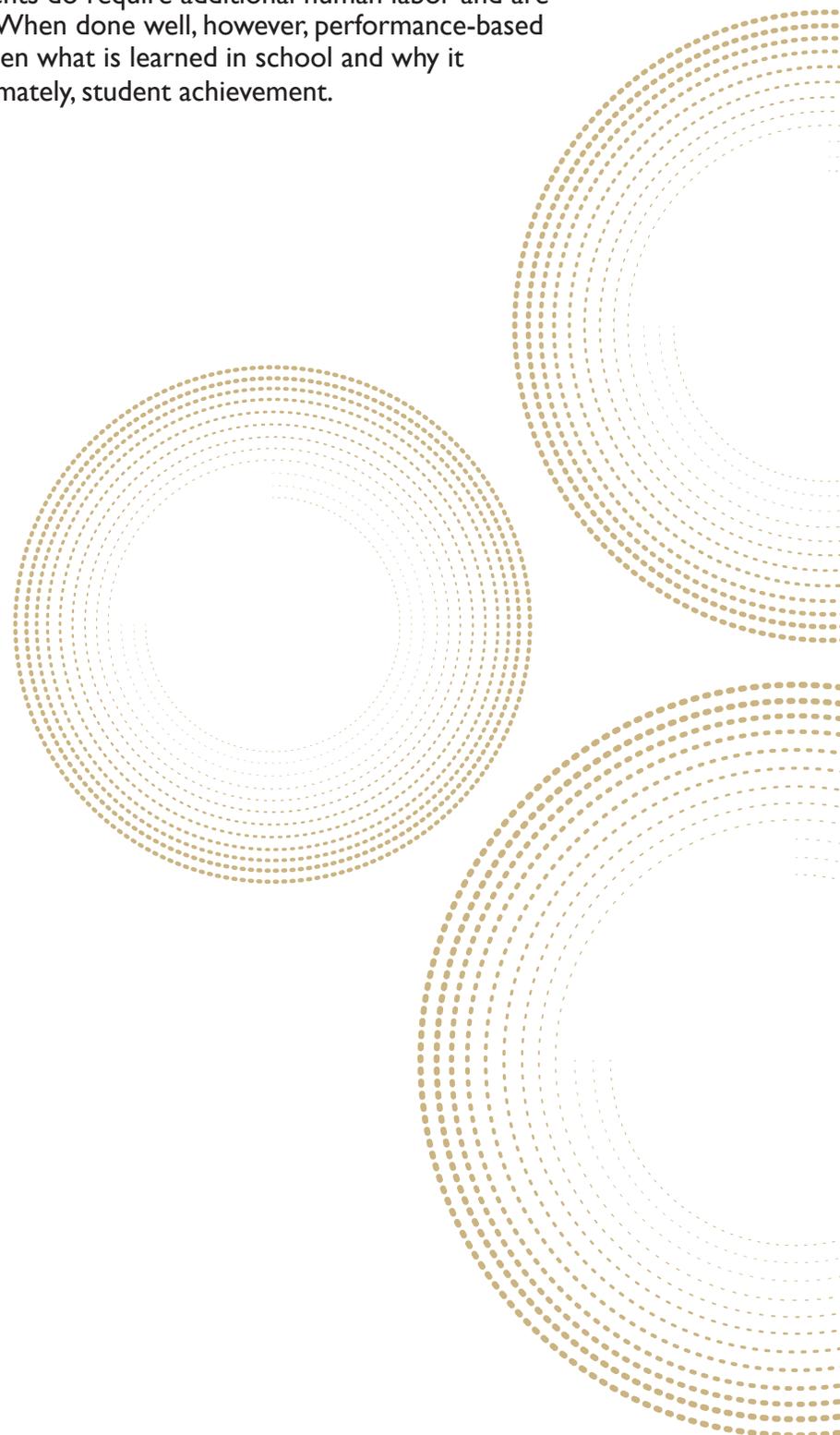
30 Catherine Gewertz. “What Tests Does Each State Require?” Education Week, March 5, 2019.

31 What Gets Tested Gets Taught: Cautions for Using College Admissions Tests in State Accountability Systems. Achieve, March 2018.

32 Catherine Gewertz. “Will States Swap Standards-Based Tests for SAT, ACT?” Education Week, January 4, 2016.

33 Scott Jaschik. “New SAT Score: Adversity.” Inside Higher Ed, May 20, 2019.

performance-based assessments.<sup>34</sup> Early results show that students with disabilities in the pilot districts show dramatic academic improvement compared to their peers.<sup>35</sup> Authentic, performance-based assessments provide more equitable opportunities for students from diverse racial, cultural, economic, and linguistic backgrounds to demonstrate what they know and are able to do. Performance-based assessments do require additional human labor and are not as efficient to score as standardized exams. When done well, however, performance-based assessments make the critical connection between what is learned in school and why it matters, thereby increasing engagement and ultimately, student achievement.



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<sup>34</sup> Lola Duffort. “New Hampshire’s testing pilot, PACE, gaining ground.” *Concord Monitor*, August 19, 2017.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* See also Ace Parsi. “Performance Assessments and Students with Disabilities.” *Education Week*, September 25, 2017.

## ■ CHOICES IN EDUCATION

*School choice refers broadly to the ability of parents to select the best schools for their children, even if that school is not the one assigned to them by their public school district.*

The school choice debate is often traced to Milton Friedman, an economist who introduced the contemporary idea of school vouchers as a way to opt out of public schools. John Chubb and Terry Moe's arguments in 1990, however, contributed to the political pressure to make school choice a reality for millions of students today.<sup>36</sup> Chubb and Moe insisted that the bureaucracy of public schools was an impediment to student achievement, and school choice was the best solution to the problems in public education. Placing schools in the "free market" where parents could choose which schools their children attend would pressure schools to improve their services. Those that could compete would attract more students; those that could not would be forced to close.

The majority of U.S. students continue to attend traditional neighborhood public schools, but the number of school choice options has increased considerably over the past 30 years. Because school choice is more carefully regulated in Rhode Island, there is less of a free market than can be found in other states. Still, students in Rhode Island have the option to be homeschooled, attend a private school, or choose from a menu of public choice options, including charter schools.

### RHODE ISLAND'S PUBLIC CHOICE OPTIONS

There are currently 61 public local education agencies (LEAs), or school districts, in Rhode Island. Among these, there are 32 regular school districts, 4 regional school districts, 4 state-operated schools, 1 regional collaborative LEA, and 20 charter districts.

#### Regular & Regional School Districts

Regular school districts in Rhode Island are public districts that serve a single municipality. Regional school districts serve two or more municipalities. The four regional school districts in Rhode Island are Bristol Warren, Exeter-West Greenwich, Foster-Glocester, and Chariho.<sup>37</sup> Open enrollment is a choice option available within or across public school districts. In some states, including Rhode Island, open enrollment is voluntary; school districts can choose to let a student transfer. In other states, open enrollment is mandatory and the school district is required by law to let a student transfer. Many states have both voluntary and mandatory open enrollment policies. Forty-seven states and the District of Columbia offer some form of open enrollment.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> John L. Rury. *Education and Social Change: Contours in the History of American Schooling*, 4th ed. Routledge, 2013.

<sup>37</sup> Chariho Regional School District serves Charlestown, Richmond, and Hopkinton. See <https://www.chariho.k12.ri.us>.

<sup>38</sup> Micah Ann Wixom & Tom Keily. "50-State Comparison: Open Enrollment Policies (2018 Update)." Education Commission of the States, October 30, 2018.



## State-Operated Schools

State-operated schools are public schools designed to meet unique needs for different populations of students across the state. The four state-operated schools currently in Rhode Island are Davies Career and Technical High School, Department of Children Youth & Families (DCYF), Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center (The Met), and Rhode Island School for the Deaf. Students attending Davies Career and Technical High School have an opportunity to earn certification in an area of industry after graduation. DCYF is responsible for all Rhode Island children and families involved in child protection, behavioral health, and juvenile justice. The Met is a network of six small, public high schools in Providence and Newport. Some of The Met's distinguishing features are real-world learning, personalization, authentic assessment, and an advisor to help manage each student's learning plans. Rhode Island School for the Deaf serves deaf and hard-of-hearing students in the state.

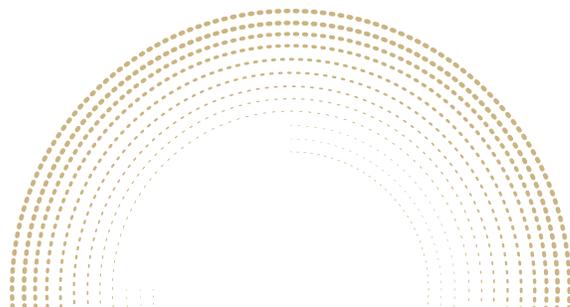
## Collaboratives

The Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program (UCAP) is a Providence-based middle school. It partners with school districts to identify and support students at risk of dropping out of school, and helps students to catch up with their grade-level peers so that they can return to high school.

## Charter Schools

Charter schools are publicly funded independent schools. In general, charter schools receive flexibility from certain requirements with the expectation that they will outperform traditional public schools on measures of academic achievement. As of 2017, 44 states and the District of Columbia have charter school laws. Each state has different rules regarding who can authorize a charter school. Authorizers may be higher education institutions, a local or state education agency, a nonprofit organization, an independent chartering board, or a non-educational government entity.

In Rhode Island, only the state education agency—the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education—can authorize new charter schools. The council authorizes three types of charter schools in Rhode Island: district, independent, and mayoral academies.



## Figure 5.1 Rhode Island's Charter Schools

### **District Charter Schools**

Schools created by existing public schools, groups of public school personnel, public school districts, or a group of school districts.

### **Independent Charter Schools**

Schools created by: (a) Rhode Island nonprofit organizations, provided that these nonprofit organizations shall have existed for at least two years and must exist for a substantial reason other than to operate a school, or (b) Colleges or universities within the State of Rhode Island.

### **Mayoral Academies**

Schools created by a mayor of any city or town within the State of Rhode Island, acting by or through a nonprofit organization (regardless of the time said nonprofit organization is in existence) to establish a mayoral academy. A mayor must serve as chairperson of the charter public school board.

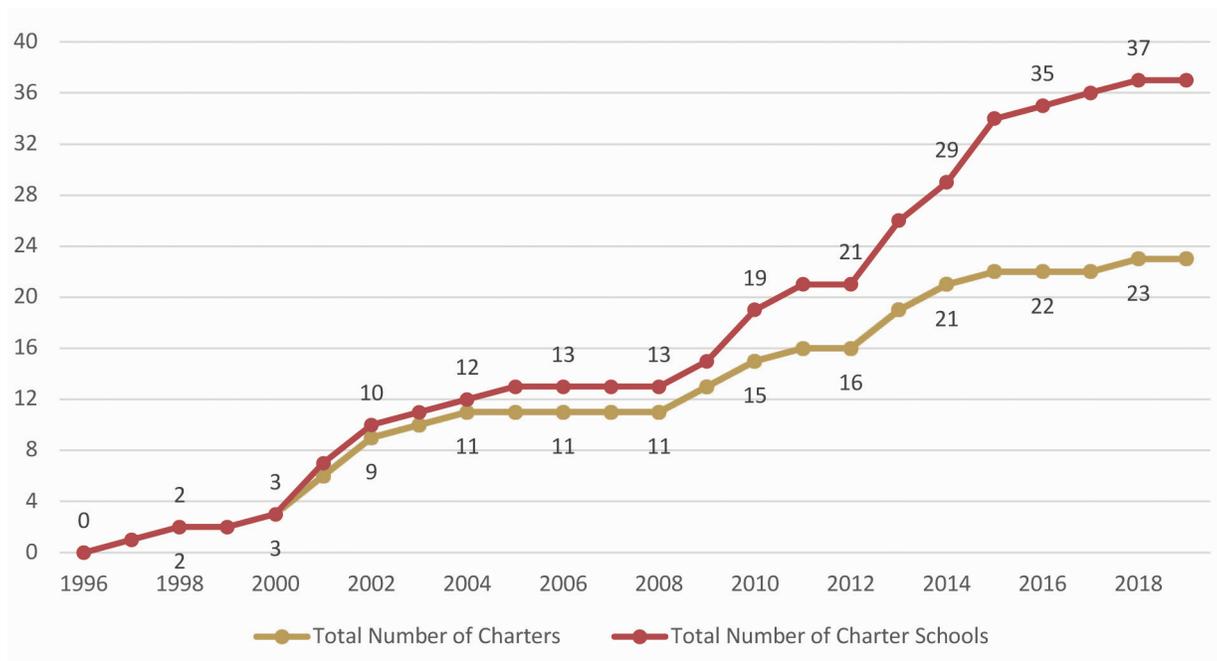
*Source: Rhode Island's Charter Schools. Rhode Island Department of Education.*

Rhode Island's charter school law was established in 1995 through an act of the General Assembly. This first act allowed for district charter schools. Several years later, the law was amended to allow nonprofit organizations and colleges and universities to establish charter schools. In 2008, the law was amended again to allow mayors to establish regional charter schools. Rhode Island currently limits the total number of charters to 35, although multiple locations can be opened under the same charter.<sup>39</sup> Rhode Island's charter school regulations require that all proposals include evidence of need and community support for any proposed charter school. The proposal must also have a plan for identifying and successfully serving students with disabilities, emergent bilingual students, students who are "academically behind," and gifted students. Figure 5.2 shows the growth in the number of charters and charter schools in Rhode Island and Figure 5.3 shows the growth in charter school enrollment.

