

**Understanding
Institutional Differences
in Education Governance:
A Comparison of
Massachusetts and Rhode
Island**

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RIPEC

RIPEC Mission Statement

RIPEC is an independent, nonprofit and nonpartisan public policy research and education organization dedicated to the advancement of effective, efficient and equitable government in Rhode Island.

Through in-depth research, program monitoring, advocacy and public information activities, RIPEC:

- Suggests approaches to help improve the effectiveness and efficiency of government agencies;
- Promotes fiscal responsibility and sound management practices;
- Assists elected officials and their staffs in the development of sound policies and programs;
- Enhances understanding between the private sector and state and local governments;
- Provides objective information and conducts educational programs for the benefit of Council members, public officials, and the general public;
- Builds coalitions with other community groups to promote sound public policies; and
- Promotes a public policy agenda to foster a climate for economic opportunity.

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I. Introduction

This Rhode Island Public Expenditure Council (RIPEC) report is intended to examine the differences in institutional structure and governance of the public education systems in Rhode Island and Massachusetts. Students in Rhode Island's public schools generally perform near the national average on national tests and the Ocean State's schools are usually ranked as being average or slightly above-average. By contrast, Massachusetts' students consistently outperform most other states on national tests and its schools are widely regarded as being among the best in the United States.¹

Despite these differences in performance, Rhode Island and Massachusetts devote similar amounts of financial resources to education and have similar student demographics. Therefore, it is necessary to explore the differences that may exist between Rhode Island and Massachusetts with regards to the governance of each state's public education system. It should be noted that this report represents RIPEC's analysis and understanding of state statutes and regulations in Rhode Island and Massachusetts.

The second section of this report provides data comparing the demographic characteristics and performance of public school students in Rhode Island and Massachusetts. As this section demonstrates, socioeconomic characteristics are not sufficient to explain the difference in student performance between the two states. The remainder of this report is focused on identifying differences in the institutional structures and governance of public education in the two states, which may provide part of the explanation for why students in Massachusetts consistently outperform students in Rhode Island.

The third section of this report explores the broad historical and institutional context in each state. More specifically, this section examines the education clauses contained in each state's constitution, and considers how subsequent case law has clarified and impacted the state's role in public education. This section then considers the history of education reform in both states, and explores differences in state funding of public education.

The fourth section of this report focuses on the structure of education governance in Rhode Island and Massachusetts. This section of the report considers the implications of differences in the organization, distribution of authority, and leadership duties of each state's State Education Agency (SEA) and Local Education Agencies (LEAs).

The fifth section of this report is dedicated to an exploration of each state's education standards, assessment, and accountability systems. Finally, the sixth section concludes this report with a discussion of RIPEC's perspective on how Rhode Island can emulate the successful education reforms implemented in Massachusetts.

¹ <http://www.usnews.com/education/best-high-schools/articles/how-states-compare>

II. Public School Student Demographics and Performance

Demographics

Academic research has consistently found that there is a strong correlation between student achievement and certain demographic factors. These differences, sometimes referred to as “achievement gaps,” appear when comparisons are made between student performance and a number of demographic factors, ranging from race and ethnicity to socioeconomic status. Therefore, it is essential that student demographics in Rhode Island and Massachusetts be examined to ensure that differences in student performance cannot be attributed to these factors. Table 1 presents an overview of student demographic data from the 2013-2014 school year for Rhode Island and Massachusetts, as reported by the [National Center for Education Statistics](#).

As presented in Table 1, students in the two states have similar demographic characteristics on most variables, but two notable differences exist. In terms of pupil-teacher ratio, Massachusetts has one teacher for every 13.6 pupils in all schools in the state (including public, private and religious schools), while Rhode Island has one teacher for every 14.5 students. A second difference concerns the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, a variable that is sometimes used as a proxy for poverty levels among students. In Rhode Island, 46.2 percent of students were eligible to receive a free or reduced-price lunch, while 38.2 percent of students in Massachusetts were eligible.

	Massachusetts	Rhode Island
Total Per-Pupil Expenditures*	\$15,321	\$14,889
Number of Pupils Enrolled	955,739	142,008
State Ranking by Per Pupil Expenditures*	8	9
Percent with Individualized Education Programs (IEP)	17.5%	16.4%
Percent in English Language Learner (ELL) programs	7.4%	6.6%
Percentage of students eligible for free/reduced lunch	38.2%	46.2%
Number of School Districts	394	54
Number of Schools	1,829	317
Number of Charter Schools	law permits 120; 80 operational	law permits 35; 19 operational
Number of FTE Teachers	70,415	9,729
Pupil/Teacher Ratio	13.6	14.5
*Data for the 2012-2013 school year; excludes capital outlays and interest on school debt; ranks include D.C.		
SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics; U.S. Census Bureau		

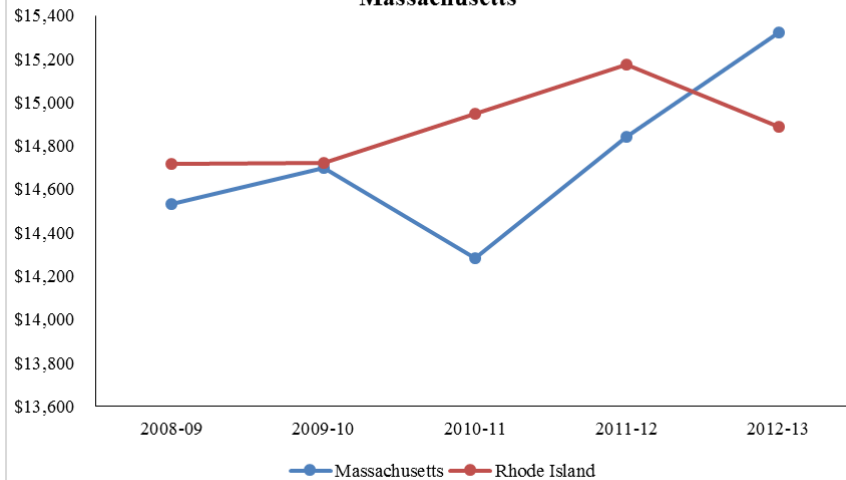
Table 2
Current Expenditures Per Pupil in Fall Enrollment in Public Elementary and Secondary Education

	Massachusetts		Rhode Island	
2012-13	\$	15,321	\$	14,889
2011-12		14,844		15,172
2010-11		14,285		14,948
2009-10		14,699		14,723
2008-09		14,534		14,719

Note: Current expenditures per pupil includes instruction, support services, food services, and enterprise operations; excludes capital outlays and interest on school debt.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics

Figure 1
Current Expenditure Per Pupil, Rhode Island and Massachusetts



SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics

On most other demographics, the two states are comparable to one another. For example, per pupil expenditures totaled \$15,321 in Massachusetts during the 2012-2013 school year (the most recent year for which expenditure data is available), while these expenditures totaled \$14,889 in Rhode Island. Similarly, 6.6 percent of students in Rhode Island were enrolled in English Language Learner (ELL) programs, while 7.4 percent of students in Massachusetts were enrolled in these programs. Furthermore, 16.4 percent of students in Rhode Island were enrolled in an Individualized Education Program (IEP), while 17.5 percent of students in Massachusetts were enrolled in an IEP.

Another relevant demographic feature is the racial and ethnic composition of each state's public school student body. According to data from the National Center for Education Statistics, the student bodies of Rhode Island and Massachusetts are relatively similar in terms of racial and

ethnic composition. During the 2013-2014 school year, a greater percentage of students in Massachusetts were white than in Rhode Island (64.9 percent compared to 61.5 percent). Similarly, a greater percentage of students in Massachusetts were black than in Rhode Island (8.7 percent compared to 8.1 percent). By contrast, a greater percentage of students in Rhode Island were Hispanic than in Massachusetts (23.4 percent compared to 17.0 percent). Overall, 38.5 percent of students in Rhode Island were members of a minority group, compared to 35.1 percent of students in Massachusetts.

Table 3
Public School Enrollment by Race and Ethnicity
(2013-2014 School Year)

	Massachusetts	Rhode Island
White	64.9%	61.5%
Black	8.7%	8.1%
Hispanic	17.0%	23.4%
Asian	6.1%	2.9%
Hawaiian Native/Pacific Islander	0.1%	0.2%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	0.2%	0.7%
Two or more races	2.9%	3.2%
Total minority	35.1%	38.5%

SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics

Standardized Test Performance

National Assessment of Educational Progress

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), also known as *The Nation’s Report Card*, is a national, periodic assessment of student performance across a range of topics and is the only national metric available for cross-state comparisons of student performance. Since 2001, all states receiving Title I funding under the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) are required to test fourth and eighth graders in reading and mathematics every two years as a means to verify the adequacy of state tests used for the assessment provisions of federal law. Participation in tests on other subjects, such as science and writing, is at the discretion of each state.

Table 4 compares the average scores of fourth and eighth grade public school students in Rhode Island and Massachusetts on the NAEP reading assessment in 2005, 2013 and 2015. As the data demonstrate, students in Massachusetts have consistently scored above both the national average and the average score for students in Rhode Island. On the most recent test conducted in 2015, 40.0 percent of Rhode Island fourth graders scored *at or above proficient* on the reading assessment, compared to 50.0 percent of fourth graders in Massachusetts and 35.0 percent nationally. Among eighth graders, 35.0 percent of Rhode Island students scored *at or above proficient* in 2015, compared to 46.0 percent of Massachusetts students and 33.0 percent of students nationally.

**Table 4
NAEP Reading Assessment**

Grade 4													
State	Score				Percentage								
	2005	2013	2015	Change 05-15	2005 Below Basic	2005 At or Above Basic	2005 At or Above Proficient	2013 Below Basic	2013 At or Above Basic	2013 At or Above Proficient	2015 Below Basic	2015 At or Above Basic	2015 At or Above Proficient
United States	217	221	221	4	38%	62%	30%	33%	67%	34%	32%	68%	35%
Massachusetts	231	232	235	4	22%	78%	44%	21%	79%	47%	18%	82%	50%
Rhode Island	216	223	225	9	38%	62%	30%	30%	70%	38%	28%	72%	40%

Grade 8													
State	Score				Percentage								
	2005	2013	2015	Change 05-15	2005 Below Basic	2005 At or Above Basic	2005 At or Above Proficient	2013 Below Basic	2013 At or Above Basic	2013 At or Above Proficient	2015 Below Basic	2015 At or Above Basic	2015 At or Above Proficient
United States	260	266	264	4	29%	71%	29%	23%	77%	34%	25%	75%	33%
Massachusetts	274	277	274	0	17%	83%	44%	16%	84%	48%	17%	83%	46%
Rhode Island	261	267	265	4	29%	71%	29%	23%	77%	36%	24%	76%	35%

NOTE: All scores are for public schools only
Source: National Center for Education Statistics - The Nation's Report Card - Reading

**Table 5
NAEP Mathematics Assessment**

Grade 4													
State	Score				Percentage								
	2005	2013	2015	Change 05-15	2005 Below Basic	2005 At or Above Basic	2005 At or Above Proficient	2013 Below Basic	2013 At or Above Basic	2013 At or Above Proficient	2015 Below Basic	2015 At or Above Basic	2015 At or Above Proficient
United States	237	241	240	3	21%	79%	35%	18%	82%	41%	19%	81%	39%
Massachusetts	247	253	251	4	9%	91%	49%	10%	90%	58%	10%	90%	54%
Rhode Island	233	241	238	5	24%	76%	31%	17%	83%	42%	20%	80%	37%

Grade 8													
State	Score				Percentage								
	2005	2013	2015	Change 05-15	2005 Below Basic	2005 At or Above Basic	2005 At or Above Proficient	2013 Below Basic	2013 At or Above Basic	2013 At or Above Proficient	2015 Below Basic	2015 At or Above Basic	2015 At or Above Proficient
United States	278	284	281	3	32%	68%	28%	27%	73%	34%	30%	70%	32%
Massachusetts	292	301	297	5	20%	80%	43%	14%	86%	55%	19%	81%	51%
Rhode Island	272	284	281	9	37%	63%	24%	26%	74%	36%	28%	72%	32%

NOTE: All scores are for public schools only
Source: National Center for Education Statistics - The Nation's Report Card - Mathematics

Table 5 displays average scores for fourth and eighth grade public school students in Rhode Island and Massachusetts on the NAEP mathematics assessment in 2005, 2013 and 2015. Similar to the results found on the NAEP reading assessment, 37.0 percent of Rhode Island fourth graders scored *at or above proficient* on the 2015 mathematics assessment, compared to 54.0 percent of fourth

graders in Massachusetts and 39.0 percent nationally. Among eighth graders, 32.0 percent of Rhode Island students scored *at or above proficient* on the 2015 mathematics assessment. This compares to 51.0 percent of eighth graders in Massachusetts and 32.0 percent nationally.

NAEP also measures score gaps for various student subgroups, including racial and ethnic minorities and students from low-income families. NAEP uses student eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch as an indicator of whether or not a student comes from a low-income family. By comparing the average scores of students who are eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunches, it is possible to gauge performance gaps between students from low-income families and their peers. Tables 6 and 7 display the percentage of students in different subgroups that scored *at or above proficient* on the 2015 NAEP reading and mathematics assessments, respectively.

As the data indicate, Massachusetts public school students outperform their peers in Rhode Island across nearly every subcategory. For instance, 28.0 percent of eighth grade students eligible to receive a free or reduced-priced lunch in Massachusetts scored *at or above proficient* on the 2015 NAEP reading assessment. By contrast, only 19.0 percent of eighth grade students eligible to receive a free or reduced-price lunch in Rhode Island scored *at or above proficient* on the same assessment. Similar differences in test performance among similar groups in the two states can be found on the reading and mathematics assessments for students in fourth and eighth grades.

These data indicate that the difference in overall performance on standardized tests between students in Rhode Island and Massachusetts is not solely the result of socioeconomic factors. For instance, students in Massachusetts that are eligible for a free or reduced-price lunch outperform their counterparts in Rhode Island; similarly, students in Massachusetts that are not eligible for a free or reduced-price lunch also outperform their counterparts in Rhode Island. Similarly, English Language Learners and students with disabilities in Massachusetts outperform similar students in Rhode Island.

	MA	RI		MA	RI
4th Grade			8th Grade		
All Students	50.0%	40.0%	All Students	46.0%	35.0%
<i>Free or Reduced Lunch Eligible</i>			<i>Free or Reduced Lunch Eligible</i>		
Eligible	29.0%	24.0%	Eligible	28.0%	19.0%
Not Eligible (Not receiving)	65.0%	54.0%	Not Eligible (Not receiving)	59.0%	48.0%
<i>Race or Ethnicity</i>			<i>Race or Ethnicity</i>		
White	58.0%	50.0%	White	53.0%	44.0%
Black	25.0%	27.0%	Black	18.0%	15.0%
Hispanic	25.0%	20.0%	Hispanic	17.0%	15.0%
Asian/Pacific Islander	68.0%	37.0%	Asian/Pacific Islander	64.0%	51.0%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	N/A	N/A	American Indian/Alaskan Native	N/A	N/A
Two or More Races	43.0%	35.0%	Two or More Races	48.0%	32.0%
<i>Disability or English Language Learner</i>			<i>Disability or English Language Learner</i>		
Student with Disability*	20.0%	6.0%	Student with Disability*	15.0%	8.0%
English Language Learner	12.0%	5.0%	English Language Learner	6.0%	1.0%
*Includes students with IEP or 504 Plan.					
Source: National Center for Education Statistics - The Nation's Report Card - Reading					

Table 7
NAEP Mathematics Assessment Results, 2015
Percentage of Subgroups Scoring At or Above Proficient

	MA	RI		MA	RI
4th Grade			8th Grade		
All Students	54.0%	37.0%	All Students	51.0%	32.0%
<i>Free or Reduced Lunch Eligible</i>			<i>Free or Reduced Lunch Eligible</i>		
Eligible	31.0%	21.0%	Eligible	31.0%	15.0%
Not Eligible (Not receiving)	71.0%	52.0%	Not Eligible (Not receiving)	66.0%	46.0%
<i>Race or Ethnicity</i>			<i>Race or Ethnicity</i>		
White	62.0%	48.0%	White	59.0%	41.0%
Black	26.0%	17.0%	Black	22.0%	14.0%
Hispanic	28.0%	18.0%	Hispanic	24.0%	13.0%
Asian/Pacific Islander	81.0%	42.0%	Asian/Pacific Islander	73.0%	49.0%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	N/A	N/A	American Indian/Alaskan Native	N/A	N/A
Two or More Races	55.0%	26.0%	Two or More Races	N/A	21.0%
<i>Disability or English Language Learner</i>			<i>Disability or English Language Learner</i>		
Student with Disability*	25.0%	9.0%	Student with Disability*	16.0%	7.0%
English Language Learner	17.0%	8.0%	English Language Learner	10.0%	5.0%

*Includes students with IEP or 504 Plan.

Source: National Center for Education Statistics - The Nation's Report Card - Mathematics

Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers

Beginning with the 2014-2015 academic school year, Rhode Island began using the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessment in lieu of the New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP) assessments in reading, mathematics, and writing. The PARCC assessment, which was jointly developed by 12 states and the District of Columbia, is a computer-based test that aligns with the Common Core State Standards and is expected to provide more accurate information about the academic progress of students. Similar to the NECAP assessment, the PARCC assessment consists of English language arts/literacy and mathematics components. In Rhode Island, the PARCC assessment was administered to students in grades 3 through 10 during the 2014-2015 school year; in Massachusetts, school districts were allowed to choose between administering the existing Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) test or the PARCC assessment.

Table 8 displays the results in Rhode Island and Massachusetts from the 2015 PARCC assessment in grades 3 through 8 for English Language Arts/literacy and mathematics. Overall, 37 percent of Rhode Island students in grades 3 through 8 met or exceeded expectations in ELA/literacy, while 63 percent of students did not. In Massachusetts, 60 percent of students in these grades met or exceeded expectations in ELA/literacy, while 40 percent did not. Similarly, 28 percent of Rhode Island students met or exceeded expectations in mathematics, while 72 percent did not. In contrast, 52 percent of Massachusetts students met or exceeded expectations in mathematics, compared to 49 percent that did not.

