

**(F)(2) Ensuring successful conditions for high-performing charter schools and other innovative schools (40 points)**

*The extent to which—*

*(i) The State has a charter school law that does not prohibit or effectively inhibit increasing the number of high-performing charter schools (as defined in this notice) in the State, measured (as set forth in Appendix B) by the percentage of total schools in the State that are allowed to be charter schools or otherwise restrict student enrollment in charter schools;*

*(ii) The State has laws, statutes, regulations, or guidelines regarding how charter school authorizers approve, monitor, hold accountable, reauthorize, and close charter schools; in particular, whether authorizers require that student achievement (as defined in this notice) be one significant factor, among others, in authorization or renewal; encourage charter schools that serve student populations that are similar to local district student populations, especially relative to high-need students (as defined in this notice); and have closed or not renewed ineffective charter schools;*

*(iii) The State’s charter schools receive (as set forth in Appendix B) equitable funding compared to traditional public schools, and a commensurate share of local, State, and Federal revenues;*

*(iv) The State provides charter schools with funding for facilities (for leasing facilities, purchasing facilities, or making tenant improvements), assistance with facilities acquisition, access to public facilities, the ability to share in bonds and mill levies, or other supports; and the extent to which the State does not impose any facility-related requirements on charter schools that are stricter than those applied to traditional public schools; and*

*(v) The State enables LEAs to operate innovative, autonomous public schools (as defined in this notice) other than charter schools.*

*In the text box below, the State shall describe its current status in meeting the criterion. The narrative or attachments shall also include, at a minimum, the evidence listed below, and how each piece of evidence demonstrates the State’s success in meeting the criterion. The narrative and attachments may also include any additional information the State believes will be helpful to peer reviewers. For attachments included in the Appendix, note in the narrative the location where the attachments can be found.*

**Evidence for (F)(2)(i):**

- A description of the State’s applicable laws, statutes, regulations, or other relevant legal documents.
- The number of charter schools allowed under State law and the percentage this represents of the total number of schools in the State.
- The number and types of charter schools currently operating in the State.

**Evidence for (F)(2)(ii):**

- A description of the State’s approach to charter school accountability and authorization, and a description of the State’s applicable laws, statutes, regulations, or other relevant legal documents.
- For each of the last five years:
  - The number of charter school applications made in the State.
  - The number of charter school applications approved.
  - The number of charter school applications denied and reasons for the denials (academic, financial, low enrollment, other).
  - The number of charter schools closed (including charter schools that were not reauthorized to operate).

**Evidence for (F)(2)(iii):**

- A description of the State’s applicable statutes, regulations, or other relevant legal documents.
- A description of the State’s approach to charter school funding, the amount of funding passed through to charter schools per student, and how those amounts compare with traditional public school per-student funding allocations.

**Evidence for (F)(2)(iv):**

- A description of the State’s applicable statutes, regulations, or other relevant legal documents.
- A description of the statewide facilities supports provided to charter schools, if any.

**Evidence for (F)(2)(v):**

- A description of how the State enables LEAs to operate innovative, autonomous public schools (as defined in this notice) other than charter schools.

## **(F)(2) Ensuring successful conditions for high-performing charter schools and other innovative schools**

The Commissioner and Board of Regents have committed to grow the number of high-performing charters and other innovative schools as a key element of the *RIDE Strategic Plan* to transform public education. Charters and other innovative schools play several important roles in advancing the *RIDE Strategic Plan*:

- modeling and incubating innovative practices (especially for teacher and leader recruitment, selection, compensation, and evaluation) that can be adopted by schools and LEAs across the state;
- attracting and developing highly-effective teachers and leaders to serve both charters and traditional schools;
- providing options for low-income students; and
- playing an important role in the state's strategy to turn around low-achieving schools (see E(2)).