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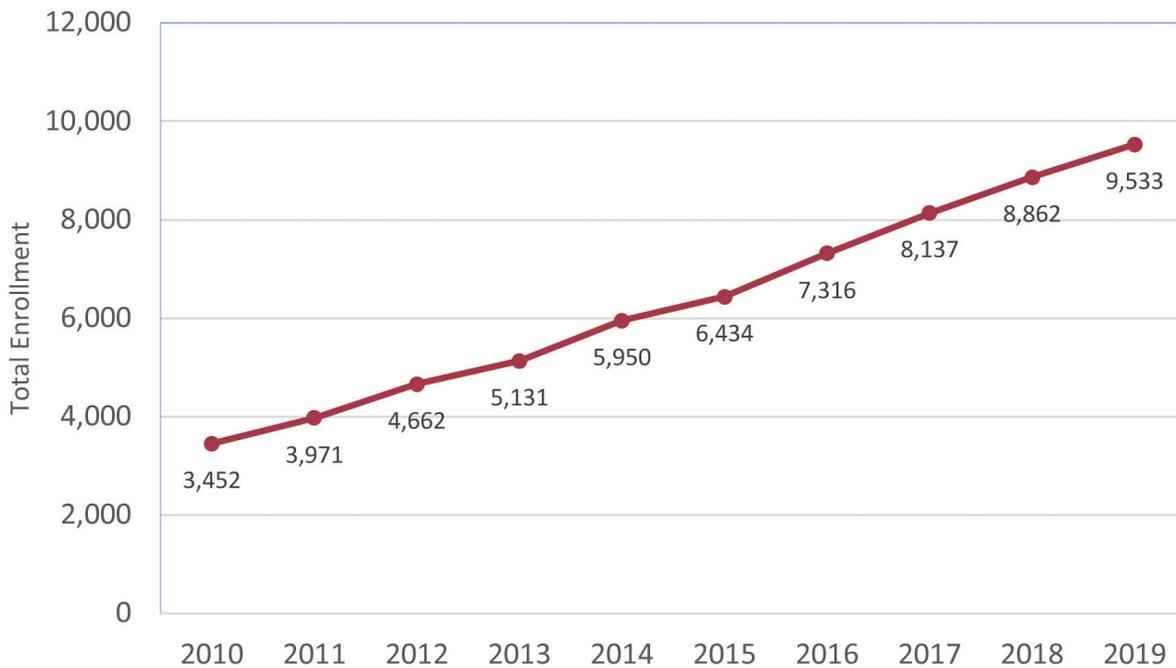
<sup>39</sup> For example, Blackstone Valley Prep Mayoral Academy has three elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school under its charter. For more information on charter policy, see Title 16: Education. Establishment of Charter Public Schools. [See Title 16 Chapter 97—The Rhode Island Board of Education Act]. <http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/Statutes/TITLE16/16-77/16-77-3.1.HTM>

**Figure 5.2 Charter Growth in Rhode Island, 1996-2019.**



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education.

**Figure 5.3 Rhode Island Charter School Enrollment, 2010-2019**



Source: October 1 Enrollments in Charter LEAs, Rhode Island Department of Education.

## OTHER CHOICE OPTIONS

### Home School

In Rhode Island, requests to home school are made at the local school district level. The state does not directly supervise homeschooling. Rhode Island students who are homeschooled do not receive a diploma at the end of grade 12, but they are allowed to take the graduate equivalency diploma (G.E.D.) test. Some districts provide a “certificate of completion.”<sup>40</sup> Approximately 3% of students nationwide are homeschooled.<sup>41</sup>

### Private Schools

In 2002, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Zelman vs. Simmons-Harris* that publicly funded vouchers to attend private, religious schools were not in violation of the Establishment Clause. School choice advocates often insist that school funding allocations should follow the child, regardless of the type of school chosen. Some current methods to support private school choice include vouchers, educational savings accounts, and tax credits and deductions.

### Figure 5.3 Initiatives Supporting Private School Choice

**Vouchers** are state funds used to offset part or all of the cost of private school tuition. Each state has its own guidelines for who is eligible to receive a voucher. Some examples of these guidelines are that eligible students come from a “failing” school district, have a disability, or come from families below a certain income level. In a few states, there are no such requirements. Fourteen states and the District of Columbia (not including Rhode Island) currently operate a state-funded voucher program.<sup>42</sup>

**Educational Savings Accounts (ESAs)** are government authorized accounts. Parents receive a portion of the funding that would otherwise have been spent on their child’s public education, and then apply those funds to a school of their choice, or other services such as tutoring, online learning programs, or college tuition. Five states (not including Rhode Island) have an active ESA program.<sup>43</sup>

**Individual Tax Credits or Tax Deductions** are available to individuals or corporations who contribute to a scholarship organization. The scholarships are similar to vouchers in that they are given to students to attend a school of their choice.<sup>44</sup> Seventeen states, including Rhode Island, offer scholarship tax credits.<sup>45</sup>

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40 “Home Schooling: Frequently Asked Questions.” Rhode Island Department of Education. RIDE’s website encourages parents who have questions about home schooling regulations to contact their local school districts or the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Legal Office.

41 U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Parent Survey and Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey of the National Household Education Surveys Program, 2016.

[https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d17/tables/dt17\\_206.10.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d17/tables/dt17_206.10.asp)

42 Micah Ann Wixom. “50-State Comparison: Vouchers.” Education Commission of the States, March 6, 2017.

43 What is an Education Savings Account? EdChoice. <https://www.edchoice.org>

44 Robert G. Owens & Thomas C. Valesky. *Organizational Behavior in Education: Leadership and School Reform*, 11th ed. Pearson, 2015.

45 Micah Ann Wixom & Karole Dachelet. “An Overview of Scholarship Tax Credit Programs.” Education Commission of the States, January 2019.

Rhode Island's Tax Credit Scholarship Program makes private education more accessible for some families. Rhode Island's Tax Credit Scholarship Program was enacted in 2006 and launched in 2007.<sup>46</sup> Families can apply for a scholarship funded through the Rhode Island Scholarship Tax Credit. To qualify, the family's annual household income cannot exceed 250% of the federal poverty level. The scholarship is only available for participating schools, and not all eligible students are guaranteed a scholarship.<sup>47</sup>

Eligible businesses can make a one-year or two-year commitment to the scholarship tax credit program. Businesses receive a 75% tax credit for a one-year commitment, and a 90% tax credit with a two-year commitment. The scholarship tax credit program is capped at \$1.5 million. In 2018, 397 students received a scholarship; the average scholarship value was \$3,416.<sup>48</sup>

## EQUITY POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

School choice has a long, contentious history based on ideological differences about the role of public education in society. Should education be a common good that is shared and invested in collectively for the betterment of society? Is education a commodity that should be responsive to individual consumers? What complicates the answer to these questions is that wealthier families have always had a choice to move to communities with high performing schools, or to pay for a private education. Lower income families typically cannot exercise these options. School choice advocates insist that this is one reason to expand access to other opportunities, particularly publicly-funded charter schools. As charter enrollment grows, however, some Rhode Island school districts will experience a loss in revenue for traditional public schools.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, research indicates that charter schools have increased segregation in many U.S. school districts by race, socioeconomic status, and language.<sup>50</sup> School choice models absent structural systems to maintain racial diversity ultimately lead to hyper segregation, and hyper segregation correlates with lower academic outcomes for students of color.<sup>51</sup> Rhode Island's mayoral academies are unique in this regard; they are "intentionally diverse" and draw students from multiple neighboring districts.

Student performance with choice programs has been mixed; older voucher studies showed some promise, but recent studies show that use of vouchers can lead to poorer performance on state exams.<sup>52</sup> Charter school performance is also conflicting, with some demonstrating strong performance on standardized exams, and others performing comparably, or sometimes worse, than traditional public schools. Wide variations in state and district charter policies make it difficult to draw clear, universal conclusions on charter schools' effectiveness.<sup>53</sup> Overall, school choice reform efforts have yet to show that reliance solely on the free market can correct a problem that has been exacerbated by systemic housing and education policies.

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46 Fast Facts. EdChoice. <https://www.edchoice.org>

47 Rhode Island Scholarship Alliance. <http://rischolarshipalliance.org>

48 Rhode Island—Tax Credits For Contributions to Scholarship Organizations. EdChoice. <https://www.edchoice.org>

49 When students leave a traditional public school for a charter school, the district experiences a loss in state revenue, and it must relinquish the local funding for educating that student. Combined, this yields a net amount that districts must find ways to save in their budgets in order to "break even." For more details, see Hearings before the Special Legislative Task Force to Study Rhode Island's Education Funding Formula, October 16, 2019. For more information on how schools are funded, see the chapter on Finance and Funding.

50 Tomas Monarrez, Brian Kisida, & Matthew Chingos. "Charter School Effects on School Segregation." Urban Institute, July 24, 2019.

51 Philip Tegeler & Michael Hilton. "Disrupting the reciprocal relationship between housing and school segregation." President and Fellows of Harvard College, 2017.

52 Matt Barnum. "Do school vouchers 'work'? As the debate heats up, here's what research really says." Chalkbeat, July 12, 2017.

53 Chris Geary. "A Call for Nuance: Reframing the Charter School Debate." Kennedy School Review, February 20, 2019.

## ■ CURRICULUM & STANDARDS

The Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) defines curriculum as “a standards-based sequence of planned experiences where students practice and achieve proficiency in content and applied learning skills.”<sup>54</sup> Curriculum includes goals that describe what students are to learn; methods that teachers use to engage students in that learning; materials that support that learning; and assessment to document what and to what extent a student has learned.

In 1983, Secretary of Education Terrel Bell produced *A Nation at Risk*. It remains “one of the most influential federal documents ever published.”<sup>55</sup> Using data from student performance on standardized exams, *A Nation at Risk* declared that U.S. schools were failing. The report’s urgency with its findings is expressed in this quote:

If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war.<sup>56</sup>

The report made several proposals in an attempt to strengthen the U.S. education system. Among them was a recommendation for specific course content in high school, and more rigorous and measurable curriculum standards. One recommendation prescribed 4 years of English, and 3 years of mathematics, science, and social studies. The report also recommended one-half year of computer science, and students who planned to attend college were to take 2 years of foreign language. *A Nation at Risk* caused a panic that was mostly unfounded. In reality, most student subgroups were showing steady or slightly improving performance on nearly every academic measure at the time of the report.<sup>57</sup> Still, the influence of the report’s recommendations is ubiquitous in U.S. high school course curriculum and graduation requirements.

### CURRICULUM STANDARDS

Curriculum standards are the goals that describe what students should know and be able to do at each grade level. Rhode Island uses a combination of state and national standards.<sup>58</sup>

**Table 6.1 Rhode Island’s Curriculum Standards**

Content Area	Standards
English Language Arts (ELA)/ Literacy	Common Core State Standards for ELA & Literacy
Mathematics	Common Core State Standards for Mathematics
Science	The Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS)
Civics & Social Studies	Rhode Island Grade Span Expectations (GSEs) for Social Studies
Dance, Media Arts, Music, Theater, Visual Arts	National Core Art Standards (NCAS)
Health Education	Rhode Island’s Health Education Standards
Physical Education	Rhode Island Physical Education Standards
Financial Literacy	National Standards for Financial Literacy
Computer Science	Rhode Island Computer Science Standards

Source: Rhode Island Department of Education

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54 For RIDE’s full definition of curriculum, see Rhode Island Department of Education. Curriculum.

<http://ride.ri.gov/InstructionAssessment/Curriculum.aspx>

55 Dana Goldstein. *The Teacher Wars: A History of America’s Most Embattled Profession*. Doubleday, 2014.

56 *A Nation at Risk*. <https://www2.ed.gov/pubs/NatAtRisk/risk.html>

57 Anya Kamenetz. “What ‘A Nation At Risk’ Got Wrong, And Right, About U.S. Schools.” NPR, April 29, 2018.

58 Rhode Island Department of Education. Instruction and Assessment.

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/InstructionAssessment/Overview.aspx>

Although curriculum standards are determined by the state, individual districts currently make their own decisions about what curriculum materials to use. Some districts adopt an already developed curriculum; many districts develop curriculum locally. Results from a 2018-2019 state-wide curriculum survey determined that 37% of K-8 math curriculum and 56% of K-8 reading curriculum were developed at the local level.<sup>59</sup> Variations in the quality of curriculum can lead to inequitable outcomes for students. Senate Bill 0863 and House Bill 5008B, passed in June 2019, require the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education to align statewide academic standards with curriculum and the Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS). The legislation also calls for a process to identify high quality curriculum and materials aligned with the standards, frameworks, and the state standardized test, and to provide support to local education agencies (LEAs).<sup>60</sup> A goal of this legislation is to help ensure that there is consistency in what students are learning state-wide.

