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Ken Wagner, Ph.D.
Commissioner

Enclosure 5d
September 18, 2018

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TO: Members of the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education

FROM: Ken Wagner, Ph.D., Commissioner

RE: Endorsement of Rhode Island Professional Learning Standards

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A robust body of research has established that, when done well, professional learning can have a significant impact on educator practices and student outcomes. However, we know in our state that professional learning is not always making the difference we hope and expect it would. Our most recent administration of SurveyWorks indicated only about one-third of educators in our state see their professional learning as valuable and relevant to the content they teach. The Rhode Island Department of Education is committed to helping our schools and districts strengthen their professional learning systems and practices. A critical component of our support is the creation, adoption, and implementation of the Rhode Island Professional Learning Standards (RIPLS).

The RIPLS are grounded in the existing research base for professional learning. They are aligned with key concepts found in strong examples of professional learning standards adopted in other states across the country. These standards outline features and conditions of high-quality professional learning, and provide a framework through which districts, school leaders, and teachers can improve adult learning, and consequently, student learning. Their creation was informed by hundreds of stakeholders in diverse roles from across the education system in Rhode Island. The RIPLS call for a shift from how we have traditionally approached professional learning so that it is more relevant, sustained and applicable, and so that we get the information we need to know what it is trying to accomplish and if it is reaching those goals.

RECOMMENDATION: THAT, the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education endorses the Rhode Island Professional Learning Standards, to replace any previously endorsed versions of professional learning standards.

Rhode Island Professional Learning Standards (RIPLS)

Rhode Island Department of Education

Office of Educator Excellence and Certification Services

September 2018

RIDE Rhode Island Department of Education

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Introduction

The Rhode Island Professional Learning Standards (RIPLS) are designed to support educators to improve adult learning, deepen teacher content and pedagogical knowledge, and utilize effective models for classroom and site-based learning. The Standards outline features and conditions of high-quality professional learning, and provide a framework through which districts, school leaders, and teachers can improve adult learning, and consequently, student learning. Rhode Island educators have clearly reported a desire for improved professional learning. In a recent Survey, two-thirds of Rhode Island teachers indicated that their professional learning is not relevant or valuable. The RIPLS outline the necessary conditions to create both high-quality professional learning systems that are aligned with district and school goals, as well as learning processes that increase the effectiveness of individual professional learning experiences.

The RIPLS rest on the following assumptions:

1) Professional learning can result in meaningful change or growth in educator knowledge, mindset, beliefs, and practices.
2) Educator growth leads to improved student outcomes.
3) Improving professional learning systems and practices leads to stronger educator and student outcomes.
4) Professional learning contributes to multiple aspects of an educator talent management system by fostering continuous improvement and creating leadership opportunities for educators.

High-Quality Professional Learning (HQPL) Definition

In Rhode Island, we believe that high-quality professional learning consists of a set of coherent learning experiences that are relevant, purposeful, systematic, and structured over a sustained period of time with the goal of improving and building upon educators' practices and student outcomes. HQPL enables educators to impact student learning and well-being through the acquisition and application of knowledge, skills, and abilities that address the whole child. HQPL conforms to best practices in research and relates directly to the educator's professional context (i.e. grade level, content area, and role) through which the learning is applied.[1]

[1] This definition of professional learning is adapted from the Kentucky and Massachusetts State Departments of Education. It is also informed by the work of the organization Learning Forward.

Why Professional Learning Standards?

Research on the potential impact of professional learning led to the Elementary and Secondary Schools Act (ESSA) to require that professional learning activities be part of an overall strategy to provide educators with knowledge and skills necessary to enable students to succeed. The Act further specifies that these activities be sustained, intensive, collaborative, job-embedded, data-driven, and classroom-focused. Therefore, RIDE assumed the first step of designing a cohesive set of standards to support districts as they endeavor to operationalize these expectations.

Professional learning is also an essential part of Rhode Island's vision for talent management. It functions as an integral lever to develop, support, and grow our educators. Thoughtful planning and implementation of professional learning that is intentionally designed to positively impact educator practice and effectiveness will both help to retain our best educators, as well as support students' highest level of academic achievement.

Figure 1 – The Lifecycle of an Educator

How were these standards developed?

As with all standards development processes, RIDE began this work by conducting a thorough review of available research on professional learning and sets of professional learning standards developed by both national organizations and state departments of education. Our goal for this review was to learn from other states, districts, and national leaders about the development and implementation of professional learning standards and ensure that our own standards were well-grounded in research. We found, through this review, that there are benefits to developing and endorsing standards of our own design. This approach was also consistent with feedback RIDE has received during past standards adoption cycles, during which stakeholders expressed a strong desire to modify standards to fit the needs of Rhode Island.

Therefore, RIDE engaged the field in iterative rounds of feedback during the development process. These feedback cycles included meetings with stakeholder groups, individual follow-up work with professional learning leaders in the state, and surveys. These mechanisms allowed hundreds of educators to offer their feedback on the document. Throughout this process, RIDE made substantive improvement to the standards. This final version, we believe, reflects a shared vision of Rhode Island educators. The combined local and national scope of input has led to richer, stakeholder-involved standards that reflect national best practices and address Rhode Island needs.

