

## EFFECTIVE PUBLIC EDUCATION POLICIES: LESSONS FROM MASSACHUSETTS AND NEW JERSEY

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High-quality educational opportunities for all children and youth are fundamental to the economic success of Rhode Island. All children need an effective, high-quality education system that develops the analytical, creative and entrepreneurial skills needed for a 21st century economy. A world-class education system is the foundation for economic development and healthy communities.

This *Issue Brief* explores education policy decisions that have been made in the two states that lead the country in education outcomes for 4th graders, specifically Massachusetts and New Jersey. Rhode Island's educational outcomes lag disproportionately behind those of Massachusetts and New Jersey. Forty-nine percent of Massachusetts 4th graders and 43% of New Jersey 4th graders scored at or above the proficiency level in reading on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), ranking them 1st and 2nd, respectively, in the nation. In contrast, Rhode Island places 32nd in the national rankings with only 31% of 4th graders reading at or above proficiency.<sup>1</sup>

A deeper look at education policies and investments in Massachusetts and New Jersey shows that these two states have implemented targeted strategies to improve the quality of education provided to children from pre-kindergarten through grade 12. Rhode Island has demographics that are similar to Massachusetts and New Jersey, which are also racially and ethnically diverse and have significant percentages of children in poverty and children in immigrant families. The successes in these states can be used to inform future education policy decisions in Rhode Island.

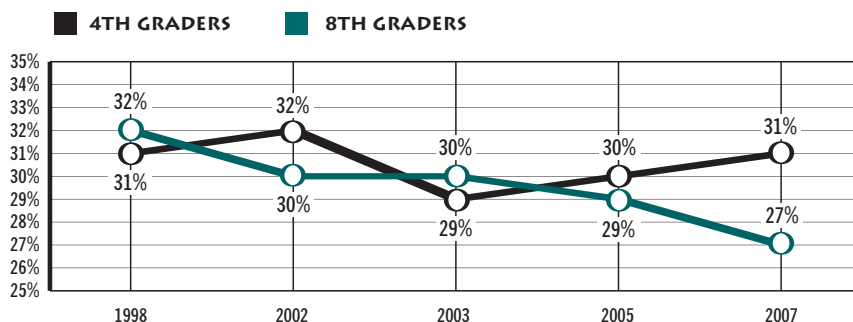
This publication includes an analysis of data from the Annie E. Casey Foundation KIDS COUNT Data Center ([www.kidscount.org/datacenter](http://www.kidscount.org/datacenter)). These data were used to rank states in terms of 4th grade education outcomes and to describe the social and economic contexts for Rhode Island as well as the five highest-ranking states and five lowest-ranking states. The tables on the following pages present a state-to-state comparison of demographic and economic indicators of child well-being, followed by an analysis of education policies in the two states that rank best in the nation for 4th grade reading proficiency, Massachusetts and New Jersey. These states are useful models to consider when building education policy in a diverse state like Rhode Island because they have achieved gains with a diverse student population.



## EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS: READING PROFICIENCY BY FOURTH GRADE

- ◆ The percentage of students that achieve reading proficiency by fourth grade can be used as a critical benchmark to measure the functioning of schools, school districts and the education system as a whole. Eighth-grade reading scores can also help show how well elementary education outcomes are sustained. Improving education outcomes among all Rhode Island children is essential if we are to continue to make gains in overall child well-being and create a positive climate for economic development.
- ◆ Reading proficiency is vital to the development of academic competencies across all areas of the curriculum, including math and science. Because content demands increase dramatically after the 3rd grade, students who continue to struggle with reading in 4th grade and beyond often face significant difficulty in all subject areas. They have a hard time keeping up with their coursework and have a difficult time catching up once they fall behind.<sup>2,3</sup>
- ◆ Students with poor reading skills will experience difficulty completing academic coursework throughout their school years, are less likely to graduate from high school and can experience difficulty finding and maintaining employment later in life.<sup>4</sup> Youth who read below grade level and drop out of school are more likely to be involved in the juvenile and adult justice systems and to receive public assistance than their peers.<sup>5</sup>

### PROPORTION OF RHODE ISLAND STUDENTS WITH READING PROFICIENCY BY FOURTH GRADE, 1998-2007



Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation KIDS COUNT Data Center, based on data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress, 1998-2007.

- ◆ In 2007, Rhode Island ranked 32nd and 35th for 4th and 8th grade reading proficiency rates, respectively. Nationally in 2007, 32% of 4th graders and 29% of 8th graders scored at or above proficiency on the NAEP reading assessment, compared with 31% of Rhode Island 4th graders and 27% of Rhode Island 8th graders.<sup>6</sup>

Based on the most recent New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP) results, Rhode Island is making progress in improving fourth grade reading proficiency statewide as well as in high poverty urban communities. The percentage of Rhode Island 4th grade students who read proficiently based on the NECAP increased from 60% in 2005 to 68% in 2008.<sup>7</sup>

### LEARNING FROM SCHOOLS THAT HAVE CLOSED THE GAP

It is important to note that while this brief focuses on the two states with the best results for 4th grade reading proficiency, these states still have fewer than half of their students who are proficient in reading by 4th grade according to the NAEP. As a nation, we face an urgent challenge to identify and learn from individual schools and districts that have achieved much higher 4th grade reading proficiency rates than the national average.

