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RHODE ISLAND BOARD OF EDUCATION  
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December 1, 2014

To: Members of the Board of Education

From: Jim Purcell, Commissioner

Subject: Approval of the OPC strategic documents: *Public Higher Education in Rhode Island: Creating a Common Vision for Change; Article 20: Establishing the Roles & Responsibilities of the Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner; Complete College Rhode Island; and Public Higher Education in Rhode Island: A Vital & Strategic Investment*

The documents presented for Board approval provide a context for changing public higher education in Rhode Island and ensuring that a common vision and strategic plan emerge. The documents were approved by the Council on Postsecondary Education at the meeting on November 19, 2014.

**Public Higher Education in Rhode Island: Creating a Common Vision for Change** provides an introduction and a brief overview of the strategic documents in response to the requirements established in Article 20 for the Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner to develop a strategic plan that better aligns public higher education to the needs of the state.

**Article 20: Establishing the Roles & Responsibilities of the Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner** translates the duties enacted through Article 20 for the Council on Postsecondary Education and the Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner to key objectives and related activities.

**Complete College Rhode Island** identifies four game-changer strategies that have demonstrated success in other states across the nation and proposes their implementation in Rhode Island.

**Rhode Island Public Higher Education in Rhode Island: A Vital & Strategic Investment** examines various metrics that offer historical data on funding levels and the critical need for targeted, strategic investments in higher education that include ensuring a college degree is attainable and affordable for all Rhode Islanders

**Motion**

It is recommended –

THAT – the Board of Education approve the strategic documents prepared by the Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner: *Public Higher Education in Rhode Island: Creating a Common Vision for Change; Article 20: Establishing the Roles & Responsibilities of the Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner; Complete College Rhode Island; and Public Higher Education in Rhode Island: A Vital & Strategic investment.*

Enclosure 7a  
December 1, 2014

**Office of the  
Postsecondary Commissioner**

**Public Higher Education in  
Rhode Island:**

**Creating a Common  
Vision for Change**

Rhode Island Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner  
80 Washington Street Suite 524  
Providence, Rhode Island 02903  
401-456-6000

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*“Rhode Island faces a number of challenges to its economic health. Addressing the job and skills gap represents a vital, yet challenging, component in the state’s recovery. Given Rhode Island’s evolving workforce supply and demands, any solution must include a focus on the capacity of the human talent pipeline. By ensuring a pool of workers who are ready to meet the labor needs of today and tomorrow, the Ocean State can expand and attract the businesses and opportunities all Rhode Islanders need for a prosperous future”*

*Rhode to Work: A Legislative Action Plan, RI Senate Policy Office, January 2014*

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## A demand for change...

Public higher education in Rhode Island needs not only a common vision, but also collective support to ensure it has the opportunity to play the critical role necessary to improve our economy and workforce. Other states are moving aggressively to expand college access, raise graduation rates, align degree and certificate programs to the needs of employers, and pursue research that drives economic development. Rhode Island can do no less if it is going to achieve a bright future for its citizens.

While the recent past has been turbulent for Rhode Island public higher education, the times are changing. Increasing state funding for our state colleges, establishing the Office of the Commissioner of Postsecondary Education, and creating the Council on Postsecondary Education of the Board of Education demonstrate the beginning of the state’s commitment to better align public higher education activities to the educational and economic needs of Rhode Island.

Make no mistake, however. Accomplishing this will require a long-term strategy and the courage to do things differently in higher education. How can we make the state’s colleges and university more adaptable and nimble in a constantly changing world? What actions will garner the biggest impact? Who will be a proactive player to achieve the changes needed? What resources will be available to advance an agenda that accomplishes a common vision for public higher education in Rhode Island?

The Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner is committed to engaging key stakeholders in a dialogue that ensures the expectations that are held for higher education in Rhode Island are aligned to the strategies necessary for accomplishing those goals creating a common agenda for change.

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*“States can build a strong foundation for economic success and shared prosperity by investing in education. Providing expanded access to high quality education will not only expand economic opportunity for residents, but also likely do more to strengthen the overall state economy than anything else a state government can do.”*

Noah Berger and Peter Fisher, A Well-Educated Workforce is Key to State Prosperity,  
Economic Policy Institute, August 22, 2013

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### Where we are now...

**Much has been done to provide a framework for change that will drive the development of a statewide strategic plan for public higher education in the Ocean State.** Article 20 of the Fiscal Year 2015 State Budget establishes the role and responsibilities for the Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner and positions the public colleges and university to begin the critical work of transition. Nationally, Complete College America is promoting proven strategies, or “game-changes,” to increase the number of college graduates, especially for our historically under-represented populations. The Education Trust through its Access to Success initiative similarly offers guidance on closing the gap and increasing the graduation rates for these students. Effective approaches exist; a commitment to adapt them for Rhode Island must be next.

The following documents provide a context for changing public higher education in this state and ensuring that a common vision and strategic plan emerge.

**Complete College Rhode Island** identifies four game-changer strategies that have demonstrated success in other states across the nation, and proposes their implementation here in Rhode Island. These include:

1. Accelerating Time to Degree so students can complete their academic programs on time;
2. Predictable Schedules by providing block schedules to help working students;
3. Guided Pathways to Success through highly structured degree plans and built in early-warning systems alerting advisors when students need academic support; and
4. Strategic Funding that rewards performance.

**Fiscal Support for Higher Education** examines various metrics that offer historical data on funding levels and the critical need for targeted, strategic investments in higher education that include ensuring a college degree is attainable and affordable for all Rhode Islanders.

**Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner's Roles & Responsibilities** translates the duties enacted through Article 20 for the Council on Postsecondary Education and the Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner to key objectives and related activities. Those core functions are:

- Systematically using data to analyze information on all aspects of postsecondary education in Rhode Island;
- Strategic planning including a five-year funding plan;
- Formulating broad policy to implement identified goals and objectives;
- Assisting in budget preparation and assuring efficient management of state property at our public colleges and university;
- Administering policies, rules and regulations; and
- Advocacy of public higher education.

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*"Launching a strategic plan begins with seeking input from Rhode Island leaders in the public, private, and philanthropic communities. It is about focusing our efforts on where we need to go for the benefit of the students, the state, and the institutions. It requires committed players that have the courage to change."*

Dr. Jim Purcell, Rhode Island Commissioner of  
Postsecondary Education

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### Getting to Where We Need to Be...

It's time for game-changers in Rhode Island if we are to significantly increase the number of college graduates. This can only be accomplished with bold, decisive actions. And, it must begin with a shared understanding and support for change.

Rhode Island's strategic plan for public higher education must recognize the need to:

**Align higher education with the state's needs for economic and workforce development** that includes producing research that translates into new businesses and technologies and establishing degrees and certificates that meet the requirements of business and industry.

**Increase the number of adults with a postsecondary degree to the national goal of 60% by 2025** by expanding the number of students taking college courses while in high school and earning degrees through reverse transfer—currently 43% of RI adults have a degree which, while above the national average, is the second lowest percentage in New England.