The Rhode Island legislature, with support from the Governor, Commissioner, and Board of Regents, has moved aggressively to open the doors to innovation and independent governance in its schools. On March 16, 2010, Governor Carcieri signed Public Law No. 2010-0003, which strengthened Rhode Island statutes to stimulate new, high-performing charter schools in Rhode Island (See Appendix F(2)-1- Public Law 2010-003). This legislation eliminated the cap on the number of students that may be served in charter schools and raised the cap on the number of charter schools that may be created statewide. This new legislation comes on the heels of innovative and bold legislation in 2008 that created Mayoral Academies, a new category of charter schools in Rhode Island.

As a result of recent legislation, Rhode Island now has one of the nation's fairest charter funding formulas, strong and improving charter school authorizing policies (including policies for school oversight and closure), and strong state and local leadership. These conditions will enable high-performing charter schools and other innovative governance models to play a key role in supporting the *RIDE Strategic Plan* to transform our entire education system.

Recent statutory changes and strong support from the Commissioner, the Board of Regents, the Governor, and state legislative leaders—despite political opposition—have created

a dramatically more hospitable and supportive climate for charter schools in Rhode Island, making Rhode Island attractive to high-quality charter school operators. RIDE is already in conversations with some of the nation's highest performing charter school networks to bring them to Rhode Island.

**F(2)(i) Rhode Island's current charter law and policies do not prohibit or effectively inhibit the growth of high-performing charter schools.**

Thirteen charter schools currently operate in Rhode Island, including five K-8 schools, four high schools, one middle school, and three K-12 schools. These schools are located in seven communities across the state, with concentrations of charter schools in the urban, high-need communities of Providence, Pawtucket, Woonsocket, and Central Falls.

State law and policy allow significant growth in the charter sector by imposing minimal limitations on expansion, allowing schools to open anywhere and serve any student, and empowering mayors to be an engine for expansion of high-quality chartering. Between 2005 and 2009, Rhode Island did not open any new charter schools, due to a legislative moratorium. In 2009-10, the legislature allowed the moratorium to expire and began appropriating funds for charter school expansion. Two new schools opened in 2009-10. The Board of Regents has granted preliminary approval to two new charter schools and is currently reviewing two additional charter applications. Conditions in Rhode Island are favorable for substantial future growth of the charter sector.

**Minimal statutory and regulatory limits on expansion.** Public Law No. 2010-0003, signed into law on March 16, 2010, completely eliminated caps on the number of charter school students and raised the limit on the number of charter schools that may be created in Rhode Island to 35—a large number for a state as small as Rhode Island, which currently has only 308 public schools. Further, state law *allows multiple charter school campuses to be operated under a single charter*. Thus, a Charter Management Organization (CMO) can use a single charter to operate multiple campuses. For example, Rhode Island Mayoral Academies (RIMA) received a single charter in 2009 to operate a network of mayor-sponsored charter schools, beginning with a single elementary campus. The increase in the number of charter schools that may be opened and the ability to operate multiple campuses under a single charter will permit *virtually unfettered growth of high-performing charter schools in Rhode Island*. The 35 charter schools permitted

under current law would make up more than 10 percent of the total number of public schools in the state; if each charter-holder operated two to three campuses, the charter sector share could easily grow—under current law—to 20 to 30 percent of all Rhode Island schools, with no limit on the number of students served.

**Complete freedom to choose location and serve all students.** Unlike some states that limit where charter schools can open and which students they can serve, Rhode Island imposes no limits on the location of charter schools or the areas from which they may draw their students. The 13 charter schools currently operating in Rhode Island are located in seven different towns and serve students from 32 of Rhode Island’s 36 school districts.<sup>1</sup>

**Empowering mayors to be an engine of growth.** Since 2008, Rhode Island’s charter law has permitted the creation of an innovative type of charter school known as “Mayoral Academies.” Mayoral Academies are independent public charter schools with boards chaired by a mayor or group of mayors and made up of representatives from each town served. Rhode Island is unique in the nation in authorizing the creation of such charter schools. Mayoral Academies operate under a different legal structure from other charter schools in Rhode Island, and they are automatically granted freedom to establish their own policies regarding teacher retirement, compensation, and tenure.<sup>2</sup> All public charter schools, including Mayoral Academies, may request waivers from the Board of Regents of almost any statute in the state’s Education Code (RIGL, Title 16).