## CORE EDUCATION OUTCOMES: READING PROFICIENCY AND HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES

◆ A comparison of the core education outcomes of the highest- and lowest-performing states (using 4th grade reading scores as the primary indicator) shows that Rhode Island is considerably under-performing when compared with Massachusetts and New Jersey as well as when compared with the other New England states.

### 4TH & 8TH GRADE READING PROFICIENCY AND HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES

	4TH GRADERS READING AT OR ABOVE PROFICIENCY, NAEP 2007		8TH GRADERS READING AT OR ABOVE PROFICIENCY, NAEP 2007		HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATE, 2006	
	%	RANK	%	RANK	%	RANK
<b>TOP STATES</b>						
Massachusetts	49%	1	43%	1	76%	15
New Jersey	43%	2	39%	3	82%	1
Vermont	41%	3	42%	2	79%	8
New Hampshire	41%	3	37%	5	77%	11
Connecticut	41%	3	37%	5	79%	6
<b>Rhode Island</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>73%</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>BOTTOM STATES</b>						
New Mexico	24%	45	17%	49	56%	48
Nevada	24%	45	22%	44	47%	50
Arizona	24%	45	24%	42	69%	34
California	23%	48	21%	45	68%	36
Louisiana	20%	49	19%	48	62%	44
Mississippi	19%	50	17%	49	61%	46
<b>United States</b>	<b>32%</b>		<b>29%</b>		<b>69%</b>	

Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation KIDS COUNT Data Center, except High School Graduation Rate which is the Cumulative Promotion Index (CPI) calculation from *Education Week: Diplomas Count 2009*. Note that "Top States" and "Bottom States" are ranked based on National Assessment of Educational Progress 4th Grade Reading Proficiency Rates.

### EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT IN MIDDLE SCHOOL AND HIGH SCHOOL

◆ Sustaining educational achievement past the 4th grade is essential to workforce development and to ensure that youth will be successful when they reach adulthood. Eighth-grade reading scores and high school graduation rates are two benchmarks that can be used to measure the effectiveness of the education system.

◆ The Rhode Island 8th grade reading proficiency rate in 2007 was 27%, compared to 39% in New Jersey and 43% in Massachusetts. Similar to the 4th-grade reading proficiency rankings, Massachusetts was ranked 1st on this measure, New Jersey was ranked 3rd and Rhode Island was ranked 35th.<sup>8</sup>

◆ According to the *Education Week: Diplomas Count 2009* publication (which uses the cumulative promotion index formula), the Rhode Island graduation rate for the class of 2006 was 73% and Rhode Island ranked 24th on this measure. This means that more than one in four Rhode Island students who enter ninth grade do not graduate four years later with a diploma. New Jersey was ranked first on this measure with an 82% graduation rate and Massachusetts was ranked 15th with a 76% graduation rate.<sup>9</sup>

## ACHIEVING SUCCESS IN HIGH POVERTY SCHOOLS

- ◆ Improvements in proficiency rates at the state level require strategies to close the gaps in educational outcomes that often exist between schools in low-income communities and schools in higher-income communities.
- ◆ High poverty schools can achieve high standards by having a strong focus on academic instruction, using student assessments to individualize instruction, nurturing positive relationships among adults and students, having high expectations for achievement, providing ongoing professional development for staff connected to student achievement data, employing enthusiastic and diligent teachers, and effectively recruiting, hiring and assigning teachers to maximize success.<sup>10</sup>
- ◆ Parental education levels are often correlated with children's educational attainment. Rhode Island has a higher percentage of heads of household without a high school diploma than the educationally top-performing states, ranking 28th in the nation.<sup>11</sup> Targeted state education policies can improve adult education levels, engage parents in their children's education and provide high-quality educational opportunities for all students.

### CHILD AND FAMILY ECONOMIC WELL-BEING, 2007

TOP STATES	CHILDREN IN POVERTY		HOUSEHOLD HEAD DOES NOT HAVE A HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA*		MEDIAN FAMILY INCOME	
	%	RANK	%	RANK	\$	RANK
Massachusetts	13%	11	9%	10	\$80,500	3
New Jersey	12%	7	10%	16	\$81,000	1
Vermont	12%	7	6%	2	\$56,300	27
New Hampshire	9%	1	7%	4	\$77,500	5
Connecticut	11%	4	9%	10	\$80,700	2
<b>Rhode Island</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>\$67,500</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>BOTTOM STATES</b>						
New Mexico	25%	47	21%	46	\$42,900	48
Nevada	15%	16	21%	46	\$58,200	23
Arizona	20%	37	22%	48	\$51,800	36
California	17%	25	25%	50	\$59,800	21
Louisiana	27%	49	18%	43	\$45,000	46
Mississippi	29%	50	19%	45	\$40,200	50
<i>United States</i>	<i>18%</i>		<i>15%</i>		<i>\$56,800</i>	

Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation KIDS COUNT Data Center. Note that "Top States" and "Bottom States" are ranked based on National Assessment of Educational Progress 4th Grade Reading Proficiency Rates. \*Percentage of children living in families in which the household head does not have a high school diploma.

