

Maximizing Returns on Rhode Island's Education Investments: Enhancing the Leadership and Collaborative Assistance Capacity of the Regents and the Rhode Island Department of Education

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report describes conclusions and resulting recommendations from a management analysis requested by the Rhode Island General Assembly and undertaken for the Rhode Island Board of Regents. The analyses were conducted by a private education consulting firm, Management Analysis & Planning (MAP) of Berkeley, California. Analyses were based upon reviews of relevant documents, budgets, and statutes, comparisons with other state education departments, and interviews with and systematic surveys of employees of the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE), Regents, state legislative and executive branch officials, and numerous professional educators and informed members of the public. Analyses were conducted during February, March, and April of 1995.

Report Objectives

The purpose of this management consulting report is to enhance the ability of the Board of Regents and RIDE to provide (1) education leadership in Rhode Island and (2) collaborative assistance to local school districts in elevating student opportunity and education performance.

Report Theme

The report's principal theme is that Rhode Island need take only a few major, and not very costly, additional steps to realize a far greater return on its existing education investments. Currently,

Rhode Island devotes less than one half of one percent of total state spending and approximately one percent of all public funds spent on education to the operation of RIDE. This is a relatively small amount of money. However, the state can acquire potentially huge leverage on the remainder of its education system spending by redirecting use of these resources toward more focused and productive ends.

Analytic Methods

In order to appraise the capacity of the Regents and RIDE to fulfill its existing education reform strategy, MAP engaged in a multipronged data gathering and analytic effort. This involved an extensive review of relevant documents, interviews with approximately 200 RIDE, Regent, and Rhode Island officials and informed citizens, observation of RIDE and Regent meetings, surveys distributed to all RIDE employees, survey questionnaires distributed to more than 1,500 individuals in local school districts, businesses, community agencies, and civic organizations, analyses of RIDE as an organization, and comparisons of RIDE with education departments in three similar states, Connecticut, Delaware, and Vermont.

Analytic Findings

The above-described data gathering and analytic endeavors lead MAP to conclude that when judged against the crucial components of state leadership and education reform (specified on page 12 of this report):

- (1) The Board of Regents has adopted and pursued an appropriate improvement strategy for Rhode Island public education.
- (2) RIDE has built momentum in pursuing the Regents' reform strategy.

- (3) A prior (1993) RIDE reorganization, while well intended, distributed the agency's attention over too wide a formal span and diluted a sense of purpose and accountability accordingly.
- (4) RIDE needs far greater specificity in its implementation work plans.
- (5) Added practical steps are necessary to sustain RIDE's momentum in moving from a regulatory and monitoring agency to a fully professional collaborative assistance organization.
- (6) RIDE, and Rhode Island education, would benefit from greater and clearer support from Rhode Island's overall policy system. Regents could enhance RIDE's progress by concentrating more upon policy issues and less upon procedural matters.
- (7) Rhode Island's interlocking system of personnel assurances via union representations, civil service protection, 20-year position guarantees, and judicial wrongful dismissal decisions contributes to an inflexible and overly bureaucratic system.
- (8) There are existing conditions upon which RIDE's reform can continue to capitalize and which provide a basis for optimism regarding the future.
- (9) Rhode Island has sustained a reasonable financial commitment to the support of public schools.
- (10) Rectifying above-listed deficiencies is not unduly expensive, and, if needed changes were made, Rhode Island would reap substantially greater returns on the education investments it has already made.

Recommended Actions

Recommended actions are intended to enhance RIDE's mission, reduce organizational complexity, treat employees fairly, and remain within anticipated spending boundaries. The accompanying matrix summarizes recommendations and specifies the problems they are intended to address. *[Matrix not available to view online.]*