These favorable legal conditions and the creation of a new nonprofit organization, Rhode Island Mayoral Academies (RIMA), make Mayoral Academies a likely engine of future charter school expansion in Rhode Island. RIMA, chaired by Cumberland Mayor Dan McKee, is building a statewide network of high-performing charter schools operated by highly successful charter operators from inside and outside the state. RIMA has raised \$5 million in funding from local and national funders to expand the number of charter schools in Rhode Island and seeks to raise \$20 million over the next two years. RIMA received its first charter in 2009 for a network of schools overseen by a board that includes the mayors of Cumberland, Central Falls, Pawtucket, and Lincoln. Democracy Prep, a successful New York City-based charter school

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<sup>1</sup> Data on number of districts of residences is based on 2008 enrollment figures.

<sup>2</sup> R.I.G.L. 16-77-11 (7)-(8)

organization, will operate these schools under a single charter, and it will ultimately serve 1,175 students in grades K-12. RIMA has already petitioned the Board of Regents to double that number to 2,350 in response to high demand for the first campus, which opened in fall 2009. The Commissioner and Board of Regents are committed to working with RIMA to open a network of high-performing charter schools in underserved communities across the state.

Under the Commissioner’s leadership, RIDE will continue to build momentum for charter schools in the state by supporting the growth of the best in-state schools and attracting to Rhode Island high-performing charter-management organizations (CMOs) from across the country.

**Building In-State Capacity to Expand and Support Quality Charters.** RIDE will use Race to the Top funds, as well as funds from its federal Charter School Program Grant, to build capacity and support the growth of strong charter schools currently operating in Rhode Island. This work will also support the dissemination and replication of innovative best practices from charter schools in our high-need LEAs.

RIDE has partnered with the League of Charter Schools to build the capacity of high-performing charters, especially those succeeding with high-need students. This support will provide operational and program management expertise to enable successful charter school operators to build a central office to support multiple schools. High-performing Rhode Island charter schools, such as those described below, face significant unmet demand for their services and are poised to expand and to work as partners with LEAs that serve students in high need/low income communities.

**Table F1 – Examples of High-Performing Rhode Island Charter Schools ready to Perform**

<b>EXAMPLES OF HIGH-PERFORMING RHODE ISLAND CHARTER SCHOOLS READY TO PERFORM</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <b>The Learning Community</b>, a charter school in Central Falls that serves students from multiple high-poverty communities, has a strong track record of success with low-income and English language learner students. The Learning Community currently has a waiting list of more than 400 students. Support from RIDE and the League of Charter Schools will enable the Learning Community to successfully expand to serve more students. The Learning Community has also created an innovative model to share and replicate its best practices in the Central Falls district by providing professional development to the district’s K-2 grade teachers. This professional development will help teachers in Central Falls, which has a substantial population of ELLs, to replicate the practices that have enabled the Learning Community to succeed with these students. </li> </ul>

- **The International Charter School (ICS)** also has served ELL and immigrant students well and might also benefit from operational and programmatic support to grow. The mission of the ICS is to integrate the diverse languages and cultures of the communities it serves by teaching all students in two languages—in Spanish and English or in Portuguese and English—and helping children develop an appreciation of other cultures. ICS has a greater percentage of students who were proficient in reading than students in all urban charters and all urban districts at the elementary level. In mathematics, a greater percentage of ICS students were proficient than in all urban districts and all but one of the Rhode Island charters at the elementary level.

