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THE RHODE ISLAND PROFESSIONAL TEACHING STANDARDS

PREAMBLE

The Rhode Island Professional Teaching Standards (RIPTS) are content standards that outline what every teacher should know and be able to do. The RIPTS are ambitious and visionary, while at the same time presenting a portrait of quality teaching that every competent professional can achieve. They are designed to be a resource for promoting agreement among state policymakers, teacher preparation faculty, school and district administrators, members of professional associations and organizations, the public, and most importantly, among teachers themselves about the attributes of quality teaching in Rhode Island.

Each Rhode Island Professional Teaching Standard is presented as a statement of the individual standard accompanied by a series of elaborated descriptors. The descriptors further define the meaning and intent of each standard. The order of the descriptors does not imply a hierarchy of importance or a desired chronology of acquisition over a teacher's career. Some standards have more descriptors than others. The number of descriptors does not communicate the relative importance of the standards. Some standards simply required more elaboration than others to clarify their meaning for multiple audiences

These standards refer repeatedly to "all students." These references really do mean all students and the multiple strengths, challenges and backgrounds that each student brings to the classroom. All students includes, but is by no means limited to English Language Learners, students with special learning needs, and students of all races, ethnicities, cultures and socioeconomic circumstances.

The RIPTS are rooted in highly respected state and national teaching standards. They are an outgrowth of the Rhode Island Beginning Teacher Standards (RIBTS) that were promulgated in 1994. The beginning teacher standards, in turn, were designed to align with the Five Core Propositions of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, as well as the standards developed by the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium – both highly regarded statements of quality teaching practice.

The RIPTS are the foundation for the continuous improvement of the teaching profession in Rhode Island. They define practices in which educators should develop increasing competence throughout their careers and as such are the embodiment of the Regents' expectation that every educator will be a life-long learner.

The RIPTS are not performance standards. They do not describe acceptable levels of performance of the skills outlined in the standards for any stage of educators' careers. The decisions about how well educators must perform on the standards, as well as decisions about the design of the assessment instruments needed to assess performance, are left to others. Stakeholders have done significant work in these areas already, based on the RIBTS. They will be able to refine and expand on this work using the RIPTS.

Examples of work that has and will be done include the following. Since 1997, teacher education programs in Rhode Island have used the RIBTS to align their teacher preparation curriculum and designed accompanying assessments to ensure that program graduates have the knowledge and skill required of beginning educators. The Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) approves teacher preparation programs at Rhode Island universities and colleges, in part, by how well their graduates are able to demonstrate competence on these standards. In this instance, the faculty and administrators of preparation programs have determined the performance standards that preparing teachers must meet and they have designed the assessments used to judge performance. They have made these decisions in accordance with state program approval and teacher certification requirements. The faculty and administration of Rhode Island teacher preparation institutions can now reexamine and refine their work based on the RIPTS and their implications for the skills and knowledge needed by beginning teachers.

At the request of Rhode Island educators, RIDE revised the certification process to align the requirements for recertification with staff development experiences that were meaningful to educators and met the needs of schools and district initiatives. The new recertification process asks educators to identify and engage in professional development that will improve their teaching as defined by the RIBTS, as well as the needs of their students and schools. RIDE will now be asking educators to use the RIPTS as they identify areas for professional growth.

Teachers, their unions, school districts, and administrators have also used the RIBTS to improve the practice of new and continuing teachers at the local level. Rhode Island districts use the RIBTS when developing their mentoring programs designed to support beginning teachers. In some Rhode Island school districts, teachers' unions and school districts have agreed to revise their teacher evaluation systems to base them on the RIBTS. With the introduction of the RIPTS, local stakeholders have the opportunity to look at teaching practice along a continuum and to use the RIPTS to inform induction, mentoring, professional development and evaluation and to create a coherent system of expectations and supports for improving teacher practice.

One measure of the strength of any set of standards is their ability to promote common agreement around a vision of quality – agreement that informs the building of systems that will support competence in the standards as the norm, rather than the exception. If the RIPTS are to achieve their promise, they must lead to the creation of systems in which teaching that encompasses them is commonplace, rather than remarkable.

