

## IMPACT STORY

# Strengthening Organizational Coherence Within the Rhode Island Department of Education

The Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE), like many state education agencies, is organized so that each of its divisions and offices oversees a workstream specific to their function. Yet, new and evolving challenges faced by the education system require increasing organizational coherence among these offices and divisions to enable them to achieve their complex and interdependent agencywide goals. Accordingly, the Region 2 Comprehensive Center (R2CC) has been partnering with RIDE to promote greater coordination and coherence across the agency.

Specifically, the R2CC has been collaborating with RIDE leaders to help establish systems to enhance communication, build awareness of project work across offices, and increase the use of common project management strategies.

All of these efforts are aimed to support RIDE in effectively carrying out its capacity-building services to improve outcomes for educators and students in Rhode Island.

## Increased organizational coherence supports RIDE in delivering on its commitment to advance opportunities for all Rhode Island students

In 2022, R2CC staff worked alongside RIDE staff on six projects (listed in the table below), aligned to RIDE's strategic priorities. To achieve each project's



*The R2CC's work has helped leaders and staff [understand] what [data-driven] engagement can look like.*

—RIDE Leader



respective goals, R2CC project teams collaborated with RIDE leaders, frontline staff, external consultants and partners, district administrators, principals, and teachers. RIDE intended its support to reach district- and school-level staff, students and their families, and the greater education ecosystem (e.g., policy-makers, advocacy organizations, researchers).

Rhode Island’s Strategic Plan for preK–12 Education identifies the following five priority areas and details commitments and measurable goals for each.

1. Equity
2. Excellence in Learning
3. Engaged Communities
4. World Class Talent
5. Governance Structures

R2CC Projects and Related RIDE Strategic Priority Areas

R2CC Project	Related RIDE Strategic Priority Areas
Supporting the Chief Equity and Diversity Officer to ensure equitable and culturally responsive and sustaining policies, procedures, and practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equity</li> <li>• Excellence in Learning</li> <li>• Engaged Communities</li> <li>• World Class Talent</li> <li>• Governance Structures</li> </ul>
Developing and implementing a blueprint for multilingual learner success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equity</li> <li>• Excellence in Learning</li> <li>• World Class Talent</li> <li>• Governance Structures</li> </ul>
Strengthening coherence around curriculum frameworks and blueprints for student success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excellence in Learning</li> <li>• World Class Talent</li> <li>• Governance Structures</li> </ul>
Developing social studies standards and curriculum frameworks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excellence in Learning</li> <li>• Engaged Communities</li> <li>• World Class Talent</li> </ul>
Facilitating a process to develop guidance for implementing a financial literacy policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excellence in Learning</li> <li>• Governance Structures</li> </ul>
Facilitating strategic planning for educator excellence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equity</li> <li>• Excellence in Learning</li> <li>• World Class Talent</li> </ul>

The R2CC recognized the interconnectedness of many of these projects, which were designed to help RIDE make progress toward its strategic priorities. However, it became clear that existing organizational structures and routines did not yet fully support the interconnected nature of these projects. To address this, R2CC staff worked with RIDE senior leaders to take the following steps toward developing greater coordination and coherence across RIDE's offices and divisions:

- **Establishing systems and structures for communication**

- » R2CC established regular meetings with RIDE deputies and cabinet-level directors to support improved communication within and across offices and divisions. The R2CC team facilitated cross-department conversations specific to the intersections between the R2CC-led projects, which helped open valuable lines of communication and led to greater alignment among projects.

- **Building engagement with projects across offices**

- » One of RIDE's offices led a multilingual learner project focused on developing educator competencies. While the Office of Student, Community, and Academic Affairs led this project, the new competencies also impact systems of educator preparation, which are led by the Office of Educator Excellence and Certification Services. The recognition of this intersection opened the door for structuring meetings to facilitate more regular collaboration among the directors of both offices to support the decision-making needed to move the work forward.

- **Using projects to build human and organizational capacity for future internal collaboration efforts**

- » For each of the six RIDE projects, the R2CC consistently included a component of data collection and decision-making to complement RIDE's existing operations, ranging from administering internal diagnostic assessments to drawing on a community of practitioners who provide input and feedback that inform policy development and implementation.

RIDE staff reported that building structures that facilitate cross-department collaboration has helped foster the development of common skill sets, a common language, and common mindsets and can help set the stage for future cross-team collaboration efforts.

## Primed to achieve agencywide goals

Through weekly meetings between the R2CC and RIDE, progress toward building organizational coherence became clear. Meeting participants' questions and cross-office and cross-division discussions led to clear next steps in achieving project milestones and outcomes. For example, various RIDE department leaders are spearheading the development of multiple content area curriculum frameworks. To ensure consistency in the development of these frameworks, each weekly meeting facilitated by R2CC staff includes time for RIDE leaders to share their progress.

The R2CC's efforts to develop common sets of skills across RIDE staff and leadership seem to be helping to generate positive cultural impacts across the agency. For example, RIDE leadership reports that R2CC's capacity-building is slowly changing the way RIDE staff use project management processes:



*The R2CC has helped RIDE staff buy-in to project management principles.*



Finally, as RIDE develops and disseminates agencywide shared goals, the R2CC's work across project teams is preparing RIDE leadership to work collaboratively and proactively to achieve these goals. By establishing and enhancing systems and structures of communication, and creating norms for sharing project work across offices, R2CC is priming project teams to successfully implement critical agencywide initiatives that will serve students and their families far into the future.

For more information about the Region 2 Comprehensive Center, visit the [Center's webpage](#).