**Assure affordability** of a college degree and make information on degree completion, majors, and employment easily available to students and their families.

**Improve effectiveness** by insuring associate degrees don't exceed 60 credits and bachelor's degrees 120 and eliminating low-performing or duplicative programs.

**Be accountable** for results by adopting key metrics and measuring progress over time.

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<b>66%</b>	<b><i>By 2020, 66% of jobs will require a career certificate or college degree.</i></b>
<b>- 43%</b>	<b><i>Forty-three percent of RI adults currently have an associate degree or higher.</i></b>
<b>23%</b>	<b><i>RI SKILLS GAP</i></b>

**Complete College America, 2011**

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**A Common Agenda for  
Public Higher Education in  
Rhode Island**

**Article 20:**

**Establishing the Roles & Responsibilities of the  
Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner**

Rhode Island Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner  
80 Washington Street Suite 524  
Providence, Rhode Island 02903  
401-456-6000

## **Rhode Island Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner (RIOPC)**

### **Mission**

The mission of the Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner is to support the work of the Board of Education and the Council on Postsecondary Education in providing an excellent, accessible and affordable system of higher education designed to improve the overall educational attainment of the citizens of Rhode Island, support economic development, and enrich the civic, social and cultural life of all living in the state of Rhode Island.

### **Scope**

The Office will serve as the definitive resource for information on and the interpretation of Council policy for public higher education and the postsecondary institutions in Rhode Island that are under the authority of the Council on Postsecondary Education. The Office will work collegially and look for shared opportunities to advance the objectives of postsecondary education with the public and independent institutions.

In fulfilling this role, the Commissioner for Postsecondary Education will work with the presidents of the state higher education institutions to determine the benefits or disadvantages of proposed new programs, departments, divisions, courses of study with the scope and role adopted by the Council on Postsecondary Education and in developing tables of organization. The presidents also will prepare and submit budgets to the Council on Postsecondary Education and the Board of Education for approval, and will be responsible for the general management of property.

To accomplish these and additional responsibilities called for in Article 20, the Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner will rely on the collegial relations and civil discussions among the members of the postsecondary community and with important stakeholders from business, government, and K-12 education.

### **Roles & Responsibilities**

Pursuant to Article 20 of the FY15 appropriation act (RIGL 16-59-1; RIGL 16-59-2; RIGL 16-59-6 as amended) relating to the Board of Education and the Council on Postsecondary Education the following are duties as outlined below. (Note that these align with the work of Complete College America and the Lumina Strategy Lab.)

**DATA ANALYSIS: Systematically gather, process, and analyze information on all aspects of postsecondary education in Rhode Island, including identifying current and future needs [16-59-6(1)]**

Objectives	Activities	OPC Unit(s)
Develop internal capacity for collection and analysis of system data to drive policy development and monitor institutional effectiveness, and to report to internal and external stakeholders	<p>Establish a robust RIOPC website that provides interactive data that is useful and user-friendly</p> <p>Identify key metrics for internal and external reporting purposes (e.g., transfers among state institutions, degree completions, excess credits, cost factors, etc.)</p> <p>Coordinate submission of annual data sets including IPEDS and A2S; participate in annual IPEDS training, and maintain access to state IPEDS database</p> <p>Use longitudinal data for tracking student success, in particular for nontraditional students</p> <p>Develop funding stream to support data collection and analysis at the system level</p> <p>Develop RIOPC unit for data analysis</p>	<p>Finance &amp; Management Policy &amp; Analysis,</p> <p>Policy &amp; Analysis, Communications</p> <p>Policy &amp; Analysis</p> <p>Policy &amp; Analysis</p> <p>Communications/ Government Relations</p> <p>Commissioner</p>
Determine economic impact of higher education in RI and further enhance its role	<p>Collaborate with public and independent postsecondary institutions, business communities, and economic and workforce development stakeholders to develop and release periodic report on "The Economic Impact of Higher Education in RI"</p> <p>Identify existing collaborative research activities within postsecondary institutions contributing to economic development goals as well as new opportunities to expand these relationships</p>	<p>Finance &amp; Management</p> <p>Policy &amp; Analysis</p>

**STRATEGIC PLANNING: Develop a strategic plan encompassing the broad goals and objectives for the state's higher education system aligned with those of the Board of Education and the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education, and with the activities of the independent higher education sector, where feasible, including a 5-year strategic funding plan [16-59-6(2), [16-59-6(6)]**

Objectives	Activities	OPC Unit(s)
Develop a five-year strategic plan to guide postsecondary education in Rhode Island over the next five years	<p>Identify major responsibilities of the Office, the Council, and the Board</p> <p>Establish process for discussion and review of strategic plan document</p> <p>Prepare robust research base for comparing various academic and financial policies to assist the Commissioner and the Board with multi-year strategic plan</p> <p>Ensure sufficient staffing and data capacity to build and maintain cutting-edge review of evolving national and state policy</p> <p>Determine potential collaborations among the three institutions to reduce costs and/or improve student services and outcomes (e.g., personnel or facilities management, etc.)</p> <p>Identify and report system metrics pertaining to goals and mission of the Board and the Council</p> <p>Establish process for discussion/review of strategic plan document</p>	<p>Commissioner</p> <p>Commissioner</p> <p>Finance &amp; Management, Policy &amp; Analysis</p> <p>Commissioner</p> <p>Finance &amp; Management, Policy &amp; Analysis</p> <p>Policy &amp; Analysis, Finance &amp; Management</p> <p>Commissioner</p> <p>Finance &amp; Management</p>
Coordinate development of a five-year strategic funding plan aligned to goals and objectives of Board	<p>Review the operating budgets of the three public institutions focusing on efficient utilization and coordination of assets</p> <p>Research and analyze innovative funding mechanisms challenging the system to increase degree output and quality</p> <p>Identify less productive usages of funding and recommend redistribution as appropriate</p> <p>Advise the Council on five-year capital improvement plans submitted by each college president for renovation and expansion of institutions' physical plants and accommodations with the goal of eliminating redundancies or inefficiencies</p>	<p>Finance &amp; Management</p> <p>Finance &amp; Management</p> <p>Finance &amp; Management, Policy &amp; Analysis</p> <p>Finance &amp; Management</p>

**POLICY DEVELOPMENT: Formulate broad policy to implement the goals and objectives established and adopted by the Board of Education and Council on Postsecondary Education promoting coordination between public and independent higher education, PreK-12 education, and other stakeholders [16-59-6(3)], [16-59-6(4)]**