- ◆ The child poverty rate in Rhode Island (17%) is higher than in Massachusetts (13%) and New Jersey (12%), and is higher than the other New England states. Rhode Island ranks 25th in the nation on this measure. While family poverty can present educational barriers for many students, education systems at the state, district and school levels can develop policies and practices that ensure equal access to a high quality education regardless of family income levels or differing rates of poverty in a neighborhood or community.
- ◆ Rhode Island has the 9th highest median family income (\$67,500) in the U.S., above the U.S. rate of \$56,800. New Jersey has the highest median family income (\$81,000) in the nation and Massachusetts ranks third highest (\$80,500).



◆ Rhode Island's demographics in terms of race/ethnicity and children in immigrant families are similar to Massachusetts and New Jersey, yet Rhode Island's education outcomes lag disproportionately behind these states.<sup>12</sup> It is important to note that Rhode Island has higher rates of child poverty and lower levels of parental educational attainment than both New Jersey and Massachusetts, presenting additional educational risk factors for children.

◆ Massachusetts and New Jersey rank 1st and 2nd best on 4th grade reading proficiency scores, respectively. Both are very diverse states in terms of race, immigration status and primary language. Despite high levels of diversity in terms of student background and student need, education policies can be designed to ensure that all students achieve at high levels.

### CHILD POPULATION, RACE/ETHNICITY AND IMMIGRANT FAMILIES, 2007

	CHILD POPULATION	MINORITY CHILDREN*	CHILDREN IN IMMIGRANT FAMILIES		CHILDREN WHO SPEAK A LANGUAGE OTHER THAN ENGLISH AT HOME**	
			%	RANK	%	RANK
<b>TOP STATES</b>						
Massachusetts	1,432,856	27%	23%	11	19%	11
New Jersey	2,063,789	45%	32%	4	26%	7
Vermont	131,353	7%	6%	39	6%	38
New Hampshire	298,186	10%	9%	30	6%	38
Connecticut	820,216	34%	20%	16	18%	14
<b>Rhode Island</b>	<b>233,115</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>BOTTOM STATES</b>						
New Mexico	500,276	70%	20%	16	31%	4
Nevada	660,002	55%	36%	2	31%	4
Arizona	1,669,866	56%	31%	5	32%	3
California	9,383,924	69%	49%	1	45%	1
Louisiana	1,079,560	45%	5%	42	6%	38
Mississippi	768,704	50%	2%	50	3%	49
<b>United States</b>	<b>73,901,733</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>22%</b>		<b>21%</b>	

Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation KIDS COUNT Data Center. Note that "Top States" and "Bottom States" are ranked based on National Assessment of Educational Progress 4th Grade Reading Proficiency Rates. \*Minority children are defined using Census Bureau categories. The category includes all children who are not White, non-Hispanic. \*\*It is important to note that many of these children are also proficient in English. Rates of public schools students who are receiving English Language Learner services are comparatively much lower.

◆ The proportion of children who are of minority racial and ethnic backgrounds is 45% in New Jersey and 27% in Massachusetts, compared with a rate of 31% in Rhode Island.

◆ More than 23% of children in Massachusetts, New Jersey and Rhode Island live in immigrant families (meaning that at least one of their parents is foreign-born). New Jersey has a significantly higher percentage of children living in immigrant families than Rhode Island, at 32% compared with 26%. The percentage of Massachusetts children who live in immigrant families was lower than in Rhode Island, at 23% and 26%, respectively.

◆ Massachusetts, New Jersey and Rhode Island all have large populations of children who speak languages other than English at home, ranging from 19% in Massachusetts to 23% in Rhode Island to 26% in New Jersey. The rates of children who speak a language other than English at home range widely in the lowest and highest performing states overall, from 3% in Mississippi and 6% in Vermont to 26% in New Jersey and 45% in California.



## POLICY OPPORTUNITIES: LESSONS FROM MASSACHUSETTS AND NEW JERSEY

Massachusetts and New Jersey have a history of comprehensive education reforms that have led to improved outcomes for students:

### MASSACHUSETTS

- ◆ The *Massachusetts Education Reform Act* of 1993 increased accountability for student achievement, increased state education funding, increased funding to the lowest-income school districts, aligned rigorous statewide academic standards with new state assessments (MCAS), funded early education, expanded school choice, and invested in professional development and a new licensure system for teachers.
- ◆ Created by an Executive Order in June of 2007, the *Readiness Project* is a statewide initiative involving over 200 educators, business leaders, and community leaders who developed a 10-year strategic plan for the future of education in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The strategic plan includes attention to four systems goals that focus on individualized student learning, teacher quality, college access, and innovations (including longer school days and the implementation of readiness schools).

### NEW JERSEY

- ◆ The *Abbott vs. Burke* New Jersey Supreme Court decision in 1997 required schools to spend the same dollar amount per pupil in the 31 lowest-income districts as in the state's wealthiest districts and required the provision of high-quality pre-school and full-day kindergarten, supplemental services and social and health services to students in these districts. New Jersey also held Abbott districts accountable for aligning curricula with state content standards.
- ◆ In June 2009, the New Jersey Supreme Court upheld Governor Jon Corzine's school-aid plan which directs aid to all districts under a formula based on enrollment and their shares of needy students - those who are poor or have limited English skills. The decision effectively replaces court mandates that had required enhanced funding to 31 historically poor areas (Abbott districts). The court's 20th Abbott ruling said the governor and legislature had made a good-faith effort to develop a fair funding plan and deserved the chance to implement it. The court stated that it wants to see the results of the formula and expected the state to abide by the law requiring the formula to be revisited and updated every three years. It also said Abbott districts must be fully funded under the plan for three years.