Table 8
2015 PARCC Results, Rhode Island and Massachusetts

<u>ELA/Literacy</u>					<u>Mathematics</u>				
Rhode Island			Massachusetts		Rhode Island			Massachusetts	
Grade	Met Expectations	Did Not Meet Expectations	Met Expectations	Did Not Meet Expectations	Grade	Met Expectations	Did Not Meet Expectations	Met Expectations	Did Not Meet Expectations
3	37%	63%	54%	46%	3	36%	64%	55%	45%
4	38%	62%	57%	43%	4	27%	73%	47%	53%
5	38%	62%	63%	37%	5	27%	73%	55%	45%
6	35%	65%	60%	40%	6	26%	74%	53%	47%
7	38%	62%	60%	40%	7	25%	75%	45%	55%
8	35%	65%	64%	36%	8	26%	74%	53%	47%
All (3-8)	37%	63%	60%	40%	All (3-8)	28%	72%	52%	49%

Note: "Met Expectations" includes students that scored Level 4 or 5, while did not meet expectations includes students scoring Levels 1, 2 or 3.

SOURCE: Rhode Island and Massachusetts Departments of Education

Table 9 displays a comparison of demographics and performance on the 2015 PARCC exam in selected Massachusetts and Rhode Island districts. This table demonstrates that the top-performing districts in Massachusetts outperform the top-performing districts in Rhode Island. Two of the highest-scoring districts in Massachusetts, Belmont and Sharon, outperform the top two districts in Rhode Island, East Greenwich and Barrington, by between 8 and 20 percentage points on the ELA/literacy portion, and by over 20 percentage points on the math portion of the exam. This is in spite of the four communities having similar free and reduced lunch populations and similar per pupil expenditures. Additionally, greater portions of the student population in both of the Massachusetts communities have an individualized education plan, are English language learners, and belong to a minority (non-white) racial/ethnic group.

Table 9 also illustrates that districts in Massachusetts with the highest portion of students eligible for free and reduced lunch perform better on the PARCC than their Rhode Island counterparts. For a complete list of Massachusetts and Rhode Island district-level performance on the PARCC exam, along with selected demographic information, see the Appendix.

Table 9
Comparison of Selected Massachusetts and Rhode Island Districts, Selected Demographic Information and 2015 PARCC Performance

State and District	2012-2013**	2013-2014**					2015	
	Total Current Expenditures per Pupil	Total Students	% White	% ELL*	% IEP*	% FRL*	PARCC % Proficient	
							Grades 3-8***	
							ELA/Lit	Math
Massachusetts - Top ELA/Lit Performers †								
Belmont	\$ 11,436	4,205	70%	4%	10%	7%	89%	81%
Richmond	18,268	150	91%	0%	9%	21%	88%	73%
Westford	11,209	5,180	75%	1%	12%	4%	87%	82%
Sudbury	12,670	2,925	83%	1%	14%	4%	87%	78%
Carlisle	16,495	640	80%	1%	14%	1%	87%	84%
Rhode Island - Top ELA/Lit Performers								
East Greenwich	\$ 13,901	2,410	86%	0%	12%	7%	71%	57%
Barrington	13,247	3,334	89%	1%	12%	6%	69%	60%
Charlino	16,117	3,427	91%	0%	11%	26%	64%	43%
South Kingstown	16,785	3,397	86%	1%	13%	19%	64%	55%
Jamestown	18,049	507	92%	1%	17%	10%	61%	54%
Massachusetts - Top Math Performers †								
Carlisle	\$ 16,495	640	80%	1%	14%	1%	87%	84%
Westford	11,209	5,180	75%	1%	12%	4%	87%	82%
Sharon	13,856	3,434	66%	3%	16%	7%	79%	82%
Belmont	11,436	4,205	70%	4%	10%	7%	89%	81%
Sudbury	12,670	2,925	83%	1%	14%	4%	87%	78%
Pelham	15,031	127	78%	0%	23%	20%	85%	78%
Wayland	15,525	2,690	72%	1%	20%	6%	79%	78%
Weston	19,343	2,333	71%	3%	17%	4%	78%	78%
Rhode Island - Top Math Performers								
Barrington	\$ 13,247	3,334	89%	1%	12%	6%	69%	60%
East Greenwich	13,901	2,410	86%	0%	12%	7%	71%	57%
Glocester	15,338	529	96%	0%	15%	18%	51%	55%
South Kingstown	16,785	3,397	86%	1%	13%	19%	64%	55%
Jamestown	18,049	507	92%	1%	17%	10%	61%	54%
Massachusetts - Highest FRL †								
Springfield‡	\$ 14,431	25,826	12%	16%	19%	87%	31%	25%
Chelsea	12,639	6,118	8%	17%	13%	83%	23%	29%
Brockton	12,210	17,011	24%	19%	13%	81%	38%	29%
Everett	11,526	6,906	34%	5%	15%	80%	45%	37%
Revere	13,051	6,831	41%	14%	15%	78%	52%	50%
Fitchburg	13,124	5,010	37%	15%	23%	77%	41%	33%
Boston‡	19,066	54,300	14%	28%	20%	77%	39%	34%
Rhode Island - Highest FRL								
Central Falls	\$ 16,331	2,694	9%	23%	23%	81%	10%	6%
Providence	15,570	23,827	9%	21%	18%	80%	17%	11%
Pawtucket	12,092	8,953	34%	11%	16%	78%	21%	16%
Woonsocket	11,144	5,920	49%	7%	23%	74%	19%	13%
East Providence	13,486	5,321	72%	4%	18%	51%	33%	25%
Massachusetts Totals ††								
	\$ 15,321	955,739	65%	7%	17%	38%	60%	52%
Rhode Island Totals								
	\$ 14,889	142,008	62%	7%	16%	45%	37%	28%

* ELL refers to English Language Learners; IEP refers to students with an Individualized Education Plan; and FRL refers to students eligible for free or reduced lunch.

** Most recent year for which comparable Massachusetts and Rhode Island data are available from the National Center for Education Statistics.

*** For purposes of comparison; Rhode Island administered the PARCC exam to grades 3-10, but Massachusetts only administered it to grades 3-8. Includes elementary (grades 3-5) and middle school (grades 6-8).

† Includes only those districts that administered the PARCC exam in 2015.

†† Massachusetts Totals include all districts for demographic information (Total Current Expenditures per Pupil, Total Students, % White, % ELL, % IEP and % FRL).

‡ In Boston, Springfield and Worcester, individual schools were allowed to select between the PARCC and MCAS in 2015. Demographic information (Total Current Expenditures per Pupil, Total Students, % White, % ELL, % IEP and % FRL) is provided for the district as a whole, but PARCC proficiency percentages are only for the schools that opted to administer the PARCC.

SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics, Massachusetts Department of Education, Rhode Island Department of Education.

SAT

The SAT, formerly called the Scholastic Assessment Test, is a voluntary college entrance exam primarily taken by high school juniors and seniors. SAT scores are intended to provide an objective evaluation of an individual applicant's verbal and mathematics scores and are thus an important part of the application process for many colleges and universities. Students taking the SAT receive a score in reading, mathematics and writing that can range from 200 to 800, for a total score that ranges from 600 to 2400. This analysis includes the writing assessment, which was first administered in 2006; the College Board announced early in 2014 that the writing section will become optional beginning in 2016.

Table 10
Overall Mean SAT Scores and Participation Rates, 2010-2015

State	Part. Rate	2015 Mean Scores*				Part. Rate	2014 Mean Scores*				Part. Rate	2010 Mean Scores*			
	2015	Read	Math	Write	Total	2014	Read	Math	Write	Total	2010	Read	Math	Write	Total
U.S. Average	44%	489	498	475	1462	44%	492	501	478	1471	36%	498	511	488	1497
Massachusetts	81%	507	521	497	1525	81%	507	523	498	1528	71%	508	524	504	1536
Rhode Island	69%	480	481	468	1429	69%	483	484	471	1438	58%	485	488	478	1451

Note: SAT scores and participation rates are for public schools only.

*Data is for students graduating in the academic year provided.

Source: The College Board; WICHE Graduation Estimates; RIPEC calculations

In 2015, graduating seniors at public high schools in Rhode Island had an average reading score of 480, an average mathematics score of 481 and an average writing score of 468 for a total average score of 1429. By contrast, graduating seniors in Massachusetts public high schools had an average reading score of 507, an average mathematics score of 521 and an average writing score of 497 for a total average score of 1525. An important consideration when interpreting optional standardized test results is the participation rate, or percentage of students that opted to take the test. In general, average test scores have been found to decline as the percentage of students taking the test increases. In 2015, 81 percent of graduating seniors in Massachusetts public high schools took the SAT, compared to 69 percent of the same students in Rhode Island public high schools. Despite having a lower participation rate, the average SAT score for Rhode Island students in 2015 was nearly 100 points lower than students in Massachusetts.

When taken together, the results from the NAEP, PARCC and SAT illustrate that public school students in Massachusetts outperform their peers from Rhode Island. This trend can be observed across multiple standardized tests, between numerous demographic groups and over a number of years. Because the two states have relatively similar demographic features, such as the percentage of students that are English Language Learners or are eligible for Free or Reduced Lunch, these factors cannot fully explain the performance gap that exists. Building upon this understanding of student demographics, student performance and performance gaps, this report will now evaluate other areas of the education systems of the two states that might impact system effectiveness and student achievement.

III. Historical and Institutional Context

Constitutional Authority

The role of state and local government in public education has a historical context dating back to colonial days, particularly in New England. In Massachusetts and Rhode Island, the extent to which state and local governments are involved in the funding and implementation of public education is directly linked to the articles engrained in their respective constitutions. The text of these education clauses serve as the foundation for court decisions that have increasingly clarified and defined state constitutional guarantees to education, as well as the delegation of responsibility and authority for public education. Each state's constitution has an education clause that demonstrates the importance of public education and outlines which branch(es) of government are responsible for its provision.

Massachusetts Constitution Education Clause:

Wisdom, and knowledge, as well as virtue, diffused generally among the body of the people, being necessary for the preservation of their rights and liberties; and as these depend on spreading the opportunities and advantages of education in the various parts of the country, and among the different orders of the people, it shall be the duty of legislatures and magistrates, in all future periods of this commonwealth, to cherish ...public schools and grammar schools in the towns.... (Massachusetts Constitution, Chapter 5, Section 2).²

Rhode Island Constitution Education Clause:

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 advances and opportunities of education and public library services. (Rhode Island Constitution, Article XII, Sections 1-4).³

While the text of the two clauses is largely similar, they have yielded fundamentally different outcomes when challenged in their respective state judicial systems. In *McDuffy v. Secretary of the Executive Office of Education*, the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court held that the Education Clause imposes an enforceable duty to provide an education for all of the state's children, regardless of any community's economic standing. The Court also found that the children in less affluent communities were "not receiving their constitutional entitlement of education as intended and mandated by the framers of the Constitution." The Court did not order equalized spending on public education, but left it to the legislative and executive branches to devise a remedy that would meet the constitutional duty.

² Education Justice (2014). Massachusetts - Litigation. "[State Constitution Education Article.](#)"

³ Education Justice (2014). Rhode Island - Litigation. "[State Constitution Education Article.](#)"

The Court also broadly defined what the duty to educate entailed:

[a]n educated child must possess 'at least the seven following capabilities: (i) sufficient oral and written communication skills to enable students to function in a complex and rapidly changing civilization; (ii) sufficient knowledge of economic, social, and political systems to enable students to make informed choices; (iii) sufficient understanding of governmental processes to enable the student to understand the issues that affect his or her community, state, and nation; (iv) sufficient self-knowledge and knowledge of his or her mental and physical wellness; (v) sufficient grounding in the arts to enable each student to appreciate his or her cultural and historical heritage; (vi) sufficient training or preparation for advanced training in either academic or vocational fields so as to enable each child to choose and pursue life work intelligently; and (vii) sufficient level of academic or vocational skills to enable public school students to compete favorably with their counterparts in surrounding states, in academics or in the job market.

The decision in *McDuffy v. Secretary of the Executive Office of Education* did not mandate equalized funding for public education. However, by reaffirming the duty of the Commonwealth to provide an adequate education (and further specifying what that means), and by declaring the education provided by poorer communities inadequate, the decision obligated the state to act to redress the situation. In other words, this decision clearly established that it is the duty of the state to ensure that every student receives an adequate education; if local communities or school districts are unable to do so, the state is required to take steps to address the problem.

In contrast, in *City of Pawtucket v. Sundlun*, the Rhode Island Supreme Court declined to hear the plaintiffs' claims that Rhode Island's system for providing state funding for public education violated the education and equal protection clauses of the state's constitution. Instead, the Court held that the Rhode Island Constitution does not guarantee equitable school funding, and further, that decisions regarding state funding for education are the sole province of the General Assembly. The Court reaffirmed this decision in *School Committee et al v. The Honorable Lincoln Chafee*, and further held that it is the duty of the General Assembly, not the Court, to define what an "adequate" education entails.

The legal history surrounding a constitutional guarantee to education and which governmental bodies are responsible for funding it illuminates clear distinctions. In Rhode Island, court rulings clearly state that the General Assembly has sole authority over state support of education. The decision in the Massachusetts case, on the other hand, vests authority over education in both the legislative and executive branches.⁴

A second difference in the legal interpretation relates to whether there exists a constitutional imperative to provide equitable education. In Massachusetts, the state Supreme Court found that equitable and adequate education is a constitutionally-guaranteed right that the state is obligated to provide. In Rhode Island, on the other hand, the state Supreme Court found that equitable

⁴ Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center (2013). "[Ed Reform at Twenty: What's Worked, What's Changed, and What's Next.](#)"

education is not a constitutionally-defined right. Furthermore, unlike in Massachusetts, the Rhode Island Supreme Court also found that it is the sole province of the General Assembly, and not the Court, to define what “adequate” education means.

It is important to note that these court decisions informed subsequent education reform initiatives in their respective states. In Massachusetts, the decision in *McDuffy v. Secretary of the Executive Office of Education* provided a clear call to action. It firmly established the state’s authority and role in the provision of education, and set the stage for comprehensive, top-down (state-driven) educational reform. In contrast, the Rhode Island Supreme Court’s decisions in *City of Pawtucket v. Sundlun* and *School Committee et al v. The Honorable Lincoln Chafee* provided no impetus for system-wide reform, as the state was not obligated to act.

The eventual adoption of a baseline funding formula in both states attempted to address the issue of equitable school funding. However, the absence of a constitutional guarantee allows the Rhode Island legislature to determine alternate methods of funding education to be instituted without considering equity, whereas Massachusetts must consider equity. Massachusetts and Rhode Island’s reform efforts and funding formulas are discussed in greater detail below.

Education Reform

Both Massachusetts and Rhode Island have undertaken education reform efforts over the past two decades; however, there are notable differences in approach, implementation and outcomes.

Massachusetts

In June 1993, three days after the *McDuffy* decision was handed down, the Governor of Massachusetts signed into law a comprehensive education reform effort that became known as the Massachusetts Education Reform Act (MERA). The law was designed as a comprehensive reform and encompassed the following five strategic goals:

- Ensure standards and programs for students that ensure high achievement;
- Establish a fair and equitable system of school finance;
- Reform school and district governance to improve student learning;
- Enhance the quality and accountability of all school personnel; and
- Introduce new models of school organization, finance, and parental participation.

These goals were to be achieved, over a seven-year period, through increased, equitable funding of schools, accountability, and statewide standards for students, teachers, schools, and school districts. MERA included changes in accountability and instituted requirements for a school council in every school, continuing education for educators, increased authority for every principal, better defined roles for school committees and clear, concise and measurable statewide standards for students and schools. The law also mandated "high-stakes" testing based on the new curriculum standards which required every student to pass in order to receive a diploma.⁵

⁵ Overview of the Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993

Rhode Island

Over the last decade, Rhode Island has implemented a number of changes to its education system. These changes were designed to increase spending on education, to track expenditures and understand their link to educational performance and to set statewide definitions of educational achievement and success, while allowing flexibility at the local level. These reforms include updating the basic education program, implementing a uniform chart of accounts (UCOA) to track education expenditures, and adopting a statewide education funding formula. Rhode Island's education reforms are discussed in greater detail below.

Unlike Massachusetts, which undertook a comprehensive approach to reform through a single piece of legislation, Rhode Island has tended to address reform efforts individually, through a combination of legislation, promulgation of rules and regulations and guidance issued by the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE).

Rhode Island's BEP Update

The Rhode Island Basic Education Program (BEP) is the overarching set of regulations that governs the Rhode Island public education system. Together with other federal and state laws and regulations, the BEP outlines the rights of every student in the Rhode Island public education system. It also sets basic standards to help ensure that high-quality education is available to all public school students, regardless of where they live or go to school.⁶ The BEP is produced by the Council for Elementary and Secondary Education, per its statutory authority to determine standards for the Rhode Island public education system and the maintenance of local appropriations to support that system's implementation.⁷

In 2009, the BEP was revised by the Rhode Island Department of Education in conjunction with the then-Board of Regents (currently referred to as the Council for Elementary and Secondary Education) to better reflect more recent standards of student knowledge and skills. The new version moved from a larger, definitional framework into a more directional document. It is based on the idea that an aligned and cohesive education system is required to ensure that all Rhode Island students are adequately prepared for life beyond high school.⁸

The new BEP aims to focus on results, rather than specific program requirements and other factors that were previously deemed essential to the education system. Whereas previous versions of the BEP were prescriptive about inputs (e.g. classroom size), the new BEP focused more on measuring outputs. In effect, the state dictated less about how the local education agencies (LEAs) achieve results and instead focused more on defining statewide standards for success. The BEP update defines how success is to be measured, and defers to LEAs when it comes to determining how best to achieve results.

The BEP clarifies that the state's education role encompasses four key responsibilities:

- Establishing clear expectations for students, educators, and systems;
- Providing capacity and resources for implementation;

⁶ Rhode Island Department of Education (2014). Information and Accountability. "[Basic Education Program.](#)"

⁷ Rhode Island Council for Elementary and Secondary Education (2009). "[Basic Education Program Regulations.](#)"

⁸ Rhode Island Department of Education (2014). Information and Accountability. "[Basic Education Program.](#)"

- Ensuring quality assurance and quality control; and
- Leveraging innovation and partnerships to expedite improvements.

LEAs have seven corresponding education responsibilities:

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

The goals of MERA, as defined previously in this report, closely resemble the state responsibilities included in the Rhode Island BEP and are displayed in Table 11. In both Rhode Island and Massachusetts, it is the responsibility of the state to establish clear standards and expectations for students, teachers, and the education system as a whole. In both cases, the state is also charged with providing the capacity and resources necessary for implementation. However, reform efforts in Massachusetts went further than Rhode Island by modifying the way that local schools and districts are governed and organized. Another difference is related to the issue of education funding; Massachusetts addressed this issue in the same piece of comprehensive reform legislation, while Rhode Island addressed it through separate legislation.