Objectives	Activities	OPC Unit(s)
Maintain OPC as the primary source for the development and interpretation of Board policy for postsecondary education	Provide staff support to the Council and the Board in developing new policy and revising current policy	Commissioner
	Research international, national and regional initiatives to provide the Council with relevant information including effectiveness, efficiency, and outcomes (e.g., Complete College America, performance funding structures, student financing options, etc.)	Commissioner, Policy & Analysis, Finance & Management
	Identify & develop new academic and fiscal policies that promote better student access and completion rates, especially for nontraditional student populations; implement policy upon approval of the Board and the Council.	Policy & Analysis
	Invite independent institutions to participate more fully in RIOPC initiatives convening them to discuss and identify potential joint ventures	RIOPC
Promote coordination among public and independent higher education in RI	Develop coordinated programs & policies that improve career & college readiness, reduce need for remedial education, implement common core & other standards, ensure a quality system of adult education and certification programs	Policy & Analysis
Promote coordination in courses of study & programs to promote collaboration PK-20	Develop policies that ensure state education is aligned with opportunities in workforce development & economic development and that students are prepared for future workforce	Commissioner, Policy & Analysis, Finance & Management
	Support access to postsecondary certificates or degrees promoting a seamless transition from K-12 to/through college (e.g., college and career ready standards, dual enrollment policies, etc.)	Policy & Analysis

<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>OPC Unit(s)</b>
Advance partnerships with K-12 education	Conduct longitudinal data studies determining strengths and weaknesses throughout the PK-20 system	Policy & Analysis
Improve alignment between state's workforce needs and certificate/degree programs offered by RI colleges and universities	Work with the state's educator preparation programs and RIDE to ensure the needs of teachers, schools, and districts are met Schedule quarterly meetings between senior administration from higher education and agencies such as the Governor's Workforce Board, Adult Education in RIDE, and industry associations Encourage the appointment of current practitioners and workforce development representatives in advisory boards for undergraduate and graduate programs Enable students to efficiently complete postsecondary credentials Consider adult degree attainment in development of degrees and certificates and institutional policies.	Policy & Analysis Policy & Analysis Policy & Analysis Policy & Analysis Policy & Analysis Policy & Analysis
Initiate and coordinate special research projects	Collaborate with public and independent higher education institutions as well as state agencies and others to explore common areas of interest Provide public postsecondary system perspective in conducting such research (e.g., dual enrollment, competency-based education)	Policy & Analysis, Finance & Management Policy & Analysis, Finance & Management

**FISCAL: Assist in budget preparation for public higher education, prepare standard accounting procedures for all public colleges and universities, and, on direction of the Council, be responsible for appropriation allocations and the acquisition, holding, and disposition of property [16-59-6(4)]. [16-59-6(12)]**

Objectives	Activities	OPC Unit(s)
Assist in budget preparation for public higher education	Prepare the annual budget for the Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner	Commissioner, Finance & Management
	Analyze each of the institutions' annual operation budgets with special focus on new programs, cost containments, etc.	Finance & Management
	Review operational budgets for institutions; advise the Council on compliance issues as well as responsiveness to the Board's and the Council's mission and goals including access, completion, affordability and alignment with workforce demands	Commissioner, Finance & Management
	Perform mid-year reviews and submissions to the State Budget Office of anticipated fiscal status at mid-year	Finance & Management
Evaluate risk exposures and effectiveness of controls relating to integrity of financial information, safeguarding of assets, and overall compliance	Maintain auditing function to provide value-added audit and advisory service to the system's three institutions; coordinate and support annual external audits of the three institutions of public higher education	Finance & Management
	Oversee annual financial statement audits as well as the A-133 audit to assure compliance with standards set by auditor general	Finance & Management
	Coordinate the system actuarial studies as required	Finance & Management
	Manage the fiscal officers' work group to address the system's approach to such issues as reporting of special items – RICAP, OPEB, GASB	Finance & Management
On direction from the Council, insure accountability for appropriation allocations and the acquisition, holding and disposition of property	Present draft financial statement audit results for review and approval	Finance & Management
	Provide guidance and assurances to the Council regarding all real and personal property now owned by and/or under control of the Board for use of public postsecondary institutions and in accordance with all laws/regulations of state	Finance & Management
	Acquire, hold and dispose of property as deemed necessary for the execution of the Council's corporate purposes	Finance & Management
	Prepare resolutions for Board review of capital projects as well as bond	Finance & Management

Objectives	Activities	OPC Unit(s)
	and debt service funding plans in coordination with issuing institutions and bond counsel	
	Provide support to institutions identifying funding options and other compliance processes once Board approval is received	Finance & Management
	Produce the most marketable issuance possible working with bond counsel, financial advisors, investment banks, RHEBC, and rating services	Finance & Management
	Report on account activity for all bond issuances to reconcile each account and assure compliance with bond covenants	Finance & Management

**REGULATORY & ADMINISTRATIVE: Administer policies, rules, and regulations of the Council on Postsecondary Education including those duties relating to independent higher education institutions in Rhode Island under the terms of Chapter 40 and any other relevant laws [16-59-6(10), [16-59-6(11)**

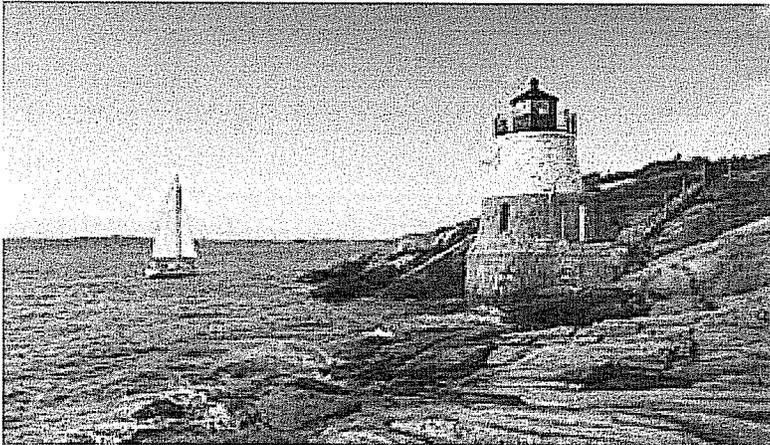
Objectives	Activities	OPC Unit(s)
Insure compliance with Board regulations and RIOPC procedures by providing technical support to institutions on the interpretation and implementation of policy and regulations	Provide trainings as needed to insure an understanding and uniform response to Board policy	Commissioner
Ensure students receive protections afforded by law and due process is accorded in the resolution of conflicts	Monitor and enforce compliance with RI law and act to enforce compliance or to end non-compliance as indicated	Commissioner
Promote access to postsecondary education for RI veterans and/or their beneficiaries and other underserved adults	Revise <i>Regulations Governing Institutions of Higher Education Operating in Rhode Island</i>	Commissioner
Regulate proprietary schools in the state	Respond to student complaints and monitor the resolution of issues	Policy & Analysis
Regulate proprietary schools in the state	Evaluate requests for authority of out-of-state institutions to offer on-line instruction to RI residents	Commissioner, Policy & Analysis
Regulate proprietary schools in the state	Revise <i>Regulations on Distance Learning</i>	Commissioner
Regulate proprietary schools in the state	Plan and conduct system-wide promotional campaign encouraging enrollment of adults, veterans and other underserved populations	Policy & Analysis
Regulate proprietary schools in the state	Review services and enrollment and completion metrics for these populations	Policy & Analysis
Regulate proprietary schools in the state	Determine school and program eligibility for approval of veterans' education benefits and monitor and support all those eligible	Policy & Analysis
Regulate proprietary schools in the state	Review and approve academic programs and curricula of proprietary schools ensuring academic integrity and fair business practices	Policy & Analysis
Regulate proprietary schools in the state	Evaluate program offerings against industry standards and market analyses	Policy & Analysis
Regulate proprietary schools in the state	Determine financial stability and legal compliance with all pertinent laws and regulations	Finance & Management, Policy & Analysis
Regulate proprietary schools in the state	Perform annual oversight visits and evaluations of all aspects of a proprietary school's operations (academic, legal, financial and structural)	Finance & Management, Policy & Analysis
Regulate proprietary schools in the state	Revise the <i>Regulations Governing Proprietary Schools in Rhode Island</i>	Commissioner
Support the council with its mission as the employer of record for higher	Negotiate and monitor 14 collective bargaining units' contracts as well as state-based collective bargaining contracts	Commissioner