### CORE ELEMENTS OF AN EFFECTIVE PRE-K TO 12 EDUCATION SYSTEM

Education policies and investments in Massachusetts and New Jersey can inform education policy decisions in Rhode Island. These states are good models for building education policy in a diverse state like Rhode Island because they have achieved success with a diverse student demographic. The education system interventions identified through national research as best-practice and likely to improve fourth-grade reading scores and other educational outcomes include:

- ◆ Access to high-quality pre-kindergarten programs and full-day kindergarten
- ◆ Investments in intensive literacy supports for struggling readers
- ◆ Alignment of curriculum, standards and accountability
- ◆ Policies and practices that ensure well-qualified, effective teachers in every classroom
- ◆ Programs that promote high school graduation and reduce dropout rates
- ◆ Equitable, adequate and targeted education funding



## ACCESS TO HIGH-QUALITY PRE-KINDERGARTEN

◆ Preschool education programs play a vital role in school readiness, and the impact of early learning opportunities persists across children’s school careers. Families with low-to-moderate incomes and those with low parental education levels are the least likely to have access to preschool education for their children.<sup>13</sup> Children who participate in high-quality early education programs score higher on tests of skills and achievement and develop stronger cognitive, emotional and social skills. The impact of program quality is even stronger for children from low-income families.<sup>14</sup> As a result of participation in high-quality early learning programs, students also become much less likely to drop out, repeat grades and enroll in special education.<sup>15</sup>

### CHILDREN AGES 3 & 4 ENROLLED IN NURSERY SCHOOL, PRESCHOOL OR KINDERGARTEN, 2007

TOP STATES	%	RANK
Massachusetts	59%	3
New Jersey	61%	1
Rhode Island	43%	27
<i>United States</i>	<i>47%</i>	

Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation KIDS COUNT Data Center.

#### MASSACHUSETTS:

◆ Massachusetts has strategically invested in improving access to high quality preschool experiences for young children since the 1990s. The state also provided targeted community grants to improve the quality of early education programs and to increase access for low-income children through the Community Partnerships for Children Program. Resources were allocated to children based on family income regardless of the community in which they lived. Massachusetts also created early learning guidelines to tie educational programming in preschool to the K-12 curriculum framework in order to create continuity in young children’s educational experiences. In 2005, Massachusetts created a Department of Early Education and Care to increase access to early learning opportunities, and in 2008 the state established a Universal Pre-Kindergarten Program that is being phased in based on annual appropriations.<sup>16,17</sup>

#### NEW JERSEY:

◆ New Jersey provides all 3- and 4-year-old children in high-poverty school districts (Abbott districts) with access to high-quality preschool. Abbott preschool teachers are required to have a bachelor’s degree or early childhood certification, and programs must use an approved curriculum, pay teachers the same as K-12 educators, and have classroom sizes limited to 15 children with one teacher and a teacher’s aide. Children in Abbott preschool classrooms also receive health and special needs assessments and services. Preschool is also available to all children in non-Abbott school districts where between 20% and 40% of children qualify for free or reduced lunch. In remaining districts, the state provides per-pupil funding based on qualifying family incomes.<sup>18,19,20,21</sup> A large-scale evaluation of the Abbott preschool programs showed significant and meaningful improvements in language, literacy and numeracy development. Children who attended for two years outperformed those who only attended for one year, and students in pre-kindergarten classrooms located in child care centers did just as well as those in public school settings.<sup>22</sup>

#### RHODE ISLAND:

◆ Rhode Island has historically invested public funds into the child care system and state-funded Head Start as the primary vehicles for delivering early education to children from low-income families. The *Rhode Island Early Learning Standards* were finalized in 2003 and disseminated through a series of professional development opportunities for staff working with preschoolers in community-based programs and public schools. In 2008, the *Rhode Island Pre-Kindergarten Education Act* was passed by the General Assembly calling for the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to plan a high-quality Pre-K pilot program to be delivered by a diverse network of providers (child care, Head Start, and public schools) and to be targeted to communities with concentrations of low-performing schools.



## FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN AVAILABILITY AND QUALITY

◆ Kindergarten is a critical school year during which children learn basic academic skills, social skills and knowledge.<sup>23</sup> Full-day kindergarten programs can be especially beneficial to poor and minority children and can contribute significantly to closing academic achievement gaps.<sup>24</sup> Children in full-day kindergarten classes make greater academic gains in both reading and mathematics compared to those in half-day classes, even after adjusting for differences associated with race/ethnicity, poverty status, fall achievement level, sex and class size.<sup>25</sup> On average, the learning gains that students make in full-day kindergarten programs translate to a month of additional schooling over the course of a school year.<sup>26</sup>

◆ Nationally, enrollment in full-day kindergarten has been increasing steadily over the past 25 years. In 1979, 25% of kindergartners were in full-day programs.<sup>27</sup> In 2006, 72% of the nation’s public school kindergartners ages 3 to 6 and 74% of private school kindergartners were enrolled in full-day programs.<sup>28</sup>

**PERCENTAGE OF PUBLIC SCHOOL KINDERGARTNERS ENROLLED IN FULL-DAY PROGRAMS, 2005-2007 AVERAGE**

TOP STATES	%	RANK
Massachusetts	76%	23
New Jersey	65%	33
Rhode Island	46%	44
<i>United States</i>	<i>70%</i>	

Source: Population Reference Bureau analysis of 2005-2007 Current Population Survey data.