## Common Core Standards

In 2009, governors and state commissioners from 48 states, two territories, and the District of Columbia collaborated to draft a set of common academic standards for students in grades K-12. The goal was to develop consistent expectations in mathematics and English language arts (ELA) so that students graduating from any high school in the U.S. were prepared for postsecondary success in college, training programs, or the workforce. The process to develop the standards included the National Education Association, the American Federation of Teachers, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, and the National Council of Teachers of English, among other organizations. Most states, including Rhode Island, adopted the Common Core standards in 2010, with a few more adopting in 2011 or 2012. Several states have chosen not to adopt, or have repealed their decision to adopt the standards, at times citing a high cost of alignment and implementation, or a belief that the standards are an example of federal overreach in education.<sup>61</sup> Some critics claim that the accountability measures often tied to the standards narrow teachers' focus on math and ELA. In spite of these and other critiques, most states continue to use the Common Core standards for their K-12 math and/or ELA curriculum.<sup>62</sup>

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59 RIDE describes locally developed curriculum as that which is written by teachers/organizations, or is a blend of curriculum materials. Fifty-two LEAs responded to the curriculum survey, which was conducted by EdReports. See RIDE's 2018-2019 Curriculum Survey Report.

60 Curriculum Act. S 0863. State of Rhode Island, May 8, 2019.

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText19/SenateText19/S0863.pdf>; Curriculum Alignment and Standards for All Students Act. H 5008 Sub B. State of Rhode Island, January 3, 2019.

<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText19/HouseText19/H5008B.pdf>

61 Although the Common Core standards were developed among state leaders, states increased their chances of success at winning a federal Race to the Top grant if they adopted the Common Core or other standards that were similar in their ability to prepare students for "college and careers."

62 Common Core State Standards Initiative. <http://www.corestandards.org>



## GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

Table 6.2 shows the minimum requirements to earn a high school diploma in Rhode Island.

**Table 6.2 Minimum Requirements to Earn a High School Diploma in Rhode Island**

Requirement	
Successful completion of 20 courses	4 ELA courses 4 Mathematics courses 3 Science courses 3 Social Studies courses 6 Additional courses which may include physical education and health, the arts, technology, and foreign language
Demonstrated proficiency in 6 core areas	ELA, math, science, social studies, the arts, technology
Completion of one performance-based diploma system	Graduation portfolio, student exhibitions, senior project, and/or a capstone project

*Source: Rhode Island Department of Education. Local LEAs may set additional requirements for graduation.*

### Special High School Graduate Designations

Beginning with the graduating class of 2021, students can earn additional recognition by meeting an established benchmark on standardized exams. To earn the Commissioner's Seal, students must meet the benchmark in both ELA and mathematics. To earn a Seal of Biliteracy, students must meet the benchmark in ELA and another world language. Graduating seniors in 2021 can also earn a Pathway Endorsement by completing 3 components in one of six disciplines: the arts; business and industry; public service; science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM); and teaching. The three components required to earn the endorsement are independent, connected coursework; work-based learning; and a performance-based diploma assessment.

## EQUITY POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Rhode Island is primed to make an important shift in K-12 education. Policymakers are emphasizing the importance of adopting curriculum standards and frameworks that will meet the needs of diverse learners. This is an opportune time to make sure that each district's curriculum materials reflect the cultural, racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity in our state and our nation. Culturally responsive curriculum is one component of a culturally responsive education that can meet the needs of Rhode Island's student population. Culturally responsive education accentuates the strengths of diverse student populations and challenges instructors to be inclusive of the diversity in their classrooms.<sup>63</sup> Any serious commitment to improving academic achievement will require a commitment to centering students' identities and interests in the school curriculum.

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63 Evan M. Johnston, Pamela D'Andrea Montalbano, & David E. Kirkland. "Culturally Responsive Education: A Primer for Policy and Practice." Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools, New York University, 2017.

## ■ FINANCE AND FUNDING

Education finance refers to the processes by which revenues are generated, distributed, and expended to support schools.<sup>64</sup> Although no state's finance system is perfect, progressive state school finance systems attempt to address the needs of children in poverty and support competitive teacher wages. Such finance systems should be systematic, or predictable, across a state's school districts.<sup>65</sup>

In the landmark 1973 case *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez*, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled against a group of parents who claimed that inequitable funding for their low wealth Texas school district violated their children's rights to a quality education. Insisting that the U.S. Constitution does not guarantee a fundamental right to education, the Court left subsequent fights over school funding up to the states.<sup>66</sup> Although the constitutions of each of the 50 states guarantee a public education system, the language in each state's constitution "has consequences for how schools are funded in each state."<sup>67</sup>

### Figure 7.1 Article XII of Rhode Island's Constitution

#### **Section 1. Duty of general assembly to promote schools and libraries.**

The diffusion of knowledge, as well as of virtue among the people, being essential to the preservation of their rights and liberties, it shall be the duty of the general assembly to promote public schools and public libraries, and to adopt all means which it may deem necessary and proper to secure to the people the advantages and opportunities of education and public library services.

#### **Section 2. Perpetual school fund.**

The money which now is or which may hereafter be appropriated by law for the establishment of a permanent fund for the support of public schools, shall be securely invested and remain a perpetual fund for that purpose.

Source: *1986 Constitution of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations*. State of Rhode Island General Assembly.

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64 James W. Guthrie & Patrick J. Schuermann. "Education Finance." Oxford Bibliographies, December 15, 2011.

65 Bruce Baker. "Toward a Consensus Approach to Evaluating State School Finance Systems! (and dumping the others!)." SchoolFinance101.wordpress.com, 2018.

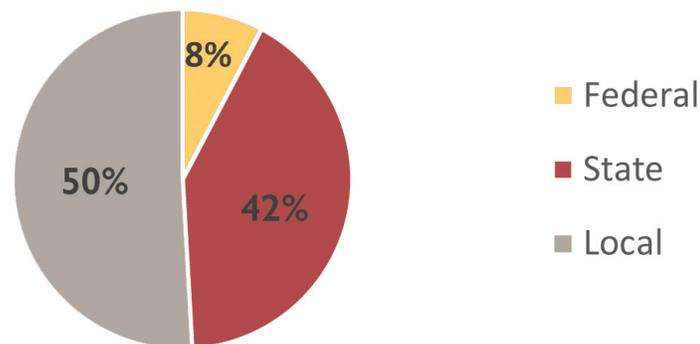
66 Michael A. Rebell. "Educational Adequacy, Democracy, and the Courts." The National Academies Press, 2002.

67 Emily Parker. "50-State Review: Constitutional Obligations for Public Education." Education Commission of the States, March 2016.

## FUNDING BASICS

In nearly every state, schools are supported by a combination of local, state, and federal dollars.<sup>68</sup> Although several states may raise local funds through income, sales, and other taxes, most states rely heavily on property taxes. In an attempt to equalize funding for higher wealth and lower income communities, state dollars are often used to supplement this local share. States apply one of three general funding formula types: student-based funding, funding based on the amount of resources a school needs to operate, and funding based on the programs a school runs.<sup>69</sup> The majority of states, including Rhode Island, use a student-based funding formula, starting with the cost to educate a student without special needs or disadvantages.

**Figure 7.2 Rhode Island Public School Revenues by Source, Fiscal Year 2017**



Source: “National Public Education Financial Survey.” U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), Fiscal Year 2017.

Although the Supreme Court essentially left most funding decisions up to the states, the federal government influences state funding, and thereby state policy, through financial incentives. In 2009, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) provided some relief to cash-strapped districts negatively affected by the Great Recession. One initiative of ARRA was Race to the Top, a competitive grant that offered funding to states committed to advancing key education policies.<sup>70</sup> In order to compete for the grant, 34 states changed their laws or policies on education.<sup>71</sup> Among these was Rhode Island, which had to change its status as the only state without a funding formula for its public schools. In 2009-2010, Rhode Island’s school funding research team began working on a new formula. The final legislation on the formula was signed by the governor on June 23, 2010.

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<sup>68</sup> Some states do not have specific expectations that local communities help to pay for public schools, although among them, most make an allowance to raise funds for particular expenses. See <http://funded.edbuild.org/national#local-share>

<sup>69</sup> “Key Elements of Funding.” EdBuild. <http://funded.edbuild.org>

<sup>70</sup> Race to the Top was a \$4 billion program spanning 2009-2015. States that won awards were expected to implement reforms around college- and career-ready standards and assessment; informative data systems; teacher recruitment, development, and retention; and school improvement. For more information on Race to the Top, visit <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/index.html>.

<sup>71</sup> Dana Goldstein. *The Teacher Wars: A History of America’s Most Embattled Profession*. Doubleday, 2014.

## KEY ASPECTS OF THE RHODE ISLAND FUNDING FORMULA

- 1. Core instructional cost for each student.** The core instructional cost was determined by averaging the costs of instruction (for students without special needs) in four New England states—Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island. The cost is adjusted each year based on the Consumer Price Index.
- 2. Student success factor.** The student success factor allocates additional funding to children who qualify for free and reduced-price lunch. The factor is 40% of the average pupil instructional cost. To prevent districts from over-identifying emergent bilingual students or special education students and to instead encourage mainstreaming when appropriate, the student success factor is not tied to these populations. Instead, categorical funding supports emergent bilingual and special education students.
- 3. State and local dollars follow the student.** If a student enrolls in a charter school, state and local funding follows the student.
- 4. State share ratio.** A mathematical formula is used to determine the amount of state aid each district should receive. Using a quadratic mean, the formula combines community property values—adjusted for median family income—and the concentration of Pre-K through grade 6 students living in poverty. The formula results in the larger of these two values having greater weight in determining the amount of state aid.<sup>72</sup>

**Figure 7.3 Formula Aid Calculation**



Source: Ken Wagner. “Funding Formula Reference Guide.” Rhode Island Department of Education, Spring 2018.

**Categorical funding** is funding designated for a particular purpose. Table 7.1 shows the amount of categorical funding provided in fiscal year (FY) 2020.

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<sup>72</sup> Kenneth Wong. “The Design of the Rhode Island School Funding Formula: Toward a Coherent System of Allocating State Aid to Public Schools.” Center for American Progress, August 2011; Ken Wagner. “Funding Formula Reference Guide.” Rhode Island Department of Education, Spring 2018.

**Table 7.1 Categorical Funding Amounts for Fiscal Year 2020**

Category	Change from Enacted (in millions)	Total Funding (in millions)
Transportation	\$0.0	\$7.4
Early Childhood	9.3	15.6
High-Cost Special Education	-	4.5
Career & Technical Schools	-	4.5
English Learners	2.3	5.0
Public School Choice Density	(0.5)	0.0
Regionalization Bonus	-	-
Group Home Aid	(0.3)	3.2
School Resource Officer Support	(1.0)	1.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$9.8</b>	<b>\$41.2</b>

Source: FY 2020 Education Aid. Senate Fiscal Office.

Categorical funding ensures that districts spend money on the expense for which it was allocated. Yet categorical funding also limits districts’ flexibility to apply funding to different areas of need. Because it is subject to annual appropriations, it is subject to changes in the political climate and therefore is not a stable source of funding.<sup>73</sup>

One benefit of using categorical funds for emergent bilingual students in Rhode Island is that districts were able to receive funding immediately after the formula changes went into effect. Funding provided by the formula weights was phased in over a ten-year period so that districts would not experience the full extent of the redistribution of funds for several years. Governor Gina Raimondo made categorical funding for emergent bilingual students permanent in 2017, but the amounts are still variable each year.<sup>74</sup> The fund provides an additional 10% of the per-pupil core instruction amount for each qualified emergent bilingual student. The amount is then multiplied by the state share ratio (see Figure 7.4).

**Figure 7.4 Formula for Funding Emergent Bilingual Students**



Source: Ken Wagner. “Funding Formula Reference Guide.” Rhode Island Department of Education, Spring 2018.

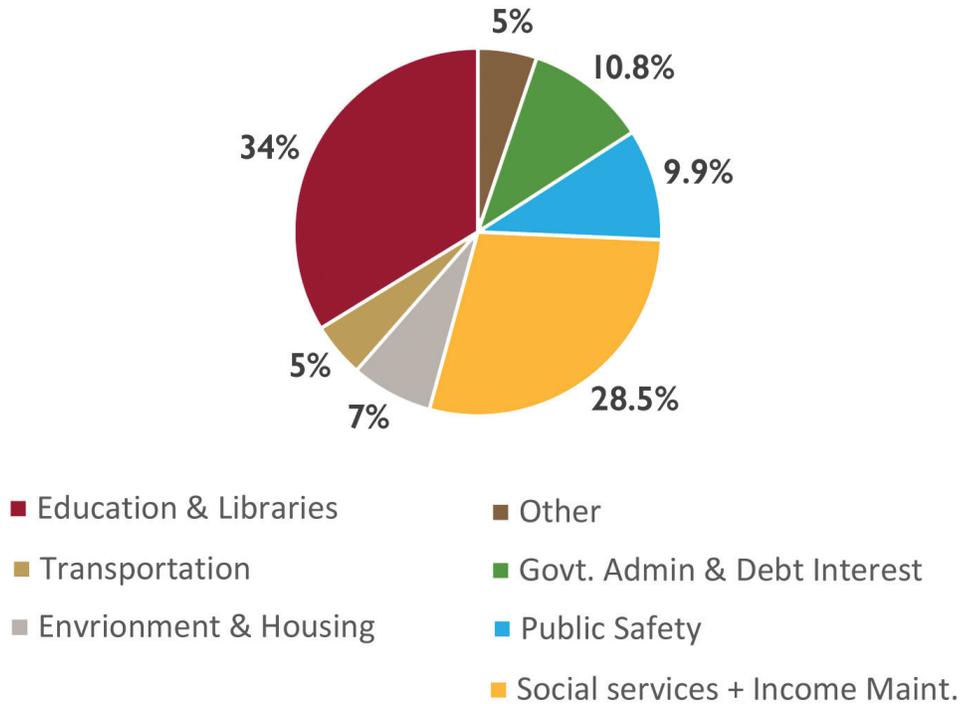
73 Joanna Smith, Hovanes Gasparian, Nicholas Perry, & Fatima Capinpin. “Categorical Funds: The Intersection of School Finance and Governance.” Center for American Progress, November 18, 2013.