Objectives	Activities	OPC Unit(s)
<p>education and the OPC (The Council retains all authority formerly vested in the Board regarding the employment of faculty and staff at the public institutions.)</p>	<p>Assure diversity in hiring and promotion programs.</p>	<p>Commissioner</p>
<p>Participate in the workgroup on insurance coverage for state employees as well as the system of public higher education</p>	<p>Study levels of coverage needed by the system as it does not have the sovereign immunity of the state</p>	<p>Finance &amp; Management</p>
<p>Provide Council with proper and timely compilation of all compliance reporting for public higher education required by federal, state, and other authorities</p>	<p>Annually review the risk management portfolio and renewal of all policies included</p>	<p>Finance &amp; Management</p>
<p>Coordinate the Business Continuity Plan for the system and verify each institution has its own BC policy in place</p>	<p>Establish and maintain a database of standard reports containing an array of statistics and benchmarks for the system of public higher education</p>	<p>Commissioner, Policy &amp; Analysis, Finance &amp; Management</p>
<p>Support oversight of institutions as part of a system of public higher education</p>	<p>Lead work group in review of prior Business Continuity Plan (BCP) for the OPC in order to update and complete</p>	<p>Finance &amp; Management</p>
<p>Work with the institutions to ensure that their BCPs are in order and up-to-date</p>	<p>Work with the institutions to ensure that their BCPs are in order and up-to-date</p>	<p>Commissioner</p>
<p>Provide the Council with updated system mission, role &amp; scope statements</p>	<p>Provide the Council with updated system mission, role &amp; scope statements</p>	<p>Commissioner</p>
<p>Coordinate higher education functions to maximize efficiency and economy</p>	<p>Coordinate higher education functions to maximize efficiency and economy</p>	<p>Commissioner</p>

**ADVOCACY & IMPLEMENTATION: Make recommendations to the Council on Postsecondary Education regarding the mission of each public institution and their programmatic operations and carry out the Council's policies and priorities [16-59-6(7)], [16-59-6(8)], [16-59-6(9)], [16-59-6(13)]**

Objectives	Activities	OPC Unit(s)
Organize and sustain a robust OPC to fulfill duties and responsibilities established in law and by Board and Council	Identify skills necessary for RIOPC to successfully fulfill its responsibilities	Commissioner
Pursue and administer public and private financing to advance the mission of the Council and the Office	Acquire sufficient FTEs and hire staff to carry out its mission	Commissioner
	Identify and submit grant proposals applicable to the system level and responsive to mission	Policy & Analysis
	Comply with all requirements and specifications of the granting agency	Policy & Analysis
	Serve as liaison for special federal, regional or private grants to assure compliance with fiscal requirements (ARRA)	Finance & Management
	Account for all fiscal activity of OPC including variance analysis	Commissioner
Proactively represent public postsecondary in RI and nationally	Actively participate in relevant state and federal initiatives (e.g., Governor's Workforce Board, Complete College America, PARCC, etc.)	RIOPC
	Ensure all oral and written communications are presented in a unified and professional manner	RIOPC
	Serve as primary resource for local, state and national queries	Commissioner
	Establish a statewide completion agenda	Commissioner
Enhance postsecondary education on behalf of RI students	Advance proposals to the Board and the Council submitted by the presidents	Commissioner
	Develop coherent plans for elimination of unnecessary duplication and address future needs of state in most efficient & economical manner	Policy & Analysis
	Revise <i>Regulations Governing Academic Changes in RI Public Institutions</i>	Policy & Analysis
	Convene academic administrators and others to reform remedial programs	Policy & Analysis
	Provide a seamless transition for students transferring among public	

Objectives	Activities	OPC Unit(s)
	higher education institutions revising current transfer policies and procedures and reporting annually	Policy & Analysis
	Ensure regular assessment of learning outcomes is conducted and consider institutional plans for the same	Policy & Analysis
Encourage the development and improvement of virtual learning options	Review current course offerings and degrees available through distance learning	Policy & Analysis



## Complete College Rhode Island

How the smallest state can take big steps to transform the state and its economy through college completion...

Complete College America identifies four “game changers” that have been proven nationally to increase the number of college degrees produced thereby altering the economy and improving the quality of life of its citizens.

### Complete College RI: FOUR GAME CHANGER STRATEGIES

- Accelerating Time to Degree
- Predictable Schedules
- Guided Pathways to Success
- Strategic Funding

Rhode Island Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner  
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# A Pathway for Public Higher Education in Rhode Island

## A Commitment to Change...

Rhode Islanders know the importance of postsecondary education to the state's economic success. The recent establishment of the Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner demonstrated the desire by state leaders for a clear and focused effort by our state's postsecondary resources to address the needs of the state and its citizens. Strong guidance regarding the role of this office to advance new approaches was provided through Article 20 passed during the 2014 legislative session. Higher education now must step up and become a committed partner in helping to shape a new future for Rhode Island—one that contains a thriving and growing economy and available jobs for a skilled workforce.

Higher education recognizes that increasing the pool of workers with higher skills also signifies helping to ensure the success of students including those who have rarely been successful in the past. This will be challenging work requiring a profound commitment to change. A three-part approach will advance us toward these goals: reportable metrics (because data means accountability and transparency of outcomes), alignment with current and emerging workforce needs, and implementing Complete College America's strategic actions. The proven best practices identified by the national Complete College America (CCA) movement offer a pathway to achieving this goal and boosting college completions. The key strategies, or game-changers, include accelerating time to degree through such approaches as block scheduling, remediation design, and guided pathways to success. Strategic funding is a statewide policy change that can focus campus efforts on desired outcomes.