### MASSACHUSETTS:

◆ Seventy-six percent of public school kindergartners in Massachusetts schools attend full-day programs.<sup>29</sup> The Kindergarten Development Grant Program has supported full-day kindergarten expansion and quality improvements in Massachusetts. There are two types of grants available: Quality Full-Day Kindergarten Grants are used to maintain high-quality programs and Transition Planning Grants are used to help with the cost of transitioning an existing program to full-day. Approximately half of districts have the capacity to serve all interested families, and the remainder use a lottery program to choose families that will receive services.<sup>30,31</sup>

### NEW JERSEY:

◆ Sixty-five percent of public school kindergartners in New Jersey schools attend full-day programs.<sup>32</sup> New Jersey is required to provide all Abbott and select other districts with funding for full-day kindergarten for 5-year-olds as a provision of the Abbott decision. Full-day kindergarten is considered a minimum of 4 hours in New Jersey.<sup>33</sup>

### RHODE ISLAND:

◆ Forty-six percent of public school kindergartners in Rhode Island attend full-day programs, significantly lower than Massachusetts, New Jersey and the national rate.<sup>34</sup> Since 2001, Rhode Island has provided districts that offer full-day kindergarten with a per-pupil incentive grant on a sliding scale based on the tax effort index of the community and has seen a marked increase in districts offering full-day classrooms. Rhode Island’s urban districts are more likely to offer full-day kindergarten than other districts in the state, with four of the six core cities providing universal full-day kindergarten in the 2008-2009 school year. Ninety-five percent of kindergartners in the core cities attended full-day programs in the 2008-2009 school year, compared with 32% in the remainder of the state.<sup>35,36</sup> The core cities are the six Rhode Island communities in which more than 15% of children live in poverty: Central Falls, Newport, Pawtucket, Providence, Woonsocket and West Warwick.





## INTENSIVE LITERACY SUPPORT FOR STRUGGLING READERS

◆ Intensive early reading programs for struggling students and adequate preparation and supports for teachers are key elements of improving reading outcomes for students who are not at grade level in language and literacy skills.<sup>37</sup> Success in school often depends on being able to read proficiently by the beginning of fourth grade, when students are expected to move from "learning to read" to "reading to learn." When students continue to have difficulty reading beyond 3rd grade, they can make progress with interventions that have been specifically designed for teaching reading to older students. Some students, including those with language-based learning disabilities, will need intensive services that use evidence-based strategies designed to make progress in reading and writing proficiency.<sup>38</sup> Supporting schools and teachers through the alignment of curriculum, assessments, accountability and resources for improving literacy is also fundamental.<sup>39</sup>

### PERCENTAGE OF 4TH GRADERS READING AT OR ABOVE PROFICIENCY, 2007

TOP STATES	%	RANK
Massachusetts	49%	1
New Jersey	43%	2
Rhode Island	31%	32
<i>United States</i>	<i>32%</i>	

Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation KIDS COUNT Data Center.

#### MASSACHUSETTS:

◆ Massachusetts ranks first in the nation for the highest percentage of fourth-grade students reading at or above proficiency as measured by the NAEP, with 49% of students achieving reading proficiency.<sup>40</sup> In the 1990s, Massachusetts aligned the *Core Curriculum Standards* with the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) with the explicit goal of having all students reading proficiently by the end of 3rd grade. Massachusetts simultaneously invested in targeted reading support programs for students in early grades, including Reading First, the Massachusetts Early Literacy Intervention Grant that targets students at risk of failing to read in 1st grade, and the Elementary Schoolwide Literacy Program. The state also employs more than a dozen reading specialists at the state education department to support reading interventions.<sup>41,42</sup>

#### NEW JERSEY:

◆ New Jersey ranks second in the nation for highest percentage of fourth-grade students reading at or above proficiency on the NAEP, at 43%.<sup>43</sup> Curricula in Abbott districts are required to be fully aligned with *New Jersey Core Content Standards*. Abbott districts must provide relevant instructional materials and tailored professional development to teachers and administrators.<sup>44</sup> Abbott districts in New Jersey provide students who are "at risk" with intensive early literacy instruction, small class sizes, and social and health services.<sup>45</sup> In 2002, Governor McGreevey signed an executive order on literacy requiring the development of pre-K to fourth-grade literacy standards for the state along with increasing professional development and best practice identification and dissemination.<sup>46</sup>

◆ To address the challenges faced by older students who are struggling readers, New Jersey formed a Task Force on Middle Grades Literacy Education and the development of the "Literacy is Essential to Adolescent Development and Success" (LEADS) model. Preliminary outcome data indicate that students who participate in LEADS showed overall literacy gains.<sup>47</sup>

#### RHODE ISLAND:

◆ Rhode Island ranks 32nd in the nation for the percentage of 4th grade students reading at or above proficiency on the NAEP, at 31%.<sup>48</sup> The *Rhode Island Literacy and Dropout Prevention Act* provides for classroom teacher professional development and allocates state aid funds for K-3 literacy efforts. Rhode Island also requires a personal literacy plan (PLP) for all students reading below grade level and has a K-12 literacy policy for the state.<sup>49,50</sup>



## ALIGNMENT OF CURRICULUM, STANDARDS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

◆ State education standards that are aligned with an assessment and accountability system are an essential building block of a strong education system. According to *Education Week Quality Counts 2008*, Massachusetts, New Jersey and Rhode Island all score highly on the key components used to measure Standards and Accountability.<sup>51</sup> All three states have curriculum content standards and/or grade level expectations that can be used to guide classroom instruction at each grade level. These are aligned with assessment systems that are used to hold schools and districts accountable for student outcomes.