Table 11
Comparison of MERA Strategic Goals and RI Basic Education Program

MERA Strategic Goals	Rhode Island BEP
Establish standards and programs for students that ensure high achievement	Establishing clear expectations for students, educators, and systems;
Ensure a fair and equitable system of school finance	<i>Rhode Island 2010 Funding Formula</i>
Reform school and district governance to improve student learning	
Enhance the quality and accountability of all school personnel	Ensuring quality assurance and quality control
Introduce new models of school organization, finance, and parental participation.	Providing capacity and resources for implementation;
	Leveraging innovation and partnerships to expedite improvements.

SOURCE: Massachusetts Education Reform Act; Rhode Island Basic Education Plan

School Funding

The Massachusetts Foundation Budget

In Massachusetts, the Chapter 70 program is the major program of state aid to public elementary and secondary schools. In addition to providing state aid to support school operations, it also

establishes minimum spending requirements for each school district and minimum requirements for each municipality's share of school costs.

A district's foundation budget is calculated by multiplying the number of students at each grade level and demographic group (limited English proficiency, low-income, etc.) by a set of education spending categories, such as teacher salary and district maintenance costs. The total dollar amount added together produces the foundation budget, which is a gauge of the minimum required funding level to provide an adequate education. In addition, the state provides additional funding for exceptionally high-needs special education students. The foundation budget will vary district-to-district based on the specific demographics of the student population.⁹

Rhode Island Funding Formula

In 2010, Rhode Island enacted a public school funding reform law that establishes a statewide funding formula. The law set a baseline-funding amount for each student in the state and added money to account for those in poverty, providing additional state aid for 70.0 percent of the students throughout the state. Under the new law, those districts receiving additional state aid would receive a gradual increase in aid over a period of seven years and those districts receiving less state aid would have a gradual, 10-year phase-in period before the lower amount took effect. Rhode Island is currently in the sixth year of the funding formula phase-in.

While exceptionally high-needs special education students were given additional categorical funding, the formula itself did not assign additional weights to special education students or English language learners. This was done to avoid incentivizing the over-identification of students in need, instead creating an incentive for schools to integrate these students into their mainstream instructional systems. This was an example of a control aimed at reducing the possibility that districts would inflate reported numbers of special education students for the purposes of receiving more financial resources.

The Rhode Island funding formula legislation also preserved a prior requirement for school districts to implement a uniform chart of accounts (UCOA) designed to enable state monitoring of how local districts spend state dollars. This reporting requirement—which requires all districts to use a common set of accounting codes—allows the state to see connections between local allocative practices and educational performance.

It is notable that the Massachusetts Department of Education is also required to operate within a uniform chart of accounts for reporting revenues and expenditure data. Each school district is required to report general fund receipts, state aid receipts, state federal grant receipts and revolving fund receipts in an annual end-of-year financial report.

⁹ NOTE: The FY 2015 budget included major changes to the calculations that go into determining the above structure. These changes were made to better align the system with the chart of accounts schools use to track expenditures. The changes consolidated many of the statutory categories (for example, the new 'administration' category encompasses superintendents, assistant superintendents, school committee costs, general administration costs of the district, and other categories that were previously reported separately); and increased rates for ELLs (by \$50) and low-income pupils (\$25). Special education tuition remained in its own category.

IV. The Structure of Education Governance

State-Level Governance Structures

There are differences in structural governance in terms of the way that state government is configured to oversee education in Rhode Island and Massachusetts. Each state's education governance structure is discussed below.

Massachusetts State-Level Governance Structures

Massachusetts organizes government operations related to education in an Executive Office of Education that includes the departments of early education and care, elementary and secondary education and higher education. The Executive Office of Education is supervised by a Secretary of Education that is appointed by the governor and serves as the governor's advisor on educational issues as well as representing the interests of education in the governor's cabinet.

Each department within the Executive Office of Education (early education and care, elementary and secondary education and higher education) is overseen by a board and each has its own commissioner that is recommended by the board and appointed by the Secretary of Education. The commissioner serves as the secretary to the board, its chief executive officer and the chief state school officer for the respective departments. The commissioner exercises such delegated powers and duties with the full authority of the board. The Secretary of Education also serves as an ex officio voting member of the boards of early education and care, elementary and secondary education and higher education and the Board of Trustees of the University of Massachusetts and is responsible for facilitating coordination and communication between and among the three departments.

Rhode Island State-Level Governance Structures

Unlike Massachusetts, Rhode Island does not use a secretariat model for education. In 2014, the Rhode Island General Assembly altered the previous structure and organization of the education system by replacing the Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education and Board of Governors for Higher Education with a single, unified Board of Education whose purpose is to be "responsible for the coordination of education from pre-k through higher education and shall set goals and policies for the effective coordination of these public education systems."¹⁰ The Board of Education is comprised of the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education and the Council on Postsecondary Education.

Education policy adopted by the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education, within the Board of Education, is implemented by the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE). RIDE is managed by a Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education, who is appointed by the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education and approved by the full Board of Education. The Commissioner of Postsecondary Education, appointed by the Council on Postsecondary Education and approved by the Board of Education, oversees the Office of Postsecondary Education.

¹⁰ R.I. General Laws (2014). Title 16: Education. Section 16-97-1 "[The Rhode Island Board of Education Act.](#)"

Leadership Duties

The duties prescribed by statute for the commissioners of education constitute a difference in education governance between Rhode Island and Massachusetts. Based on the responsibilities and duties outlined in state law, the Rhode Island Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education takes on an advisory role in terms of setting education policy, which is largely set in regulation by the Council. In Massachusetts, the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education works in conjunction with the board, rather than being required to seek board approval for the majority of actions that he or she wishes to make.

In Rhode Island, the majority of the duties in statute¹¹ are supportive of the duties detailed to the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education. For example, 11 of the 13 duties assigned to the commissioner in the statute either require the commissioner to seek approval or certification from the board (e.g. “The commissioner shall recommend to the board an outline of the subjects and courses of study and the instructional standards for elementary and secondary schools”) or to certify or approve actions already taken by the board (e.g. “The commissioner shall certify the approval of accredited schools”). In practice, however, the commissioner is appointed by the Council to act as its primary advisor on education policy and has influence with the Council about the content of regulations. In Massachusetts, the commissioner works in consultation with the board to develop “future goals, needs and requirements of public education,” a “five year master plan for public education” and a number of other duties that are designed to “encourage and facilitate” effectiveness and quality education and to develop action plans.¹²

In both Massachusetts and Rhode Island, the commissioners act as the primary point of contact between the state and local schools and school districts. However, in Rhode Island, most of the statutory duties assigned to the commissioner in this regard involve either ensuring that schools and districts are in compliance with the laws and regulations of the board (e.g. “The commissioner shall certify that school bus routes and schedules and all contracts for pupil transportation conform with provisions of law and the rules and regulations of the board;” “The commissioner shall verify that school sites and school building plans are in accordance with law and regulations”) or providing administrative support (e.g. “The commissioner shall prepare and recommend standard forms for the use of local schools”).

In Massachusetts, the commissioner plays a more active role at the local level by assisting schools and districts to implement state-level policies and directives, rather than serving a primarily regulatory or administrative function. For example, the commissioner is charged with providing assistance to local-level officials and administrators in their efforts to design local policies and practices that comply with, and meet the stated objectives of, the policies adopted by the board of education (e.g. “The commissioner shall assist school districts in the development of school based management systems. Such assistance shall focus on the implementation of participatory management systems involving all school based professionals, parents, and on the secondary level, students”; “The commissioner shall provide guidelines and ongoing training for school districts and charter schools in order to ensure the quality of student evaluations conducted pursuant to the

¹¹ R.I. General Laws (2014). Title 16 - Education. Section 16-1-5 “[Duties of Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education.](#)”

¹² M.A. General Laws (2014). Title 12 - Education. Chapter 69, Section 1A “[Department of Elementary and Secondary Education: commissioner duties.](#)”

provisions [regarding children with special needs]”). It is also the duty of the commissioner to evaluate, assess, and report on the performance and improvement of public schools and districts (e.g. “The commissioner shall assess the effectiveness and monitor the improvement of the public schools in each district”; “The commissioner shall appoint independent fact-finding teams to assess the reasons for a school or school district's under-performance [...] and shall assess the prospects for school district improvement”).¹³ By helping schools and districts implement statewide policies at the local level, and by evaluating and reporting on local performance to the Board of Education, Massachusetts commissioners exercise a significant degree of influence on the shape and content of policies and action at both the state and local levels.

Table 12
Duties of the Massachusetts Secretary of Education Compared to the Rhode Island Council on Elementary and Secondary Education

Massachusetts (Secretary of Education)	Rhode Island (Board of Education)
N/A	<i>The Board shall</i> maintain a department of elementary and secondary education, to provide for its staffing and organization and to appoint a commissioner of elementary and secondary education pursuant to §16-60-6 who shall serve at its pleasure.
Analyze the present and future goals, needs, and requirements of public education in the commonwealth.	<i>The Board shall</i> approve a master plan implementing the broad goals and objectives for elementary and secondary education in the state that have been established by the board of education. These goals and objectives shall be expressed in terms of what people should know and be able to do as a result of their educational experience. The council on elementary and secondary education shall continually evaluate the efforts and results of education in the pursuit of these objectives. <i>The Board shall</i> adopt standards and exercise general supervision over all elementary and secondary public and nonpublic education in the state.
Review and approve mission statements and five-year master plans encompassing each sector of the public education system. These statements and plans shall take into account the secretary’s analysis of goals, needs, and requirements and shall be designed to achieve a well-coordinated system of education.	<i>The Board shall</i> prepare with the assistance of the commissioner a multi-year plan of priority educational goals and objectives. This plan should recommend policy objectives, implementation strategies, and a timetable for major policy initiatives.
Approve the appointments of commissioners of early education and care, elementary and secondary education, and higher education.	There are two councils that make up the Board and appoint the commissioners of elementary and secondary education and the post-secondary commissioner. <i>The Board shall</i> submit an annual report of its activities to the governor, the speaker of the house, and the president of the senate. The report shall provide: a consolidated financial statement of all funds received and expended; a summary of performance during the previous fiscal year including shortcomings and remedies; a briefing on anticipated activities in the upcoming FY; and findings and recommendations for improvements. The director of DOA is responsible for the enforcement of this subsection.
Make recommendations to the secretary of administration and finance and the governor concerning the funding of education in the commonwealth	<i>The Board shall</i> prepare with the assistance of the commissioner a total educational budget for the elementary and secondary sector which shall include: the budgets of the department of elementary and secondary education; subordinate boards and agencies; and state aid to local school districts. Prior to submitting the budget the council shall present the budget to the board of education for review and approval.

SOURCE: Massachusetts and Rhode Island Statutes

¹³ M.A. General Laws (2014). Title 12 - Education. Chapter 69, Section 1A “[Department of Elementary and Secondary Education; commissioner duties.](#)”

As described above, the responsibilities of the commissioners in each state differ in the sense that the Massachusetts commissioner is granted greater autonomy and flexibility to develop and implement education policy than the Rhode Island commissioner. Generally speaking, the language that defines the commissioner's duties in Massachusetts is directional while the language that defines the duties of the commissioner in Rhode Island is prescriptive. This means that the Board of Education tends to have greater influence over education policy in Rhode Island whereas the commissioner and the board share responsibility in Massachusetts. Table 12 highlights the similarities in statutory responsibilities between the Massachusetts Secretary of Education (and, by extension, the individual commissioners) and the Rhode Island Board of Education.

Analysis and Discussion

As Table 12 demonstrates, the key functions and responsibilities of the state education agency (SEA) are similar in both states. However, the organization and distribution of authority is different across the two states. In Massachusetts, state-level governance of education is characterized by a broad distribution of power, with authority distributed across three separate departments. Authority is further distributed within each department between the board and commissioner, and the commissioner plays an active role in shaping policies at both the state and local levels. In Rhode Island, there is a different distribution of authority between the board and commissioners, and the commissioner fulfills an advisory role to the Council of Elementary and Secondary Education during the policy-making process and is responsible for the implementation of policies.

These differences in the roles and responsibilities of the commissioner have significant implications for education governance in the two states. As mentioned earlier in this section, the commissioner in both states acts as the primary link between the SEA and local schools and districts. Therefore, the commissioner's role fundamentally determines the manner and extent to which the state exercises influence and authority over the provision of education at the local level.

In Massachusetts, the commissioner plays an active role in helping local actors translate state-level objectives into actionable policies on the ground, and in evaluating and assessing local performance relative to those statewide objectives; as a result, the state's influence over the provision of education at the local level is relatively high. In Rhode Island, in contrast, the commissioner's duties are primarily restricted to providing oversight and administrative support, while responsibility for translating and implementing statewide policies is largely left in the hands of local officials.

State-level goals and the degree of alignment in Massachusetts and Rhode Island will be explored in greater detail later in this report. First, however, the report analyzes and compares the local level institutions responsible for education governance in Massachusetts and Rhode Island, and considers the potential implications of any differences.

Local-Level Governance Structures

As with state-level education governance, there are clear differences in the organization and distribution of authority in local education agencies (LEAs) in Massachusetts and Rhode Island. Each state's local governance structure is discussed below.

Massachusetts

One of the principal changes to the local governance structure under MERA was to move towards a school-based management model in which the majority of personnel and operational decision-making authority rests with the principal of each individual school. This change generally removed personnel concerns from the school committee and formed clear and direct lines of accountability, though the school committee does maintain significant override authority.

Since the adoption of school-based management reform, local education governance (like state-level governance) is characterized by a broad distribution of authority across four local bodies: school committees, superintendents, principals, and school councils.

Each school district is governed by a school committee, whose members are usually elected by the public (though in some large cities, such as Boston, members are appointed by the mayor). One of the goals of MERA was to narrow the focus of school committees to an emphasis on policymaking. Their major responsibilities include establishing district-wide educational goals and policies, negotiating collective bargaining agreements, approving school department expenditures and the budget, and establishing performance standards and professional development plans for personnel. School committees are also responsible for hiring and firing the district's school superintendent.

The superintendent, in turn, operates as the chief executive officer, charged with administrating and managing the day-to-day operations of the district. The superintendent's duties include supervising, hiring and firing school principals and other personnel not assigned to a specific school; reviewing and approving teacher and school-based staff appointments made by principals; maintaining records and providing annual reports on the performance of students and staff; and recommending personnel performance standards to the school committee.

Principals, are charged with the day-to-day administration and management of their individual schools, and they are held responsible for the teaching and learning that occurs in their building. They are granted substantial authority over the allocation of resources within their schools, and are responsible for the hiring and firing of teachers and other school-based personnel, subject to the approval of the superintendent, collective bargaining agreements, and state law. Principals are also responsible for establishing the school council, and they serve as the council's co-chair.

Finally, each school must establish a school council composed of the principal, teachers, parents, community members, and, at the high school level, students. School councils are designed to promote participation and involvement in school governance among various stakeholders. Major responsibilities include helping the principal identify educational needs of students; reviewing the school budget; assisting in the formulation and review of an annual school improvement plan; and helping with the development of a plan for improving student performance.¹⁴

Local education governance in Massachusetts resembles the corporate governance model, which is characterized by a clear demarcation of roles and responsibilities among government actors, and a separation of policymaking and management duties. The school committee operates like a

¹⁴ M.A. General Laws (2014). Title 12 - Education. Chapter 71, Sections 59, 59A, 59B and 59C "[Public Schools](#)"; see also John Portz, "Governing Massachusetts Public Schools: Assessing the 1993 Massachusetts Education Reform Act," *New England Journal of Public Policy*, Vol. 13, No. 2, pp. 125-142 (March 1998).

corporate board of directors, the superintendent like a chief executive officer, and the principal like a department head or manager.

Rhode Island

In Rhode Island, the entire care, control and management of all public school interests of the several cities and towns is vested in the school committee.¹⁵ Each school district in Rhode Island is governed by a school committee, whose members are usually elected by the public (though in some cities, such as Providence, members are appointed by the mayor). The committee has broad policymaking, management, and administrative authority, and its responsibilities include developing local education policies, including in areas relating to curriculum, instruction and student conduct; implementing federal, state, and local laws and regulations; approving a master plan defining the goals and objectives of the school system; adopting a budget and approving expenditures; establishing standards for personnel performance and evaluation; and negotiating collective bargaining agreements.

The ultimate authority over school staffing decisions also rests with the school committee, including the selection and termination of superintendents. The superintendent has the power to select, appoint and terminate principals, teachers and other school personnel, but these decisions require the consent of the school committee.¹⁶

Rhode Island state law also requires that the school committee establish a school improvement team in each school. The school improvement team is “composed of the principal and an appropriately balanced number of teachers, education support employees, students, parents, and other business and community citizens.”¹⁷ The teams are responsible for assisting “in the preparation and evaluation of the school improvement plans and shall provide any assistance that the principal may request in preparing the school's annual budget and plan.”¹⁸ However, their role and authority is largely determined by the school committee: according to statute, “Each school improvement team shall perform any functions that are prescribed by regulations of the school board or school committee.”¹⁹

In Massachusetts, superintendents operate as chief executive officers, whereas in Rhode Island, state law explicitly states that superintendents “shall be the chief administrative agent of the school committee.” Primary responsibilities include making policy and budget recommendations to the school committee; overseeing and administering school finances and personnel within the district; and evaluating schools and personnel according to the standards adopted by the committee.²⁰

¹⁵ R.I. General Laws (2014). Title 16 - Education. Section 16-2-9 [“General Powers and duties of school committees.”](#)

¹⁶ R.I. General Laws (2014). Title 16 - Education. Section 16-2-9 [“General Powers and duties of school committees.”](#)

¹⁷ R.I. General Laws (2014). Title 16 – Education. Section 16-53.1-2, [“Establishment of School Improvement Teams.”](#)

¹⁸ R.I. General Laws (2014). Title 16 – Education. Section 16-53.1-3, [“Duties of the School Improvement Teams.”](#)

¹⁹ R.I. General Laws (2014). Title 16 – Education. Section 16-53.1-3, [“Duties of the School Improvement Teams.”](#)

²⁰ R.I. General Laws (2014). Title 16 - Education. Section 16-2-11 [“General Powers and duties of superintendent.”](#)

In contrast to Massachusetts, local education governance in Rhode Island is characterized by a high concentration of authority within a single body – the school committee. Rhode Island has not adopted a model of school-based management, and principals exercise little authority in the individual schools they are charged with managing.