ICS' strong investment in dual language education aims to help students gain strong cross-cultural competencies, and the school is continuing to formalize ways for students to gain an understanding of themselves, their histories, and their cultures.

**Attracting High-Performing National Charter Operators.** RIDE will use Race to the Top and Charter School Program Grant funds to bring to Rhode Island the highest-performing charter operators from across the nation. The state already has secured commitments from several of the nation's top-performing charter school operators—Achievement First, MATCH, and School Revolution (formerly Excel)—to apply for charters and open schools in the next two years (See Appendix F(2)-2 Letters of Intent), RIDE will continue to seek out CMOs with track records of producing outstanding academic results for high-need students, especially those with a track record of producing outstanding results for special education and English language learner students.

**F(2)(ii) Rhode Island has strong policies regarding charter authorizing, serving high-need students, and closing ineffective charter schools.**

**Legal Description of Charter Laws:** Existing public schools, groups of public school personnel, public school districts, established Rhode Island nonprofits, and mayor-led nonprofits (in the case of a Mayoral Academy) may apply to establish a charter school (R.I.G.L. 16-77-3 (b)). The Board of Regents is the only charter school authorizer in Rhode Island. Before an application may be submitted to the Board of Regents, it must receive approval from either the Commissioner or the district school committee, which may request that the applicant make revisions to the charter application prior to final submission (R.I.G.L. 16-77-4(b)). The Commissioner has established stringent oversight requirements for charter school operators

(R.I.G.L. 16-77-8). Charter schools are also subject to fiscal oversight by the Auditor General (R.I.G.L. 16-77-12).

**Strong Authorizing Policies:** The Board of Regents has developed strong charter authorizing policies. RIDE staff thoroughly vets all charter applicants, and the Commissioner recommends to the Board of Regents for approval only those applications with a high likelihood of success. In May 2009, the Board of Regents adopted a new *Framework for Charter School Authorization Criteria (Framework)* and *Application Review Process*. This *Framework* ensures that the Board of Regents will grant a charter “only when an application demonstrates strong capacity and commitment to the operation of a high quality charter school.” The *Framework* sets forth rigorous criteria for the school concept, application content, the applicant’s capacity and long-term commitment, and the extent of community support.

The *Framework* also describes a multi-step charter application approval process, which includes review by a Charter Review Committee, a period of public comment, and a recommendation by the Commissioner for preliminary approval. Applicants who receive preliminary approval must then meet a series of robust “readiness” tests before receiving a charter, including a review that the Auditor General of their financial plans, the hiring of a competent school leader, the identification of a suitable facility, and the enrollment of a substantial portion of the school’s planned student body. RIDE is further obligated to negotiate performance contracts with newly approved or reauthorized charter schools that articulate “the rights and responsibilities of each party regarding school autonomy, RIDE regulatory oversight, expected outcomes, measures for evaluating success or failure, performance consequences, and other material terms such as statutory and regulatory conditions of operation.” (See Appendix F(2)-3: BOR Approval Process and RIDE Charter Review Policy).

The Board of Regents’ authorizing process has proven rigorous in practice. The Board of Regents has approved only 13 the 37 applications it has received since the 1995 passage of the *Charter Public School Act of Rhode Island*. The Board of Regents has rejected 17 applications, nearly half of those it has received, because it found their plans were financially or programmatically unsustainable. Currently, two additional applications have received preliminary approval, and two more are currently under review.

**Charter Reauthorization Process:** The *Framework* also spells out the process and requirements for reauthorization of charters when their initial five-year terms expire. The Board

of Regents requires RIDE to conduct an extensive reauthorization review. The review team must include RIDE staff with expertise in assessment, finance, and school improvement, as well as staff from the Commissioner's office. The review team is required to collect and analyze a wide range of data, including state assessment results, survey data, school visit reports, financial statements, annual reports, and the school's own self-analysis, all with reference to the original charter application. The team is then charged with reviewing the school's Performance Contract to ensure that only those charter schools that meet or exceed the expected outcomes and performance measures in their Performance Contract are recommended for reauthorization. The review team's findings are then documented in a report from the Commissioner to the Board of Regents. When this process is complete, the Board of Regents decides, based on the Commissioner's recommendation, whether to reauthorize the school's charter.