74 Sophie Culpepper. “State grapples with lack of resources for English language learners.” The Brown Daily Herald, April 26, 2018.

## STATE EXPENDITURES 2017

State budgets reflect priorities. FY 2017 expenditures are included for consistency across data representations. Figure 7.5 shows that in FY 2017, the largest share of Rhode Island's state spending went to education and libraries.<sup>75</sup>

**Figure 7.5 Rhode Island State Expenditures, Fiscal Year 2017**



Source: Rhode Island Public Expenditure Council (RIPEC) calculations based on U.S. Census data.

<sup>75</sup> "How Rhode Island Expenditures Compare: 2018 Edition." RIPEC, December 2018. [http://www.ripec.org/pdfs/2018\\_HRIC\\_Exp.pdf](http://www.ripec.org/pdfs/2018_HRIC_Exp.pdf)

## EQUITY POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Since *San Antonio v. Rodriguez*, equitable funding lawsuits have been filed in state courts across the country on behalf of low-income communities and students requiring additional resources and services. Many states have provisions in their constitutions for an adequate or effective education, but Rhode Island's constitution lacks such language. In 2011, the City of Pawtucket and the City of Woonsocket filed lawsuits over the new funding formula, claiming it failed to address costs of special needs populations, particularly emergent bilingual students and students with disabilities.<sup>76</sup> That lawsuit was dismissed on the grounds that the funding formula is the responsibility of the Rhode Island General Assembly, not the courts.<sup>77</sup>

Recognizing that there are funding inequities and challenges across districts, however, a special task force of the General Assembly began re-examining the funding formula during the fall of 2019. Each district's challenges are unique, such as rising transportation costs for students in the child welfare system, or a growing emergent bilingual student population.<sup>78</sup> Because state and local funding follow students to charter schools, some districts are also increasingly concerned about the costs associated with rising charter enrollments.<sup>79</sup> Funding makes a difference in the quality of education that students receive. Several states that have made significant, sustained financial investments in education have experienced considerable gains in student achievement, and nonwhite students have experienced more rapid growth on standardized measures of academic achievement.<sup>80</sup> These gains remain tenuous, however; tax cuts and spending caps introduced by political shifts can negatively affect education spending and undermine student progress. The development of Rhode Island's funding formula was an important first step toward making education more equitable, but huge disparities remain in learning environments across the state.

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76 Kenneth Wong. "The Design of the Rhode Island School Funding Formula: Toward a Coherent System of Allocating State Aid to Public Schools." Center for American Progress, August 2011.

77 "Court rejects challenge to funding formula." PBN, July 21, 2012. <https://pbn.com/Court-rejects-challengetofunding-formula,69143/>

78 Hearings before the Special Legislative Task Force to Study Rhode Island's Education Funding Formula, November 19, 2019.

79 Eli Sherman. "RI communities fear costs as over 10,000 students apply for charter schools." WPRI, September 4, 2019.

80 Linda Darling-Hammond. "Investing for Student Success: Lessons from State School Finance Reforms." Learning Policy Institute, April 2019.

## ■ GOVERNANCE AND POLICYMAKING

*Governance refers to the ways in which agencies create, implement, and administer state education policies.<sup>81</sup> An understanding of governance demands more than just knowledge of governmental hierarchies, but how and why agencies work in the ways that they do.<sup>82</sup>*

The federal funding that came with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), and other grant funds during the 1960s, expanded states' capacity to do what was previously out of their reach. Since that time, the federal government has cut much of its direct ties to cities, relying on and empowering states to administer and allocate federal funding for social services and other programs.<sup>83</sup> Although federal funding definitely influences states' policy decisions, states wield incredible influence over education. Governance and policymaking in Rhode Island are accomplished through a diverse network of people, programs, and agencies at both the state and local levels.

### RHODE ISLAND'S STATE AGENCIES & POLICY LEADERS

#### Rhode Island General Assembly

The General Assembly is the legislative body for the state, meaning it drafts, debates, and passes education laws. It also approves the state education budget. The two committees primarily responsible for education legislation are the House Committee on Health, Education and Welfare, and the Senate Committee on Education. The Senate provides advice and consent for the governor's appointments to the Board of Education.

#### Figure 8.1 Law versus Regulation

**Law:** Developed through a bill process in the General Assembly

**Regulation:** Created by a government agency, often to aid in the implementation of a particular law

#### Governance Framework for Rhode Island's State Education Agencies

Rhode Island's state agencies create rules, regulations, and procedures, and provide oversight of education in the state.

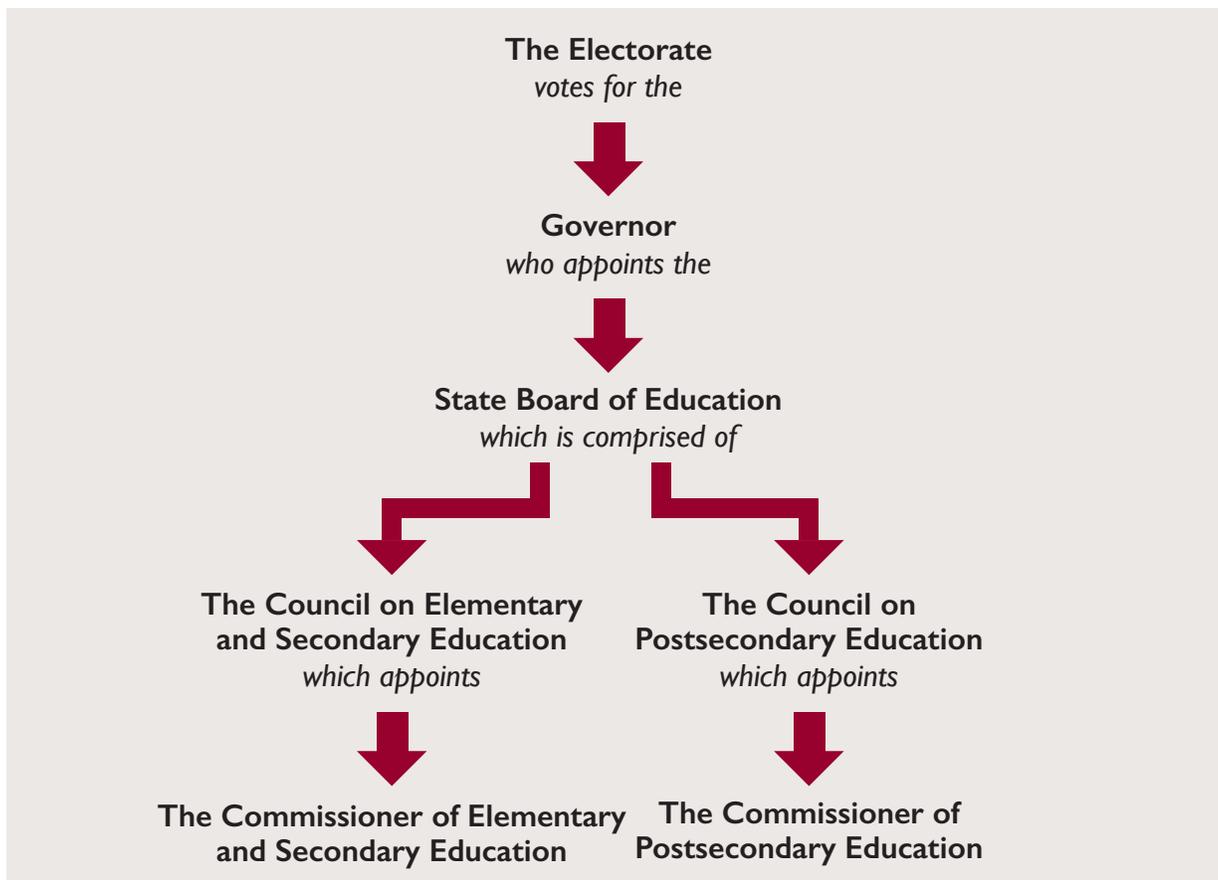
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81 Hunter Railey. "State Education Governance Structures: 2017 Update." Education Commission of the States, August 2017.

82 Stephen J. Ball & Carolina Junemann. *Networks, New Governance and Education*. Chicago: The Policy Press, 2012.

83 Domingo Morel. *Takeover: Race, Education, and American Democracy*. New York: Oxford University, 2018.

**Figure 8.2 Structure of Rhode Island State Education Agencies**



## Rhode Island Board of Education

The Council on Elementary and Secondary Education and the Council on Postsecondary Education comprise the Rhode Island Board of Education. The board is the primary policymaking organization for K-20 education in the state. The board was created by the Rhode Island General Assembly in 2014. There are 17 members on the board.<sup>84</sup>

## The Council on Elementary and Secondary Education

The Council on Elementary and Secondary Education sets policy affecting elementary and secondary education in Rhode Island. The governor appoints 8 board members, and the chair of the council from among the 8 members. A student advisory council consists of one elected high school student representative from each public secondary school in Rhode Island.<sup>85</sup> The commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education is responsible for developing and implementing a plan to address all aspects of elementary and secondary education in the state. The commissioner is appointed by the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education, with “the advice and consent of the board of education” for no more than three years. In order to appoint, retain, or dismiss the commissioner, the governor serves as an additional voting member of the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> “Board of Education.” Rhode Island Department of Education.

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/BoardofEducation/Overview.aspx>

<sup>85</sup> The Rhode Island Board of Education Act. <http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/Statutes/TITLE16/16-60/16-60-2.HTM>

<sup>86</sup> Title 16: Education. Council on Postsecondary Education [See Title 16 Chapter 97 – The Rhode Island Board of Education Act]. RIGL § 16-60-6.

## The Council on Postsecondary Education

The Council on Postsecondary Education provides oversight for the system of public higher education in Rhode Island, which currently includes Rhode Island College (RIC) and the Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI), as well as the Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner. The Commissioner of Postsecondary Education heads the Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner. This office is the administrative and research arm of the Rhode Island Council on Postsecondary Education.

The Council on Postsecondary Education has 8 voluntary members that serve three-year terms and one non-voting student member that serves a two-year term. Student members are full-time students at RIC or CCRI. The governor appoints 8 board members, and the chair of the council from among the 8 members.<sup>87</sup> The Chair of the Board of Education also serves as an ex-officio member of the council. The council supervises all public higher education in the state. The council also governs the Division of Higher Education Assistance.

Effective February 1, 2020, the University of Rhode Island (URI) is no longer governed by the Council on Postsecondary Education. Instead, it has its own 17-member board of trustees appointed by the governor, with the advice and consent of the Senate. The chair of the Board of Education and the chair of the Council on Postsecondary Education will serve as non-voting, ex-officio members.<sup>88</sup>

## ADDITIONAL STATE AGENCIES

### Rhode Island Children’s Cabinet

The General Assembly created the Children’s Cabinet in 1991. When Governor Gina Raimondo reconvened the cabinet in 2015 in partnership with the General Assembly, it was the first time it had been active since 2007. Cabinet members are statutorily authorized and include representation from the governor and ten child and health focused agencies. The Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education sits on the cabinet as one of the statutorily appointed members and serves as the vice chair.<sup>89</sup> The cabinet convenes to address all issues, especially those that cross departmental lines, that relate to children’s needs and services; develop an annual comprehensive children’s budget; and develop a comprehensive statewide plan.

### Rhode Island Early Learning Council

The Rhode Island Early Learning Council serves as an advisory board to the governor and the Children’s Cabinet. It was formed in 2010 according to federal guidelines for State Early Care and Education Advisory Councils. Approximately 50 stakeholders are members of the council, and all are appointed by the governor. The council is co-chaired by the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education; the Director of the Rhode Island Department of Human Services; and the Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. The council’s goal is to expand access to high quality early learning programs, including child care, Head Start, state Pre-K, K-3 public education, family home visiting, and early intervention.<sup>90</sup>

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87 Ibid.