Table 13
Rhode Island and Massachusetts School Hiring and Firing Authority

	Massachusetts	Rhode Island
Superintendents	Hired and terminated by school committees	Hired and terminated by school committees
Principals	Appointed and terminated by superintendents, subject to review by the school committee	Appointed and terminated by superintendents, with consent of the school committee
Teachers	Hired by principals, terminated by principals, subject to review by superintendents	Hired and terminated by superintendents, with consent of the school committee
Other School Personnel	Hired by principals, terminated by principals, subject to review by superintendents	Hired and terminated by superintendents, with consent of the school committee

SOURCE: Rhode Island and Massachusetts state law

Analysis and Discussion

The institutional differences in local-level governance of education described above may be relevant to understanding variation in educational outcomes between Massachusetts and Rhode Island. School-based management has been popular among education reformers since the 1960s, and a number of studies have been conducted over time to investigate the impact of this particular model of governance on various education outcomes.

Proponents of school-based management argue that empowering school-level officials, who best understand the needs of their students and staff, enables them to make decisions that better serve the interests of their school. Furthermore, supporters argue that encouraging broad participation of key stakeholders (e.g., parents, teachers, students) in the school-level decision-making process facilitates the emergence of a shared vision and promotes a higher level of commitment to achieving common goals and objectives. Involving teachers in the process is theorized to improve teacher morale, increase commitment to professional improvement and development, and promote a strong professional community; when teachers are happier and more dedicated, classroom instruction is likely to benefit.²¹

Proponents also argue that devolving authority over school-level decisions to school-level officials improves the efficiency and effectiveness of district-level governing bodies, namely, school committees. School committees that are responsible for the day-to-day administration and management of every school within the district, on top of developing policies for the district as a whole, are more likely to become over-burdened. By transferring school management responsibilities from the district-level school committee to the school, the committee is able to

²¹ For a brief literature review on the topic of school-based management, see: Kerri L. Briggs and Priscilla Wohlstetter, “Key Elements of a Successful School-Based Management Strategy,” *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, Vol. 14, No. 3, pp. 351-372 (2003).

focus its attention on its primary role – that is, developing and adopting district-wide policies and objectives. This greater focus and attention, in turn, may result in better, more effective policies.²²

A review of the empirical evidence provides support for the contention that the school-based management model, or its absence, has important implications that may directly or indirectly impact school effectiveness and student performance. Several studies find evidence that empowering principals to make staffing decisions for their schools, as well as teacher participation in the decision-making process, improve teacher satisfaction, commitment, and morale.²³ Further research has been able to link the positive impacts of school-based management on teachers to improved instructional programs and student achievement.²⁴ Centralized (within the district) hiring, on the other hand, has been found to have a detrimental impact on teacher quality, fit, and satisfaction.²⁵

Other empirical studies find evidence that school-based management improves principal satisfaction.²⁶ Additional research highlights the quality of principals as among the most important factors contributing to school effectiveness and successful reform,²⁷ and since school-based management empowers principals to act and contributes to job satisfaction and retention, this governance model is likely to enhance the positive impact principals are able to have on educational outcomes. Finally, some studies have directly linked school-based management reforms to improvements in student achievement and performance.²⁸

²² See, for example: Kerri L. Briggs and Priscilla Wohlstetter, “Key Elements of a Successful School-Based Management Strategy,” *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, Vol. 14, No. 3, pp. 351-372 (2003); Paul T. Hill, Kelly Warner-King, Christine Campbell, Meaghan McElroy, and Isabel Muñoz-Colón, *Big City School Boards: Problems and Options*, Center on Reinventing Public Education, Sponsored by the Annie E. Casey Foundation (December 2002).

²³ See, for example: Timothy Daly, David Keeling, Rachel Grainger, and Adele Grundies, *Mutual benefits: New York City's shift to mutual consent in teacher hiring*, New York: The New Teacher Project (2008); Susan Moore Johnson, Jill Harrison Berg, and Morgaen A. Donaldson, *Who stays in teaching and why: A review of the literature on teacher retention*, Harvard Graduate School of Education: The Project on the Next Generation of Teachers (2005); Kenneth Leithwood and Teresa Menzies. “Forms and Effects of School-Based Management: A Review,” *Educational Policy*, Vol. 12, No. 3, pp. 325-346 (1998).

²⁴ See, for example: Mark A. Smylie, Virginia Lazarus, and Jean Brownlee-Conyers, “Instructional Outcomes of School-Based Participative Decision Making,” *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, Vol. 28, No. 3, pp. 181-198 (1996).

²⁵ See, for example: Jessica Levin, Jennifer Mulhern, and Joan Schunk, *Unintended consequences: The case for reforming the staffing rules in urban teachers union contracts*, New York: The New Teacher Project (2005).

²⁶ See, for example: John Portz, “Governing Massachusetts Public Schools: Assessing the 1993 Massachusetts Education Reform Act,” *New England Journal of Public Policy*, Vol. 13, No. 2, pp. 125-142 (March 1998).

²⁷ See, for example: Priscilla Wohlstetter and Kerri L. Briggs, “The Principal’s Role in School-Based Management,” *Principal*, Vol. 74, No. 2, pp. 14-17 (1994); Kenneth Leithwood, Karen Seashore Louis, Stephen Anderson, and Kyla Wahlstrom, *How leadership influences student learning*, Minneapolis, MN: Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement, University of Minnesota (2004).

²⁸ See, for example: Anthony S. Bryk, Yeow Meng Thum, John Q. Easton, and Stuart Luppescu, *Examining Productivity: Ten-Year Trends in Chicago Public Schools*, Chicago: Consortium of Chicago School Research (March 1998); G. Alfred Hess, Jr., “Understanding Achievement (and Other) Changes Under Chicago School Reform,” *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, Vol. 21, No. 1, pp. 67-83 (March 1999); Brian P. Gill, Laura S. Hamilton, J. R. Lockwood, Julie A. Marsh, Ron W. Zimmer, Deanna Hill, and Shana Pribesh, *Inspiration, Perspiration, and Time: Operations and Achievement in Edison Schools*, Santa Monica, CA: RAND Education (2005).

Proponents of school-based management are careful to point out that such governance reforms are unlikely to improve student performance and educational outcomes on their own. Rather, the effectiveness of these reforms depends on the presence or absence of additional key elements and conditions. For example, school-based management is more likely to succeed when combined with a shared educational vision that is aligned with rigorous district and state standards for performance; with a well-coordinated professional development plan that is geared toward student needs and collective, rather than individual, goals; with the collection and communication of meaningful data that can be used to evaluate performance and guide future actions related to improving performance; and with the authority and willingness to make decisions that substantively change teaching and learning.²⁹ These elements are considered in greater depth in the following section of this report.

²⁹ Kerri L. Briggs and Priscilla Wohlstetter, “Key Elements of a Successful School-Based Management Strategy,” *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, Vol. 14, No. 3, pp. 351-372 (2003).

V. Standards, Evaluation and Accountability

This section of the report examines how educational standards are established for students, educators, and schools in Massachusetts and Rhode Island; how performance is measured and evaluated relative to those standards; and how various actors within the system are held accountable for their performance and underperformance is addressed. This analysis again highlights key differences between Massachusetts and Rhode Island, and considers the implications of these differences for understanding variation in student performance across the two states.

Standards

Content Standards and Curriculum

Broadly speaking, content standards can be defined as the overarching goals or desired outcomes of the education system. That is, content standards establish the outcomes that schools should produce and the knowledge and skills that students should acquire as they advance from one grade to the next and ultimately graduate. Curriculum, on the other hand, links those educational goals for learning with the instruction and activity that occurs in the classroom. It guides teachers as they enable students to develop the knowledge and skills that they need to pursue further education and/or employment opportunities. Simply put, content standards define *what* students should know, while curriculum defines *how* those goals are to be achieved.

It is also important to distinguish content standards from performance standards, which will be discussed in greater detail later on in this section of the report. While content standards “outline the scope and sequence of the academic content a student is expected to learn at each grade level,” performance standards “measure a student’s progress toward learning that content – how much of the academic content do we expect a student to know to be considered proficient.”³⁰

Content standards constitute the foundation upon which the rest of the education system is built. They establish the (minimum) goals of the education system, and the rest of the system – including curriculum, instruction, instructional materials, student and educator evaluation and assessment, systems of accountability, professional development, etc. – should be aligned with those standards in order to produce the desired outcome. The standards themselves have the capacity to exert substantial influence over what actually happens in the classroom.³¹

Clear, comprehensive, and rigorous content standards can promote improved student achievement by expanding the scope and content of what all students are taught and by improving instruction. Standards are intended to guide classroom instruction; the more clearly-defined, comprehensive, and rigorous they are, the more useful they become in developing curricula, lesson plans, and teaching tools. Studies suggest that high-quality standards have actually led to improvements in classroom instruction, especially when combined with effective assessments of student

³⁰ Gary Phillips and Alicia N. Garcia, *Aiming High: Setting Performance Standards for Student Success*, Education Policy Center at American Institutes for Research (February 2015), pg. 2.

³¹ Chester E. Finn, Jr., Liam Julian, and Michael J. Petrilli, *2006 The State of State Standards*, Washington, D. C.: Thomas B. Fordham Foundation (August 2006).

achievement, which serve as important feedback mechanisms for educators. For example, a study conducted by Achieve, Inc. finds that high standards in Texas, Massachusetts, and Maryland have been linked to positive changes in classroom instruction.³² That same study also finds a connection between stronger content standards and improved student performance; additional research provides evidence for this relationship in other states as well.³³

Content standards do not provide a complete explanation for student achievement and school effectiveness, and strong standards are unlikely to improve outcomes unless the rest of the education system is closely aligned. However, a comparison of content standards in Massachusetts and Rhode Island does provide some useful insight into the reasons why students in the former state outperform their counterparts in the latter.

Content Standards in Massachusetts and Rhode Island

As noted earlier in this report, SEAs in both Massachusetts and Rhode Island are charged with establishing statewide standards for education that define what students are expected to know at the end of each school year. However, the standards adopted by each state differed substantially in terms of clarity, comprehensiveness, and rigor, especially in the years between 1993, when Massachusetts passed MERA, and 2010, when Rhode Island first adopted the Common Core State Standards.

Since the passage of MERA, Massachusetts has worked to develop content standards that are high quality, driven by results and focused on world-class standards. The Massachusetts Department of Education considers its content standards a work in progress and continually refines them. This process of periodic updates has improved the quality of the standards over time in terms of clarity, comprehensiveness, and rigor. According to an assessment by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, standards in Massachusetts earned an overall grade of a C in 1998. By 2000, that grade improved to a B-, and by 2006, the Institute gave Massachusetts an A, representing a perfect score across all measured subject areas and ranking the state first in the nation in terms of quality standards.³⁴

In 2010, the Massachusetts Board of Education adopted the Common Core State Standards (generally considered on par with prior Massachusetts standards³⁵), though the state added additional Massachusetts standards and features. For example, the framework for English language arts and literacy also incorporates literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects.

³² *Three Paths, One Destination: Standards-Based Reform in Maryland, Massachusetts, and Texas*, Washington, D.C.: Achieve, Inc. (2002).

³³ See, for example: Chester E. Finn, Jr., Liam Julian, and Michael J. Petrilli, *2006 The State of State Standards*, Washington, D. C.: Thomas B. Fordham Foundation (August 2006).

³⁴ Michael J. Petrilli, Chester E. Finn, Jr., and Gregg Vanourek, *1998 The State of State Standards* Washington, D. C.: Thomas B. Fordham Foundation (July 1998); Chester E. Finn, Jr. and Michael J. Petrilli, *The State of State Standards 2000*, Washington, D. C.: Thomas B. Fordham Foundation (January 2000); Chester E. Finn, Jr., Liam Julian, and Michael J. Petrilli, *2006 The State of State Standards*, Washington, D. C.: Thomas B. Fordham Foundation (August 2006).

³⁵ Sheila Byrd Carmichael, Gabrielle Martino, Kathleen Porter-Magee, and W. Stephen Wilson, *The State of State Standards – and the Common Core – in 2010*, Washington, D. C.: Thomas B. Fordham Foundation (July 2010).

Massachusetts supplements the Common Core State Standards with standards for pre-kindergarten students that lay a foundation for the kindergarten standards.^{36 37}

Massachusetts' standards are widely regarded as world-class and among the best in the nation.³⁸ In general, scholars and observers agree that the state's standards are top-notch because they "are clear and provide adequate guidance to teachers, they are rigorous and suggest a clear progression of knowledge and skills over time, and they emphasize challenging but appropriate content."³⁹ Indeed, as the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education notes in a report, "the quality of [the state's] standards is often cited as an important element in the Reform Act's success and the state's high performance on national and international assessments."⁴⁰

In Rhode Island, the state (more specifically, the Board of Education) is also charged with adopting a set of content standards for students at every grade level. However, according to the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, standards in Rhode Island were rather weak prior to adoption of the Common Core State Standards in 2010. In 2000 and 2006 the Fordham Institute assigned Rhode Island's standards an overall grade of a D+ (ranked 28th and 34th nationally). In a 2010 report focused specifically on Math and English Language Arts standards, Rhode Island earned a D in both content areas.⁴¹

The state recognized that its content standards were insufficient, and in 2010, Rhode Island moved towards stronger, more rigorous standards by adopting the Common Core State Standards. All districts within the state are expected to align curricula to the Common Core State Standards by the 2014-15 school year. According to the Rhode Island Department of Education, aligned curriculum is integral to connecting education goals to standards-based assessments.⁴² The RIDE website states that by emphasizing required achievements, the Common Core State Standards allow teachers, curriculum developers, and states to determine how educational goals should be reached and what additional topics should be addressed. Teachers are free to provide students with whatever tools and knowledge their professional judgment and experience identify as most helpful for meeting the goals set out in the Standards.⁴³ Rhode Island also supplements the Common Core State Standards with Early Childhood Education Standards for Pre-kindergarten students.

³⁶ M.A. Dept. of Education (2011). "[Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for Mathematics.](#)"

³⁷ M.A. Dept. of Education (2011). "[M.A. Curriculum Framework for English Language Arts and Literacy.](#)"

³⁸ See, for example: *Three Paths, One Destination: Standards-Based Reform in Maryland, Massachusetts, and Texas*, Washington, D.C.: Achieve, Inc. (2002); *Building on 20 Years of Massachusetts Education Reform*, Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (November 2014); Joanne Jacobs, *It Takes a Vision: How Three States Created Great Academic Standards*, Washington, D. C.: Thomas B. Fordham Foundation (August 2006).

³⁹ *Three Paths, One Destination: Standards-Based Reform in Maryland, Massachusetts, and Texas*, Washington, D.C.: Achieve, Inc. (2002), pg. 13.

⁴⁰ *Building on 20 Years of Massachusetts Education Reform*, Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (November 2014), pg. 8.

⁴¹ Chester E. Finn, Jr. and Michael J. Petrilli, *The State of State Standards 2000*, Washington, D. C.: Thomas B. Fordham Foundation (January 2000); Chester E. Finn, Jr., Liam Julian, and Michael J. Petrilli, *2006 The State of State Standards*, Washington, D. C.: Thomas B. Fordham Foundation (August 2006); Sheila Byrd Carmichael, Gabrielle Martino, Kathleen Porter-Magee, and W. Stephen Wilson, *The State of State Standards – and the Common Core – in 2010*, Washington, D. C.: Thomas B. Fordham Foundation (July 2010).

⁴² R.I. Dept. of Education (2011). "[The Common Core State Standards - A Guide for Rhode Island Parents.](#)"

⁴³ Common Core State Standards Initiative (2010). "[Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts.](#)"

Although standards are established at the level of the state, both Massachusetts and Rhode Island require local communities to develop more specific curriculum using the statewide standards as a guide. However, in Massachusetts, the Department of Education also creates curriculum frameworks, which translate the content standards into a delivery system of instruction. Going down the line of specificity, content standards inform the curriculum frameworks, which local schools and districts use to develop curricula, which lead to syllabi, which lead to lesson plans.

Massachusetts also has a Center for Curriculum and Instruction within the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. The center's mission "is to help schools, districts, and organizational partners build capacity to engage all students in learning to meet rigorous expectations."⁴⁴ As part of a Race to the Top Grant, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has also developed over 100 Model Curriculum Units, which are "intended to help educators with implementation of the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks... Massachusetts' educators are encouraged to adopt the units as they are, adapt the units to meet their curriculum needs, and/or use the units as models for developing their own curriculum units."⁴⁵

Since the adoption and implementation of MERA, comprehensive curriculum frameworks in Massachusetts clearly define the scope and sequence of content to be taught at each grade level in all public schools throughout the state, providing clear guidance for the local policymakers and educators that are responsible for developing curricula and classroom instruction. Clear content standards create the foundation in Massachusetts for the rest of the education system, thus promoting strong alignment between statewide standards, classroom instruction and materials, student assessments, and evaluation of educator and school performance. As noted earlier, strong student performance and achievement in Massachusetts is often attributed, in part, to the state's high-quality standards.

Rhode Island policymakers recognized that existing state standards were vague and lacking clarity and, therefore, moved to adopt the Common Core State Standards. Since the adoption of the Common Core, however, standards in Rhode Island have improved markedly, and are nearly identical to those in Massachusetts. Nevertheless, this reform alone may not be sufficient to close the performance gap between the two states. Massachusetts is characterized by strong systemic alignment between statewide standards, curriculum and instruction, student assessments, teacher evaluations, and professional development. In Rhode Island, on the other hand, there is no office that is equivalent to the Center for Curriculum and Instruction in Massachusetts, and the state has not developed curriculum frameworks or model curricula for use in local communities.

In the absence of clear guidance from the state, local officials are granted a much higher degree of autonomy in defining the content and scope of education than their counterparts in the Bay State, making it difficult to promote strong alignment throughout the education system between statewide goals, locally-developed curricula and instruction, student assessments, and teacher and school evaluations. In the absence of such alignment, strong standards alone may have little impact on educational outcomes.

⁴⁴ M.A. Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, [Curriculum and Instruction](#).

⁴⁵ M.A. Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Curriculum and Instruction, [Model Curriculum](#).

Performance Standards

Performance standards are closely related to, but distinct from content standards. While content standards outline what students are expected to know when they leave the classroom each year, “Performance standards measure a student’s progress toward learning that content.”⁴⁶ In other words, performance standards define exactly how much students are expected to know to be considered proficient.