**Serving high-need students:** To ensure that charter schools serve high-need students, the Rhode Island charter law stipulates that the Board of Regents may not authorize any charter school unless it serves “students eligible for free or reduced cost-lunch, students with limited English proficiency, and special education students in a combined percentage equal to those of the student populations enrolled in the school district as a whole.”<sup>3</sup> Under state law, half of the state's 35 charters are reserved for schools designed to serve at-risk pupils.<sup>4</sup> The *Framework* amplifies this statute by stating that, “the Board of Regents and RIDE shall give priority to projects that are designed to target and serve students from disadvantaged backgrounds. In particular, projects designed to serve students from districts under state intervention and/or under corrective action will be given priority.” Charter schools in Rhode Island serve a higher percentage of low-income students than the state's public schools as a whole; 49 percent of charter school students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, compared with 38 percent of students statewide.

**Charter school accountability:** RIDE has implemented an ongoing review system to ensure high levels of charter school performance. In addition to oversight that applies to all public schools, RIDE's accountability process for charter schools includes:

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3 R.I.G.L. 16-77-4 (b)(10)

4 R.I.G.L. 16-77-8 (d)

- Annual reports, filed by charter schools, that cover mission, program performance, governance, and financial accountability;
- Submission of annual audited financial statements;
- Reports to the Auditor General’s Office and the Office of Municipal Affairs;
- School visits conducted by the Board of Regents; and
- Monitoring of charter school enrollment lotteries.

Most importantly, the Board of Regents now requires that all newly approved or reauthorized charter schools enter into Performance Contracts with RIDE. The Performance Contract “articulates the rights and responsibilities of each party regarding school autonomy, RIDE regulatory oversight, expected outcomes, measures for evaluating success or failure, performance consequences, and other material terms such as statutory and regulatory conditions of operation.” Beginning in 2010, RIDE will base all annual charter school performance evaluations on the Performance Contract requirements.

To ensure accountability and high-quality oversight for growing numbers of charter schools, the Commissioner has elevated the role of charter schools within RIDE and dramatically increased RIDE’s capacity to monitor comprehensive charter school performance. The Division of Accountability and Quality Assurance includes a full-time staff member focused solely on supporting and overseeing charter schools. RIDE’s Charter Schools Coordinator will consult and communicate regularly with charter school directors, including conducting multiple site visits. RIDE also has in place a detailed data system specific to charter school performance and a process for investigating public complaints and inquiries regarding charter schools. This enhanced capacity will enable RIDE to identify charter schools that consistently fall short of high-quality standards and to capture effective charter school practices that should be replicated elsewhere in the education system.

To ensure public accountability for the Board of Regents' charter authorizing activities, the Commissioner will publish an annual report detailing the student performance results achieved by existing charter schools; the numbers of new charter applications and whether they were approved, rejected, or withdrawn; and any school closures or charter renewals and the student achievement results upon which these decisions were based.

**Revocation, closure and re-chartering:** State law allows the Board of Regents to revoke a charter at any time if the school fails to achieve student performance targets, does not meet the terms of its charter, or falls short of applicable legal or fiscal standards (RIGL 16-77-8). To date, the state has not closed any charter school, although it has required one charter schools to change its leadership and governing board following a hearing at which the school was required to “show cause” as to why its charter should not be revoked. The strong initial authorizing process established by the Board of Regents, which ensures that the Board approves only those applications with both strong academic and financial plans is one reason for the lack of charter school closure to date. Further, the Commissioner and Board of Regents are committed to raising the bar for charter school performance in Rhode Island even higher. We will build the capacity of existing charter schools to deliver even higher levels of student performance, and we will aggressively identify charters that fall short of high expectations and either close them or “re-charter” them under new governance and management.