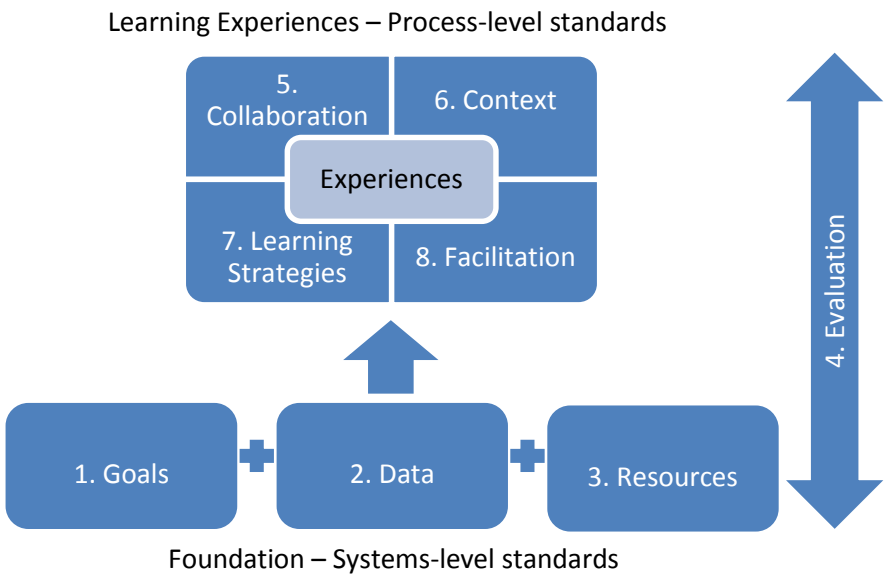
How are the standards structured?

The professional learning standards and descriptors are organized for both systems- and process-level support. For the purpose of these standards, *system*-level standards support necessary foundational practices (i.e. goal setting, resource allocation, progress monitoring, etc.) that districts or schools must engage in to create the conditions for effective professional learning. System-level standards call for professional learning goals that are intentionally designed to meet both educator and student outcomes as part of a long-term strategic plan (#1), decision-making grounded in analysis of local data and information (#2), and allocation of appropriate resources needed to sustain this work over time (#3).

Alternately, *process*-level standards focus on implementation of effective professional learning models and strategies in learning experiences. Process-level standards encourage intentional designs such as collaborative learning that fosters shared responsibility (#5), while also ensuring that learning is relevant and applied to an individual's context (#6). These learning experiences should always be grounded in evidence-based adult learning strategies (#7) via individuals and/or well-conceived activities that provide the structures and information necessary to meet the goals and objectives (#8).

Standard four bridges both system and process, as evaluation of both the professional learning system and the processes used to implement professional learning is critical. Systems and process level standards work in tandem to fully support effective professional learning (#4).

Figure 2 - Relationship Between Systems and Process Standards



How do I use the standards and descriptors?

RIDE intentionally designed the standards and their descriptors to guide users toward high-quality professional learning. While there are many possible uses for the standards, the most common will be using the standards to reflect on current practices, identify areas of strength, and target areas for improvement. The descriptors support this process by providing an in-depth look at the expectations of each standard in practice. Professional learning systems are not new to Rhode Island educators, and as a result many of these standards may already be present in some local systems and processes.

For instance, through reflection on the standards and current practices, stakeholders might want to focus on ensuring that locally provided professional learning is more relevant for participants (*Standard 6*). Descriptor 6.1 offers an opportunity for leaders within the district to reflect on their differentiation process for professional learning experiences by individual roles (building leaders, coaches and support professionals, teachers, teaching assistants, etc.) and contexts (grade level, service delivery, etc.). Descriptor 6.2 goes further to suggest that the system supports sustained learning after the individual learning experience has ended with cycles of feedback, observation, and coaching. It is through self-assessment against standards and descriptors that districts or schools can refine practices and procedures to move toward the development of high-quality professional learning systems.

Who assumes leadership of professional learning?

Professional learning takes place in school- and district-level systems through a variety of formats. All participants in this system (educators, coaches, administrators, district specialists, superintendents, etc.) bear responsibility for ensuring professional learning is high-quality. As such, it is critical to have leaders at all levels of the system who are championing high-quality professional learning and are committed to its continuous improvement. When stakeholders engage collaboratively and honor educator voice and input, the outcomes achieved via professional learning can be consistently strong.

School leaders have a particularly important role to play when it comes to creating the culture necessary to support professional learning. The RIPLS and The Rhode Island Standards for Educational Leaders (RISEL) work in tandem to describe collaborative, empowering, and accountable professional communities. Professional learning is most effective when the professional community described by those standards is achieved. Accordingly, the school leader plays an essential role in building a strong professional learning community by fostering trust and open communication, creating collaborative systems, and promoting a mindset of continuous improvement.

What new opportunities do the standards offer?