### MASSACHUSETTS

◆ The *Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System* (MCAS) is designed to meet the requirements of the Education Reform Law of 1993. This law specifies that the testing program must test all public school students in Massachusetts, including students with disabilities and limited English proficient students, measure performance based on the Massachusetts Curriculum Framework learning standards, and report on the performance of individual students, schools, and districts. As required by the Education Reform Law, students must pass the grade 10 tests in English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics as one condition of eligibility for a high school diploma (in addition to fulfilling local requirements).

### NEW JERSEY

◆ In May 1996, the New Jersey Board of Education adopted the *Core Curriculum Content Standards* (CCCS) that enumerated what all New Jersey students should know and be able to do by the end of the fourth and eighth grades, and upon completion of a New Jersey public school education. The CCCS informed the development of subsequent statewide assessments. The *New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge* (NJ ASK) is used in grades 3-8. The *High School Proficiency Assessment* (HSPA) is the state's graduation test for all students who entered the eleventh grade as of the fall of 2001. End of course high school competency assessments in biology and algebra are also required for graduation.

### RHODE ISLAND

◆ In October 2005, Rhode Island began using a new statewide assessment system for elementary and middle school students and Rhode Island implemented a new high school assessment beginning in October 2007. The tests were developed and administered in collaboration with New Hampshire and Vermont through the *New England Common Assessment Program* (NECAP), the first multi-state testing collaboration in the nation. Beginning with the class of 2012, students will have to achieve a score of “partially proficient” or better on the NECAP math and reading subtests in order to receive a high school diploma. All graduating students must also successfully complete two of the four following performance-based diploma assessments as developed by their local high school: exhibition, comprehensive course assessments, graduation portfolio, and certificate of initial mastery.

## ACADEMIC SUCCESS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

Across the country, programs for English Language Learners (ELL) students vary greatly in quality and effectiveness. Because there is so much variation in the ELL population in terms of academic background and language ability, effective screening of ELL students is critical. Determining where an English-language learner should be placed at the time of enrollment - and when a student should be moved - is a key part of assuring student success.<sup>52</sup> In addition, policies need to enable flexibility in the structure and format of classes, increase student access to supports outside the classroom, include professional development and training of teachers, and improve the use of data to track student outcomes and opportunities to share best practices.<sup>53,54</sup>

## TEACHER EFFECTIVENESS: A KEY FACTOR IN LEARNING

- ◆ Having a well-qualified, effective teacher in every classroom is fundamental to student learning. Research shows that teacher quality affects student achievement.<sup>55</sup> Students taught by well-trained, experienced teachers achieve at demonstrably higher levels than students who have inexperienced, untrained teachers.<sup>56,57</sup>
- ◆ *Education Week: Quality Counts 2008* highlights state policy in key areas related to teacher quality, incentives for leadership, allocation of teacher talent, and building and supporting teacher capacity (including policies and practices to recruit, retain, mentor and support teachers).<sup>58</sup>
- ◆ The report identified the following areas, among others, that states can address in order to strengthen the teaching profession. Note that these data are from 2007-2008 and states, including Rhode Island, are making progress in many of these areas. A new *Quality Counts* update on these measures is due in January 2010.<sup>59</sup>

Initial Licensure Requirement for All Prospective Teachers	MA	NJ	RI
State requires substantial formal coursework in subject area taught		X	
Prospective teachers must pass written tests in subject-specific knowledge	X	X	
Prospective teachers must pass written tests in subject-specific pedagogy			
State requires student teaching during teacher training	X	X	
<b>Supports for Beginning Teachers</b>			
All new teachers are required to participate in a state-funded mentoring program	X	X	
State has standards for selecting, training and/or matching mentors	X	X	
<b>Evaluation of Teacher Performance</b>			
State requires all teacher's performance to be formally evaluated	X	X	
Teacher evaluation is tied to student achievement			
Teacher evaluation occurs on an annual basis		X	
State requires evaluators to receive formal training	X		
<b>Incentives for Teacher Leadership and Performance</b>			
State has pay-for-performance or pilot rewarding teachers for raising student achievement			
State formally recognizes differentiated roles for teacher leaders	X		
State provides incentives or rewards for teachers taking on leadership roles	X		
State provides incentives for teachers to earn national Board certification	X	X	X
<b>Managing and Allocating Teacher Talent</b>			
State provides incentives for teachers who work in targeted schools	X		
State provides incentives for national board-certified teachers to work in targeted schools			
State provides incentives for principals who work in targeted schools	X		
<b>Professional Development</b>			
State has formal professional development standards	X	X	X
State finances professional development for all districts			X*
State requires districts to set aside time for professional development			
State requires districts to align professional development with local priorities and goals	X	X	X
<b>School Leadership</b>			
State has standards for the licensure of school administrators	X	X	
State requirements for initial administrator license includes supervised internship and participation in induction of mentoring program	X		

\*This professional development funding was eliminated in the 2009 legislative session.