Creating such systems will require providing educators with opportunities and resources as they are held accountable for the competent performance of these standards. It is easier for teachers to “work collaboratively with colleagues to examine teacher practice, student work and student assessment results . . .” if they are provided with the time, skills, and leadership to do so. For educators to teach in ways that address the needs of English Language Learners, they must have had opportunities to learn what those needs are and how they can be addressed in the classroom. If state, higher education and local systems want to hold educators accountable for meeting these standards, then they have the responsibility to provide the supports and opportunities educators need to demonstrate competence in the standards. At the same time, educators and their professional associations are also responsible for promoting these standards and helping members to develop sufficient competence and skill. The intent of the RIPTS is to encourage all sides to step forward and contribute to their realization. Making the RIPTS a reality in Rhode Island classrooms will require systemic support, as well as initiative on the part of each individual teacher.

A potential liability for any set of standards is that they can be abused and used in unintended ways that are not supported by their design. The RIPTS present a holistic portrait of high quality teaching. This portrait of high quality teaching must be honored if stakeholders decide to use the standards for developing performance standards and assessments. If observing performances of these standards is reduced to filling out evidence, this will be an abuse of their purpose and will negate their promise of improving teacher practice.

Instead, these standards should be used to inform discussions that create a common vision of quality teaching and of what will be needed from all stakeholders to help teachers achieve the shared vision and to galvanize the actions needed to create these conditions. The conditions that stakeholders must create include:

- Common agreement on the attributes of good teaching and the conditions needed to support it;
- Well-developed performance standards and assessments and training in how to use them well;
- Professional preparation and professional development that equips teachers to meet the standards;
- Professional responsibility to seek out additional information and participate in learning opportunities;
- Systematic observation, evaluation and adjustment as these systems are being built so that they can be improved over time.

It is the Regents' intent that the teaching profession and all Rhode Island stakeholders embrace the RIPTS and use them to reach agreement about what constitutes quality teaching in Rhode Island.

THE RHODE ISLAND PROFESSIONAL TEACHING STANDARDS (RIPTS)

Standard 1: Teachers create learning experiences using a broad base of general knowledge that reflects an understanding of the nature of the communities and world in which we live.

Teachers...

- Reflect a variety of academic, social, and cultural experiences in their teaching
- Use a broad content knowledge base sufficient to create interdisciplinary learning experiences designed to ensure that all students achieve state standards for content and achievement
- Exhibit a commitment to learning about the changes in their disciplines and in our world that models a commitment to lifelong learning for students
- Facilitate student involvement in the school and wider communities

Standard 2: Teachers have a deep content knowledge base sufficient to create learning experiences that reflect an understanding of central concepts, vocabulary, structures, and tools of inquiry of the disciplines/content areas they teach.

Teachers...

- Know their discipline/content areas and understand how knowledge in their discipline/content area is created, organized, linked to other disciplines, and applied beyond the school setting
- Design instruction that addresses the core skills, concepts, and ideas of the disciplines/ content areas to help all students meet Rhode Island's learning standards
- Select appropriate instructional materials and resources (including technological resources) based on their comprehensiveness, accuracy, and usefulness for representing particular ideas and concepts in the discipline/content areas
- Engage students in a variety of explanations and multiple representations of concepts, including analogies, metaphors, experiments, demonstrations, and illustrations, that help all students develop conceptual understanding
- Represent and use differing viewpoints, theories, and methods of inquiry when teaching concepts and encourage all students to see, question, and interpret concepts from a variety of perspectives

Standard 3: Teachers create instructional opportunities that reflect an understanding of how children learn and develop.

Teachers...

- Understand how students use their prior knowledge to construct knowledge, acquire skills, develop habits of mind, and acquire positive dispositions toward learning
- Design instruction that meets the current cognitive, social and personal needs of their students
- Create age-appropriate lessons and activities that meet the variety of developmental levels of students within a class

Standard 4: Teachers create instructional opportunities that reflect a respect for the diversity of learners and an understanding of how students differ in their approaches to learning.

Teachers...

- Design instruction that accommodates individual differences (e.g., stage of development, learning style, English language acquisition, cultural background, learning disability) in approaches to learning
- Use their understanding of students (e.g., individual interests, prior learning, cultural background, native language, and experiences) to create connections between the subject matter and student experiences
- Seek information about the impact of students' specific challenges to learning or disabilities on classroom performance, and work with specialists to develop alternative instructional strategies to meet the needs of these students where appropriate
- Make appropriate accommodations and modifications for individual students who have identified learning differences or needs in an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP), 504 Accommodation Plan, Personal Literacy Plans (PLP's), or other approved school-based individualized learning plans (ILP's)

Standard 5: Teachers create instructional opportunities to encourage all students' development of critical thinking, problem solving, performance skills, and literacy across content areas.