**Complete College Rhode Island** will also call for the commitment and further support of leadership in this state. Accepting the challenge is the first step; taking action using and adapting the CCA framework will require the state to come together if it is to achieve a strong, vibrant economy.

# The Game Changers for Rhode Island...

## Accelerating Time to Degree

Establishing a student culture where full-time enrollment is at least 15 credits a semester or 30 credits over an academic year (including summers) is essential to on time (4-year) graduation. CCA recommends providing students incentives for enrolling in at least 15 credits a semester or 30 credits per academic year as well as restricting bachelor's degree programs to 120 credits and associate degree programs to 60 credits, with few exceptions. CCA recommends enrolling most students in college-level gateway courses and if underprepared, with mandatory, just-in-time instructional support or courses. They also recommend curricular redesign by combining reading and writing instruction and aligning mathematics to programs of study, including matching the curriculum to real-world career needs. Providing remedial help parallel to highly structured coursework eliminates remediation as a barrier to entry into college-level study.

## Predictable Schedules

Helping working students balance jobs, family responsibilities and school by utilizing block scheduling of classes adds predictability to their busy lives and enables many more students to attend college full-time, shortening their time to completion. Graduating on time decreases the cost of the degree and decreases the time to employment. Offering more academic programs in block schedules will also improve time-to-degree and create a quality educational experience.

## Guided Pathways to Success

Enrolling all students in highly structured degree plans, not individual courses, and mapping out every semester of study for the entire program keeps a student focused; it also compels the institution to provide courses when they are needed. An additional benefit of this approach is a better utilization of classrooms, faculty and related facilities. Building in early warning systems to alert advisors when students fall behind in their matriculation allows for more strategic intervention.

## Strategic Funding

Using metrics that focus on campus initiatives and increasing student progression and completion keeps performance funding relevant. CCA and the National Governors' Association identified metrics to tie state funding to student progression through programs and completion of degrees and certificates, including financial incentives to encourage the success of low-income students and the production of graduates in high-demand fields. By including strategic goals as part of the base funding of an institution, it keeps state funding relevant and a driver of innovation and change on campus.

**There is no time to waste. Rhode Island higher education must act to generate the graduates needed to fuel the economy. Starting now, for the future that we want for our state, we need to enact proven game changer strategies.**

Although the smallest state in size, Rhode Island has a significant history of innovation beginning with being the birthplace of the industrial revolution in America. Starting with Roger Williams, innovative thinkers have made this state their home. No wonder the statue on the State House is of the Independent Man. And while the "Ocean State" has more than 400 miles of scenic coastline and areas of pristine beauty, we need more than the Lighthouse at Castle Hill to get our state back on course.

It is time for Rhode Island to reclaim its reputation for innovative thought and action. The challenges of the present and the future can only be met and overcome by a well-trained and educated population.

A data report prepared with Complete College America reveals that while there are improvements in some areas, others need to get much better quickly. For Rhode Island to be competitive, we need to produce more bachelor's degrees, associate degrees and postsecondary certificates, which mean achieving higher retention and graduation rates.

**By 2020, 66% of jobs will require a career certificate or college degree; currently, only 43% of Rhode Island adults have an associate degree or higher.**

While there is much work to be done, there is reason to believe these goals can be accomplished. Our community college, college, and university have already begun to implement some of the major ideas of Complete College America with notable success.

- URI has developed academic maps which are a term by term sequence of courses for each major that include all required courses and milestones needed to complete the degree in four years. Milestones include not only courses needed for on-time graduation, but also GPA requirements, pre-requisites, application processes, and advising recommendations such as internships, international study, and minors. The academic maps also include a narrative section that helps students to understand the nature of the major, including career information and any other policies that may impact satisfaction of all requirements. The maps provide transparent information for students, supports the work of advisors, and results in efficiencies in facilities management. The academic maps support the goal of on-time degree completion by providing an additional guidance and information tool.
- Rhode Island College developed an alternative version of the required four-credit First Year Writing (FYW) 100 course. Students who would otherwise place into the developmental writing course, were given the opportunity to take FYW 100Plus, a 6-credit, all-college-

credit course with two extra contact hours per week in a learning lab in a computer classroom. Some students who would normally place into FYW 100 elected to take FYW 100P instead as a way to bolster confidence in their writing skills. In an initial pilot study, 67% of students in the developmental English course passed, while 84% of 100P students achieved a good grade. In addition, students taking FYW 100Plus earned higher GPAs indicating these students were generally more successful. A comparable version of MATH 139, Contemporary Topics in Mathematics is being planned which allow students who otherwise would require a developmental mathematics course, to meet their general education mathematics requirement.

- The Community College of Rhode Island will be piloting block scheduling options in spring 2015. The college is setting up full-time MWF, TR, and weekend blocks that will include both developmental or college-level writing, developmental math, college success and a college-level course (typically a social science or business course). Given the large part-time student population, the college will have some part-time (6 credit blocks) during the day, evening and on weekends. The college will evaluate the outcomes during spring semester and tweak accordingly for the fall.
- Take 5, Finish in 4 is a URI initiative intended to change the mindset of students regarding credit attempts and completion; this initiative is introduced at new student orientation and is promoted throughout the year. Students are encouraged to take at least five courses (15 credits or more) each semester. This message is repeated to students and their families through social media, advising, in residence halls, in URI 101: Planning for Academic Success, and on tee shirts distributed at orientation . URI has also reduced the time allowed during which a student may drop a course, encouraging continuing effort at completion, rather than reduced course load. The university is in the process of deploying more professional advisors who can better monitor student progress and reach out to those who are not fully enrolled, as well as those who may need more academic support services. In 2014 URI launched its first new winter January J-term to help students stay on track, catch up, or get ahead. Incentives for using the winter term include reduced tuition and no additional charge for students living in campus housing. Since URI began implementing a strategic use of financial aid and these credit completion strategies, there has been a 15% increase in first year students earning 30 credits in their first year.
- Rhode Island College noticed that freshmen who begin as “undeclared” students graduate at a lower rate. The college has reduced to 45 credits the time before students must declare a major. Students have the option of declaring a major or a meta-major if they have identified an area of interest. Meta-major options include exploring arts, business, humanities, science/math or social and behavioral sciences. Academic maps, which guide students through a semester-by-semester sequence of courses, are being developed for the meta-majors and more popular majors.
- Recognizing the need to better integrate support in college-level writing gateway courses, the Community College of Rhode Island began piloting the ALP (Accelerated Learning

Program) co-requisite model in the fall 2014 semester. CCRI has worked extensively with experts from the Community College of Baltimore County to train CCRI faculty, revise curriculum and educate the college community about the advantages of this innovative approach. CCRI began piloting this approach in fall 2014 and plans to double the number of sections offered in spring 2015. Upon demonstrating the success of this model, the offerings will be further expanded in fall 2015.