Together, these standards foster professional learning that is coherent and sustained, ensure that educators have opportunities for reflection, analysis, and improvement, and guide the process by strategic use of evidence. RIPLS provide direction for new practice and flexibility to develop innovations that honor the importance of educator input in crafting and participating in learning opportunities.

Looking ahead, opportunities exist for districts to consider high-quality professional learning systems that offer competency-based learning experiences. Professional learning structured in this way seeks to personalize learning for educators to improve their practice through focused competencies. One competency-based approach is micro-credentialing, where educators work at their own pace to meet goals through the support of collaborative peer groups or individual coaching. Moving toward a range of designs for professional learning experiences can be supported through the application of the RIPLS.

Rhode Island Professional Learning Standards & Descriptors	
Definition	**High-quality professional learning** consists of a set of coherent learning experiences that are relevant, purposeful, systematic, and structured over a sustained period of time with the goal of improving and building upon educators' practices and student outcomes. HQPL enables educators to impact student learning and well-being through the acquisition and application of knowledge, skills, and abilities that address the whole child. HQPL conforms to best practices in research and relates directly to the educator's professional context (i.e. grade level, content area, and role) through which the learning is applied.
Systems-Level	**1. HQPL has clear goals and related objectives that articulate desired educator outcomes and student outcomes.** 1.1 The goals of a professional learning system articulate a coherent rationale that connects learning to intended student outcomes. 1.2 The learning objectives of professional learning activities specify changes in educators' knowledge, beliefs, and/or practices necessary to achieve the intended student outcomes. 1.3 Educator input shapes professional learning that aligns with applicable professional standards, individual professional growth goals, and/or improvement priorities of the state, district, or school.
	2. HQPL planning utilizes ongoing analysis of data relevant to identified goals and objectives. 2.1 Multiple sources of qualitative and quantitative student and educator data and information inform decisions about professional learning goals and learning objectives. 2.2 Structured data analysis leads to a collective understanding of the targeted areas for improvement as well as the appropriate professional learning to address those areas.
	3. HQPL is strategically-resourced and sustained over time to support the identified goals and objectives. 3.1 Strategic planning process supports the identification of local resources (i.e. time/scheduling, fiscal resources, materials, technology, and personnel) available and needed to support identified goals and objectives. 3.2 Resource allocation provides sustained support over time for implementation of learning. 3.3 Resource allocation supports varied forms of professional learning that are planned in a logical and coherent manner.

System & Process	**4. HQPL is evaluated to measure the impact related to the intended goals and objectives.** 4.1 Formative evaluations measure progress toward identified goals and objectives. 4.2 Summative evaluations measure the attainment of identified goals and objectives. 4.3 Data and evidence inform continuous efforts to improve the quality and outcomes of professional learning.
Process-Level	**5. HQPL promotes collaboration among educators to encourage a shared responsibility to achieve the identified goals and objectives.** 5.1 Responsibility for the design, implementation, and outcomes of professional learning is shared. 5.2 Protocols, processes, and strategies facilitate collaboration throughout professional learning to support implementation of learning. 5.3 Professional learning is grounded in a culture of trust, collaboration, and continuous improvement.
	6. HQPL advances an educator's ability to apply learnings to their context. 6.1 Professional learning is relevant to participants' professional context (i.e. grade level, content area, role). 6.2 Ongoing professional learning includes opportunities (e.g. coaching) for educators to practice, give and receive feedback, and reflect on their learning. 6.3 Professional learning focused on content is rooted in the curriculum educators use to teach that content.
	7. HQPL incorporates effective, evidence-based, adult learning strategies. 7.1 Professional learning incorporates strategies to connect new learning with learners' prior knowledge and experiences. 7.2 Professional learning incorporates strategies for active engagement of learners. 7.3 Professional learning includes models of the practices needed to attain goals and learning objectives. 7.4 The structure and delivery of professional learning meets the unique learning needs of educators.
	8. HQPL is guided by a skillful person or well-conceived activity that provides structures and information necessary to meet the identified goals and objectives. 8.1 The facilitation of professional learning demonstrates the relevant expertise, skills, and/or deliberate planning necessary to guide the learning to meet the goals and objectives. 8.2 Educators are supported to become facilitators of professional learning by growing their knowledge, skills, and practices.

References and Acknowledgements

RIDE wishes to thank all stakeholders who contributed to the creation of this document. Hundreds of Rhode Island practitioners at all levels of the education system informed the development of these standards. Special thanks to the RIFT, RISEAC, RI Math Advisory Board, RI Literacy Advisory Board, and district professional learning leaders for participating in input sessions. We are also indebted to states and national organizations for their thinking on professional learning standards. We drew heavily on work from Massachusetts, Kentucky, Florida, and Tennessee, as well as the invaluable expertise of Learning Forward. These standards and future revisions will be posted on the RIDE website.

The Rhode Island Standards for Professional Learning are deeply grounded in the available literature on professional learning. As part of the drafting process, a literature review was conducted that encompassed published work from peer-reviewed academic journals, governmental and quasi-governmental agencies, and non-profits. The following studies were the most influential in the development of the standards. While not an exhaustive list, these studies form the core of the research base for the standards.

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