

7 Educator Collaboration

The Urban Education Task Force recommends creating new capacity for cross-district and partner collaboration to harness the state's full potential for progress. In addition to achieving greater efficiency of resources and a shared sense of accountability for outcomes, this new capacity would further drive progress in the critical areas of curriculum, instruction, assessment, and educator quality.

Introduction

Over the past eighteen months the Task Force has studied promising efforts by the five urban school districts, charter and alternative schools, community partners, the regional collaboratives, and RIDE to improve student and school success. In our consultations with urban education leaders throughout the state, we have heard them express interest in working more collaboratively across school district lines to develop effective strategies, practices, and solutions to the challenges facing urban communities.

- District leaders made the following observations:
 - ✦ Superintendents would be willing to collaborate across district lines on common educational priorities such as English language learners, high school redesign, community partnerships, parent engagement, provided the time and resources are justified by the intended end result.
 - ✦ Superintendents recommended that the Task Force examine existing models of cross-system collaboration operating in other states and urban districts.
 - ✦ RIDE should be centrally involved in any collaborative effort, given the likelihood that the outcomes of any collaboration will be of interest to other school systems, with possible implications for state policy.

- ✦ The Research Collaborative, a partnership composed of nonprofit research and policy centers, should continue to function as a resource to the cross-district collaborative effort by providing data analysis, documentation, evaluation, and promising-practice research.
- The regional collaboratives expressed interest in lending both capacity and expertise in a broad-based effort to advance the goals of the Task Force.
- Several participants in discussions with leaders of charter schools and alternative schools expressed interest in collaborating with their counterparts in traditional districts in areas of mutual interest (mentioned specifically were educator quality and parent involvement).
- The Research Collaborative has completed research and policy analysis at the request of the Task Force, including a study of student mobility completed by the Providence Plan, funded in part by a grant from the Rhode Island Foundation (see appendix 7S).

Active members of the Research Collaborative are Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, the Providence Plan, the Annenberg Institute for School Reform and the Urban Education Policy Program at Brown, the Northeast Regional Lab at Education Development Center, and Rhode Island Public Expenditure Council. In June, representatives of the Research Collaborative attended a national conference in Chicago designed to promote approaches to research collaboration modeled after the Consortium on Chicago School Research. Representatives from nineteen urban areas attended the meeting and are making plans to form a professional network that could be a source of technical support for the emerging Research Collaborative here in Rhode Island.

Current Rhode Island Context

There are some notable examples of educator collaboration in Rhode Island, such as the promising partnership between Central Falls Public Schools and the Learning Community Charter School. Also, the mission of the four regional collaboratives is to serve the collective instructional and non-instructional needs of member districts. However, substantial collaboration among educators across district lines or between traditional districts and charters remains rare and episodic.

The main conclusion of the Task Force's fact-finding stage is that there is both interest and willingness on the part of educators for more purposeful, organized, and sustained collaboration. This dovetails with the need for more efficient use of resources in these challenging economic times and the renewed interest of both the federal government and foundations in cross-sector partnerships to support urban education reform.

Recommendations, Action Steps, and Partner Responsibilities

In the latter stages of its work, the Task Force has grappled with the challenge of sustaining the cross-sector (e.g., education, business, labor, community-based organizations, arts and cultural institutions) dialogue and partnership the Task Force helped to create, while shifting the focus from developing a plan to monitoring and supporting its implementation. And while we recognize that RIDE and the districts are making impressive strides, we firmly believe that it will take concerted and aligned support from all major stakeholders and partners to create the will and capacity to transform our schools and enhance outcomes for all students.

As noted above, education stakeholders throughout the state – in the urban districts, RIDE, charter and alternative schools, higher education, and business and community organ-

izations – have expressed the willingness to work together to reverse persistently low trends in urban school performance noted in the introduction to this report. Elements of the new capacity that needs to be developed include planning and implementation support, fundraising, community engagement and outreach, research and data analysis, communications, and reporting.

In response, we propose the following short-term objectives and action steps to launch such an effort over the next six months.

RECOMMENDATION Create an Urban Education Consortium, serving as a public-private partnership, that would be endorsed by the Governor, the Board of Regents, the General Assembly, and the Commissioner of Education but would be supported by private donors and governed by an independent advisory board.

The Consortium would be established to undertake the following proposed responsibilities:

- Serve as an ongoing voice for fundamental education reform in the state through evidence-based advocacy and by building the knowledge and political will needed to take on tough changes in policy and practice.
- Monitor and support the efforts of the education agencies, their partners, and the broader community to implement the Task Force recommendations and new priorities established by the Regents, RIDE, and the districts.
- Produce an annual report on the state of urban education in Rhode Island that focuses on one or more of the recommendations, as well as on the overall performance of urban students.
- Conduct public forums to engage and mobilize various constituencies and shareholders (students, educators, administra-

tors, business leaders, parents, union leaders, elected officials, partner organizations, funders, higher education leaders, etc.) and to channel their concerns and aspirations into constructive action.