States vary widely in their definitions of student proficiency, and in the tests they use to measure it. The specific tools used to measure student achievement and proficiency in Massachusetts and Rhode Island will be discussed later in this report, when the systems and processes related to evaluation and assessment are explored in greater depth. For the purposes of this part of the discussion, however, the analysis will focus on comparing how students fare on state assessments of proficiency compared to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which constitutes a common, nationwide metric for student performance. The NAEP’s proficiency standards are established by informed experts, and the American Institutes for Research demonstrated that NAEP’s definition of proficient is similar to international tests of student performance.⁴⁷

Differences in state performance standards can be gauged by comparing student performance on state assessments to student performance on NAEP tests. If the percentage of students regarded as “proficient” is similar across state and NAEP tests, the state’s performance standards can be fairly labeled as rigorous and world-class; if, on the other hand, state assessments identify many more students as proficient than NAEP assessments, then state performance standards are relatively low, and proficiency figures can be regarded as inflated.⁴⁸

Rigorous performance standards are important, and without an accurate assessment of student achievement, “the adoption of rigorous content standards will not be enough to affect student achievement in a meaningful way because many students will be described as ‘proficient’ when they are not adequately prepared for postsecondary success.”⁴⁹

A comparison of Massachusetts and Rhode Island performance standards reveals that expectations for students are higher in the Bay State. According to one 2008 study that evaluates the performance standards of all 50 states, Massachusetts is one of only three states to receive an ‘A’ grade, which indicates that the state has set a high bar for students to reach in order to be considered proficient (importantly, the grade refers to state’s *standards* of performance, and does not necessarily indicate high student achievement or performance). Rhode Island’s performance standards, on the other hand, receive a B- in 2003 and 2005, and a C+ in 2007, indicating that more students are deemed proficient by the state assessment than the NAEP. In other words, Rhode

⁴⁶ Gary Phillips and Alicia N. Garcia, *Aiming High: Setting Performance Standards for Student Success*, Education Policy Center at American Institutes for Research (February 2015).

⁴⁷ Paul E. Peterson and Frederick M. Hess, “Few States Set World-Class Standards: In fact, most render the notion of proficiency meaningless,” *Education Next*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (Summer 2008).

⁴⁸ Paul E. Peterson and Frederick M. Hess, “Few States Set World-Class Standards: In fact, most render the notion of proficiency meaningless,” *Education Next*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (Summer 2008).

⁴⁹ Gary Phillips and Alicia N. Garcia, *Aiming High: Setting Performance Standards for Student Success*, Education Policy Center at American Institutes for Research (February 2015), pg. 4.

Island standards for student performance and proficiency are relatively low when compared to Massachusetts and the nationally-benchmarked NAEP.⁵⁰

More recent analyses confirm these findings. Achieve, Inc. analyzed disparities between the portion of students deemed “proficient” by the state assessment and the NAEP exam for 4th and 8th grade reading and math in the 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 school years. The data for Massachusetts and Rhode Island are displayed in Table 14. In Massachusetts, the differentials between the state assessments and the NAEP are relatively low (less than an 8 percentage point difference), with the exception of the 8th grade reading assessment, indicating that the state’s proficiency standards are on par with national standards. On the 4th grade math assessment, a larger portion of students were deemed “proficient” by the NAEP than the state exam, suggesting that Massachusetts standards are actually slightly more rigorous. In Rhode Island, in contrast, the portion of students deemed “proficient” by the state’s reading and math assessments is at least 21 (and as high as 41) percentage points higher than the portion deemed “proficient” by the NAEP, across both grades and years.⁵¹

Table 14
Disparity in Percent of Students Deemed "Proficient,"
State Assessment vs. NAEP

	Massachusetts		Rhode Island	
	Differential	Rank*	Differential	Rank*
4th Grade Reading				
2013-14	-7	5	-32	24
2012-13	-6	3	-31	19
4th Grade Math				
2013-14	6	1	-21	19
2012-13	6	1	-23	21
8th Grade Reading				
2013-14	-31	18	-38	30
2012-13	-30	16	-41	36
8th Grade Math				
2013-14	3	3	-21	21
2012-13	0	3	-22	21

NOTE: Massachusetts state assessment is the MCAS; Rhode Island state assessment is the NECAP.

NOTE: A negative number indicates that a larger percentage of students are deemed "proficient" by the state assessment; a positive number indicates that a larger percentage of students are deemed proficient by the NAEP.

* Refers to national ranking, including Washington, D.C.

SOURCE: Achieve, Inc.

Since transitioning to the Common Core State Standards, both Massachusetts and Rhode Island have begun field testing the associated student assessment, called the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) exam. If both states continue with full adoption

⁵⁰ Paul E. Peterson and Frederick M. Hess, “Few States Set World-Class Standards: In fact, most render the notion of proficiency meaningless,” *Education Next*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (Summer 2008). See also: Gary Phillips, *International Benchmarking: State and National Education Performance Standards*, American Institute for Research (2014).

⁵¹ *Proficient vs. Prepared: Disparities between State Tests and the 2013 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)*, Achieve, Inc. (May 2015).

of the PARCC, then performance standards in Massachusetts and Rhode Island will be equivalent. Still, historically lower performance standards in the Ocean State may constitute another contributing factor to the student achievement gap that exists today between Massachusetts and Rhode Island.

Educator Standards – Teacher Licensing

Licensing requirements for teachers establish the standards educators are required to meet in each state in order to teach. Massachusetts and Rhode Island differ in the process that teachers must complete to receive an educator’s license. In Massachusetts, skills necessary to become an educator are measured through a state-specific examination developed following approval of MERA. By contrast, Rhode Island utilizes a system of standardized tests that nearly all other states throughout the country use.

Massachusetts

Educators wishing to be hired as teachers in Massachusetts are generally required to hold a license issued by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. In order to meet the licensure requirements, teachers must pass the appropriate Massachusetts Tests for Educator Licensure (MTEL). Passing the MTEL Communication and Literacy Skills test (reading and writing subtests) is required for all types of licenses. Additional subject matter tests are required for teacher and specialist teacher licenses and professional-level licenses in Massachusetts are required to be renewed every five years.

The MTEL was initiated by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education in 1998 during implementation of MERA. It includes communications and literacy skills tests as well as assessments of subject matter knowledge. It is designed to ensure that Massachusetts educators can communicate adequately with students, parents/guardians, and other educators and that they are knowledgeable in the subject matter of the license(s) sought.⁵² MTEL is focused on ensuring teachers are competent to teach the content of the curriculum frameworks that is outlined by the Department of Education. In other words, the state-specific standards and exam are designed to promote alignment between statewide goals and classroom instruction. No other tests are accepted in Massachusetts for educator licenses and licenses must be renewed every five years.

Rhode Island

In Rhode Island, the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education is responsible for adopting standards and qualifications for the certification of educators. Educator certification is required for all teachers in Rhode Island public schools, state-approved special education programs and state-funded pre-kindergarten programs. Professional educator certificates are valid for five years in Rhode Island.

Candidates applying to be educators in Rhode Island must pass Praxis Series II exams, which assess academic skills in content areas and teaching ability. The exams are designed to provide comprehensive assessments that measure the skills and content knowledge of candidates entering teacher preparation programs. Praxis tests are taken in 46 states by teachers looking for specific

⁵² M.A. Dept. of Education (2014). Massachusetts Tests for Educator Licensure. “[About the MTEL.](#)”

subject certification and measure subject-specific content knowledge, as well as general and subject-specific teaching skills that are needed to begin teaching. Thus, unlike in Massachusetts, teacher licensing standards in Rhode Island are not explicitly aligned with statewide goals for student achievement and educational outcomes.

It should be noted that Rhode Island's General Laws preclude anyone who obtained an initial certificate prior to January 8, 2002 from being barred from certification solely because of his or her score on any standardized teacher's examination. Such individuals are still required to complete an alternate assessment based on criteria established by the Council for Elementary and Secondary Education. In Massachusetts, when MERA was enacted in 1994, teachers and administrators whose certificates were granted prior to the act's passage were deemed 'standard certificates' which had to be renewed every five years. All such certificates had to be renewed by June 18, 1999.

Performance Assessment and Evaluation

In order for standards to be meaningful, educators and policymakers must have the ability to assess educational performance relative to established goals. Measures of performance provide important feedback to students, educators, and policymakers regarding the effectiveness of current practices. In other words, are current methods of classroom instruction, school and district policies and curricula, and the education system as a whole effectively teaching students the information and skills they are supposed to learn at each level? Educators and policymakers at all levels can use this information to guide future actions aimed at improving student learning and educational performance by identifying areas of strength and weakness where there is room for improvement. For assessments to provide a useful gauge of educational performance relative to established goals and standards, however, tight alignment between standards and assessments is critical.

Student Assessment

Like most states, both Massachusetts and Rhode Island rely on standardized tests to measure student performance. Historically, the two states have utilized different tests. However, both states have now adopted the Common Core standards, and they each began field testing the Common Core-aligned PARCC test during the 2014-2015 school year. It remains to be seen whether both states will ultimately continue down the path of adopting the PARCC assessment, or whether they will choose different paths.

After the passage of MERA in 1993, Massachusetts developed a standardized assessment program called the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS). State law requires all students receiving an education with public funds to participate in MCAS.⁵³ Since 2003, all students, including those with disabilities, are required to meet MCAS Competency Determination standards in English Language Arts (ELA), Mathematics, and Science and Technology/Engineering (STE) at the Grade 10 level to receive a high school diploma.⁵⁴ Students failing one or more of the required tests are offered multiple opportunities to take test(s) again, in

⁵³ M.A. Dept. of Education (2014). Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System. "[Participation Requirements.](#)"

⁵⁴ M.A. Dept. of Education (2014). "[Standards for Competency Determination.](#)"

addition to the opportunity to file an MCAS Performance Appeal if certain eligibility requirements are met.⁵⁵

According to Achieve, Inc., the MCAS stands out as an exemplary assessment of student performance that is tightly aligned with statewide content standards. Furthermore, “educators throughout the state are hard-pressed to articulate what students should know that is not on MCAS. The reason is simple: the test measures important knowledge and skills.”⁵⁶

Since adopting the Common Core State Standards, Massachusetts is deciding whether to keep the MCAS, switch to the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), or develop and adopt a hybrid test that combines elements of both. PARCC assessments are aligned with the Common Core State Standards in an effort to gauge college and career readiness at each grade level. Massachusetts implemented field testing for PARCC performance-based assessments and end-of-year assessments in the spring of 2014. A comparison of the two assessments reveals that “Both the MCAS and the PARCC predict college readiness: The validity of scores on the PARCC assessments in predicting college grades is similar to the validity of scores on the MCAS.”⁵⁷ Regardless of the Board’s ultimate decision, the 10th grade MCAS will continue to be a graduation requirement through at least the class of 2019.⁵⁸

Unlike Massachusetts, which developed its own test to create tight alignment between state standards and student assessments, Rhode Island has relied on the New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP), a series of annually administered achievement tests in reading, writing, mathematics, and science developed by Vermont, New Hampshire and Rhode Island in the years following passage of the federal No Child Left Behind Act. Rhode Island is nearing the end of the transition phase from NECAP assessments to the Common Core State Standards and closely aligned PARCC assessments. Like Massachusetts, the Ocean State implemented field testing for PARCC performance-based assessments and end-of-year assessments in the spring of 2014. Unlike Massachusetts, however, Rhode Island has not adopted high-stakes testing. The PARCC assessments were originally intended to serve as graduation requirements as soon as 2014, but the General Assembly pushed this date back to 2017. The Board is currently considering waiting until 2020 to institute mandatory high-stakes testing.

Teacher Evaluation

In a recent report by the Rhode Island Department of Education, 98 percent of teachers and 99 percent of school leaders (building administrators) attained ratings of effective or highly effective.⁵⁹ Broken down, 56.6% are rated as ‘highly effective,’ 41.7% as ‘effective,’ 1.3% as

⁵⁵ M.A. Dept. of Education (2014). “[Requirements for the Participation of Students with Disabilities in MCAS](#).”

⁵⁶ *Three Paths, One Destination: Standards-Based Reform in Maryland, Massachusetts, and Texas*, Washington, D.C.: Achieve, Inc. (2002), pg. 14.

⁵⁷ Ira Nichols-Barrer, Kate Place, Erin Dillon, and Brian Gill, *Predictive Validity of MCAS and PARCC: Comparing 10th Grade MCAS Tests to PARCC Integrated Math II, Algebra II, and 10th Grade English Language Arts Tests*, Cambridge, MA: Mathematica Policy Research (October 2015).

⁵⁸ Massachusetts Department of Education, “[2015-2016 PARCC and MCAAS FAQ for Administrators and Educators](#).”

⁵⁹ R.I. Dept. of Education (2014). News “[RIDE releases 2nd annual report on educator evaluations](#).”

‘developing,’ and 0.4% as ‘ineffective.’⁶⁰ In Massachusetts, the 2013-2014 educator evaluation report shows 8.1% of teachers score ‘exemplary,’ 86.5% score ‘proficient,’ 4.8% score ‘needs improvement,’ and 0.5% score ‘unsatisfactory.’⁶¹

While both states classify 99% of their teachers as effective or higher, 56.6% of Rhode Island teachers achieve the highest ranking of highly effective while just 8.1% of Massachusetts teachers achieve their highest ranking of exemplary.

The following section details the educator evaluation systems in Massachusetts and Rhode Island.

Massachusetts

In Massachusetts, the standards for the evaluation of teachers, principals, and administrators are set by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education⁶² and implemented by the superintendent.⁶³ The statute in Massachusetts relating to the Board of Education’s purview over teacher performance standards also encourages public school districts to develop programs and standards which provide for a more rigorous and comprehensive evaluation process (Ch. 69, Section 1B). The purpose of the educator evaluation regulations in Massachusetts is to ensure that every district has a system to enhance the professionalism and accountability of teachers and administrators that will enable them to assist all students to perform at high levels.⁶⁴

Efforts to improve the quality of instruction program in Massachusetts have focused on linking the Massachusetts academic content standards with the educator evaluation mandate that originated with MERA. Following the adoption of new educator evaluation regulations in June 2011, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education worked collaboratively with Massachusetts educators to develop a comprehensive educator evaluation system, known as the Model System. The Model System centers the evaluation process on student learning, and it is aligned with Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks, as it is designed to assess educator effectiveness in teaching this material.⁶⁵

*Massachusetts Post-Evaluation Action*⁶⁶

The following section is an excerpt from the Massachusetts Department of Education’s regulations on educator evaluation. Following the conclusion of the educator evaluation cycle, teachers are given ratings of Exemplary, Proficient, Needs Improvement, or Unsatisfactory.

For an educator receiving a rating of Exemplary or Proficient, the district will:

1. For the educator whose impact on student learning is either moderate or high, the evaluator shall place the educator on a Self-directed Growth Plan.

⁶⁰ R.I. Dept. of Education (2014). “[RI Educator Evaluation Systems Report.](#)”

⁶¹ M.A. Dept. of Education (2014). “[2013-2014 Educator Evaluation Performance.](#)”

⁶² M.A. General Laws (2014). Ch. 69, Section 1B “[Board of Elementary and Secondary Education; duties.](#)”

⁶³ M.A. General Laws (2014). Ch. 71, Section 38 “[performance evaluation; performance standards.](#)”

⁶⁴ M.A. Dept. of Education (2014). “[Final Regulations on Evaluation of Educators.](#)”

⁶⁵ *Building on 20 Years of Massachusetts Education Reform*, Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (November 2014).

⁶⁶ M.A. Dept. of Education (2013). Final Regulations on Evaluation of Educators. “[Evaluation Cycle.](#)”

- a. The educator shall receive a summative evaluation at least every two years.
- b. The educator may receive a formative evaluation at the end of the first year.
- c. The educator may be eligible for additional roles, responsibilities and compensation, as determined by the district and through collective bargaining, where applicable.
2. For the educator whose impact on student learning is low, the evaluator shall place the educator on a Self-directed Growth Plan.
 - a. The educator and evaluator shall analyze the discrepancy in practice and student performance measures and seek to determine the cause(s) of such discrepancy.
 - b. The plan shall be for one school year in duration.
 - c. The plan may include a goal related to examining elements of practice that may be contributing to low impact.
 - d. The educator shall receive a summative evaluation at the end of the period determined in the plan, but at least annually.

For an educator receiving a rating of Needs Improvement, the district will place the educator on a Directed Growth Plan:

1. The educator shall receive a summative evaluation at the end of the period determined in the Plan.
2. The educator must either earn at least a proficient rating in the summative evaluation, or shall be rated Unsatisfactory, and shall be placed on an improvement plan.

For an educator receiving a rating of Unsatisfactory, the district shall place the educator on an Improvement Plan. The educator shall receive a summative evaluation at the end of the period determined by the evaluator for the Plan.

Rhode Island

In Rhode Island, the Council for Elementary and Secondary Education approves teacher evaluation systems. All teacher and building administrator evaluation systems implemented across districts and charter public schools in the state are designed to meet the common expectations for quality established in the Rhode Island Educator Evaluation System Standards, adopted by the Rhode Island Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education (now the Board of Education) in spring 2009.⁶⁷

Each LEA in Rhode Island is required to adopt a RIDE-approved teacher evaluation model. The Rhode Island Model for educator evaluation, which is used by the majority of LEAs in the state, relies on multiple measures to paint a fair, accurate, and comprehensive picture of teacher performance. All teachers will be evaluated on three criteria. Evidence from each of the three criteria will be combined to produce a Final Effectiveness Rating of Highly Effective, Effective, Developing, or Ineffective.⁶⁸

1. Professional Practice – A measure of effective instruction and classroom environment as defined in the Teacher Professional Practice Rubric.

⁶⁷ R.I. Dept. of Education (2014). “[RI Educator Evaluation Systems: Improving Teaching and Learning.](#)”

⁶⁸ R.I. Dept. of Education (2014). “[Rhode Island Educator Evaluation System.](#)”

2. Professional Responsibilities – A measure of instructional planning and the contributions teachers make as members of their learning community, as defined in the Teacher Professional Responsibilities Rubric.
3. Student Learning – A measure of a teacher’s impact on student learning through the use of Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) and/or Student Outcome Objectives (SOOs), and the Rhode Island Growth Model (RIGM), when applicable. It should be noted that the RIGM has not yet been fully implemented as part of the evaluation process.

Rhode Island Performance Improvement Plans

Teachers in Rhode Island may utilize a Performance Improvement Plan at any time during the school year to help improve their performance, but it is required if a teacher receives a Final Effectiveness Rating of Developing or Ineffective. Performance Improvement Plans should identify specific supports and teacher actions and establish a timeline for improvement, as well as frequent benchmarks and check-ins.⁶⁹ Teachers with Performance Improvement Plans work with improvement teams to assist in the plan’s development. Teachers who do not demonstrate sufficient improvement may be subject to personnel actions, as required by the Educator Evaluation System Standards and LEA policy.

