Ensuring Equitable Access to Excellent Educators

Rhode Island's Equity Plan

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Rhode Island Department of Education

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Executive Summary

Rhode Island is committed to ensuring "that high-quality education is available to all public school students, regardless of where they reside or which school they attend".[1] All students deserve high quality, developmentally-appropriate, and engaging instruction that prepares them for colleges and careers. Central to ensuring equitable education and outcomes is ensuring equitable access to excellent teachers and support professionals supported by excellent leaders.

Rhode Island recognizes that educators are our state's critical resource in education. Recent efforts reflect an ongoing and unwavering commitment to ensuring access to excellent educators through creation and revision of talent management policies and allocation of resources to support continued, career-long professional learning. That said, our work is not done.

In order to serve our students better, we need to ensure that all students have access to excellent educators. This plan identifies current inequities that exist and details steps the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) will take in concert with LEAs to ensure that students in high poverty and high minority schools are not taught at higher rates than other students by inexperienced, unqualified, or out-of-field teachers. Given the research that underscores the importance of leaders, this plan also includes the specific steps the SEA will take to ensure that students in high poverty and high minority schools are not disproportionally attending schools led by inexperienced or unqualified principals. This plan also aims to align whenever possible with our soon-to-be released 2020 Strategic Plan.

Our plan centers on and is guided by our state's theory of action, which focuses on implementing a coherent and comprehensive approach to managing educator talent. This approach must address all aspects of talent management: preparation, certification, recruitment and hiring, mentoring and induction, professional learning, educator evaluation, educator environment, and compensation. Recognizing that this work will take time, we believe in taking a three-pronged approach to equity, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1- Rhode Island's Approach to Equity Plan Work

This plan's success will depend on the investment and engagement of multiple stakeholders, including LEA leaders, school leaders, teachers, parents, and educator preparation programs. Therefore, during the plan development process, RIDE engaged multiple stakeholder groups in identification of equity gaps, brainstorming of root causes, and development of strategies.

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[1] Rhode Island Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education, 2009

Moving forward, RIDE will continue to involve stakeholders in the refinement and implementation of the state's equity plan through additional meetings and ongoing two-way feedback loops. In addition, RIDE will work with highest minority and highest poverty schools and LEAs to gain their support for this work and identify a set of LEA and charter school partners to receive targeted support.

For the purposes of this plan, RIDE, with input from stakeholders, defined the following key terms to guide data analysis: inexperienced teacher and support professional, inexperienced leader, unqualified teacher and support professional, and out of field teachers and support professionals. Review of state-level data found the following:

- Highest poverty and highest minority schools are more likely to have inexperienced teachers, support professionals, and leaders.

- When looking at data disaggregated by school level (elementary, middle, high), middle schools have greater percentages of inexperienced teachers, support professionals, and leaders compared to elementary and high schools.

- When looking at data disaggregated by school level (elementary, middle, high), high poverty elementary schools are more likely to have inexperienced teachers, support professionals, and leaders than low poverty schools.

RIDE recognizes current limitations of the data and is fully committed to improving data collection and reporting over time. By June 2016, RIDE will report not only on the metrics mentioned above but also on teacher turnover and long-term substitute use. Future analyses will also include full-time equivalent data. RIDE will also explore collecting teacher attendance and data on teaching and learning conditions in the future.

After reviewing state-level data, stakeholders engaged in root cause analyses and identified potential strategies that will address these root causes. The strategies listed below represent RIDE's current best thinking on these issues and are strategies to be considered. Because Rhode Island is in a transitional period and expects both new Commissioner to be confirmed and a new strategic plan to be adopted within the next few months, RIDE will reassess and adjust the list of strategies by February 2016. In the meantime, RIDE will begin implementing some priority strategies (shown below in **bold**.)

Table 1. Root Causes and Proposed Strategies

Root Cause	Strategies
Lack of specific preparation to work in high poverty and high minority schools	**Research best practice on practicum and student teaching/internship experiences and propose a policy change if appropriate.**
	Facilitate ongoing learning related to educator preparation standards.
	Continue to coordinate opportunities for LEAs and programs to meet and build partnerships.
	Conduct a focus group with principals to identify the characteristics and dispositions of effective middle school teachers in their schools.
	Facilitate development/adaptation of program completer and employer surveys and offer technical assistance grounded in data inquiry.

Root Cause	Strategies
Confusing/hard-to-meet certification requirements	**Increase understanding of new pathways and certificates.**
	As needed, provide certification support in highest poverty and highest minority schools.
	Offer information sessions for educators and potential candidates considering pursuing certificates in shortage areas.
Lack of a diverse cohort of educators and candidates	Serve as a thought partner to preparation providers and LEAs as they work to increase the diversity of the educator workforce.
Insufficient professional learning, induction, and coaching	**Facilitate cross-LEA collaboration related to assessing and improving cultural competency.**
	Continue providing job-embedded coaching related to educator evaluation through the principal partnership.
	Identify ways to improve LEA implementation of educator evaluation.
	Improve training on and support for building administrator evaluations.
	Convene professional organizations that prepare and support leaders to conduct a gap analysis of current offerings and supports.
	Convene principals and coordinate cross-LEA professional learning opportunities for school leaders in high minority and high poverty schools.
	Analyze disproportionality data and provide targeted supports as needed to schools with disproportionate representation of racial and ethnic groups in special education and related services.
	Work towards establishing a robust regional induction model for inexperienced educators, especially those working in highest minority and highest poverty schools.
	Support LEA self-assessment of financial allocation for professional learning and support.
Ineffective recruitment, hiring, and staff management practices	Help union and LEA leaders, including human resource directors, self-assess recruitment, hiring, staff management, and compensation policies and practices.
	Facilitate reviews of LEA-level equity data.
	Pursue data sharing agreement with retirement board.
	Collect data on the number of vacancies as of September 1st.
	Analyze long-term substitute data.
	Collect and analyze educator attendance data.
Unfavorable perceptions of high poverty and high minority schools

Limited career paths and leadership opportunities

Lack of competitive compensation | **Assemble a task force focused on elevating education professions.** |
| Poor working conditions and insufficient resources | Explore feasibility of administering a survey of teaching and learning conditions |
| | Help LEAs improve teaching and learning conditions. |

RIDE will continuously monitor progress toward performance objectives and assess effectiveness of strategies in reducing equity gaps. RIDE will engage in ongoing data sharing and supports as well as regular engagement with stakeholder groups. In an effort to provide

transparency related to implementation of the equity plan, RIDE will use a web page, blog, and annual report to communicate ongoing results of implementation. Through the implementation of this plan and other current efforts, Rhode Island will improve talent management practices and reduce equity gaps, ultimately bringing us closer to our goal of education: to ensure that all of our graduates are ready for success in college and in challenging careers.