Two co-chairs, accomplished and committed leaders representing the business and education communities, would lead the proposed organization. As a consortium, the organization would operate with a small staff, solicit grants to support its work, and draw on the expertise of a core group of partner organizations such as the Providence Plan, KIDS COUNT, the Annenberg Institute for School Reform, Young Voices, and the Rhode Island After School Plus Alliance, among others. Leadership of the Consortium would help to determine the Consortium's role in relation to the Center for Innovation mentioned in the recommendation on Innovation for School Success.

Action Steps

- ▶ Convene a cross-sector design team from existing Task Force members and others to develop parameters for this new entity – its mission and bylaws, a collaborative governance structure, a funding mechanism, and a staffing plan.
- ▶ Develop a work scope that addresses the most urgent priorities of the Task Force.
- ▶ Convene a team, in conjunction with the Urban Education Consortium, to pursue external core funding from national foundations (Gates, Ford, Carnegie, Broad, and Nellie Mae, among others) to support the implementation of the Task Force recommendations and the organizational capacity needed to support them.

RECOMMENDATION Expand the existing Research Collaborative to provide the required analytic and research support to implement the Task Force recommendations.

To date, the Research Collaborative has provided a range of technical support to the Task Force, including analysis of student and school performance data, documentation of student mobility between schools and districts, promising practice scans, documentation and analysis of constituency engagement forums, and production of model program profiles. We recommend that the Research Collaborative acquire institutional partners with the capacity to support the implementation of Task Force recommendations (see appendix 7S).

The Research Collaborative could provide the following types of services in support of work in the field:

- Documentation and evaluation of pilot projects
- Development of planning and implementation tools
- Dissemination of evidence-based promising practices
- Construction of a value-added data system (see the recommendation on a Statewide Educator Quality Development System)
- Development of performance standards and indicators
- Assistance to RIDE with rollout of the longitudinal data system
- Training of end users in the state's vast data-warehouse collection

Action Steps

- ▶ Recruit new member organizations to the Research Collaborative to meet the technical and substantive needs to support implementation of the recommendation and action steps outlined in the preceding recommendation.
- ▶ Develop a Research Collaborative work scope based on the previous action step.
- ▶ Secure funding for the Research Collaborative (see next recommendation).

Supplements to the Recommendations

1S Pre-Kindergarten Education

Pre-K benefits children, their families, and their communities. From improved academic outcomes to the economic savings to schools and states, the benefits of high-quality pre-K are irrefutable. The following summary of the benefits of pre-K from the national organization Pre-K Now, funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts, highlights some of the research findings about the positive impact of high-quality pre-K (Gayl, Young & Patterson 2009).

Successful Students

- **Pre-K increases high school graduation rates.** Chicago children who attended a pre-K program were 29 percent more likely to graduate from high school than their peers who did not have pre-K. (Source: Chicago Longitudinal Study)
- **Pre-K helps children do better on standardized tests.** Michigan fourth-graders who had attended pre-K passed the state's literacy and math assessment tests at higher rates than their peers who had no pre-K. (Source: "State Efforts to Evaluate the Effects of Pre-Kindergarten," Yale University Child Study Center)
- **Pre-K reduces grade repetition.** Maryland fifth-graders who attended pre-K were 44 percent less likely to have repeated a grade than their peers who did not attend pre-K. (Source: "State Efforts to Evaluate the Effects of Pre-Kindergarten," Yale University Child Study Center)

- **Pre-K reduces the number of children placed in special education.** Among Chicago children, those who attended pre-K were 41 percent less likely to require special education services than their peers who did not attend. (Source: Chicago Longitudinal Study)

Responsible Adults

- **Pre-K reduces crime and delinquency.** Chicago children who did not attend pre-K were 70 percent more likely to be arrested for a violent crime by age eighteen than their peers who had been pre-K participants. (Source: Chicago Longitudinal Study)
- **Pre-K lowers rates of teen pregnancy.** North Carolina children who attended pre-K were less likely to become teen parents than their peers who did not attend pre-K (26 percent vs. 45 percent). (Source: Carolina Abecedarian Project)
- **Pre-K leads to greater employment and higher wages as adults.** Forty-year-old adults in Michigan who attended pre-K as children were more likely to be employed and had a 33 percent higher average income than their peers who did not have pre-K. (Source: High/Scope Perry Preschool Project)
- **Pre-K contributes to more stable families.** Forty-year-old adults in Michigan who attended pre-K as children were more likely to report that they were getting along very well with their families than their peers who did not attend pre-K (75 percent vs. 64 percent). (Source: High/Scope Perry Preschool Project)