Hope is the Rhode Island state motto and higher education is already showing there are reasons to be optimistic that these goals can and will be accomplished. But as many other states have come to realize, it requires more than small improvements or model programs. This is a time for bold, strategic, and systemic change. Thirty-three states have embraced the Complete College America Game Changers; now, Rhode Island needs to act rather than observe from the sidelines. In partnership with workforce development, business, and other Rhode Island offices and agencies, public higher education will work to adopt all of these strategies and fully execute them in our state. The only question remaining is if the winds of change will billow our sails on an exciting new venture or will we allow ourselves to miss this critical opportunity to move forward.

## Accelerating Time to Degree

**Students' Voice: *"I need a degree to get a good job and can't afford to take five or six years to accomplish it."***

The goal is to ensure that students make continued and steady progress toward earning a degree. Too many students begin college only to get discouraged and drop out. What are the obstacles and what can we do to help more students reach the finish line? How can we change the paradigm so that the time needed to earn a degree is decreased for Rhode Island students?

How we support students that are not academically prepared for college-level work must change. Too many dollars and too much time are going into developmental courses. Students, discouraged by having to take courses that don't count toward their degree, drop out at high rates. Postsecondary education must not only enroll students, but support their success to degree as well.

The more time it takes for students to complete their degrees, the more expensive it is for students, their families, and the taxpayers. And, the longer it takes to complete a degree, the more challenging it is for students who work and/or have families to focus on their education. What strategies can Rhode Island undertake to help insure that students are able to complete what they started?

Do the math: if fulltime students can take 15-18 credits per semester and 6 over the summer, graduating with an associate degree in 2 years and a bachelor's degree in 4 years will be commonplace.

### Recommendations

- Expand access to dual enrollment programs for students who, with appropriate advice from guidance counselors and college advisors, can jumpstart their college careers by earning college credits while in high school.
- Degrees requiring extra credits result in additional time and have additional costs. Reduce the number of unnecessary, excess credits and maintain credit limits on bachelor's degrees to 120 credits and associate degrees to 60 credits for most majors. Cap certificate programs at 18 to 22 credits.
- Make transfer credit count by decreasing the number of excess credits that transfer students routinely have by the time they graduate by establishing a common core of general education and common prerequisites for majors. Develop common first-level courses for popular transfer majors. By having a general education core and the common major prerequisites, the majority of transfer students will be able to transfer in as juniors.
- Provide incentives for students to earn 30 credits over an academic year either by taking 15 credits per semester or by taking courses over the summer. Students who stay on track are much more likely to graduate on time.
- Make college-level coursework the "default placement." For those students needing support, establish mandatory attendance in tutorial sessions or extend the course time providing additional hours focused on areas requiring remediation.

### Predictable Schedules

**Students' Voice: *"I work full-time and go to school as well as have family responsibilities at home. Course schedules don't account for this."***

To reach the goal of more college graduates we want to ensure that students make continued and steady progress toward the degree. Block schedules establish classes in set time periods so students can plan accordingly. For example, if students know that all of their classes will be from 8:00 AM to noon, they can schedule their work hours or meet family needs accordingly.

Block schedules provide predictability in a college education, giving students the opportunity to plan for work and family obligations and decreasing the likelihood of missed classes and dropping out.

### Recommendations

- Develop block schedules for selected programs and assess outcomes; request institutions to identify which certificate and degree programs are the best candidates for such scheduling.
- Map out block scheduling for whole programs of study, creating student cohorts. This allows the opportunity for working groups and learning communities to emerge providing student-to-student support.

### Guided Pathways to Success

***Students' Voice: "I was glad that a road map through my first two years of college was basically handed to me through the JAA [Joint Admissions Agreement] program. College is a different setting compared to high school, and choosing gen eds [general education courses] that will count toward a degree and that will transfer is nerve-racking. More students need such guidance and support."***

With countless options in choosing majors and in selecting courses, it is understandable why too many students get off track and end up graduating with more credits than they need. There are too many choices and too little guidance. With too many choices, the decisions become more difficult. The advisor-to-student ratio and the complexity of student lives make the traditional advising model less than effective. Additionally, students don't always take advantage of the advising that is available, relying only on peer support.

Uncertainty about careers and majors also often leads to excess credits. Establishing highly structured degree programs with guided pathways or maps showing semester-by-semester course sequencing and milestone courses keeps students on track to graduation without extra courses. By scheduling students on a pathway for their major or meta-major (disciplinary area, such as science/technology, for students not yet committed to a specific major), students are guided onto a path that will direct them toward the right courses at the right times. The institutions benefit from degree mapping in gaining a more accurate knowledge of course and facilities needs.

The Student Access & Persistence Program (APP), facilitated by the Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner, supports college enrollment and persistence to degree of traditionally underserved students using federal College Access Challenge Grant funds to support Connect to College (C2C) at CCRI, Learning for Life (L4L) at RIC and RELAAY at URI. Central to this work is providing advising and strategic interventions early based on individual student needs. Core

program components include: establishing strategic partnerships with college access organizations serving nontraditional students; delivering blended, comprehensive, student-centered services (e.g., academic assistance, counseling, and financial planning); and ensuring satisfactory progress of students toward degree completion.

The Joint Admission Agreement (JAA) Transition Plans provide students with a guided pathway for over 60 majors at RIC or URI. Students participating in the Joint Admissions Agreement program rank the JAA Transition Plans, which map a program of study, as the first reason they would recommend the program. JAA Transition Plans are models for additional and alternate transfer paths from the community college to the bachelor's degree.

Aligning higher education with workforce needs means inviting business, industry and technology to be true partners in the higher education of their future employees. This translates as greater involvement of business in advisory boards that contribute to mapping pathways, thus providing assurance to students and employers alike that graduates will be appropriately prepared.

### Recommendations

- Promote academic mapping at each of Rhode Island's public postsecondary institutions. Ensure clear academic maps are provided that list sequentially courses required for a specific major each semester and include milestone courses. Milestone courses are those that should be taken at a specific time in a student's academic career, and gateway courses are the first-level math and English courses that are prerequisites for more advanced coursework.
- Guide students unable to commit to a specific major to a meta-major in an area of interest (which is not as specific as a major). Roadmaps for a meta-major allow students to take introductory courses in a widely defined discipline and would enable them to develop a specific major without having "wasted" excess credits on courses that are not related to degree requirements.
- Coordinate maps for associate degrees at the community college with maps established at the baccalaureate institutions. Community college maps would show the first two years of study for majors offered at RIC or URI.
- Promote the Joint Admissions Agreement (JAA) and other articulated transfer pathways as efficient transfer options for students transitioning to RIC and URI from CCRI. Students who transition through JAA graduate from CCRI with an associate degree and 60 credits applicable to the bachelor's degree. Students are also eligible for a 10-30% tuition discount at RIC or URI.
- Expand existing coordinated support services that include intrusive advising, academic tutoring, and career services such as those provided through the Access & Persistence

Programs. This is particularly important if Rhode Island is to increase access to and through college for historically under-served students.

