



Donald L. Carcieri
Governor

Action Plan Rhode Island **American Diploma Project Network**

The Challenge

Rhode Island's public school system is comprised of 47 Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) including 36 locally-operated school districts. Of the 327 public schools in our state, there are eight Career & Technical Schools; four state-operated; ten charters; and one collaborative-run school.

This system serves a diverse group of approximately 155,000 students of which:

- 33% are eligible for the subsidized lunch program;
- 6% receive ESL/bilingual education services;
- 19% receive special education services; and
- ethnically, 9% are African-American, 3% are Asian, 16% Hispanic, less than 1% are Native American, and 71% are White.

There are a number of indicators that point to the need for change if Rhode is to be competitive. While improvements are occurring in student performance on state and national assessments, significantly greater gains still are needed—especially in our urban communities and in the core subjects of math and science. Additionally, only 73% of Rhode Island's high school students graduate—a little more than one-quarter does not. The graduation rates for diverse ethnic/racial groups include 85% White, 81% Asian/Pacific Islander, 71% Black, 66% Hispanic and 62% American Indian.

Indicators at our post secondary level reinforce the challenge that exists in our state. Almost 60% of our high school graduates going on to the Community College of Rhode Island require two or more remedial classes and its minority graduation rate is only 4.4%. College retention rates are down at Rhode Island's three public institutions of higher education and the 6-year graduation rate from its four-year institutions is significantly lower than that of the nation or neighboring states. With all of the above, it is not surprising, therefore, that the adult literacy rate in our state is low.

Economically, this translates to a mismatch between jobs projected to grow and the skills of the current and emerging workforce. More than 93,000 jobs in manufacturing have been lost in the last twenty years in Rhode Island, jobs that paid a decent wage and were attainable with a high school diploma or less. While many states have experienced significant declines in their manufacturing sector, few have been hit as hard as the Ocean State. These jobs have been replaced with 89,000 jobs requiring at least some college education, as Rhode Island experiences a shift to high skill, high tech jobs.

To address these statistics, partnerships of dedicated education, business and community leaders have formed, research and analyses have been conducted on a wide range of topics, reports have been published and symposia conducted. Through this process of self-examination, new policies and programs have been created, legislation written and a consensus reached that the front line in the battle for a healthy economic future lies with how well we educate our students and prepare them for the world of work and higher education – that without drastic change in Rhode Island’s K-16 systems, the economy of the state will continue to decline and its quality of life will diminish.

No one is more aware of this than Governor Donald L. Carcieri, a former high school mathematics teacher and business executive who is leading Rhode Island’s education reform and economic revitalization efforts and building the partnerships required for effective and lasting change. This partnership is centered in the Governor’s PK-16 Council, created in 2005 with the following vision statement:

We envision a Rhode Island where all Rhode Islanders will have a standards-based high school diploma, will know the advantages of a college degree, will have considered attending college, and will be confident (based on standards-based assessments) of their academic readiness to attend college if they choose to do so. By 2008, URI, RIC and CCRI will have identified standards for all courses and programs, so students will be assured of a public standards-based education throughout their school and college years.

Before deciding whether to attend college, all students will be informed of the available financial support. They will know that an initial college degree can lead to other degrees that will bring expanded job opportunities and economic security. Through a public awareness campaign, Rhode Islanders will also know the statewide educational goal: to increase the number of citizens who hold a college degree.

Governor Carcieri’s PK-16 Statewide Council brings together a powerful coalition of public and private sector leaders who are working together to transform public education. They recognize that thoughtful, aggressive measures are essential in order to create competent work- and college-ready high school graduates who will contribute to Rhode Island’s economy as they achieve academic and personal success. To be successful, it is essential to build public will for the changes required to make this vision a reality. Doing so requires an effective communications strategy. First steps in this strategy are to continue educating the public about the severity of the problem, share the vision and objectives of the Council, and build strong partnerships around school transformation and focused K through 16 reform.

Rhode Island is immersed in one of the most ambitious high school reform initiatives in the nation, supported by business, political, governmental and community leaders, educators and industrialists, scientists and researchers, and parents, teachers and school officials and led by the Governor’s PK-16 Council.

Urban, Urban Ring and Suburban/Rural Schools

It helps to envision three types of school districts in Rhode Island: Urban Districts, with 31% of enrollment, Urban Ring Districts, with 28%, and Suburban/Rural Districts, with 41%. A snapshot of Rhode Island shows our suburban schools achieving at or above the national average on mathematics and English Language Arts assessments, the urban core significantly below the national average and the urban ring communities between these two extremes.

Students in our state's suburban/rural districts perform better than others in the nation on NAEP tests, students from our Urban Ring Districts perform the same as others nationally, and our urban students under perform as compared with those in other cities. Understanding school demographics helps. For instance, most children enrolled in Providence public schools live below the poverty level and most are English language learners. Newport, considered by many non-Rhode Islanders as the playground of millionaires, faces similar school statistics, as do other major cities like Pawtucket and Central Falls.