The Commissioner recently adopted a new, rigorous charter revocation protocol (See Appendix F(2)-4: *Protocol for Revocation or Re-Chartering of Public Charter Schools*). This protocol ensures a fair, transparent, and merit-based process that bases charter closure decisions on a thorough and rigorous review of the school's performance, especially its success or failure in improving student academic achievement. Pursuant to this protocol, the Board of Regents will

hold a hearing prior to non-renewing or revoking any charter. This combination of stringent standards, high expectations, and due process protections ensures that Rhode Island is well positioned to close low-performing schools and expand the presence of high-performing charter schools in the state. The *Protocol for Revocation or Re-Chartering of Public Schools* prioritizes the well-being of the school’s students by including an option to “re-charter” the school—by identifying new governance and management to take over its operations—so that its students can continue in the existing facility. In the case of school closure, RIDE will assist students and their families in transitioning to new schools, including charters and other schools of choice.

**F(2)(iii) The State’s charter schools receive equitable funding compared to traditional public schools.**

*Rhode Island provides one of the most equitable funding policies for charter schools in the nation.* The Rhode Island charter law guarantees each charter school 95 percent of the state and local funding a traditional public school district would receive for each student enrolled. (The remaining 5 percent is distributed to each charter student’s district of residence to pay for administrative costs.) (See Appendix F(2)-5: Narrative on Charter Funding.)<sup>5</sup> The state sends federal funding directly to each charter school as if it were a district.<sup>6</sup> According to the Center for Education Reform, Rhode Island provides more equitable funding for charter schools than all but five states (Idaho, Minnesota, Missouri, North Carolina, and Tennessee).<sup>7</sup>

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5 R.I.G.L. 16-77-1-2 (a)

6 R.I.G.L. 16-77-6(e) “Federal aid received by the state shall be used to benefit students in the charter public school, if the school qualifies for the aid, as though it were a school district.”

7 [http://www.edreform.com/charter\\_schools/funding/chart.htm](http://www.edreform.com/charter_schools/funding/chart.htm)

The proposed funding formula described in F(1) would further increase funding equity for charter schools by ensuring that schools that enroll a higher concentration of at-risk students will receive higher levels of state funding.

**F(2)(iv) The State provides charter schools with funding for facilities.**

*Charter schools in Rhode Island receive substantial facilities grant funds*, through a reimbursement program outlined in R.I.G.L. 16-77.1-5. The reimbursement program provides generous support for school facilities, allowing schools to receive reimbursement for facility purchasing, renovation, and maintenance. For charter schools within districts, the sponsoring school district may access state aid for facilities in the same manner as it would for a traditional public school. Both startup charter schools and Mayoral Academies are entitled to a minimum 30 percent reimbursement of school housing costs directly from the state. Charter schools that are formed within an LEA are entitled to the district share for state reimbursement, which is currently 79 percent in Providence, which has two such charters. Between 2005 and 2007, the state provided well over \$22 million in facilities reimbursements to six charter schools. In addition, charter schools in Rhode Island can obtain tax-exempt bond financing via the Rhode Island Health and Educational Building Corporation (RIHEBC). Between 2002 and 2007, RIHEBC completed five charter school bond offerings amounting to \$27 million.<sup>8</sup> These charter school facilities' funding—which are far more generous than those in many other states—combined with a large number of vacant or under-utilized former parochial school facilities in the state, make it much easier for charter school operators to access and fund appropriate school facilities in Rhode Island than in many other states—another factor that will help the state attract the highest-performing national charter school operators.