88 Dave Lavallee. “New Board of Trustees to help boost URI’s efforts to be more ‘nimble, strategic, innovative.’” URI Today, July 11, 2019; Senate Bill S0942 “Relating to the Governance of The University of Rhode Island.” State of Rhode Island January Session, 2019. <http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/BillText/BillText19/SenateText19/S0942.pdf>

89 “Raimondo Sets Vision to Expand Opportunities for Children, Families.” Press Release, July 21, 2015. <https://www.ri.gov/press/view/25371>

90 Rhode Island Early Learning Council. “Rhode Island Early Learning Council Comprehensive Advisory Plan and Recommendations 2016-2020.” June 2016; Rhode Island’s Early Intervention Program supports infants and toddlers with development disabilities or delays. For more information see <http://www.eohhs.ri.gov/Consumer/FamilieswithChildren/EarlyIntervention.aspx>

## LOCAL AGENCIES & POLICY LEADERS

Rhode Island has 66 local education agencies (LEAs), or school districts, which include traditional, regional, charter, state-operated, and collaborative districts.<sup>91</sup> LEAs include the governing board, as well as central- and school-level personnel. Expectations for LEAs are detailed in the Basic Education Program (BEP), a set of regulations crafted by the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education.<sup>92</sup> LEAs are primarily responsible for creating and sustaining high quality learning environments and must address seven core functions (see Figure 8.3).

### Figure 8.3 Seven Core Functions of Every Rhode Island Local Education Agency

1. Lead the Focus on Learning and Achievement
2. Recruit, Support, and Retain Highly Effective Staff
3. Guide the Implementation of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
4. Use Information for Planning and Accountability
5. Engage Families and the Community
6. Foster Safe and Supportive Environments for Students and Staff
7. Ensure Equity and Adequacy of Fiscal and Human Resources

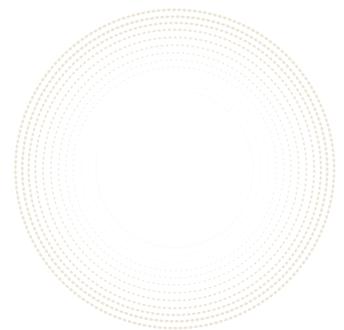
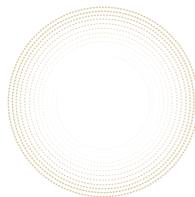
Source: Rhode Island Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education Basic Education Program Regulations, June 4, 2009.

### Parent & Local Advisory Councils

Several LEAs have Parent Advisory Councils (PACs) meant to give parents a voice in district governance. Special Education Local Advisory Councils (SELACs or LACs) can also be found in many school districts. SELACs or LACs serve as a resource and support for parents of students in special education.

### Community Advisory Boards

Community Advisory Boards (CABs) are formed in districts with schools identified for comprehensive support and improvement.<sup>93</sup> CABs serve in an advisory role to LEAs and are to be representative of a broad range of stakeholders in that school's community, including families, students, business leaders, faith leaders, and other community leaders and stakeholders.



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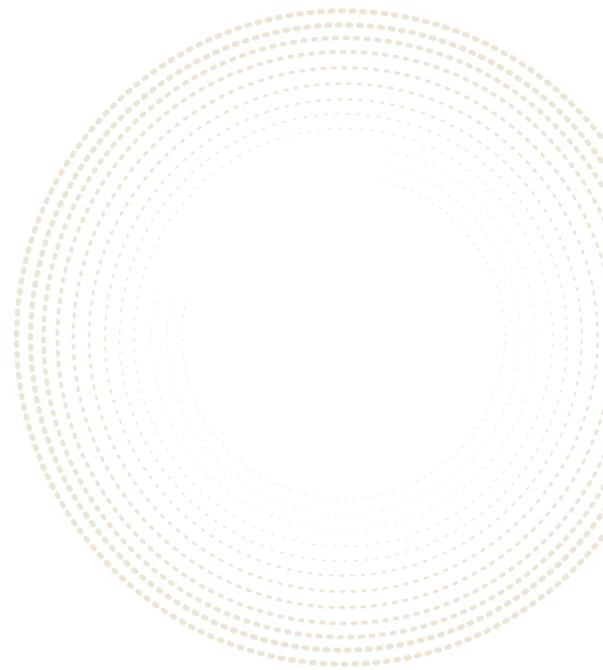
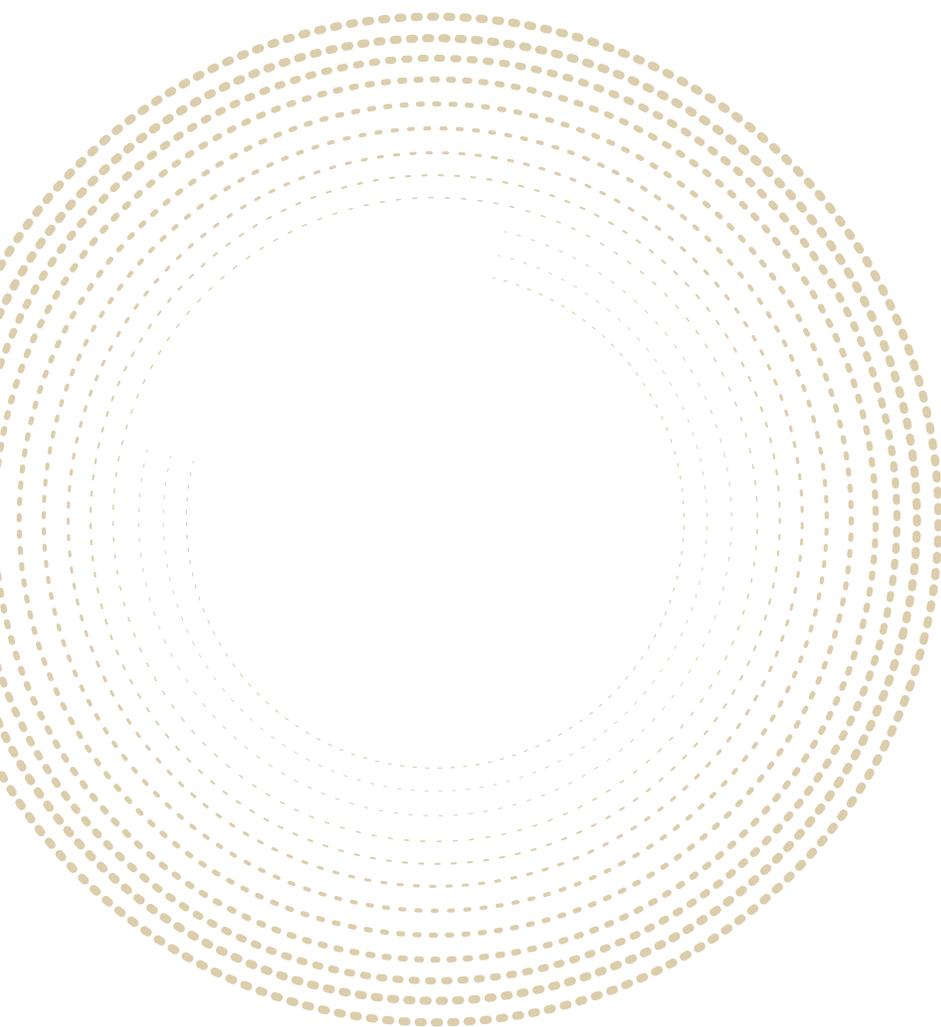
91 See the chapter on Choice for more details on each type of district.

92 Title 200: Board of Education. Council on Elementary and Secondary Education [See Title 200 Chapter 20—Council on Elementary and Secondary Education]. 200 RICR 20-10-1.

93 See the chapter on Accountability for more information about the comprehensive support and improvement designation.

## EQUITY POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Although there are official policy actors in every community, parents, students, teachers, and other community members have a role to play in ensuring that policy leaders are responsive to their needs. Holding state agencies accountable is imperative, as considerable influence over education resides at the state level. Parents, youth, and entire communities suffer when policy leaders are not responsive to calls for justice. As evidenced by reports on the Providence School District in particular, Rhode Island parents and youth have been expressing a lack of responsiveness to their demands for educational equity for decades.<sup>94</sup> As the state's largest school district prepares for changes resulting from the state takeover of its schools, it is not enough to invite parents and youth into conversations unless they can also have a role in making decisions. As noted in their joint statement on the future of Providence Public Schools, <sup>18</sup> community organizations asked for "significant, ongoing, formal roles for families, students and the community in the development and implementation of plans for intervention."<sup>95</sup> Youth "directly represent the very people that education policies are meant to benefit," and therefore should have a role not just as advisors, but as members of governance boards.<sup>96</sup> Individual LEAs also have a responsibility to cultivate relationships with parents and families so that they can be included in the governance of their local schools.



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94 See Edward Eddy et al. "Imagine...Providence Blueprint for Education." May 1993. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED365762.pdf> and "Providence Public School District: A Review." June 2019. <https://edpolicy.education.jhu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/PPSD-REVISED-FINAL-002.pdf>

95 Parent, Youth, & Community Statement on the Future of Providence Public Schools. July 23, 2019. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1pD8lElRf0DQHbTme6FeydKH5bvOyO8xR/view>

96 Gary Colletti. "Involving Students in State Education Governance." National Association of State Boards of Education, December 2018.

## ■ STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Student performance on standardized measures of academic achievement has been used to gauge individual preparation for college and careers, as well as state and national competitiveness. Improving student achievement is a primary driver of education policy reform efforts.

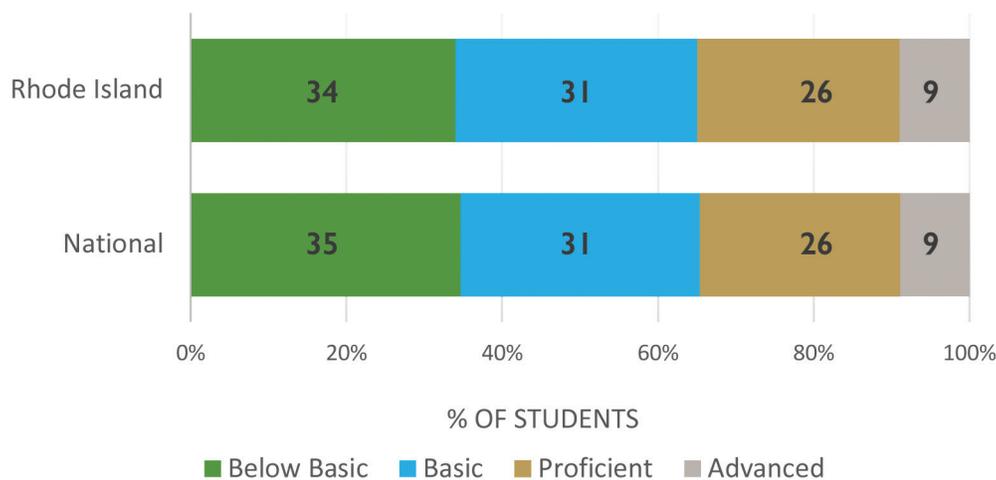
Rhode Island’s accountability and governance systems; choices of assessments, curriculum, and standards; school choice options; funding decisions; and guidelines for teacher preparation are all made with at least one crucial goal in mind: to improve student achievement. A combination of national and state-level assessments helps to inform the public on Rhode Island students’ academic performance.

### The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)

The National Assessment of Educational Progress is given to a nationally representative sample of students at least once every two years. Also known as the Nation’s Report Card, the NAEP enables comparisons of student achievement with other states, and with the nation as a whole. It is not based on any individual state’s curriculum standards. Rather, the National Center for Education Statistics, educators, and other experts develop NAEP assessment questions based on frameworks developed by the National Assessment Governing Board.<sup>97</sup> Importantly, proficiency on the NAEP is not equivalent to being on grade level; it represents a high standard of “competency over challenging subject matter.”<sup>98</sup>

Figures 9.1-9.4 show how public school students in Rhode Island compare to the rest of the U.S. in reading and math on the 2019 assessment. Table 9.1 shows significant disparities in performance by race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status.

**Figure 9.1 4th Grade Reading, NAEP 2019**

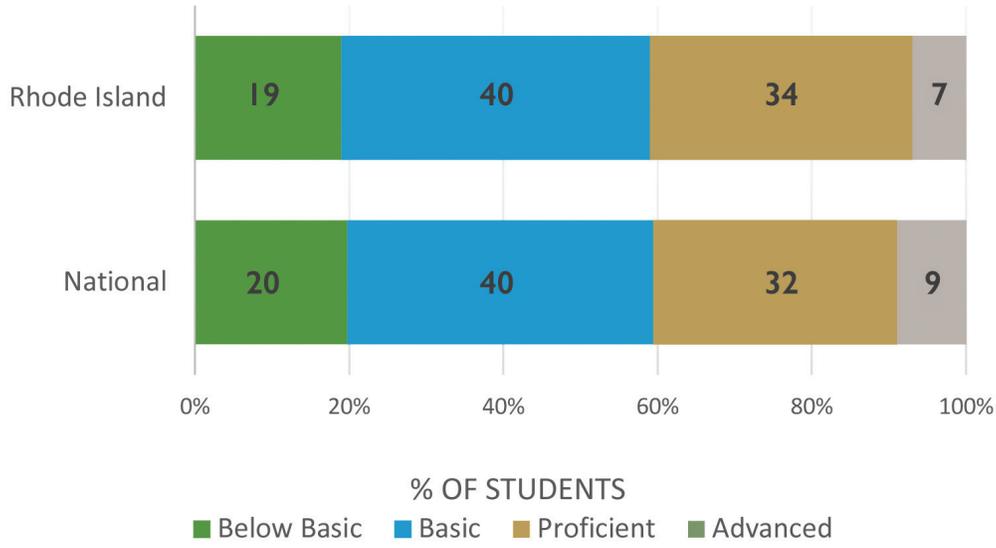


Source: National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2019.