Source: *Education Week: Quality Counts 2008*. (January 10, 2008). Editorial Projects in Education, 27(18). Retrieved on 6/28/09 at [www.edweek.org/apps/qu2009/state\\_compare](http://www.edweek.org/apps/qu2009/state_compare).



## PROMOTING HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION AND REDUCING DROPOUT RATES

- ◆ Programs and policies that engage students in school, provide meaningful connections with adults, raise academic achievement levels and prepare students for college all help to prevent students from dropping out and increase their chances for success into adulthood.<sup>60</sup>
- ◆ High school graduation is the minimum requisite for college and most employment. Dropping out of school and not becoming part of the workforce places teens at a significant disadvantage as they transition from adolescence to adulthood. These adolescents have a difficult time getting connected to the job market as young adults and have less stable employment histories than their peers who stayed in school or secured jobs.<sup>61</sup> High school dropouts are also more likely to have a range of negative social outcomes as compared to people who graduate from high school, including unemployment, living in poverty, receiving public assistance, incarceration, having poor health, and being single parents of children who also drop out of school.<sup>62</sup>

### CLASS OF 2006 GRADUATION RATE

TOP STATES	%	RANK
Massachusetts	76%	15
New Jersey	82%	1
Rhode Island	73%	24
<i>United States</i>	<i>69%</i>	

Source: *Education Week: Diplomas Count, 2009*. Retrieved from [www.edweek.org](http://www.edweek.org) on June 16, 2009. Diplomas Count uses the Cumulative Promotion Index (CPI) method to calculate graduation rates. The CPI estimates the probability that a student in the ninth grade will complete high school on time (i.e. in four years) with a regular diploma. The CPI is currently the best measure available for cross-state comparisons of graduation rates.

#### MASSACHUSETTS:

◆ Massachusetts has invested in a number of education reforms to improve student educational persistence and achievement. Charter schools in Massachusetts were launched shortly after education reform legislation passed in 1993. In addition, Massachusetts created the Commonwealth Pilot Program, which was modeled after the Boston Pilot Program, allowing chronically underperforming schools to restructure as smaller schools with no more than 450 students. A recent study shows that the Massachusetts charter school students outperformed their peers at pilot schools and traditional schools and showed greater gains in academic achievement.<sup>63</sup> In 2004, Massachusetts launched the Expanded Learning Time Initiative. Participating schools add at least 25% more time to the school year. Early results from the initiative show increases in student academic performance.<sup>64</sup>

#### NEW JERSEY:

◆ New Jersey continued its early education and early literacy investments for improving student outcomes through the Abbott Secondary Education Initiative. The initiative focuses on improving student academic achievement for students in grades 6 through 12 by breaking large schools into personalized small learning environments, creating family advocate systems, and increasing the rigor of college and career preparatory programs.<sup>65</sup>

#### RHODE ISLAND:

◆ Rhode Island has created middle and high school regulations that focus on proficiency and personalization. The regulations require a scaffolded approach to providing literacy supports based on student need and personal literacy plans for students who are struggling. The regulations also require individual learning plans for all students starting in 6th grade to plan their course of study and necessary supports through 12th grade, as well as increasing student engagement through meaningful connections with adults in their school.<sup>66</sup> Rhode Island has also piloted several statewide dual enrollment initiatives to allow high school students who are traditionally underserved by postsecondary education to take college courses and receive credits for them while still in high school. Approximately 300 students participated in the pilot programs during the 2008-2009 school year. There are also approximately 4,000 additional Rhode Island students participated in other dual enrollment experiences.<sup>67</sup>



## EQUITABLE EDUCATION FUNDING

- ◆ High quality education systems require equitable, adequate and targeted funding to meet the needs of students and to achieve outcomes for all students. Some states provide more equitable and targeted funding as the result of education equity court cases. Other states have targeted funding based on student enrollment and student need. Districts that serve larger proportions of low-income, special needs or English language learner students often require more resources in order to close the gaps in educational outcomes that currently exist.
- ◆ It is also critical for states and districts to invest wisely in programs proven to be effective in raising student achievement and improving child outcomes. Closing the gaps in student outcomes will require states to target additional funding to evidence-based programs. Use of currently allocated funds can be evaluated based on alignment with best practice as well as school accountability for making measurable progress on key student outcomes.