Teachers...

- Design lessons that extend beyond factual recall and challenge students to develop higher level cognitive skills
- Pose questions that encourage students to view, analyze, and interpret ideas from multiple perspectives
- Make instructional decisions about when to provide information, when to clarify, when to pose a question, and when to let a student struggle to try to solve a problem
- Engage students in generating knowledge, testing hypotheses, and exploring methods of inquiry and standards of evidence
- Use tasks that engage students in exploration, discovery, and hands-on activities

Standard 6: Teachers create a supportive learning environment that encourages appropriate standards of behavior, positive social interaction, active engagement in learning, and self-motivation.

Teachers...

- Use principles of effective classroom management to establish classrooms in which clear rules and standards of behavior are maintained
- Establish a safe, secure and nurturing learning environment that supports the active engagement of all students
- Provide and structure the time necessary to explore important concepts and ideas
- Help students establish a classroom environment characterized by mutual respect and intellectual risk-taking
- Create learning groups in which all students learn to work collaboratively and independently
- Communicate clear expectations for achievement that allow all students to take responsibility and advocate for their own learning

Standard 7: Teachers work collaboratively with all school personnel, families and the broader community to create a professional learning community and environment that supports the improvement of teaching, learning and student achievement.

Teachers...

- Work collaboratively with colleagues to examine teacher practice, student work and student assessment results with the goal of improving instruction and achievement
- Develop relationships with students and their families to support learning
- Understand the role of community agencies in supporting schools and work collaboratively with them as appropriate

Standard 8: Teachers use effective communication as the vehicle through which students explore, conjecture, discuss, and investigate new ideas.

Teachers...

- Use a variety of communication strategies (e.g., listening, restating ideas, questioning, offering, counter examples) to engage students in learning
- Use a variety of modes of communication (e.g., verbal, visual, kinesthetic) to promote student learning
- Use technological advances in communication, including electronic means of collecting and sharing information, to enrich discourse in the classroom and the school
- Emphasize oral and written communication through the instructional use of discussion, listening and responding to the ideas of others and group interaction
- Seek knowledge of and demonstrate sensitivity to the particular communication needs of all students

Standard 9: Teachers use appropriate formal and informal assessment strategies with individuals and groups of students to determine the impact of instruction on learning, to provide feedback, and to plan future instruction.

Teachers...

- Select and/or design individual and group classroom assessments based on the strengths, limitations, and data provided by the assessments
- Identify and consider student and contextual variables that may influence performance so that a student's performance can be validly interpreted
- Systematically collect, synthesize, and interpret assessment results from multiple assessments to monitor, improve, and report individual and group achievement
- Provide students with opportunities and guidance to evaluate their own work and behavior against defined criteria and use the results of self-assessment to establish individual goals for learning
- Use assessment results to provide students with timely, helpful, and accurate feedback on their progress toward achievement goals
- Maintain records of student learning and communicate student progress to students, parents/ guardians, and other colleagues
- Use information from their assessment of students to reflect on their own teaching, to modify their instruction and to help establish professional development goals

Standard 10: Teachers reflect on their practice and assume responsibility for their own professional development by actively seeking and participating in opportunities to learn and grow as professionals.

Teachers...

- Solicit feedback from students, families, and colleagues to reflect on and improve their own teaching

- Explore and evaluate the application of current research, instructional approaches and strategies, including technologies to improve student learning
- Take responsibility for their own professional development and improvement of their students' learning by participating in workshops, courses, or other individual and collaborative professional development activities that support their plans for continued development as teachers
- Take responsibility for learning about and implementing federal, state, district and school initiatives to improve teaching and learning

Standard 11: Teachers maintain professional standards guided by legal and ethical principles.

Teachers...

- Maintain standards that require them to act in the best interests and needs of students
- Follow school policy and procedures, respecting the boundaries of their professional responsibilities, when working with students, colleagues, and families
- Follow local, state, and federal law pertaining to educational and instructional issues, including regulations related to students', parents'/ guardians', and teachers' rights and responsibilities
- Interact with students, colleagues, parents, and others in a professional manner that is fair and equitable
- Are guided by codes of professional conduct adopted by their professional organizations