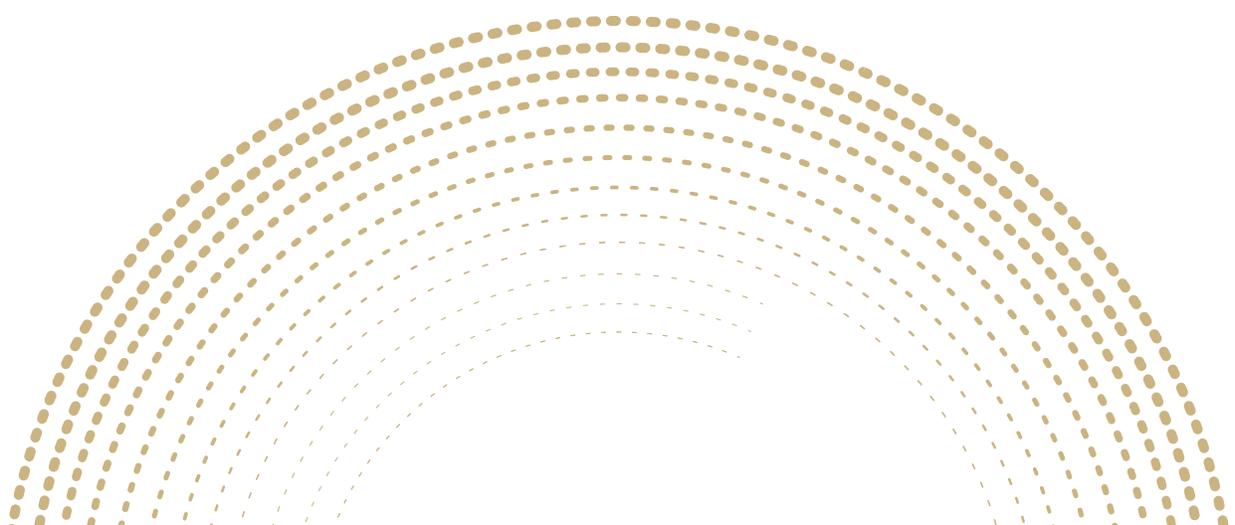
97 “Develop the Assessment Framework.” National Center for Education Statistics. [https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/assessment\\_process/develop.aspx](https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/assessment_process/develop.aspx)

98 “Understanding Assessment Results.” National Center for Education Statistics. <https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/guides/>

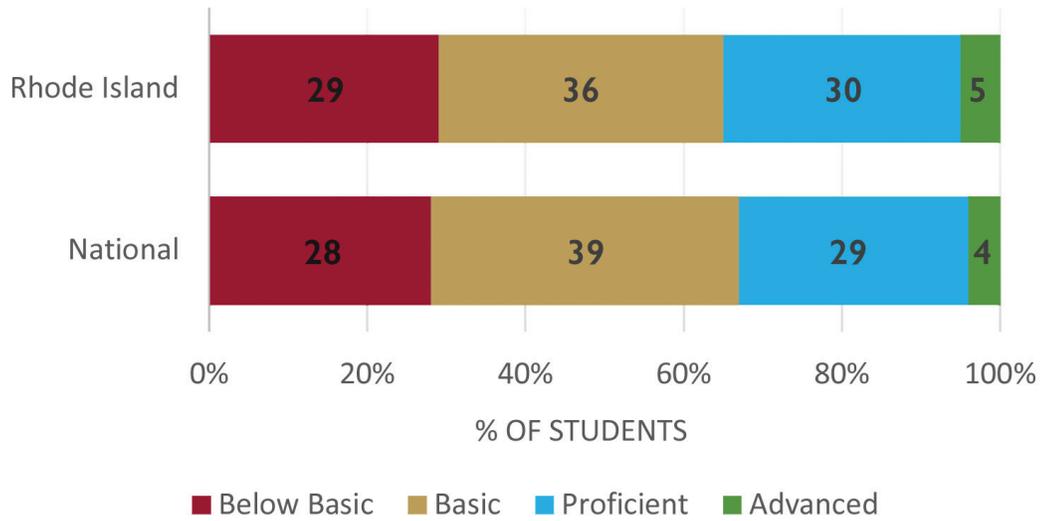
**Figure 9.2 4th Grade Math, NAEP 2019**



Source: National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2019.

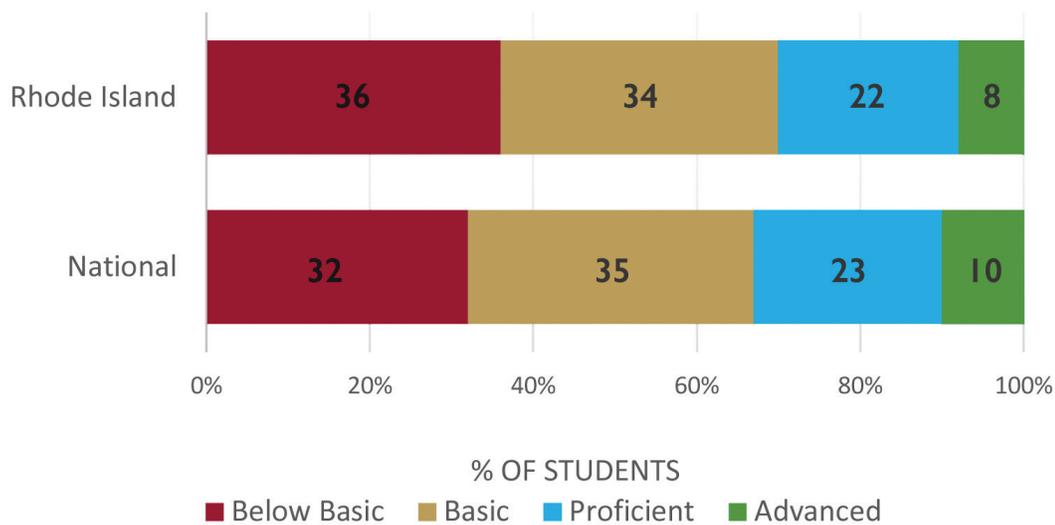


**Figure 9.3 8th Grade Reading, NAEP 2019**



Source: National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2019.

**Figure 9.4 8th Grade Math, NAEP 2019**



Source: National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2019.



**Table 9.1. Rhode Island NAEP Performance by Student Group, 2019**

Percentage Scoring at or above Basic Level of Proficiency

	Reading		Math	
	4th Grade	8th Grade	4th Grade	8th Grade
All	66	71	81	64
Asian	72	71	91	*
Black	51	58	70	44
Hispanic	50	52	68	44
White	75	83	88	75
Low- Income	52	56	71	45

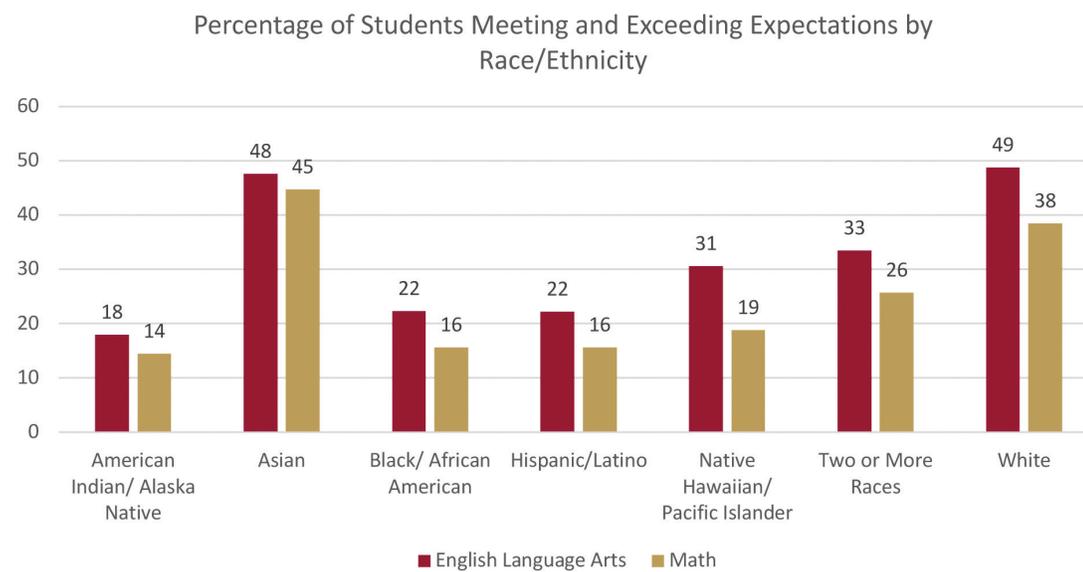
Source: National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2019.

\*Too few students for a reliable estimate.

**Rhode Island’s Measures of Student Achievement**

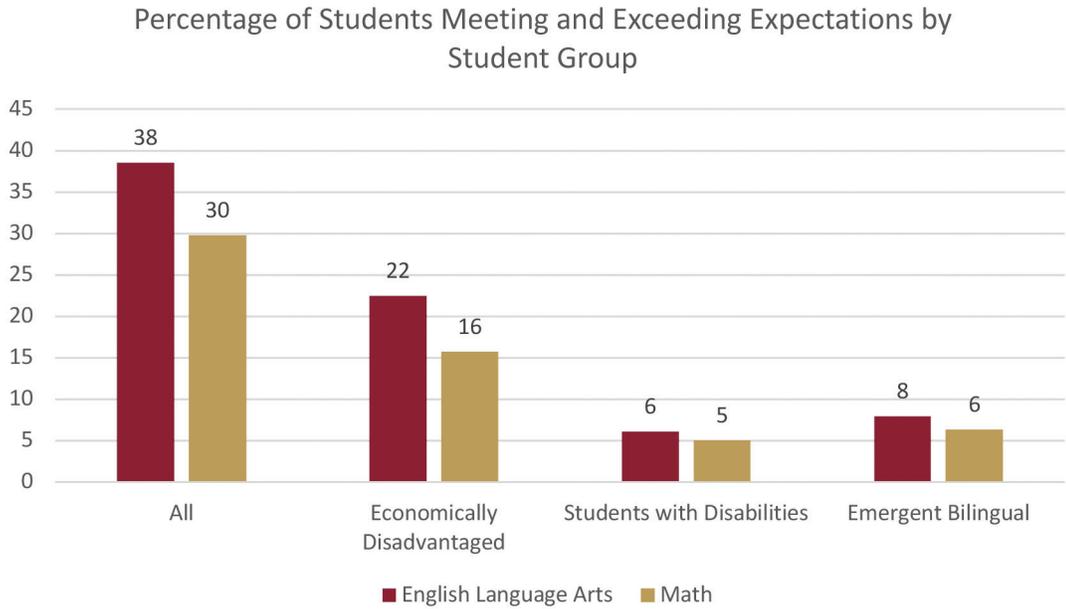
Rhode Island’s state assessments include the Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS), which is administered to students in grades 3-8. The RICAS is aligned to the Common Core State Standards. Figures 9.5 and 9.6 show the percentage of Rhode Island students meeting and exceeding expectations on the RICAS.

**Figure 9.5 Rhode Island Student Performance on RICAS by Race/Ethnicity, 2018-2019**



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education.

**Figure 9.6 Rhode Island Student Performance on RICAS by Student Group, 2018-2019**

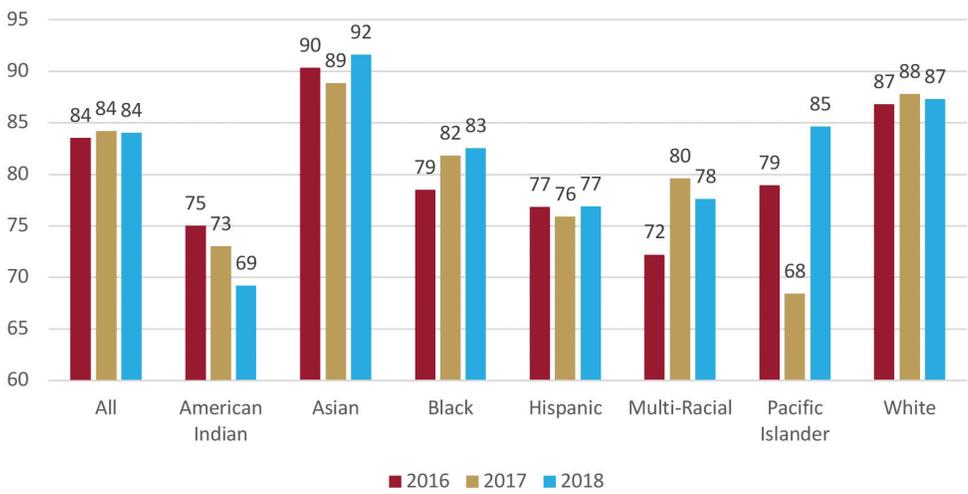


Source: Rhode Island Department of Education.