Professional Development

Professional development is an effort focused on ensuring educator excellence by supporting teachers as they further their careers with the ultimate goal of improving teacher practice and student outcomes. Both Massachusetts and Rhode Island encourage educators to improve upon their skills through various professional development programs, in turn making them more effective leaders and professionals. Professional development programs tend to be structured, systematic, and sustained over the years of an educator’s career. This is done through cooperative planning between educators and their local education authorities.

Massachusetts

In Massachusetts, professional development for teachers, administrators, and other professional staff is implemented through a multi-tier planning process. The commissioner, in consultation with the board of higher education, prepares an annual plan for providing statewide assistance for the preparation and implementation of professional development plans. This plan is submitted to the Board of Education for approval. Additionally, every school district adopts and implements a professional development plan for all principals, teachers, and other professional staff employed by the district. This plan is also annually updated, and sets forth a budget for professional development within the confines of the foundation budget.⁷⁰

The district professional development plans include training in the teaching of new curriculum frameworks and other skills, including participatory decision making, and parent and community involvement. The plans also include training in analyzing and accommodating diverse learning styles of all students, and methods of collaboration among teachers, paraprofessionals and teacher assistants to accommodate such styles. In school districts with limited English proficient students,

⁶⁹ R.I. Dept. of Education (2014). “[Rhode Island Model Evaluation Support System - Teachers.](#)”

⁷⁰ M.A. General Laws (2014). Chapter 71, Section 38Q “[Professional Development Plan; Statewide Assistance Plan.](#)”

these plans provide training for teachers in second language acquisition techniques for the re-certification of teachers and administrators.⁷¹

The following are the state-level Massachusetts standards for High Quality Professional Development.⁷²

1. HQPD has clear goals and objectives relevant to desired student outcomes.
2. HQPD aligns with state, district, school, and/or educator goals or priorities.
3. HQPD is based on analysis of data relevant to identified goals, objectives, and audience.
4. HQPD is assessed to ensure that it is meeting the targeted goals and objectives.
5. HQPD promotes collaboration among educators to encourage sharing of ideas.
6. HQPD advances an educator's ability to apply learnings from the professional development.
7. HQPD models good pedagogical practice and applies knowledge of adult learning theory.
8. HQPD makes use of relevant resources to ensure the identified goals and objectives are met.
9. HQPD is taught/facilitated by a professional who is knowledgeable about identified objectives.
10. HQPD sessions connect to provide a coherent and useful learning experience for educators.

Rhode Island

According to the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, "Professional development of educators is a responsibility shared by individual educators and their LEAs."⁷³ All teachers develop Professional Growth Goals as part of the educator evaluation system; these goals are intended to help principals identify the professional development needs of individual educators. The Rhode Island General Assembly supports professional development with annual appropriations to a Professional Development Investment Fund, which is distributed to school districts on a pupil-teacher ratio. According to the Rhode Island General Laws, "Schools that have met their performance targets in reading for the current academic year and are not designated as a school in need of improvement, may expend their Professional Development Investment Funds on professional development in the core academic subjects of mathematics, writing, or reading to improve student performance."⁷⁴ However, payments from the Professional Development Investment Fund have been suspended since Fiscal Year 2009.⁷⁵

⁷¹ M.A. General Laws (2014). Chapter 71, Section 38Q "[Professional Development Plan: Statewide Assistance Plan.](#)"

⁷² Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2012). "[The Massachusetts Standards for Professional Development.](#)"

⁷³ R.I. Dept. of Education (2014). Teachers and Administrators. "[Professional Development.](#)"

⁷⁴ R.I. General Laws (2014). Title 16 - Education. Section 16-7.1-10 "[Professional Development Investment Fund.](#)"

⁷⁵ R.I. General Laws (2014). Title 16 - Education. Section 16-7.1-10 "[Professional Development Investment Fund.](#)"

Accountability

Accountability System

Massachusetts and Rhode Island have each implemented accountability systems to set standards for the education of students and assist schools and districts in improving the education they provide. This can be done by closing achievement gaps, classifying and improving school performance, and helping schools intervene and respond to these issues. Accountability systems in Massachusetts and Rhode Island both include provisions for the classification of schools and districts, some of which include provisions for state takeover. These, along with a general overview of accountability systems in the two states will be detailed in the following section.

Massachusetts Accountability System

The Massachusetts system for schools and districts is under the authority of the Board:

*The board shall establish the process and standards for school and district audits and reviews conducted by the office of school and district accountability. In establishing such process and standards, the board shall promote efficiency and coordination with other audit, evaluation and reporting requirements established by the board and department and shall also consider the findings and recommendations of the advisory council on school and district accountability and assistance. The board shall review and approve the protocols for auditing schools, charter schools and school districts, including regional school districts.*⁷⁶

The accountability system was introduced under MERA, and governs the review of educational programs and services provided by public schools and school districts in Massachusetts. It also identifies the circumstances under which a school may be declared underperforming or chronically underperforming, resulting in accountability and assistance according to the Massachusetts General Laws:⁷⁷

*In the case of a chronically underperforming school, the commissioner may send a targeted assistance team to the school to assist the superintendent with the implementation of the turnaround plan, require the superintendent to implement the turnaround plan, or select an external receiver to operate the school and implement the turnaround plan. The commissioner may appoint such receiver if the commissioner determines that the superintendent is unlikely to implement the plan successfully; or conditions exist in the district that are likely to negatively affect the ability of the superintendent to implement such plan.*⁷⁸

Massachusetts implements a five-level system for district and school accountability and assistance. Level 1 schools and districts are those making strong and continual progress, with minimal need

⁷⁶ M.A. General Laws (2014). Chapter 69, Section 1B “[Board of Elementary and Secondary Education; Duties.](#)”

⁷⁷ M.A. Dept. of Education (2014). Education Laws and Regulations. “[Accountability and Assistance.](#)”

⁷⁸ M.A. General Laws (2014). Chapter 69, Section 1J “[Underperforming or Chronically Underperforming Schools, Creation and Submission of Turnaround Plan, Appointment of Receiver, Annual Review.](#)”

for state support or intervention. Level 4 “underperforming” schools and districts, on the other hand, are at the opposite end of the spectrum; they are the lowest performing, and demonstrate little improvement. If Level 4 schools do not improve after implementation of a turnaround plan, they can be moved to Level 5, “chronically underperforming,” and thus become subject to receivership.⁷⁹

The Massachusetts Achievement Gap Act of 2010 codified and further strengthened the accountability and assistance system that evolved under Board leadership since MERA. The 2010 reform established a system of progressive sanctions and authorities, where poor performance results in progressively increasing state oversight and expanding state authority over local schools. The 2010 Achievement Gap Act established a set of policy instruments that empowered state and local districts to improve underperforming schools. The following policy instruments are available to superintendents of Level 4 (“underperforming”) schools:⁸⁰

- Expand, alter, or replace the curriculum
- Reallocate budgets or provide additional funding
- Expand school day and/or year and add pre-K and full-day Kindergarten
- Include job-embedded professional development for teachers and increase teacher planning time
- Differentiate compensation of school staff (bargained with union)
- Require all staff to re-apply for employment
- Limit, suspend or change one or more school district policy or practice related to the school
- Limit, suspend, or change collective bargaining agreements

A study commissioned by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to examine turnaround practices in Level 4 schools found that the above-mentioned authorities were important for successful school improvement efforts. For example, the authorities relating to human capital within schools was especially important, and nine of the fourteen schools that successfully moved out of the Level 4 category replaced more than 45 percent of teachers in the first year of the turnaround efforts.⁸¹

⁷⁹ *Building on 20 Years of Massachusetts Education Reform*, Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (November 2014).

⁸⁰ *Turnaround Practices in Action: A Three-Year Analysis of School and District Practices, Systems, Policies, and Use of Resources Contributing to Successful Turnaround Efforts in Massachusetts’ Level 4 Schools*, Institute for Strategic Leadership and Learning, conducted for the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (July 2014).

⁸¹ *Turnaround Practices in Action: A Three-Year Analysis of School and District Practices, Systems, Policies, and Use of Resources Contributing to Successful Turnaround Efforts in Massachusetts’ Level 4 Schools*, Institute for Strategic Leadership and Learning, conducted for the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (July 2014).

Table 15
Massachusetts Framework for District Assistance Classifications

Level	Schools	Districts
Levels 1 & 2	<p>A school shall be placed in Level 1 or 2 of the framework for district accountability and assistance based on the performance of students in the aggregate and subgroups, according to the Department's annual performance determination. The Department shall publish guidance for schools as to what performance leads to placement in what level. A school shall move from one level to another within Levels 1 and 2 by virtue of change in the performance of students in the aggregate and subgroups, according to the Department's annual performance determination, and in accordance with guidance published by the Department pursuant to 603 CMR 2.04(1)(a).</p>	<p>Districts shall be placed in Levels 1 and 2 in accordance with the levels of their schools, and shall move from one level to another within Levels 1 and 2 by virtue of change in their schools' levels pursuant to 603 CMR 2.04(1)(b). The Department shall publish guidance for districts as to what performance leads to placement in what level.</p>
Level 3	<p>A school shall be placed in Level 3 of the framework for district accountability and assistance if any one of its subgroups scores among the lowest performing subgroups in the state. The Department may place a school in Level 3 if it scores in the lowest 20% statewide of schools serving common grade levels pursuant to 603 CMR 2.05(2)(a). The Department shall publish guidance describing the specific methodology used to identify Level 3 schools, as well as guidance for districts as to what performance leads to placement in what level.</p>	<p>A district in Level 3 shall use a process approved by the Department to complete a self-assessment, shall use the self-assessment to identify unmet conditions for school effectiveness (see 603 CMR 2.03(4)(b)), and shall address the unmet conditions by revising its District Improvement Plan and School Improvement Plans.</p>
Level 4	<p>A school shall be eligible for placement in Level 4 if it scores in the lowest 20% statewide of schools serving common grade levels on a single measure developed by the Department that takes into account at least: school MCAS performance over a four-year period based on Composite Performance Index (CPI) in English language arts; CPI in mathematics; and percentages of students scoring in the "warning" or "failing" category on MCAS; and improvement in student academic performance. Not more than 4% of the total number of public schools may be in Levels 4 & 5 at any given time.</p>	<p>A district shall be placed in Level 4 if any of its schools has been placed in Level 4. The Board may place a district in Level 4 upon recommendation of the commissioner based on findings from a district review, monitoring report, or follow-up review showing serious deficiencies, relating to one or more district standards, that are likely if they are not addressed effectively and in a timely manner to have a substantial negative effect on student performance in the district, putting the district at risk of being placed in Level 5.</p>
Level 5	<p>The commissioner may place a Level 4 school in Level 5 at the expiration of its turnaround plan if the commissioner determines: that the school has failed to improve as required by the goals, benchmarks, or timetable of the turnaround plan; or that the school has failed to make significant improvement and that conditions in the district make it unlikely that the school will make significant improvement unless it is placed in Level 5. School, school district, and municipal officials, including the school committee, as well as the local teachers' union or association president or designee, a representative of the school's parent organization, and family members of students at the school, shall have an opportunity to meet with the commissioner or his or her designee before the commissioner places a school in Level 5.</p>	<p>A district shall be eligible for placement in Level 5 if it is not a single-school district and it scores in the lowest 10% statewide of districts of the same grade levels on a single measure developed by the Department that takes into account at least: district MCAS performance over a four-year period based on Composite Performance Index (CPI) in English language arts; CPI in mathematics; and percentages of students scoring "warning" or "failing" on MCAS improvement in student academic achievement. School district and municipal officials, including the school committee, as well as the local teachers' union or association president or designee, a representative of the local parent organization, and members of the public, shall have an opportunity to be heard by the Board before final action by the Board to place the district in Level 5. Not more than 2.5% of the total number of school districts may be in Level 5 at any given time. The Department shall notify districts of the placement of any of their schools in Level 4. The notification shall be made to the school committee, superintendent, and local teachers' union or association president, and the principal and the parent organization of any school placed in Level 4.</p>

Rhode Island Accountability System

In 2012, the Rhode Island Department of Education implemented a new statewide school accountability system as part of a request for flexibility regarding some provisions of the Elementary and Secondary Education (No Child Left Behind) Act.

According to the RIDE website, the system is “designed to recognize outstanding achievement and provide support to low-achieving schools.”⁸² The system focuses on achievement gaps, diagnosing school performance by identifying specific shortcomings and achievements at each school, providing schools with the specific support or intervention needed to improve student achievement and close achievement gaps, and providing these schools with the ability to select interventions that respond to their context and their needs.⁸³

Under the 2012 system, RIDE classifies schools into six groups and issues annual report cards on all public schools, on all school districts, and on the state itself. Schools are classified based on the following criteria:

- **Proficiency:** How many students have attained proficiency or better?
- **Distinction:** How many students have attained distinction?
- **Participation:** How many students take the state assessments?
- **Gap-closing:** Is the school serving all students, including those with disabilities and ELLs?
- **Progress:** Is the school approaching its 2017 targets?
- **Growth (K-8):** Are all students making progress?
- **Improvement (high schools):** Is the school improving annually?
- **Graduation (high schools):** Is the school reaching its graduation-rate goals?⁸⁴

RIDE ranks schools by total point value, or Composite Index Score, to determine classifications. Categories for this ranking include: Proficiency, Distinction, Gap-Closing, Progress, Growth (K-8 only), Improvement (High School only), and Graduation (High School only).

	Proficiency	Distinction	Gap-Closing	Progress	Growth	Improvement	Graduation	Total
K-8	30pts	5pts	30pts	10pts	25pts			100pts
High School	30pts	5pts	30pts	30pts		5pts	20pts	100pts

The six classes of schools, detailed in Table 17, are commended schools, leading schools, typical schools, warning schools, focus schools, and priority schools. When a school meets the criteria to be considered a warning school, focus school, or priority school, there are certain required actions the school and its district must take in conjunction with approval from and implementation from

⁸² R.I. Dept. of Education (2014). Information and Accountability. Accountability. “[School Classifications.](#)”

⁸³ R.I. Dept. of Education (2014). Information and Accountability. Accountability. “[School Classifications.](#)”

⁸⁴ R.I. Dept. of Education (2014). Information and Accountability. Accountability. “[School Classifications.](#)”

RIDE and the commissioner.⁸⁵ Table 18 lists the intervention options from which priority and focus schools can select in their school turnaround efforts.

In accordance with federal reporting requirements, RIDE issues annual report cards on all public schools, school districts, and the state itself. RIDE issues two types of summaries for school, district, and state-level report cards. An **AMO Summary** shows whether schools have met their annual targets, and an **Accountability Summary** shows how a school did in several key areas (it also shows how schools are classified by RIDE).⁸⁶

In May of 2014, Rhode Island Commissioner of Education Deborah Gist submitted an application for an extension of federal flexibility regarding certain provisions of the Elementary and Secondary Education (No Child Left Behind) Act regulations so Rhode Island could continue to revise and implement its statewide school accountability system.⁸⁷ To earn approval, RIDE needs to revise the classification system, largely because of the transition from the NECAP to the PARCC assessments. This requires RIDE to rethink how it measures progress within the accountability system.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ R.I. Dept. of Education (2014). Information and Accountability. "[School Performance Measurement Fact Sheet.](#)"

⁸⁶ R.I. Dept. of Education (2014). Information and Accountability. "[School and District Report Cards.](#)"

⁸⁷ Gist, Deborah A. (2014). Rhode Island Department of Education. "[ESEA Flexibility Extension Cover Letter.](#)"

⁸⁸ R.I. Dept. of Education (2014). Information and Accountability. "[School Classifications.](#)"

Table 17
Rhode Island Statewide Accountability System School Classifications

School Classification	Description	Action Required
Commended Schools	Commended Schools are the highest performing schools that represent the strongest patterns of performance across metrics, test at least 95% of their students, and serve all students well.	
Leading Schools	Strong achievement in reading and mathematics, small or no gaps in student performance, and/or are improving student achievement, and increasing graduation rates and have an index score between 70 and 76.	
Typical Schools	Typical Schools have an index score between 50 and 70	
Warning Schools	A combination of low achievement in reading and math, unacceptable achievement gaps, and/or little or no progress in improving achievement or graduation rates. Warning schools are identified by any of these criteria: index score <50; proficiency of 10 or fewer points; gap-closing of <15 points; growth of 7.5 points or fewer; improvement plus graduation of 10 points or fewer; low graduation rate over time; or participation rate of <95 percent.	Warning Schools will implement a plan for improvement, but on a limited scale and without intensive RIDE oversight.
Focus Schools	Substandard achievement in reading and math, unacceptable achievement gaps, and little or no academic progress in improving student achievement or increasing graduation rates. Focus Schools have the lowest point totals in the state (excluding Priority Schools) for Proficiency or Gap-closing, regardless of their index score.	The school, the district, and RIDE begin a two-to three-year intervention process similar to the process for Priority Schools though involving only seven strategies that respond to the diagnosis findings.
Priority Schools	The lowest achievement in reading and mathematics, intolerable gaps in student performance and demonstrate little or no progress in improving student outcomes.	The school will undergo a diagnostic screening and develop a plan for improvement including a package of interventions, including at least nine strategies responding to the diagnosis findings (subject to Commissioner's approval); the district may also opt to close the school or reopen under new education management. The district and school will put the improvement plan into action. District leadership will oversee this process, through quarterly performance reviews with RIDE.