Rhode Island's NAEP test scores for grades 4 and 8 in mathematics are improving, but are still below the national average and the lowest in New England. In reading, while Rhode Island's results are comparable to the national average, again we have the lowest scores in New England. State tests administered in high school show gradual improvement in both English Language Arts and Mathematics, but there is a wide gap between suburban and urban/urban ring districts. Our students' SAT scores reaffirm this disparity, with verbal and math scores rising slightly in suburban districts and remaining far below state average in the cities.

The Opportunity

Rhode Island is the smallest state with arguably the greatest sense of community in the nation. It also has the second highest population density of any state. Geographically small and dense and culturally integrated, the Ocean State can be seen as a "city state," making it a natural laboratory for change. No place is farther than 45 miles from the capital of Providence, and the entire state is one media market, making communications more expeditious.

A look at Rhode Island's history reaffirms this perspective of a close knit, communicative citizenry. Originally founded by individuals fleeing from the restrictive theocracy of Massachusetts and seeking greater personal and religious freedom, the notion of tolerance and concern for one's neighbors permeates every corner of our society today.

Add to this a history of respect for ideas and creative pursuits – the industrial revolution began in Rhode Island and continues today with entrepreneurial individuals and organizations spawning new businesses and ideas daily. Indeed, because of its size, population density, respect for diversity, and tradition of community, Rhode Island is one place in the country where statewide approaches can be effectively implemented.

Rhode Island Policy Objectives & ADP Action Plan

Recognizing the need to address these disparities, Rhode Island has designed a program of educational improvement that focuses on school improvement so that ALL students will achieve. Positive change is underway, from clear standards aligned to college expectations, new high school diploma requirements, extensive professional development for our teachers, upgrades to the technology infrastructure and a variety of specific school interventions. As we work to transform our K-16 systems, we need to consider our diverse populations – Rhode Island's demographics are rapidly changing with a large influx of immigrants, largely from Spanish-speaking Central and Latin America – as we address both educational and economic gaps.

From new standards and accountability mechanisms to teacher training and institutional change, we must ensure that the policy line from the State house to the schoolhouse is coherent, clear and accountable. Effective communication is the underpinning to this line and is just what the Governor's PK-16 Council commits to ensure with its inclusive and multifaceted agenda.

As part of our strategy for improvement, Rhode Island has joined twenty-one other states in the American Diploma Project (ADP) Network to raise achievement so that ALL students graduate with the education and skills needed for personal and economic success. A number of specific objectives will allow Rhode Island to meet this goal as we engage with other states in the ADP Network. These include:

(1) Restore the value of a high school diploma by improving articulation between secondary and post secondary systems and workforce development programs.

Major activities in Year 1 include:

- Support for system-wide change and alignment by implementing performance-based assessments reflective of academic and applied learning standards and RI's common core proficiencies as the basis for graduation.
- Define Rhode Island's college ready standards in reading, writing and math and obtaining input from diverse stakeholders.
- Benchmark our state's college ready standards against Achieve's standards as well as those in other states.
- Align and sequence coursework through development of statewide curriculum in English Language Arts and mathematics based on Grade Span Expectations (GSEs) and college ready standards.

Year 2 & beyond activities include:

- Align the college ready standards to work ready expectations by convening representatives of RI's workforce development programs and business and industry to determine implications of college-ready standards in determining work-ready expectations.
- Collect course-taking data to determine the impact of coursework on college success.
- Align and sequence coursework through development of statewide curriculum in science based on GSEs and college ready standards.
- Align high school state assessments to college ready standards and analyze results on such assessments as PSAT and Accuplacer exams to further align standards.

(2) Implement a dual enrollment project in order to systematize and expand such opportunities for RI student, tightening the pipeline between secondary and post secondary education with the goal of increased student success and access to college.

- Identify policies to implement and support dual enrollment programs and expand their reach to all students by analyzing the impact of existing models and making recommendations for dual enrollment/early college approaches. This activity includes interviewing Rhode Island program experts, policy makers and opinion leaders, conducting site visits, soliciting student input, and exploring the effectiveness of existing programs at public high schools and colleges.
- The PK-16 Council will review the final report on dual enrollment and adopt an implementation strategy to create a statewide system for Year 2 and beyond.

(3) Create a unified data system to connect information between the elementary and secondary systems, post secondary institutions and workforce development programs.

Major activities in Year 1 include:

- Expand higher education's data warehouse and link it to the state's K-12 data system to ensure greater data integrity, expanded research capacity to issue reports, and higher level technical support to house and manage data. Expanding the Data Warehouse capabilities and linking it with the developing K-12 unit record system will enhance Rhode Island's ability to design a more seamless PK-16 system and provide the basis to monitor progress and evaluate high school reform efforts.
- Continue to refine performance reports for diverse audiences.

Year 2 & beyond activities include:

- Develop linkages to Rhode Island workforce development program data sources, the continued strengthening of the data warehouse and the upgrading of its linkages to the K-12 system. As development of the K-12 system continues, higher education will be actively involved to ensure that data reporting is compatible with the higher education Data Warehouse.
- Create a web portal for secondary school students and parents to access information on career majors, course requirements related to the same, financial aid opportunities, and that allows for college e-applications.