## Strategic Funding

### **Students' Voice: "I can't afford to go to college or finish my degree!"**

According to a recent article in the Providence Journal, "Rhode Island ranks 5<sup>th</sup> in the nation for the amount of debt students accumulated to earn a bachelor's degree." We can make getting a degree attainable for more students promoting on time degree completion and using state funds to achieve strategic goals.

Students' ability to complete their degree on time not only is impacted by available financial aid, it also is influenced by institutional policies or procedures. Complete College America recommends funding built into the institutions' base budget that also is based on such factors as credit accumulation and degree completion. Funding must give equal value to the important objectives of college access, academic progress, and success to degree.

Resources must be used to maximize an effective and efficient public higher education system that provides accessible, quality education for Rhode Island citizens and is an engine in driving the state's economy.

### Recommendations

- Create structures which promote students' on time degree completion.
- Examine performance-funding models used nationally (such as in Tennessee, Ohio, and Indiana).
- Identify desired student success metrics including those developed by Complete College America and establish incentives for achieving those metrics in institutions' base funding.

## Moving Forward

The postsecondary community is excited about the full implementation of this new initiative that will advance higher education for Rhode Island. It will be in the fidelity of the implementation of Complete College America strategies tailored for Rhode Island that will make this initiative a success.

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### **Works consulted**

*The Game Changers*, Complete College America, October 2013.

Johnson, Nate. *Three Policies to Reduce Time to Degree*, Complete College America, February 2011.

*Guided Pathways to Success: Boosting College Completion*, Complete College America, Winter 2012.

**Office of the  
Postsecondary Commissioner**

**Public Higher Education in  
Rhode Island:**

**A Vital & Strategic  
Investment**

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*"I am excited about the prospects for Rhode Island and the state's colleges and universities, however much needs to be done over the next decade to fully engage our campuses into addressing the needs of the state. This work must be built upon an awareness of our current social and economic circumstances, but not bound by them. Any investment must be aligned with the state's priorities and students' needs, requiring a consensus on the human and financial resources necessary to achieve those goals."*

Dr. Jim Purcell  
RI Commissioner of Postsecondary Education

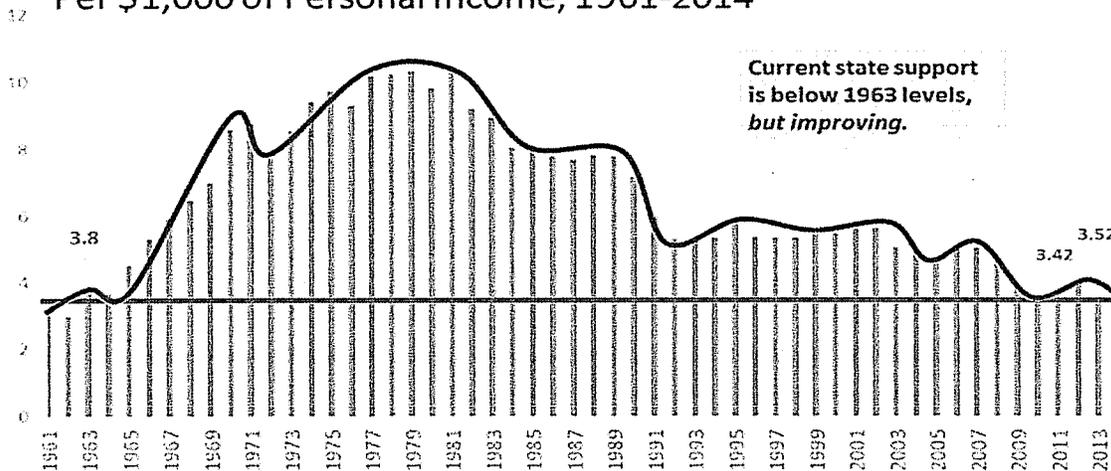
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### Intentional investment as a prerequisite...

Rhode Island needs a coordinated, comprehensive public higher education delivery system that is responsive to the state's economic and demographic changes and provides a clear pathway forward to meet the needs of the current era. Budget instability as a result of the recent recession and rising student debt has significantly impacted public higher education in states across the nation, including Rhode Island. Historical data on funding levels highlight the critical need for calculated, deliberate investments in higher education that assure a college degree is attainable and affordable for all Rhode Islanders.

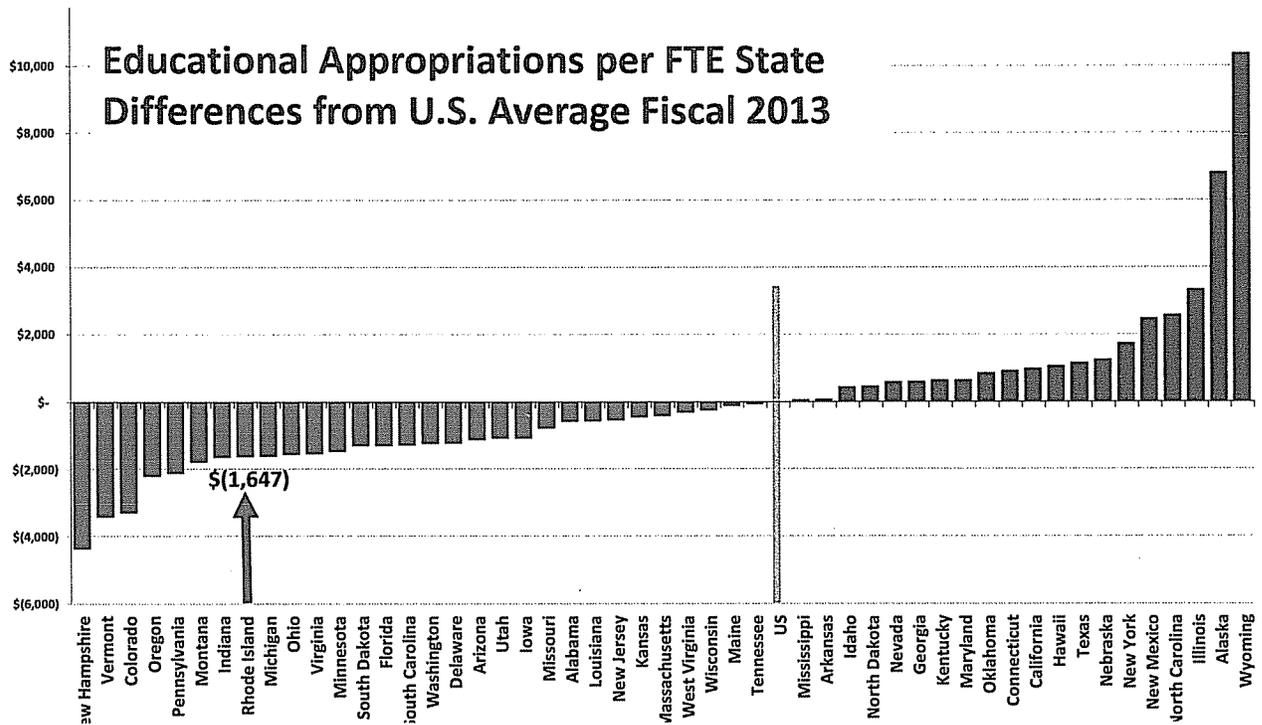
One of the national metrics used to measure support for postsecondary education is state support per \$1,000 of personal income. *Using this metric, the state of Rhode Island is currently funding the public colleges and university at levels below its support for them in 1963.* As the chart below illustrates, state support for our public higher education institutions has declined steadily and precipitously since 1980. If the state's colleges and universities are to meet the needs of the state, there must be additional targeted investments in higher education.