SOURCE: RI Department of Education

Table 18
Rhode Island Flex Model Intervention Strategy Options

Leadership	Support	Infrastructure	Content
Intervention III Strategies: Priority schools select one from each area. Focus Schools select two strategies from areas of their choice.			
L-III.1: Removal of building principal and replacement with a leader with experience and/or training in turnaround environments.	S-III.1: Require at least 30 hours of focused professional development with a focus on instructional strategies to support students with disabilities and English learners.	I-III.1: Implement staff recommitment process to substantially different working conditions, including definition of school hours, job assignment, and job duties.	C-III.1: Implement comprehensive improvement of instructional approaches for struggling students including focused professional development and a system for student progress monitoring.
L-III.2: Restructure building leadership team to dramatically increase time available for instructional leadership.	S-III.2: Hire building-level instructional specialists to support educators to serve English learners, students with disabilities, and other students at risk for failure.	I-III.2: Dramatically increase common planning time and implement a system for its effective utilization, both horizontally and vertically.	C-III.2: Review student course-taking patterns and make substantial changes to school schedule and student placement to ensure access to rigorous academic core.
L-III.3: Provide building administrators the authority and autonomy to hire, manage teacher placement, budget, and school schedule.	S-III.3: Implement a system of peer support and assistance to support the needs of educators.	I-III.3: Review and change student enrollment and placement processes to increase family engagement & improve student outcomes.	C-III.3: Implement a culturally competent support system to improve safety, reduce suspensions, increase attendance, and support all students.
Intervention II Strategies: Priority and Focus Schools select two strategies from areas of their choice.			
L-II.1: Evaluate the principal and connect him or her with a mentor or appropriate resources to ensure ability to lead the school reform work.	S-II.1: Implement a comprehensive drop-out prevention and reentry program.	I-II.1: Complete an external audit of the use of school funds to guide staffing decisions and implement findings.	C-II.1: Increase advanced coursework opportunities for students.
L-II.2: Evaluate, assess, and diagnose the performance of the existing school leadership team and take appropriate job action.	S-II.2: Implement a comprehensive ramp-up program for students at-risk of failure or subpopulations with the largest achievement gaps.	I-II.2: Reallocate resources to increase support for direct instruction of students at risk for failure.	C-II.2: Assign additional instructional coaches or other core content focused, job-embedded support for teachers.
L-II.3: Contract with a vendor or partner with a track record of success to support the leadership team in school turnaround.	S-II.3: Implement culturally competent family and community engagement program focused on instruction and academic performance.	I-II.3: Develop and implement support systems for student transition into kindergarten and/or across break grades.	C-II.3: Offer virtual education options for both at-risk and advanced students.
L-II.4: Identify one leader to routinely monitor the implementation and effectiveness of the core curriculum/instruction and services to traditionally underserved students.	S-II.4: Hire full time parent/community engagement specialist to implement family and community engagement that is systemic, sustained, and integrated with school improvement.	I-II.4: Establish a comprehensive system to support struggling teachers with content and pedagogy, especially teachers of students with disabilities and English learners.	C-II.4: Implement an instructional monitoring system to ensure that the curriculum is being fully implemented and traditionally underserved students have access to academic core.
L-II.5: Assign family/community outreach to member of leadership team and hold him/her accountable.	S-II.5: Establish flexible or expanded learning opportunities with a focus on students at risk for failure.	I-II.5: Implement a culturally competent tiered system of support focused on student psycho-social health.	C-II.5: Increase student access to career, technical, or credentialing programs.
SOURCE: RI Department of Education			

School District Receivership and Takeover

Massachusetts

Receiver for schools in Level 4 and Level 5 - Massachusetts General Laws authorize the superintendent to appoint a receiver for a school in Level 4. In such a situation, the superintendent defines the scope of the receiver's powers, up to and including all of the powers of the superintendent over the school. The superintendent can modify the scope of the receiver's powers

based on conditions in the school. The receiver reports directly to the superintendent and has full managerial and operational control over the school as provided in the turnaround plan.⁸⁹

In the case of a chronically underperforming school (Level 5), the commissioner may appoint a receiver if the commissioner determines that: the superintendent is unlikely to implement a turnaround plan successfully; or conditions exist in the district that are likely to negatively affect the ability of the superintendent to implement such plan successfully.⁹⁰ The receiver shall have all of the powers that the superintendent previously had over the school and additional powers granted to a receiver under Massachusetts General Law. The receiver shall report directly to the commissioner.⁹¹

Receiver for a district in Level 5 - Following the placement of a district in Level 5, the commissioner, on behalf of the Board, will appoint a receiver for the district. A Level 5 district receiver has the powers of the superintendent and school committee as well as full managerial and operational control over the district. The district remains the employer of record for all other purposes. The commissioner may define the scope of the receiver's powers, based on conditions in the district or its schools. The commissioner may also modify the scope of the receiver's powers based on conditions in the district or its schools.⁹²

Rhode Island

The Council for Elementary and Secondary Education is tasked with adopting a set of progressive support and intervention strategies for schools and school districts that continue to fall short of performance goals outlined in district strategic plans. These strategies must be consistent with the Comprehensive Education Strategy and the principles of the "School Accountability for Learning and Teaching" (SALT) of the council.⁹³ These strategies will initially focus on:

1. Improving planning, curriculum alignment, student assessment, instruction, and involvement;
2. Policy support;
3. Resource oversight (ensure each school has adequate resources to meet performance goals); and
4. Creating partnerships with outside groups (businesses, government, non-profits, etc.).

If after a three year period of support there has not been improvement in the education of students as determined by objective criteria developed by the council, then the department of education will assume progressive levels of control over the school and/or district budget, program, and/or personnel. This control may be exercised in collaboration with the school district and the municipality.⁹⁴

⁸⁹ M.A. Dept. of Education (2014). Education Laws and Regulations. Accountability and Assistance for School Districts and Schools. "[Accountability and Assistance for Districts and Schools in Level 4.](#)"

⁹⁰ M.A. General Laws (2014). Title 12 - Education. Chapter 69, Section 1J "[Appointment of Receiver.](#)"

⁹¹ M.A. Dept. of Education (2014). Education Laws and Regulations. Accountability and Assistance for School Districts and Schools. "[Accountability and Assistance for Districts and Schools in Level 4.](#)"

⁹² M.A. Dept. of Education (2014). Education Laws and Regulations. Accountability and Assistance for School Districts and Schools. "[Accountability and Assistance for Districts and Schools in Level 5.](#)"

⁹³ R.I. General Laws (2014). Title 16 - Education. "[Intervention and Support for Failing Schools.](#)"

⁹⁴ R.I. General Laws (2014). Title 16 - Education. "[Intervention and Support for Failing Schools.](#)"

If further needed, the school shall be reconstituted. Reconstitution responsibility is delegated to the council and may range from restructuring the school's governance, budget, program, personnel, and/or may include decisions regarding the continued operation of the school. The council shall assess the district's capacity and may recommend the provision of additional district, municipal and/or state resources.

If a school or school district is under the council's control as a result of actions taken by the council pursuant to this section, the local school committee shall be responsible for funding that school or school district at the same level as in the prior academic year increased by the same percentage as the state total of school aid is increased.

In cities and towns in which the taxable property does not generate adequate revenue to provide for public education of a high standard, the school committee may request the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education assume the supervision, control, and management of the public schools for the ensuing year. The city or town must still appropriate certain funds for education. If the department deems the request warranted and believes public schools will be better served, it may assume supervision, control, and management.⁹⁵ Following a takeover of city and town schools, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education assumes all the powers and functions of the city or town school committee, including the right to draw funds (appropriated by the town into its public school account) to pay for public schools in the city or town.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ R.I. General Laws (2014). Title 16 - Education. "[Assumption of Control of Schools by Department.](#)"

⁹⁶ R.I. General Laws (2014). Title 16 - Education. "[Powers of Department After Taking Over Schools.](#)"

VI. RIPEC Comments

In recent years, policymakers in Rhode Island have enacted a number of reforms intended to improve the state's public education system. Despite these reforms, students in the Ocean State continue to perform near the national average on most standardized tests and are significantly outperformed by their peers in Massachusetts. This analysis is intended to explore the structural governance issues that may contribute to the difference in academic performance among students in the two states.

The comparison of Massachusetts and Rhode Island finds two key structural differences between the states' education systems. First, there is a greater degree of state influence over the governance and provision of education in Massachusetts, which seems to promote strong alignment between statewide content and performance standards and the rest of the education system. Second, Massachusetts utilizes a school-based management model that differs from Rhode Island's approach to local school governance, in which the entire care, control and management of public schools is vested in the district-level school committee.

The Degree of State Influence and Control

Massachusetts is characterized by a greater degree of state influence over the governance and provision of education. This difference is apparent in how each state's supreme court has interpreted the education clause of the constitution – in Massachusetts, the court's interpretation clearly established that it is the duty of the state to ensure that every student receives an adequate education, and created an obligation for the state to act. In Rhode Island, in contrast, the court did not provide an impetus for system-wide education reform or obligate the state to act.

The nature and degree of state involvement in the governance and provision of education is also influenced by the specific roles that the education commissioner plays at the local level in each state. In both Massachusetts and Rhode Island, the commissioner acts as the primary link between the state and local districts. In Massachusetts, the commissioner plays an active role in helping local actors translate state-level objectives into actionable policies on the ground, and in evaluating and assessing local performance relative to those statewide objectives; as a result, the state's influence over the provision of education at the local level is relatively high. In Rhode Island, in contrast, the commissioner's duties are primarily restricted to advising the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education on issues pertaining to policymaking, and providing oversight and administrative support at the local level; responsibility for translating and implementing statewide policies in the Ocean State is largely left in the hands of local officials.

Rhode Island has moved closer to the Massachusetts model in recent years by adopting the stronger Common Core State Standards and the associated PARCC exam. The Common Core provides more guidance than previous versions of Rhode Island's standards to local communities regarding the scope and sequence of what is to be taught at each grade level. However, even with those changes, local districts in Rhode Island are still responsible for functions that in Massachusetts are performed, in whole or in part, at the level of the state. For example, the Massachusetts Department of Education is charged with creating curriculum frameworks based on the Common Core that translate those content standards into a delivery system of instruction. Furthermore, Massachusetts also has a state office, the Center for Curriculum and Instruction, that is dedicated to helping local districts and schools implement the standards. This office has created over 100

model curricula that local communities can adopt or build upon. Therefore, while local communities are still ultimately responsible for developing curricula in Massachusetts, the state provides substantial support and guidance, which in turn promotes alignment between statewide standards and the actual curriculum and instruction that is provided to students on the ground.

Similar to its role in curriculum development, the state in Massachusetts also provides capacity, support, and guidance to local districts when it comes to teacher evaluations and professional development, while in Rhode Island, these functions are performed primarily at the local level. The greater degree of state involvement in the governance and provision of education in Massachusetts appears to promote strong alignment between statewide standards and objectives and the rest of the education system, including teacher certification, curriculum, instruction, instructional materials, student assessment, teacher evaluation, professional development, and systems of accountability. Rhode Island has made progress in recent years by adopting the stronger Common Core State Standards and the aligned PARCC exam. However, in the absence of strong alignment throughout the entire education system, these reforms alone may not be sufficient to close the performance gap that exists between Rhode Island and Massachusetts.

School-Based Management

The second fundamental difference between Massachusetts and Rhode Island is that Massachusetts has adopted a school-based management model for governing education at the local level. In Massachusetts, school committees hire superintendents, superintendents hire principals, and principals hire teachers and other school-based staff, which empowers school-level officials to control more of the decision-making process. The Massachusetts model also encourages broad participation of key stakeholders, including teachers, parents and students, in the school-level decision-making process, which promotes participatory decision-making. Participatory decision-making, in turn, facilitates the emergence of a shared vision and promotes a higher level of commitment to achieving common goals and objectives.

In Rhode Island, in contrast, the entire care, control and management of public schools is vested in the district-level school committee. Rather than focusing exclusively on district-wide policy- and decision-making, school committee members must also be responsible for the day-to-day management and administration of individual schools and school personnel. In addition to potentially over-burdening committee members, this approach to local education governance also limits the authority of principals and teachers, who are ultimately responsible for instruction, education outcomes, and student performance.

Existing research, reviewed earlier in this report, demonstrates that empowering principals and teachers within their own schools through school-based management has been linked to improved job satisfaction, commitment, and morale among principals and teachers; improved instructional programs; and improvements in student achievement and performance.

RIPEC Recommendations

RIPEC recommends that Rhode Island move towards the Massachusetts education model by promoting system-wide alignment and increasing the degree of state-level influence, guidance, and/or control over certain key education functions. Examples of those functions include curriculum development, teacher evaluation, and professional development. Reforms of this nature

may require categorical funding, which suggests that legislation, rather than regulatory action, is called for.

Furthermore, the success of these types of reforms in Massachusetts cannot be separated from the adoption of MCAS competency determination standards as a graduation requirement. Meaningful evaluation of, and requirements for, student performance ensures that students who graduate from the public school system actually have the knowledge and skills required by the statewide standards. Without such a mechanism for accountability, reforms that improve alignment and increase the degree of state-level involvement in education may not have the full positive impact on actual student and school performance. Therefore, RIPEC recommends that Rhode Island adopt competency determination standards as a graduation requirement.

RIPEC also recommends supporting any reform efforts within Rhode Island that serve to empower local school-based officials, such as principals, to make school-level decisions and move the state closer to the school-based management model. Finally, RIPEC urges policymakers to consider the implications that any future reforms may have on alignment throughout the education system.

This RIPEC report is the second of a three-part series on education. The first report, *Results: Education in Rhode Island 2016*, provides a more detailed look at student demographics, student performance, and education revenues and expenditures in Rhode Island relative to the other New England states and the national average. RIPEC's third education report, forthcoming, analyzes charter schools and the state's formula for allocating resources to education. RIPEC will also release a more detailed set of recommendations regarding education reform based on the analysis contained in these three reports.

VII. Appendix

**Appendix Table 1:
Massachusetts School Districts, Selected Demographic Information and 2015 PARCC Performance †**

District	2012-2013**	2013-2014**					2015	
		Total Current Expenditures per Pupil	Total Students	% White	% ELL*	% IEP*	% FRL*	PARCC % Proficient
							All (Grades 3-8)***	ELA/Lit
Academy Of The Pacific Rim Charter Public (District)	\$ 11,924	498	16%	0%	20%	55%	45%	41%
Acushnet	10,745	992	98%	1%	19%	24%	63%	56%
Alma Del Mar Charter School (District)	14,425	200	29%	14%	20%	79%	46%	44%
Andover	13,567	6,110	76%	2%	18%	6%	78%	68%
Argosy Collegiate Charter School (District)	-	-	-	-	-	-	31%	46%
Ashburnham-Westminster	11,608	2,297	92%	1%	19%	21%	61%	53%
Ashland	12,003	2,581	77%	3%	15%	12%	68%	61%
Attleboro	11,727	5,862	73%	8%	18%	39%	64%	56%
Auburn	12,321	2,348	88%	3%	12%	27%	67%	57%
Avon	12,531	740	60%	0%	16%	28%	52%	46%
Ayer Shirley School District	12,631	1,666	78%	3%	23%	37%	57%	45%
Barnstable	13,791	4,900	78%	6%	15%	36%	62%	48%
Baystate Academy Charter Public School	-	161	10%	6%	14%	76%	48%	21%
Bedford	14,942	2,539	71%	5%	18%	13%	74%	70%
Belchertown	11,054	2,416	91%	1%	15%	20%	66%	51%
Bellingham	11,953	2,404	90%	1%	16%	22%	47%	45%
Belmont	11,436	4,205	70%	4%	10%	7%	89%	81%
Benjamin Baneker Charter Public (District)	17,297	345	1%	4%	10%	81%	71%	60%
Benjamin Franklin Classical Charter Public (District)	9,727	448	75%	0%	8%	2%	81%	73%
Berkshire Arts And Technology Charter Public (District)	13,161	326	79%	1%	20%	56%	63%	50%
Berkshire Hills	16,397	1,385	86%	2%	15%	25%	66%	40%
Berlin	16,372	204	92%	1%	26%	7%	55%	50%
Berlin-Boylston	13,737	542	99%	1%	19%	12%	66%	61%
Beverly	11,571	4,404	84%	2%	20%	24%	63%	53%
Billerica	12,692	5,361	87%	1%	19%	16%	59%	50%
Boston†	19,066	54,300	14%	28%	20%	77%	39%	34%
Boston Collegiate Charter (District)	12,962	632	54%	5%	18%	43%	69%	53%
Boston Green Academy Horace Mann Charter School (District)	17,084	324	15%	14%	32%	84%	29%	17%
Boston Preparatory Charter Public (District)	15,723	371	4%	6%	19%	87%	34%	49%
Boston Renaissance Charter Public (District)	12,931	939	4%	7%	10%	81%	56%	49%
Bourne	13,866	2,046	89%	0%	13%	26%	57%	46%
Boxford	13,967	747	93%	1%	17%	3%	76%	73%
Boylston	11,332	315	88%	1%	14%	8%	72%	57%
Braintree	11,400	5,647	78%	3%	21%	21%	80%	66%
Bridge Boston Charter School (District)	20,056	146	0%	23%	12%	81%	65%	74%
Brimfield	12,643	307	96%	0%	11%	19%	73%	76%
Brockton	12,210	17,011	24%	19%	13%	81%	38%	29%
Brooke Charter School East Boston (District)	14,849	288	13%	13%	6%	76%	85%	90%
Brooke Charter School Mattapan (District)	13,824	360	3%	6%	10%	76%	80%	79%
Brooke Charter School Roslindale (District)	14,913	492	1%	1%	7%	78%	90%	88%
Burlington	15,388	3,579	74%	2%	14%	12%	60%	48%
Carlisle	16,495	640	80%	1%	14%	1%	87%	84%
Carver	12,694	1,708	97%	0%	17%	24%	59%	44%
Central Berkshire	14,442	1,736	93%	0%	15%	33%	54%	49%
Chelsea	12,639	6,118	8%	17%	13%	83%	23%	29%
Chicopee	12,669	7,779	60%	4%	18%	63%	54%	48%
Christa McAuliffe Regional Charter Public (District)	11,113	347	80%	3%	24%	22%	60%	55%
Clarksburg	14,310	178	97%	0%	26%	35%	35%	37%
Clinton	11,161	1,905	71%	7%	20%	48%	40%	28%
Codman Academy Charter Public (District)	18,184	194	2%	5%	25%	82%	5%	0%
Community Charter School Of Cambridge (District)	11,788	377	4%	4%	19%	51%	67%	62%
Concord	15,135	2,178	79%	3%	18%	4%	82%	76%
Conservatory Lab Charter (District)	14,983	312	19%	19%	9%	65%	41%	36%
Danvers	12,456	3,644	88%	1%	18%	20%	59%	44%
Dartmouth	10,983	3,694	91%	2%	13%	23%	71%	59%
Dennis-Yarmouth	15,728	3,044	75%	8%	16%	42%	53%	45%
Douglas	10,163	1,596	95%	0%	16%	15%	60%	47%
Dudley Street Neighborhood Charter School (District)	16,282	178	1%	17%	10%	81%	42%	48%
East Longmeadow	11,988	2,699	87%	0%	19%	17%	77%	61%
Eastham	20,502	212	90%	1%	19%	26%	71%	64%
Easthampton	11,549	1,561	86%	0%	18%	35%	55%	40%
Edgartown	22,323	356	81%	10%	23%	25%	61%	55%
Erving	21,522	151	87%	0%	23%	38%	55%	37%
Everett	11,526	6,906	34%	5%	15%	80%	45%	37%
Excel Academy Charter (District)	20,171	212	16%	10%	18%	71%	70%	68%
Fairhaven	11,140	1,966	90%	1%	15%	33%	51%	39%
Falmouth	14,474	3,541	84%	1%	19%	29%	65%	56%
Fitchburg	13,124	5,010	37%	15%	23%	77%	41%	33%
Florida	14,414	95	92%	0%	26%	55%	45%	41%