(4) Improve teacher knowledge and skills by initiating an improved instruction and curriculum alignment project in science called *Physics First*.

- Identify five pilot high schools and assist them in making the changes necessary to realign their high school science curricula with the needs of the 21st Century marketplace and State content standards (GSEs) by introducing physics concepts to all freshman followed by micro scale chemistry and biology in subsequent years.
- Develop and maintain an organized professional development, planning and management infrastructure for high school science teachers and department chairs in *Physics First* pilot schools.
- Secure state funding to provide appropriate texts and lab equipment and to begin expanding the pilot to more RI high schools.
- Begin implementation of micro scale chemistry in Year 2 and biology in Year 3; expand this project to additional schools in subsequent years.

(5) Coordinate educational governance to ensure policy alignment across systems.

Major activities in Year 1 include:

- Fully operationalize the PK-16 Council with appropriate staffing, scheduling of meetings and activities, etc. Ensure the Council is positioned to create and sustain effective partnerships between public K-12 and postsecondary educational infrastructure and

institutions in Rhode Island as well as between and among our state's workforce development systems and economic development organizations.

- Build a culture of change that values the individual, supports teamwork and shares the pursuit of educational excellence and accountability across all grade levels and schools with immediate emphasis on high schools.
- Develop clear and effective policies to improve student pathways from secondary to post-secondary education (especially for low-income students), including the establishment of formal high school credit-based transition programs with higher education institutions.

Years 2 & beyond activities include:

- Continue to align standards for achievement in reading, writing and mathematics so that students graduating from high school are fully prepared for college-level work. Begin work on statewide science curriculum and standards alignment.
- Link college ready and work ready standards to post secondary admissions requirements as well as employer expectations and employment criteria.
- Administer new NECAP high school assessments in 2007-08.
- Fully implement the new high school diploma system with class of 2008; provide necessary support to ensure student and school success.

Our success hinges on our state's history and tradition at the same time as it deploys high-energy, finely focused action strategies to transform our high schools and educational systems into positive forces for change. Rhode Island's ADP Action Plan will utilize our significant experience and assets, from dynamic partnerships and community networks to communications expertise, as we transform our schools at the same time as we continue to build the political and public will for high school redesign and student success.

Core group – Statewide PK-16 Council

One of the primary recommendations of Governor Donald L. Carcieri's Education Transition Team in 2002 was the creation of a more effective working partnership between the leaders of PK-12 public education and Rhode Island's public and private institutions of higher education. Building on the articulation work of a joint subcommittee of the Rhode Island Board of Regents (K-12) and Board of Governors (Higher Education), in April 2005 Governor Carcieri issued an Executive Order establishing a Statewide PK-16 Council. Chaired by the Governor, this interdisciplinary policy team responds to the state's need to improve the quality of its education system to produce a workforce able of performing in today's economy and students who are prepared for college level work. The Governor's order creating the Statewide PK-16 Council underscored the need for a coherent, well-aligned PK-16 system of education designed to improve student achievement at all levels while upgrading communications among all stakeholders.

The PK-16 Council includes:

The Honorable Donald L. Carcieri

Governor & PK-16 Council Chair

The Honorable Frank Caprio

Chief Judge, Municipal Court of Providence & Chair of the RI Board of Governors

Paul Choquette

President and CEO, Gilbane Building Company & Chair of the Economic Policy Council

James DiPrete

Chair, Board of Regents for Elementary & Secondary Education

Joseph Macaurele

President and CEO, Citizens Bank of RI and Connecticut & Chair of the Governor's Workforce Board

Michael McMahon

Executive Director, RI Economic Development Corporation

Peter McWalters

Commissioner, RI Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

Adelita Orefice

Director, RI Department of Labor and Training

Dr. Jack Warner

Commissioner, RI Office of Higher Education

The work of the Council necessitates the involvement of numerous state and local entities. In addition to the Council members, more than fifty individuals representing a broad spectrum of stakeholders are included in the Council's regular communications and activities—many of whom are important partners as the Council moves forward. These individuals range from educators and community activists to legislators and business leaders.

How we communicate is as important as what we do. The Council's success will in large part be conditioned on the effectiveness of how well it communicates these goals and progress achieved toward them. Communications will be targeted to the general public and to specific audiences -- including students, schools and staff, elected officials, and parents and other stakeholders. An effective communications program will show the extent to which the K-16 system is realigned and the extent to which our students are successful in meeting their educational and employment goals.

The power of the combined talents and authority of the members of the PK-16 Council provide Rhode Island with a unique opportunity to effectuate change now and into the future. From aligning standards so that high school graduates are fully prepared for college-level work to linking achievement standards with employer expectations; accelerating dual enrollment opportunities; creating new mechanisms for data collection, storage, analysis, and sharing; and creating a healthier economy with work ready students, the Council will create a culture of change that values the individual, supports teamwork, and shares the pursuit of educational excellence and accountability across all grade levels at all schools for all children, with an immediate emphasis on our public high schools.