### MASSACHUSETTS:

◆ The *Massachusetts Education Reform Act* was passed in 1993 in order to ensure that students in urban districts in Massachusetts received the education to which they were entitled under state law. This Act led to a more equitable state investment in education, increased accountability for student achievement, the development of rigorous statewide academic standards, early education investments, implementing school choice, and more professional development for teachers.<sup>68,69</sup> As part of education reform in Massachusetts, more funds were allocated to districts with high poverty rates. Massachusetts is the only state in which the 25% of school districts with the lowest incomes spend more per student than the 25% of districts with the highest incomes.<sup>70</sup>

### NEW JERSEY:

◆ Through the New Jersey Supreme Court case ruling *Abbott vs. Burke*, New Jersey increased investments in and improved access to high-quality preschool education and full-day kindergarten for children in the 31 lowest-performing districts, known as Abbott districts. New Jersey also provided funding and support for supplemental education services to students in Abbott districts. Based on *Abbott vs. Burke*, New Jersey was specifically required to: improve access to high-quality preschool education for children in Abbott districts, provide all students in Abbott districts with full-day kindergarten, spend the same dollar amount per pupil in Abbott districts as is spent in the state's wealthiest districts, and provide supplemental education services and social and health services to students in these districts. Accountability measures related to state education and content standards help to ensure the effective use of Abbott funds.<sup>71</sup>

### RHODE ISLAND:

◆ Rhode Island is currently the only state without a funding formula for the public education system. While there have been a number of efforts in the past few years to create a funding formula for Rhode Island, they have not been successful. Rhode Island state funding for public education is mainly based on standard increases, decreases or maintenance of the previous year's funding with no incorporation of equity adjustments based on student need and size of the student population in each district.

## STATE EDUCATION FUNDING, FISCAL YEAR 2007

	PER PUPIL EXPENDITURES	RANK
Massachusetts	\$12,857	6
New Jersey	\$16,163	1
<b>Rhode Island</b>	<b>\$13,453</b>	<b>5</b>
<i>United States Average</i>	<i>\$9,683</i>	

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. (2009). *Revenues and expenditures for public elementary and secondary education: School year 2006-07 (Fiscal Year 2007)*, publication number NCES 2009-337. Retrieved June 28, 2009 from <http://www.nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2009337>.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

### HIGH QUALITY EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

- ◆ Implement an equitable, predictable and adequate state education funding formula that is tied to student enrollment and student need. Include accountability for improving education outcomes for all children, including children who are low-income, enrolled in special education and/or English Language Learners.
- ◆ Ensure that all students in all districts have courses with the rigor necessary to achieve at high levels and that provide access to college.
- ◆ A well-qualified, effective teacher in every classroom is fundamental to student learning and achievement. Implement a system for teacher evaluation that rewards effective teachers, provides mentoring and professional development to improve teaching, and removes ineffective teachers.
- ◆ Increase access to charter schools and alternative school models that provide students and their families with high-quality educational options. Increase competitiveness for federal funding by lifting the cap on charter schools and supporting other innovations.
- ◆ Promote innovation through exchange of best practices among district schools, charter schools and alternative schools that are achieving gains in student achievement.

### EARLY EDUCATION

- ◆ Establish a state-funded pre-kindergarten program in Rhode Island, beginning with access for children in communities with low-performing schools. Use a diverse delivery system (child care, Head Start and public schools) with high quality standards.
- ◆ Build on Rhode Island's current investments in full-day kindergarten by improving incentives for districts to offer full-day kindergarten.
- ◆ Create an Office of Early Learning at the Rhode Island Department of Education to coordinate and improve the management of all aspects of early care and education programs in Rhode Island.

### LITERACY SUPPORT FOR STRUGGLING READERS

- ◆ Create early warning systems to identify and provide academic support to students who are having difficulty reading. Use evidence-based instructional methods that have been proven to increase reading proficiency, and writing proficiency.
- ◆ Ensure that evidence-based literacy instruction is integrated into teacher training programs, professional development opportunities, and ongoing classroom supports for teachers. Address the shortage of reading specialists in Rhode Island schools to support classroom teachers.

### EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS OF MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

- ◆ Create and implement early warning systems to identify middle and high school students at risk of dropping out. Provide evidence-based interventions to address academic deficits and accelerate to grade level.
- ◆ Implement Rhode Island's personalization and individual learning plan requirements to ensure that all students have meaningful connections with at least one professional adult in their school and are on track for graduation.
- ◆ Increase access to expanded learning time opportunities that are linked to academic success, youth development, jobs and careers.
- ◆ Increase access to dual enrollment and early college opportunities for high school students. Develop alternative pathways to high school graduation and college, with a focus on under-served students.

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## EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES IN THE AMERICAN RECOVERY AND REINVESTMENT ACT (ARRA)

There are new opportunities for education through the federal ARRA investments, including the following funding that will be made available to states:

- ◆ \$5 billion for early learning programs, including Head Start, Early Head Start, child care, and programs for children with special needs.
- ◆ \$300 million for Early Learning Challenge Grants and additional resources to establish and support state Early Learning Advisory Councils
- ◆ \$5 billion in competitive funds to spur innovation and chart ambitious reform to close the achievement gap. (These are also known as “Race to the Top” funds).
- ◆ \$77 billion for reforms to strengthen elementary and secondary education, including \$48.6 billion to stabilize state education budgets and to encourage states to:

Make improvements in teacher effectiveness and ensure that all schools have highly-qualified teachers.

Make progress toward college and career-ready standards and rigorous assessment that will improve both teaching and learning.

Improve achievement in low-performing schools, through intensive support and effective interventions.

Enhance data systems and use information to improve student learning, teacher performance, and college and career readiness.

- ◆ Over \$30 billion to address college affordability and improve access to higher education.

For more information visit the U.S. Department of Education website at [www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov).



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