The existence of Mayoral Academies further reduces the burden of locating and acquiring charter school facilities. RIMA provides ready-to-use facilities with rents based on enrollment, aiming to limit rent to five percent of the schools' per-pupil funding. The unique partnership created between the community and the charter sector in Mayoral Academies encourages mayors to use their influence over municipal resources to increase the number of high-performing

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<sup>8</sup> Local Initiatives Support Corporation, *2007 Charter School Facility Finance Landscape* (New York: LISC: 2007), p. 33.

charter schools. In many municipalities, the town or city may own school facilities. In this case, mayors could facilitate a charter school’s acquisition of an unused property. In other instances, mayors could help increase the number of high-performing charter schools less directly, by galvanizing the local community and local philanthropy to secure additional funding for a new charter school facility.

**F(2)(v) Rhode Island law does not restrict the ability of an LEA to operate an innovative or autonomous public school.**

The BEP creates new opportunities for LEAs to create innovative learning environments for students. Unlike many states that simply accredit schools, Rhode Island has chosen to regulate the quality of instruction and the delivery of a “guaranteed and viable curriculum” to every student at every grade level. The BEP codifies existing practice to provide opportunities for innovative programs of study—including the creation of autonomous public schools. LEAs have historically used this authority in many ways, such as Providence’s conversion of Hope High School into three small, autonomous high schools. The Jacqueline M. Walsh School for the Arts in Pawtucket, a high-performing Regents Commended school, is a similar example of an autonomous school created to serve high-poverty urban students.

Virtually every LEA in the state has taken advantage of R.I.G.L. Ch. 16-3.1 to create regional collaboratives, in which several school districts join together to develop innovative school programs for a variety of student populations. Working in concert, Rhode Island LEAs have created cost-effective and innovative programs and entire schools to meet the needs of students with special education needs, over-age and under-credited students, and students on long-term suspensions. Detailed below are just a few examples of innovative programs presently on-going in Rhode Island schools.

**Table F2 – Additional Examples of Innovative Public Schools and Programs in Rhode Island**

<b>ADDITIONAL EXAMPLES OF INNOVATIVE PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND PROGRAMS IN RHODE ISLAND</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The <b>Smithfield School District</b> partnered with the Inner Space Center (ISC) at the University of Rhode Island (URI), the Rhode Island Network of Educational Technology (RINET), and RIDE to create a satellite of the ISC control center at Smithfield High School. The ISC at Smithfield High School allows students to participate in primary research with oceanographers around the world and supports real-time ship-to-shore scientific data</li> </ul>

streaming and communication through telepresence. Smithfield's elementary and middle schools use the ISC at Smithfield High School as a learning resource. This partnership serves as a model for other LEAs to replicate. With strong support from the URI-ISC creator, world-famous oceanographer Dr. Robert Ballard, the Inner Space program provides hands-on learning and remote control access to underwater cameras around the globe to facilitate a standards-based oceanography curriculum—all within the four walls of an existing comprehensive high school. The ISC is used to integrate STEM subjects around the oceanography focus, and recently Smithfield High School's Technology and Design Education program was recognized by the International Technology and Engineering Education Association (ITEEA) with its Program Excellence Award. The award identifies the Smithfield High School Technology Program as one of the top 50 programs worldwide.

- The **Foster-Glocester School District** received a \$984,000 United States Department of Energy grant to create an Alternative Energy Lab at Ponagansett High School. The grant provides funding to construct a facility that houses biodiesel conversion equipment as well as fuel cell and solar panel design and engineering. This program emphasizes all aspects of STEM. Work is underway to provide access for other LEAs to tuition students to the facility to gain experience and skills in alternative energy production. Ponagansett High School has been nationally recognized prior to this grant for its work in fuel cell production. Its Fuel Cell-powered Model T Ford, designed and engineered by Ponagansett High School students was recently featured in the March 2010 issue of *Hot Rod Magazine*.
- The **Confucius Institute**, developed in partnership with Bryant University, is an example of an innovative program with global reach, allowing Rhode Island schools and their Chinese counterparts to exchange students, teachers, and new approaches to pedagogy. The Confucius Institute provides professional development training for K-12 teachers and intensive Chinese-language instruction and cultural immersion activities for middle and high school students. At present, 10 Rhode Island LEAs are involved with this initiative, and interest is high to involve more. Rhode Island is proud of several STEM-related initiatives that provide strong examples of innovation within LEAs.