**Public High School Graduation Rates**

High school graduation rates indicate the share of young adults that are ready to engage in the workforce or pursue postsecondary education. Students who graduate high school earn more money over their lifetimes than non-graduates, have better health and life expectancies, and are better positioned to serve their families and communities.<sup>99</sup> Figures 9.7 and 9.8 show Rhode Island’s 4-year high school graduation rate by race/ethnicity and student group.

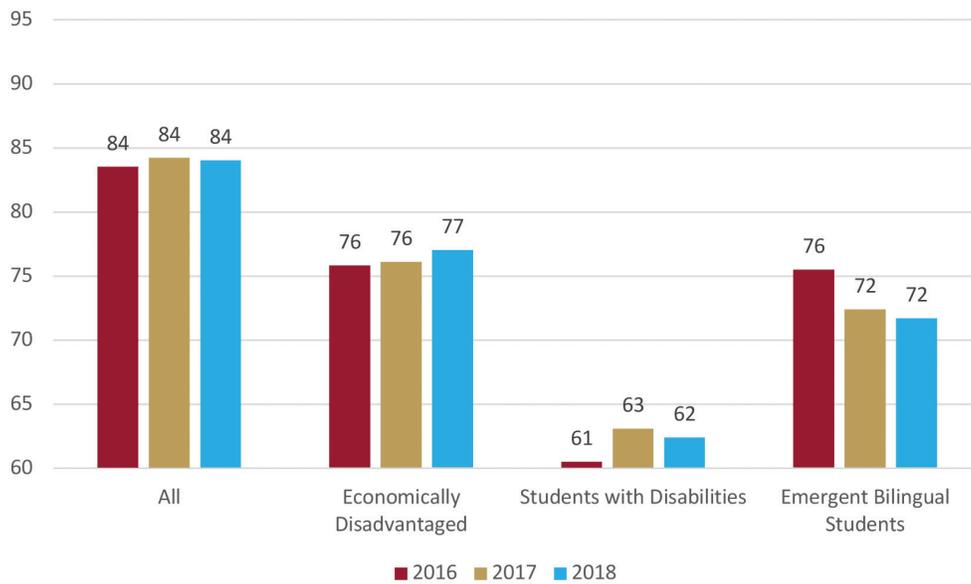
**Figure 9.7 Rhode Island’s 4-Year High School Graduation Rate by Race/Ethnicity, 2016-2018**



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education.

<sup>99</sup> “High School Graduation Facts: Ending the Dropout Crisis.” America’s Promise Alliance. <https://www.americaspromise.org/high-school-graduation-facts-ending-dropout-crisis>

**Figure 9.8 Rhode Island’s 4-Year High School Graduation Rate by Student Group, 2016-2018**



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education.

## EQUITY POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

One thing that is evident in every measure of achievement in Rhode Island is that students from low-income households, emergent bilingual students, students with disabilities, and students from certain racial/ethnic backgrounds (i.e. American Indian/Alaska Native, Black, Hispanic, Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander, and multiracial) do not perform as well on standardized assessments, and they graduate at lower rates than their peers in the state. Aggregated assessment results for Asian American students mask differential outcomes by ethnic groups; many Southeast Asian students face linguistic, economic, and other barriers to educational attainment.<sup>100</sup> Quality assessment data provide critical feedback to educators, policymakers, students, and families, and give a snapshot of how education is—or is not—working in the state. Yet, assessment data only offer a snapshot, and do not give the full picture of students’ experiences in school. School discipline, attendance, and overall climate are important indicators of how well schools are working for children and youth, but even those measures do not tell the full story. Student achievement disparities are one of multiple indicators that systemic social inequities are at the root of challenges in public education.

100 Bic Ngo & Stacey J. Lee. “Complicating the Image of Model Minority Success: A Review of Southeast Asian American Education.” *Review of Educational Research*, 2007. Vol. 77(4), 415-453.



## ■ TEACHER WORKFORCE

*Teachers are generally considered the most important school-based factor in a student's education.*

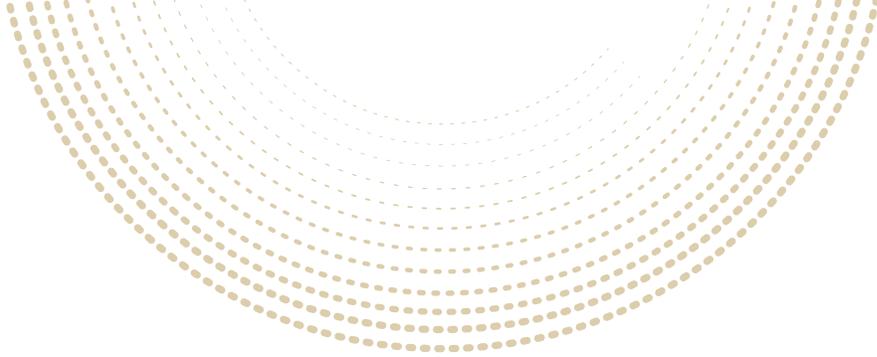
Teachers are accorded considerable social responsibility. As Dana Goldstein notes in her book *The Teacher Wars*,

For two hundred years, the American public has asked teachers to close troubling social gaps—between Catholics and Protestants; new immigrants and the American mainstream; blacks and whites; poor and rich. Yet every new era of education reform has been characterized by a political and media war on the existing teachers upon whom we rely to do this difficult work, often in the absence of the social supports for families that make teaching and learning more effective for kids, like stable jobs and affordable housing, child care, and health care.<sup>101</sup>

Given all that teachers are expected to do, policymakers, teacher preparation providers, and other stakeholders have attempted to determine what qualifies someone to do this work. Do teacher demographics, such as gender or race, matter? What does it take to attract people to teaching? Importantly, what does it take to keep teachers in the profession?

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<sup>101</sup> Dana Goldstein. *The Teacher Wars: A History of America's Most Embattled Profession*. Doubleday, 2014.



## TEACHER PREPARATION IN RHODE ISLAND

### Approved Teacher Preparation Providers in Rhode Island

As shown in Table 10.1, there are eight traditional and two alternative teacher preparation providers in Rhode Island.

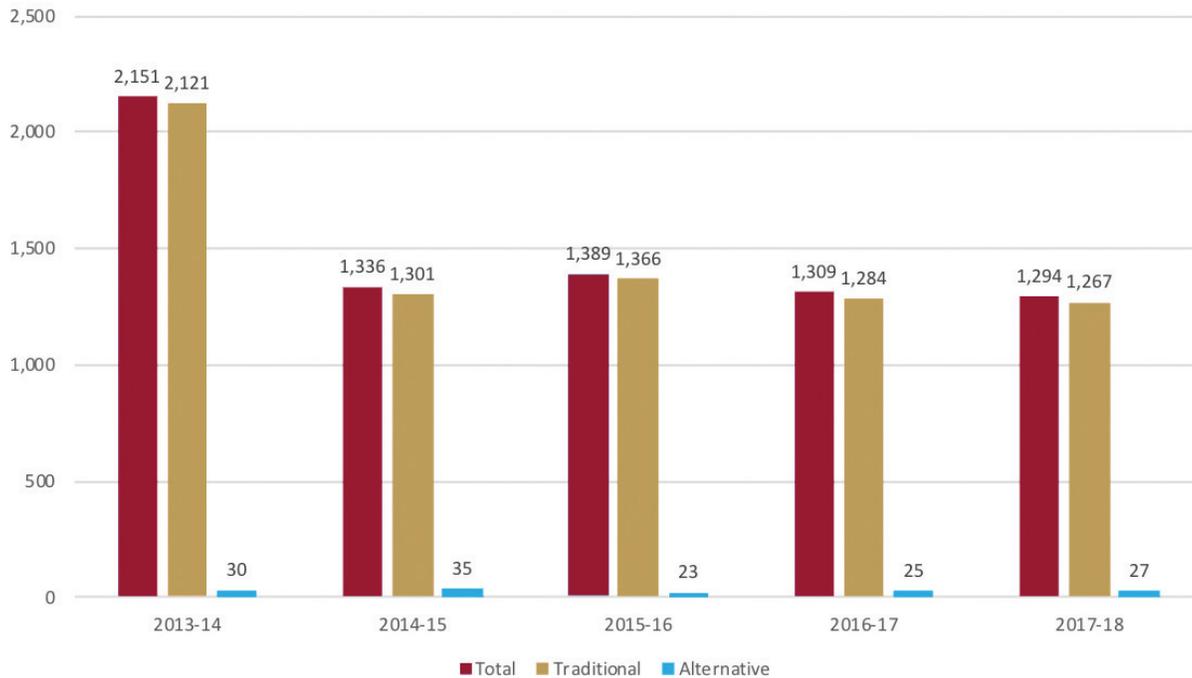
**Table 10.1 Rhode Island Teacher Preparation Providers**

	Traditional or Alternative	Levels of Program Certification Offered (*Subject areas vary.)
Brown University	Traditional	Secondary
Johnson & Wales	Traditional	Elementary, Secondary
Providence College	Traditional	Elementary, Secondary, “All Grades”
Rhode Island College	Traditional	Early Childhood, Elementary, Middle, Secondary, “All Grades”
Rhode Island School of Design	Traditional	Secondary
Rhode Island School for Progressive Education	Traditional	Early Childhood, Elementary
Roger Williams University	Traditional	Early Childhood, Elementary, Middle, Secondary, “All Grades”
Salve Regina University	Traditional	Early Childhood, Elementary, Secondary, “All Grades”
Teach for America Rhode Island	Alternative	Elementary, Secondary
University of Rhode Island	Traditional	Early Childhood, Elementary, Middle, Secondary, “All Grades”

*Source: Rhode Island Approved Programs. Rhode Island Department of Education, May 29, 2019. Not all programs are offered at each level. For example, at Rhode Island School of Design, only Secondary Art is available for teaching licensure. “All Grades” applies to certification in art, health, physical education, music, technology, library media, world languages, bilingual/dual language, special education for severe intellectual disabilities, and English to speakers of other languages.*

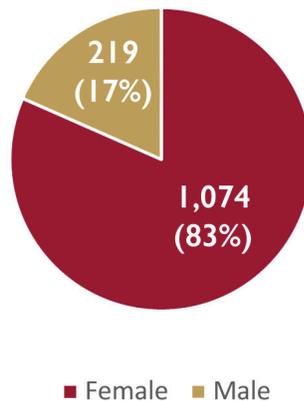
Data from 2017-18 showed that Rhode Island had 60 programs enrolling 1,294 students, and a total of 582 program completers. Nearly all students in Rhode Island teacher preparation programs pursue a traditional program (see Figure 10.1). As shown in Figure 10.2 and Table 10.2, enrollees identify predominately as female and white.

**Figure 10.1 Rhode Island Enrollment in Teacher Preparation Programs**



Source: 2017, 2018, & 2019 Title II Reports.

**Figure 10.2 Academic Year Enrollment by Gender, 2017-18**



Source: 2019 Title II Reports. Respondents have the option to decline reporting gender. The total here is one less than the total enrollment for 2017-18.

## Certification

There are three pathways to full teacher certification in Rhode Island: completion of a Rhode Island approved educator preparation program; reciprocity, whereby applicants who completed an out-of-state program can pursue Rhode Island certification; and credential review, which requires an examination of the applicant's experience and skills that may qualify the applicant for certification. Most pathways require that applicants hold a bachelor's degree, pass required tests in their certification area, and complete 60 hours of field experience prior to student teaching. Some specialized areas, such as special education and bilingual/dual language education, require additional training. Certain Career and Technical Education certificate areas have education requirements that are aligned to industry standards and therefore might require a high school diploma or associate's degree plus 3-5 years of work experience. In 2018, the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) made changes to teacher certification requirements. Some of these changes include:

**Table 10.2 Academic Year Enrollment by Race/ Ethnicity, 2017-2018**

American Indian or Alaska Native	6
Asian	24
Black or African American	29
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	1
White	1097
Two or more races	22
Hispanic/ Latino of any race	65

Source: 2019 Title II Reports

- **Expanded student teaching to the equivalent of a full year residency.** The residency may be completed in one year, or it may be completed over the course of multiple academic terms as long as the residency experience is based on a full teaching load.
- **Reciprocity with Connecticut and Massachusetts.** As of June 1, 2019, certified teachers from these two neighboring states are eligible for a Rhode Island teacher license without completing any additional requirements.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Teachers seeking certification in special education, English as a second language, or math or reading specialists must have the appropriate certificate in these additional areas. See Title 200: Board of Education. Council on Elementary and Secondary Education [See Title 200 Chapter 20—Council on Elementary and Secondary Education. Subchapter 20 – Educator Quality and Certification]. 200-RICR-20-20-1.