Four Rivers Charter Public (District)	12,110	216	87%	1%	16%	23%	63%	53%
Foxborough	13,214	2,738	89%	1%	16%	15%	65%	65%
Foxborough Regional Charter (District)	8,941	1,265	56%	3%	9%	8%	64%	53%
Framingham	15,238	8,280	61%	13%	24%	40%	54%	43%
Franklin	10,423	5,760	90%	1%	16%	10%	69%	62%
Gardner	11,303	2,478	78%	5%	22%	59%	38%	29%
Gateway	15,100	989	93%	1%	16%	33%	52%	42%
Gill-Montague	15,714	1,010	85%	5%	19%	56%	37%	36%
Gloucester	14,550	3,078	89%	3%	23%	44%	61%	49%
Greenfield	12,534	1,733	83%	4%	18%	60%	50%	42%
Groton-Dunstable	12,168	2,625	92%	0%	15%	6%	73%	72%
Hampden Charter School Of Science (District)	11,132	353	41%	5%	10%	69%	75%	72%
Hancock	14,348	45	98%	0%	11%	0%	76%	59%
Hanover	11,031	2,642	96%	0%	17%	8%	78%	62%
Haverhill	12,615	7,147	65%	7%	20%	57%	45%	38%
Hill View Montessori Charter Public (District)	8,407	305	73%	1%	19%	22%	49%	30%
Holland	11,211	237	94%	0%	16%	24%	49%	51%
Holyoke Community Charter (District)	11,610	702	7%	6%	13%	83%	32%	27%
Hull	15,551	1,061	96%	0%	16%	37%	58%	48%
Innovation Academy Charter (District)	10,333	726	82%	1%	19%	13%	73%	62%
King Philip	11,514	2,123	95%	0%	14%	7%	75%	62%
Kipp Academy Boston Charter School (District)	20,583	141	0%	16%	21%	86%	32%	19%
Kipp Academy Lynn Charter (District)	14,694	721	10%	9%	13%	80%	68%	63%
Leicester	10,690	1,626	89%	1%	16%	31%	42%	37%
Leominster	12,067	6,171	58%	6%	20%	47%	61%	53%
Leverett	17,776	121	89%	0%	21%	25%	64%	53%
Lowell Collegiate Charter School	-	272	26%	19%	8%	56%	50%	45%
Lowell Community Charter Public (District)	13,128	658	4%	53%	17%	82%	52%	53%
Malden	12,214	6,535	32%	18%	15%	59%	44%	44%
Marblehead	12,456	3,293	89%	3%	17%	11%	81%	68%
Marion	12,454	451	90%	0%	19%	16%	75%	71%
Martha's Vineyard Charter (District)	21,027	177	80%	5%	11%	23%	83%	67%
Mashpee	14,557	1,670	81%	2%	19%	33%	61%	50%
Massachusetts Virtual Academy At Greenfield Commonwealth Virtual District	-	454	75%	0%	8%	39%	45%	37%
Match Charter Public School (District)	16,411	494	3%	6%	17%	75%	59%	60%
Mattapoisett	14,942	512	91%	1%	11%	16%	70%	67%
Maynard	13,961	1,418	83%	2%	18%	18%	72%	51%
Melrose	11,042	3,685	81%	2%	17%	16%	82%	68%
Middleton	12,567	774	90%	1%	16%	6%	71%	68%
Milford	11,829	4,182	70%	9%	17%	32%	65%	50%
Millbury	12,950	1,776	86%	2%	19%	28%	63%	53%
Milton	12,312	3,944	70%	1%	14%	13%	71%	72%
Monomoy Regional School District	-	1,869	83%	3%	16%	22%	54%	40%
Monson	11,867	1,160	95%	0%	15%	28%	44%	37%
Nahant	14,189	180	92%	0%	8%	9%	82%	59%
Nantucket	19,093	1,481	62%	11%	14%	14%	47%	38%
Natick	12,538	5,285	82%	1%	15%	10%	74%	64%
Neighborhood House Charter (District)	17,188	399	19%	6%	14%	66%	62%	47%
New Bedford	13,116	12,744	48%	5%	23%	76%	41%	33%
New Salem-Wendell	15,416	138	88%	0%	17%	54%	72%	71%
Newton	15,945	12,601	66%	7%	20%	11%	79%	75%
North Reading	12,002	2,611	92%	0%	18%	8%	77%	66%
Norwell	12,425	2,263	95%	0%	14%	4%	75%	58%
Norwood	13,151	3,471	74%	7%	18%	29%	71%	54%
Oak Bluffs	21,172	387	72%	10%	22%	27%	59%	53%
Old Rochester	14,197	1,223	93%	0%	14%	13%	73%	67%
Orange	12,449	661	87%	0%	16%	49%	29%	30%
Pelham	15,031	127	78%	0%	23%	20%	85%	78%
Pembroke	10,323	3,272	97%	0%	12%	13%	70%	60%
Pentucket	11,658	2,846	94%	0%	17%	12%	70%	48%
Petersham	14,966	111	89%	0%	12%	23%	61%	35%
Pioneer Charter School Of Science (District)	10,042	359	33%	4%	10%	67%	68%	63%
Pioneer Charter School Of Science Ii (Pcss-Ii) (District)	-	164	30%	7%	9%	66%	73%	69%
Pioneer Valley	15,139	993	94%	0%	15%	29%	54%	45%
Pittsfield	13,027	5,879	72%	4%	19%	56%	38%	37%
Plainville	11,761	768	85%	4%	14%	15%	65%	52%
Plymouth	13,032	7,802	90%	1%	20%	31%	55%	48%
Prospect Hill Academy Charter (District)	13,499	1,148	13%	10%	14%	61%	44%	28%
Quaboag Regional	11,898	1,382	92%	0%	16%	45%	50%	48%
Ralph C Mahar	13,525	819	86%	0%	16%	46%	35%	40%
Reading	10,454	4,432	90%	1%	17%	7%	72%	65%
Revere	13,051	6,831	41%	14%	15%	78%	52%	50%
Richmond	18,268	150	91%	0%	9%	21%	88%	73%
Rochester	12,203	487	93%	0%	16%	11%	69%	64%
Rockland	13,180	2,270	82%	2%	17%	42%	49%	41%
Rockport	15,336	968	94%	0%	19%	15%	77%	55%
Rowe	27,155	56	93%	0%	18%	32%	57%	43%
Roxbury Preparatory Charter (District)	18,078	716	1%	11%	14%	78%	62%	54%

Sabis International Charter (District)	10,533	1,574	29%	0%	13%	54%	40%	39%
Salem Academy Charter (District)	11,378	370	52%	4%	14%	41%	66%	72%
Savoy	17,805	36	89%	0%	17%	39%	71%	50%
Scituate	11,731	3,122	95%	1%	14%	9%	73%	64%
Seekonk	11,970	2,042	91%	1%	15%	20%	67%	62%
Seven Hills Charter Public (District)	13,039	668	8%	26%	11%	83%	24%	26%
Sharon	13,856	3,434	66%	3%	16%	7%	79%	82%
Shrewsbury	10,339	6,011	67%	3%	14%	15%	80%	71%
Shutesbury	16,428	155	80%	1%	17%	21%	69%	49%
Silver Hill Horace Mann Charter (District)	6,787	596	74%	3%	16%	42%	64%	48%
South Hadley	13,237	1,939	83%	1%	13%	32%	50%	54%
South Shore Charter Public (District)	10,802	564	62%	9%	15%	29%	61%	45%
Springfield‡	14,431	25,826	12%	16%	19%	87%	31%	25%
Stoneham	12,795	2,352	87%	3%	19%	22%	72%	54%
Stoughton	11,530	3,651	67%	4%	15%	34%	56%	46%
Sturbridge	11,592	976	88%	0%	12%	14%	73%	66%
Sudbury	12,670	2,925	83%	1%	14%	4%	87%	78%
Swansea	11,486	2,059	95%	0%	13%	29%	59%	46%
Taunton	11,174	7,870	72%	3%	20%	50%	46%	36%
Tewksbury	12,316	3,756	93%	1%	17%	17%	71%	58%
The Sizer School: A North Central Charter Essential (District)	–	–	–	–	–	–	49%	25%
Tisbury	21,679	326	67%	13%	13%	28%	62%	70%
Topsfield	13,776	602	93%	0%	20%	3%	73%	68%
Triton	12,968	2,800	94%	0%	14%	23%	73%	57%
Truro	26,859	137	84%	0%	18%	22%	74%	60%
Tyngsborough	11,485	1,838	85%	0%	14%	12%	63%	56%
Up Academy Charter School Of Boston (District)	15,107	459	10%	23%	24%	88%	55%	61%
Up-Island Regional	25,475	340	85%	1%	21%	16%	66%	57%
Veritas Preparatory Charter School (District)	17,160	156	8%	12%	10%	86%	60%	55%
Wakefield	11,817	3,347	89%	1%	16%	11%	59%	49%
Wales	12,933	157	87%	0%	16%	38%	74%	54%
Ware	12,324	1,267	87%	1%	16%	56%	50%	32%
Watertown	15,668	2,708	70%	8%	23%	32%	66%	52%
Wayland	15,525	2,690	72%	1%	20%	6%	79%	78%
Webster	12,457	1,859	72%	4%	20%	58%	43%	25%
Wellfleet	22,164	125	90%	0%	13%	34%	74%	58%
West Bridgewater	9,911	1,324	92%	1%	10%	15%	64%	54%
West Springfield	11,805	3,899	71%	7%	21%	55%	53%	54%
Westborough	13,453	3,585	66%	8%	15%	10%	80%	76%
Westford	11,209	5,180	75%	1%	12%	4%	87%	82%
Weston	19,343	2,333	71%	3%	17%	4%	78%	78%
Westwood	14,109	3,199	85%	1%	16%	5%	77%	71%
Weymouth	11,507	6,843	81%	3%	18%	30%	62%	47%
Whitman-Hanson	9,730	4,165	92%	0%	14%	21%	49%	43%
Winchendon	12,907	1,362	88%	1%	20%	45%	44%	33%
Woburn	13,448	4,840	74%	4%	15%	27%	68%	53%
Worcester‡	13,039	24,562	36%	26%	21%	73%	41%	29%
Massachusetts Totals††	\$ 15,321	955,739	65%	7%	17%	38%	60%	52%

† Includes only those districts that administered the PARCC exam in 2015.

†† Massachusetts Totals include all districts for demographic information (Total Current Expenditures per Pupil, Total Students, % White, % ELL, % IEP and % FRL).

* ELL refers to English Language Learners; IEP refers to students with an Individualized Education Plan; and FRL refers to students eligible for free or reduced lunch.

** Most recent year for which comparable Massachusetts and Rhode Island data are available from the National Center for Education Statistics.

*** Massachusetts only administered the PARCC exam to grades 3-8.

‡ In Boston, Springfield and Worcester, individual schools were allowed to select between the PARCC and MCAS in 2015. Demographic information (Total Current Expenditures per Pupil, Total Students, % White, % ELL, % IEP and % FRL) is provided for the district as a whole, but PARCC proficiency percentages are only for the schools that opted to administer the PARCC.

– Indicates that the data are missing or unavailable.

SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics, Massachusetts Department of Education.

**Appendix Table 2:
Rhode Island School Districts, Selected Demographic Information and 2015 PARCC Performance**

District	2012-2013**	2013-2014**					2015				
		Total Current Expenditures per Pupil	Total Students	% White	% ELL*	% IEP*	% FRL*	PARCC % Proficient			
	All (Grades 3-10)							Grades 3-8***		Notes	
							ELA/Lit	Math	ELA/Lit	Math	
Achievement First Rhode Island	–	180	6%	18%	8%	86%	–	–	–	–	
Barrington	\$ 13,247	3,334	89%	1%	12%	6%	71%	57%	69%	60%	
Beacon Charter School	12,261	227	71%	0%	17%	46%	50%	21%	†	†	High only
Blackstone Academy	13,188	168	14%	2%	16%	83%	38%	12%	†	†	High only
Blackstone Valley Prep, A Ri Mayoral Academy	12,373	966	39%	14%	10%	62%	49%	48%	48%	50%	
Bristol Warren	13,326	3,429	88%	3%	13%	36%	41%	35%	44%	37%	
Burrillville	12,882	2,401	93%	0%	17%	32%	30%	20%	32%	22%	
Central Falls	16,331	2,694	9%	23%	23%	81%	10%	5%	10%	6%	
Chariho	16,117	3,427	91%	0%	11%	26%	57%	36%	64%	43%	
Coventry	13,267	4,992	94%	0%	14%	29%	34%	26%	38%	31%	
Cranston	13,647	10,552	61%	5%	13%	37%	45%	24%	45%	27%	
Cumberland	11,610	4,531	83%	2%	17%	24%	42%	37%	45%	43%	
Davies Career And Tech	17,426	849	35%	2%	10%	65%	15%	7%	†	†	High only
DCYF	–	65	15%	6%	95%	95%	0%	0%	–	–	Middle Only
East Greenwich	13,901	2,410	86%	0%	12%	7%	70%	58%	71%	57%	
East Providence	13,486	5,321	72%	4%	18%	51%	32%	23%	33%	25%	
Exeter-West Greenwich	18,928	1,648	94%	1%	13%	15%	50%	48%	46%	46%	
Foster	14,847	272	96%	0%	15%	17%	37%	33%	37%	33%	Elem. Only
Foster-Glocester	15,598	1,153	97%	0%	9%	18%	40%	30%	43%	34%	Middle Only
Glocester	15,338	529	96%	0%	15%	18%	51%	55%	51%	55%	Elem. Only
Highlander	16,290	352	9%	14%	13%	78%	20%	17%	20%	15%	
International Charter	13,307	325	29%	38%	9%	60%	37%	24%	37%	24%	Elem. Only
Jamestown	18,049	507	92%	1%	17%	10%	61%	54%	61%	54%	
Johnston	16,078	3,095	79%	3%	25%	45%	47%	25%	48%	27%	
Kingston Hill Academy	14,522	185	87%	0%	12%	21%	77%	58%	77%	58%	Elem. Only
Learning Community	13,535	558	6%	30%	14%	87%	28%	15%	28%	15%	
Lincoln	15,281	3,182	90%	1%	15%	27%	51%	35%	54%	37%	
Little Compton	22,953	260	94%	0%	22%	15%	58%	48%	58%	48%	
MET Career And Tech	16,826	838	34%	0%	16%	71%	9%	2%	†	†	High only
Middletown	14,220	2,267	73%	3%	16%	28%	45%	34%	42%	38%	
Narragansett	17,610	1,396	90%	0%	19%	20%	53%	44%	56%	47%	
New Shoreham	40,866	114	91%	3%	21%	11%	60%	39%	52%	43%	Elem. Only
Newport	17,376	1,996	46%	4%	20%	‡	32%	21%	34%	24%	
North Kingstown	14,042	4,056	91%	1%	12%	20%	56%	44%	61%	49%	
North Providence	14,646	3,498	68%	2%	19%	46%	31%	18%	30%	19%	
North Smithfield	13,018	1,729	89%	0%	16%	16%	48%	32%	46%	36%	
Paul Cuffee Charter Sch	15,407	774	9%	6%	19%	68%	24%	19%	28%	23%	
Pawtucket	12,092	8,953	34%	11%	16%	78%	20%	14%	21%	16%	
Portsmouth	14,235	2,647	91%	0%	15%	14%	49%	44%	47%	45%	
Providence	15,570	23,827	9%	21%	18%	80%	18%	10%	17%	11%	
R.I. Sch For The Deaf	93,319	61	48%	0%	100%	64%	3%	3%	0%	0%	
Rhode Island Nurses Institute Middle College	12,876	266	15%	1%	7%	87%	13%	2%	†	†	High only
Scituate	13,541	1,448	97%	0%	12%	17%	42%	37%	45%	39%	
Segue Institute For Learning	12,898	230	7%	15%	17%	93%	28%	5%	28%	5%	Middle Only
Sheila Skip Nowell Leadership Academy	–	154	31%	9%	19%	46%	0%	0%	†	†	High only
Smithfield	14,199	2,396	90%	0%	11%	16%	46%	32%	48%	37%	
South Kingstown	16,785	3,397	86%	1%	13%	19%	58%	50%	64%	55%	
The Compass School	14,050	163	93%	0%	19%	6%	76%	43%	76%	43%	
The Greene School	12,976	162	79%	0%	21%	25%	36%	8%	†	†	High Only
Tiverton	15,510	1,873	96%	0%	20%	27%	48%	33%	54%	40%	
Trinity Academy For The Performing Arts	15,699	131	6%	7%	14%	88%	14%	2%	7%	3%	Middle Only
Urban Collaborative	–	137	7%	1%	20%	90%	7%	2%	7%	2%	Middle Only
Village Green Virtual	–	133	28%	2%	8%	89%	16%	4%	†	†	High only
Warwick	16,444	9,393	86%	1%	19%	33%	32%	22%	34%	26%	
West Warwick	13,959	3,421	79%	2%	18%	51%	31%	22%	32%	23%	
Westerly	17,621	3,016	83%	1%	17%	35%	35%	25%	34%	27%	
Woonsocket	11,144	5,920	49%	7%	23%	74%	20%	12%	19%	13%	
Rhode Island Totals	\$ 14,889	142,008	62%	7%	16%	45%	36%	25%	37%	28%	

* ELL refers to English Language Learners; IEP refers to students with an Individualized Education Plan; and FRL refers to students eligible for free or reduced lunch.

** Most recent year for which comparable Massachusetts and Rhode Island data are available from the National Center for Education Statistics.

*** For purposes of comparison; Rhode Island administered the PARCC exam to grades 3-10, but Massachusetts only administered it to grades 3-8. Includes elementary (grades 3-5) and middle school (grades 6-8).

‡ Indicates that the data do not meet National Center for Education Statistics data quality standards.

† Indicates that the data are not applicable.

– Indicates that the data are missing or unavailable.

SOURCE: National Center for Education Statistics, Rhode Island Department of Education.