The state also funds the Metropolitan Regional Career and Technological Center (The Met), a career and technical academy in Providence developed in partnership with the Big Picture Company. The Met School uses internships as a way to take theory and abstract knowledge and have students apply them to real life. For example, students learn mathematics by selling a house or physics by building a boat. This model has inspired a national network of 50 similar schools, all founded by Big Picture Learning.

Rhode Island's high schools have also implemented several innovative e-learning opportunities that enable students to access Web-based content and differentiated instructional delivery systems for credit recovery and advancement. Rhode Island high schools are currently working with a variety of providers—including Virtual High School, Virtual Learning Academy,

NovaNet, Brigham Young University, Keystone University, Plato, Vista, Skills Tutor, and Anywhere Learning—to provide these virtual learning opportunities to their students.

Rhode Island is committed to offering high-quality e-learning experiences that allow both youth and adults to prepare for and access meaningful learning for college and careers and to become members of a worldwide learning community. RIDE is coordinating with LEAs, workforce cabinet partners, business partners, institutions of higher education, and experts from the field to create a statewide plan to build a dynamic integrated virtual learning network that will advance e-learning opportunities and promote educational innovation. Rhode Island will advance its comprehensive and cohesive statewide development plan by:

- Launching a virtual learning network (a consortium of invested stakeholders who commit to improving access to rigorous, high-quality e-learning in Rhode Island) that includes coursework, training, and college e-learning and creates state-wide guidance around access and opportunity for secondary students; and
- Approving the design and implementation of a state-sponsored virtual learning high school that attends to both credit recovery and credit advancement by building access to expanded high-quality curriculum in a synchronous and asynchronous offering structure.

As an objective in the *RIDE Strategic Plan*, we are currently working to develop a statewide virtual high school. This virtual learning high school will advance on-line interactive learning and addresses individual student educational needs and interest.

**Evidence for (F)(2)(i):**

- A description of the State’s applicable laws, statutes, regulations, or other relevant legal documents. (In Narrative and see Appendix F(2)-1.)
- The number of charter schools allowed under State law and the percentage this represents of the total number of schools in the State. (In Narrative and see Appendix F(2)-1.)
- The number and types of charter schools currently operating in the State. (In Narrative.)

**Evidence for (F)(2)(ii):**

- A description of the State’s approach to charter school accountability and authorization, and a description of the State’s applicable laws, statutes, regulations, or other relevant legal documents. (In Narrative and see Appendix F(2)-3, F(2)-4.)
- For each of the last five years:
  - The number of charter school applications made in the state.
  - The number of charter school applications approved.
  - The number of charter school applications denied and reasons for the denials (academic, financial, low enrollment, other). (In Narrative.)

- The number of charter schools closed (including charter schools that were not reauthorized to operate). (In Narrative.)

**Evidence for (F)(2)(iii):**

- A description of the State’s applicable statutes, regulations, or other relevant legal documents. (In Narrative and see Appendix F(2)-2.)
- A description of the State’s approach to charter school funding, the amount of funding passed through to charter schools per student, and how those amounts compare with traditional public school per-student funding allocations. (In Narrative and see Appendix F(2)-5.)

**Evidence for (F)(2)(iv):**

- A description of the State’s applicable statutes, regulations, or other relevant legal documents. (In Narrative.)
- A description of the statewide facilities supports provided to charter schools, if any. (In Narrative.)

**Evidence for (F)(2)(v):**

- A description of how the State enables LEAs to operate innovative, autonomous public schools (as defined in this notice) other than charter schools. (In Narrative.)