Rhode Island Fiscal Support for Higher Education  
Per \$1,000 of Personal Income, 1961-2014



Source: Postsecondary Education  
OPPORTUNITY Feb. 2014

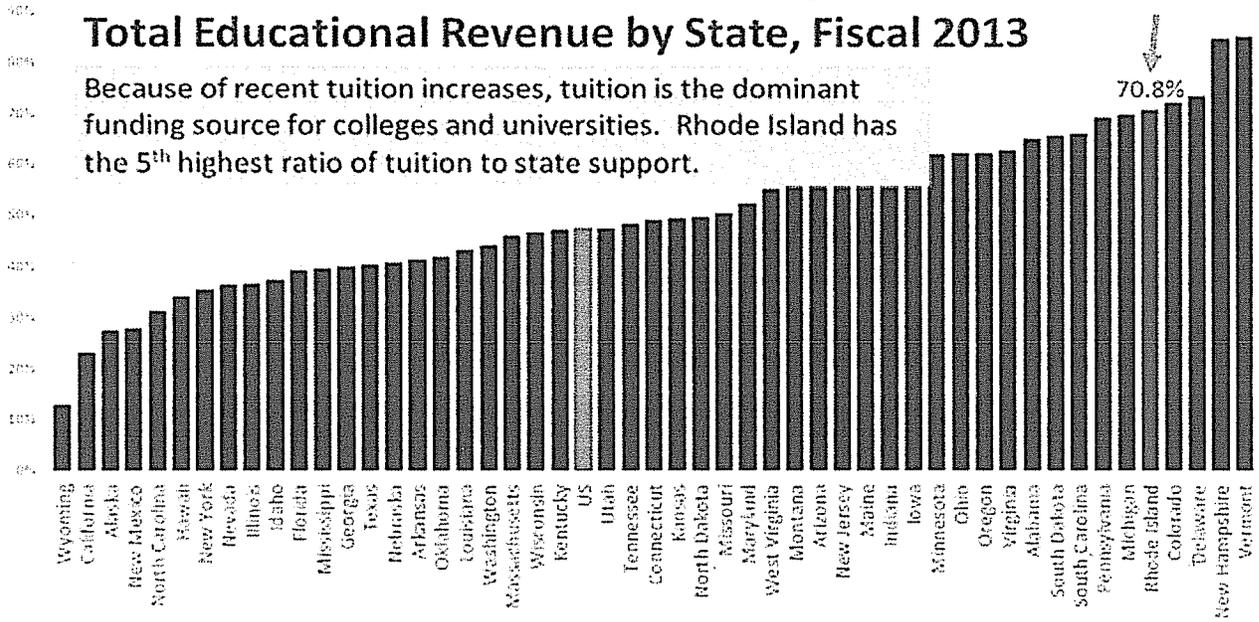
In addition, Rhode Island currently ranks 42<sup>nd</sup> nationally in its financial support for higher education. *The state's public colleges and university are operating currently with \$1,647 less per student than the national average.*



While the causes for the loss of state resources for higher education and other state services are understandable, it also must be understood that this insufficient support for human capital development and university research has contributed to the current inability of the state to transform itself from a primarily low-skilled, industrial based economy to a more sustainable diversified modern economy. To ensure a system that is more responsive to the needs of the state there must be additional resources for public higher education, while also ensuring appropriate accountability for results.

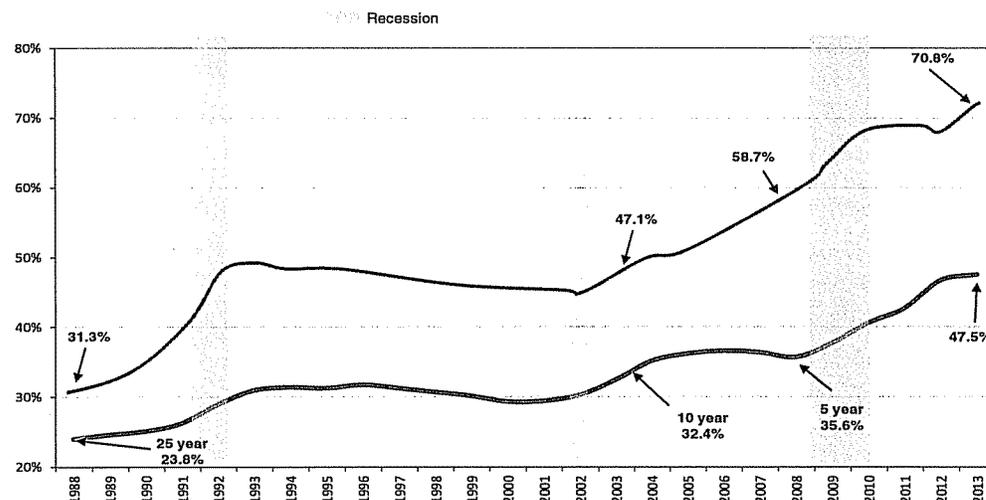
Insufficient state funding also has impacted access to higher education in the Ocean State. Ease of access is especially important for first-generation, low income, minority and adult students. These groups' ability to enroll and persist to degree is greatly impacted by cost. As the following charts illustrate, *Rhode Island students pay a much larger share of the cost of the higher education budget than do students in most states and have been paying more for decades.* The disinvestment has placed the financial burden of obtaining a postsecondary degree primarily on students and their families.

## Net Tuition as a Percent of Public Higher Education Total Educational Revenue by State, Fiscal 2013



The strong reliance on tuition revenue to support state colleges and universities is atypical. Students across the country paid about 25% of the actual cost of a college education 25 years ago; Rhode Island students paid nearly 33% of the cost. **Currently, Rhode Island students pay 70.8% of the cost compared to the national figure of 47.5%.** The recognition of the impact of tuition increases on access compelled Governor Chafee and the legislature to freeze tuition for the last two years at our public institutions.

## Net Tuition as a Percent of Public Higher Education Total Educational Revenue, U.S., Fiscal 1988-2013



Note: Net tuition revenue used for capital debt service is included in net tuition revenue, but excluded from total educational revenue in calculating the above figures.

Source: State Higher Education Executive Officers