## TEACHER RECRUITMENT & RETENTION

The Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) does not calculate retention rates for teachers. A Learning Policy Institute analysis of data found that the combined teacher turnover rate for Rhode Island, New Hampshire, and Vermont was among the lowest in the country.<sup>103</sup> Nationally, teacher attrition is higher among those who teach math, science, foreign languages, special education, and English to speakers of other languages. Nonwhite teachers and teachers who were alternatively certified are more likely to turnover. Teacher attrition is higher in schools with a large number of low-income students, with a large number of nonwhite students, with lower salaries, and/or with poor working conditions.<sup>104</sup>

National trends in recruitment, employment, and retention of nonwhite and Hispanic<sup>105</sup> teachers show that since the 1980s, the number of nonwhite and Hispanic teachers has increased by over 100%, outpacing the growth in the number of white, non-Hispanic teachers and the growth in the number of nonwhite and Hispanic students. Nonwhite and Hispanic teachers are 2 to 3 times more likely to work in high-need schools, but they are also much more likely to leave schools than white, non-Hispanic teachers. The working and organizational conditions of a school, such as the ability to make collective governance decisions or the amount of individual instructional autonomy, were a high predictor of nonwhite and Hispanic teachers leaving.<sup>106</sup> Antagonistic work cultures that make teachers feel unwelcome and/or invisible, and lack of recognition, support, or compensation for their work are additional challenges.<sup>107</sup> Thus, while recruitment is important, attention to the organizational structure and culture of high-need schools is critical to keeping nonwhite and Hispanic teachers.



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103 Desiree Carver-Thomas & Linda Darling-Hammond. “Teacher Turnover: Why it Matters and What We Can Do About It.” Learning Policy Institute, August 2017.

104 Ibid.

105 This research is based on Ingersoll, May, and Collins’ (2017) work, which uses the term minority to include Hispanic teachers who identify racially as white. I replace the term with “nonwhite and Hispanic.”

106 Richard Ingersoll, Henry May, & Greg Collins. “Minority Teacher Recruitment, Employment, and Retention: 1987 to 2013.” Learning Policy Institute, September 2017.

107 Davis Dixon, Ashley Griffin, & Mark Teoh. “Why Teachers of Color Leave and How to Disrupt Teacher Turnover.” The Education Trust and TeachPlus, September 2019.

## Figure 10.3 Why focus on diversifying the teacher workforce?

- **Demographic parity:** the belief that the racial/ethnic teacher population should match that of the student population, or even the racial ethnic population of society more broadly. All students need to see nonwhite and Hispanic teachers as role models.
- **Cultural synchronicity:** the belief that nonwhite and Hispanic teachers are more suitable for nonwhite and Hispanic students because of shared cultural understandings. Research shows that having one Black teacher in grades 3, 4, or 5 reduced the probability of low-income Black boys from dropping out of school by 39%.<sup>108</sup> School discipline rates are also lower when nonwhite students are taught by a nonwhite teacher.
- **Teacher shortages:** Because nonwhite and Hispanic teachers are more likely to work in low-income districts with higher populations of nonwhite and Hispanic students, it makes sense to address the teacher shortage by seeking more nonwhite and Hispanic teachers who will choose to work in these schools.

Source: *Ingersoll, May, & Collins, 2017*

National areas of attrition align with the teacher shortage areas in Rhode Island: math, science, foreign languages, special education, and English to emergent bilingual students. Rhode Island also has a shortage of nonwhite teachers. RIDE does not disseminate information on the racial and ethnic demographics of its teacher force alone, but some estimates show that as much as 95% of Rhode Island's teacher workforce is white.<sup>109</sup> Publicly available data on the racial composition of all of the state's educators (which includes teachers, district administrators, building administrators, and support professionals) show that approximately 89% of the state's total educator workforce is white (see Figure 10.4).<sup>110</sup> States are experimenting with a variety of strategies to recruit and retain teachers, including career pathways in middle and high school, Grow-Your-Own (GYO) programs (see Figure 10.5), financial incentives such as loan forgiveness and scholarships, and alternative licensure procedures for hard to staff areas.<sup>111</sup> In 2017, at least 47 bills were enacted in 23 states to recruit teachers to high-need schools and hard-to-staff subject areas,<sup>112</sup> which reveals how great the need is for teachers across the U.S. Analysts note, however, that if national teacher attrition rates were reduced from 8% to 3 or 4%, overall teaching shortages would be eliminated.<sup>113</sup>

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108 Seth Gershenson, et al. "The Long-Run Impacts of Same-Race Teachers" [Working Paper]. National Bureau of Economic Research, 2017. See also Donald Easton-Brooks. *Ethnic Matching: Academic Success of Students of Color*. Rowman & Littlefield, 2019.

109 "The State of Rhode Island Public Education." RI-CAN. <http://ristateofed.ri-can.org>

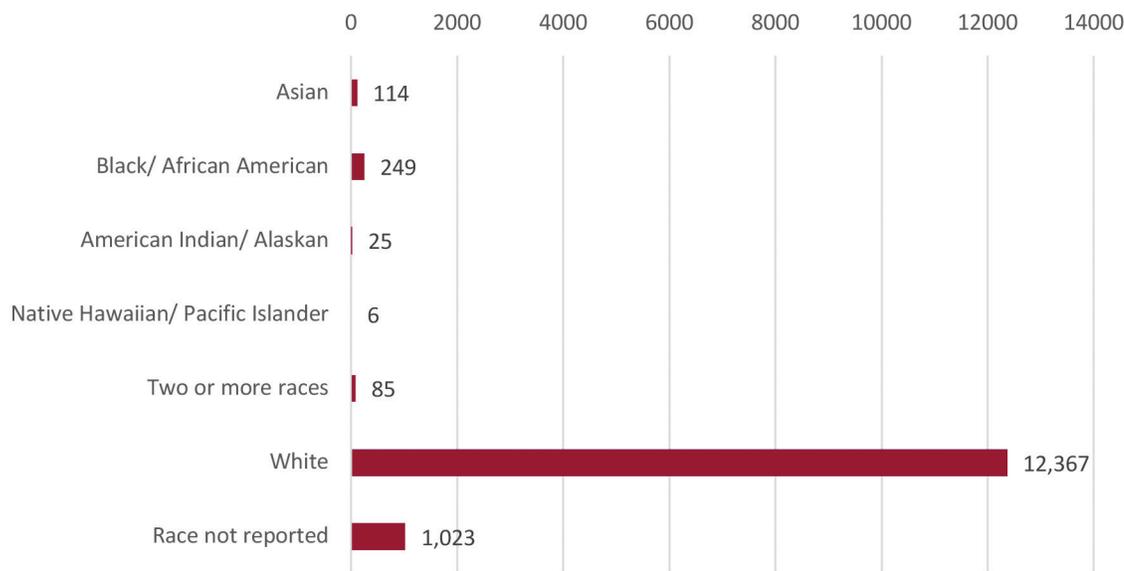
110 Educator race is self-reported at the time of certification application.

111 Policy Snapshot: Targeted Teacher Recruitment. Education Commission of the States, March 2018.

112 Ibid.

113 Leib Satcher, Linda Darling-Hammond, & Desiree Carver-Thomas. "A Coming Crisis in Teaching? Teacher Supply, Demand, and Shortage in the U.S." Learning Policy Institute, September 15, 2016.

**Figure 10.4 Racial Demographics of Rhode Island Educators, 2018-2019**



Source: *Rhode Island Report Card State Snapshot: Educator Data*. Racial data is self-reported on certification applications. Educators include teachers, district administrators, building administrators, and support professionals. Ethnicity was noted separately, with 454 educators identifying as Hispanic; 6,663 identifying as not Hispanic; and 6,752 not reporting an ethnicity.

**Figure 10.5 Grow Your Own Teacher Programs**

Grow-Your-Own (GYO) teacher programs are of growing interest in states seeking to recruit teachers. Programs vary in focus and scope, with some identifying and supporting middle school students, high school students, school paraprofessionals, or other community members to pursue teaching as a career. GYO programs differ from other alternative preparation programs because they focus on identifying people who already have a strong connection to a particular school community, which can help with retention.

## COMPENSATION

In all states, teachers earn less, on average, than college-educated professionals in other fields. One estimate suggests that, on average, there is as much as a 23.8% teacher pay penalty in the U.S.—the percentage of wages “lost” by choosing teaching over another career. After accounting for teacher benefits, including pension plans, the penalty is reduced to about 11%.<sup>114</sup> Critics argue that this analysis fails to account for a number of other factors, including the market value of an education degree. Still, others maintain that compensation is about more than economic principles, and that the focus should be on paying teachers fairly for the type of work that they do.<sup>115</sup> Rhode Island teachers are more likely to earn salaries that are nearly comparable to those which can be earned by college graduates in other fields.<sup>116</sup> In 2017-2018, public school teacher salaries in Rhode Island averaged \$41,689 for a first-year teacher.<sup>117</sup>

114 Sylvia Allegretto & Lawrence Mishel. “The teacher pay penalty has hit a new high.” Economic Policy Institute, September 5, 2018.

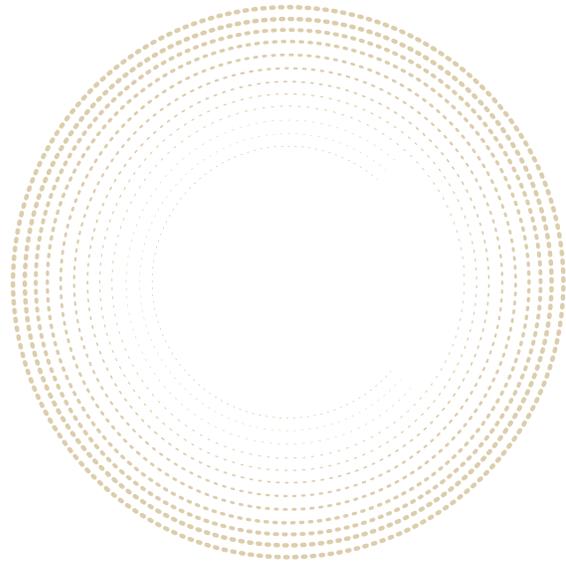
115 Matt Barnum. “The salary slide: As other professionals see growth, teachers’ pay stagnates, new report finds.” Chalkbeat, September 5, 2018.

116 Sylvia Allegretto & Lawrence Mishel. “The teacher pay penalty has hit a new high.” Economic Policy Institute, September 5, 2018.

117 2017-2018 Average Starting Teacher Salaries by State. National Education Association. <http://www.nea.org/home/2017-2018-average-starting-teacher-salary.html>

## Equity Policy Considerations

Diversifying the teacher workforce is a priority for any state that wants to see improved student outcomes. Shifting the demographics of Rhode Island's teacher workforce will take considerable time and investment. Students who did not receive a quality K-12 education are less likely to enter and complete college. Nonwhite and Hispanic college students have many more career options today than in the past. Students who do pursue a teaching degree may face barriers, such as an inability to pass required licensure exams.<sup>118</sup> Given Rhode Island's cultural, racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity, there is a dire need for teachers who can meet the cultural and linguistic needs of Rhode Island students. In addition to recruiting a diverse teacher workforce, it is equally important to support the existing workforce. The teacher workforce would be less of a "pipeline" problem if sufficient supports were given to plug the "leaking bucket" of teachers leaving the profession.

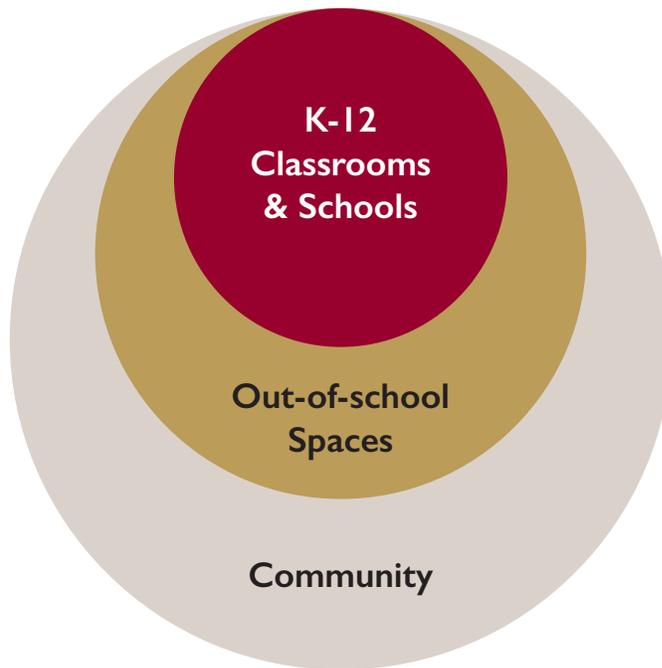


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<sup>118</sup> Richard Ingersoll, Henry May, & Greg Collins. "Minority Teacher Recruitment, Employment, and Retention: 1987 to 2013." Learning Policy Institute, September 2017.

## ■ MOVING FORWARD

The Social Policy Hub for Equity Research in Education (SPHERE) is committed to linking research, policy, and practice for all of Rhode Island's education stakeholders. SPHERE envisions that this primer will be a tool to help Rhode Islanders understand, and become more involved in education policy decisions. Importantly, SPHERE recognizes that societal factors affect students' quality of life and their ultimate educational outcomes. For this reason, SPHERE's policy priorities extend beyond K-12 classrooms and schools. SPHERE will conduct and disseminate research on educational and social policies that affect the student experience, including policies on out-of-school time, and policies affecting safe, stable, and affordable homes and communities. SPHERE welcomes inquiries and feedback on this primer, as well as opportunities to dialogue further about our work.



# SPHERE

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