

“There is not just one solution. It will take a partnership of teachers, parents and administrators to improve student achievement. No one and no thing can accomplish this monumental task alone.”

“Treat all students equally, provide high-quality teaching, have high expectations and students will succeed.”

“In today’s world it is absolutely necessary for students to achieve at the highest level their ability allows, and then go beyond.”

PRIMARY SOURCES:
AMERICA’S TEACHERS ON AMERICA’S SCHOOLS
RHODE ISLAND
A PROJECT OF SCHOLASTIC AND THE BILL & MELINDA GATES FOUNDATION

“Everyone should finish high school and move on to something higher. I think they all can.”
“Give them standardized tests, but not all the time, and their lives shouldn’t depend on it; and neither should ours.”

“Learning is a lifelong project and all students are capable of being lifelong learners.”
“How do we prepare students for jobs that don’t yet exist?”



“Our job is to help students understand that each and every lesson—every moment they spend in school—is critical to their future success.”

– *High School Teacher in Rhode Island*

***Primary Sources: Rhode Island* is meant for use in conjunction with the complete *Primary Sources* report available at www.scholastic.com/primarysources.**

A NOTE FROM SCHOLASTIC AND THE BILL & MELINDA GATES FOUNDATION

In March 2010, Scholastic and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation released the landmark study, *Primary Sources: America's Teachers on America's Schools*, placing the views of our nation's public school teachers at the center of the discussion on education reform.

More than 40,000 teachers participated in the survey – from every state and at every grade level – and the unprecedented size and scope of the study allows for the release of new, state-level data from Rhode Island. *Primary Sources: Rhode Island* is based on the responses of 117 public school teachers across the State of Rhode Island who participated in the national survey.

We asked teachers about the state of American education, the challenges facing students and the variety of supports and tools that teachers need to tackle those challenges. They responded with powerful, nuanced opinions on a number of issues, from student and teacher performance, to classroom innovation and academic standards, to the importance of the school-to-home connection.

Similar to their peers nationwide, teachers from Rhode Island had important opinions about the critical issues in education at the national and state levels. Specifically, teachers in Rhode Island:

- Generally say the level of difficulty of Rhode Island's state standards is about right (72%). Of the 28% who do not feel this way, three times as many say standards are too high (21%) than say they are too low (7%).
- Say clearer and common standards across states would make a strong impact on student achievement.
- Rank non-monetary factors like supportive leadership, access to high-quality curriculum and teaching resources as far more important than raising salaries when it comes to the factors that impact teacher retention.
- Put significantly less emphasis than teachers do nationally on higher salaries as important in retaining good teachers (55% vs. 82% say this is absolutely essential or very important).

It is important to note that *Primary Sources: Rhode Island* is a small subset of the data we collected on Rhode Island's teachers. Although we have selected the most statistically significant and state-relevant data for inclusion in this mini-report, we encourage you to look at the additional data on Rhode Island State available in the appendices of the complete *Primary Sources* report. While *Primary Sources: Rhode Island* reflects the wide range of voices and opinions of teachers across the state, one thing is constant: Teachers teach for the love of their students and the chance to make a difference in those young lives. Our goal should be to do all we can to support them in this endeavor.

Sincerely,



Margery Mayer

President, Scholastic Education, Scholastic Inc.



Vicki L. Phillips

Director of Education, College Ready, United States Program

THE CHALLENGE

Rhode Island's Teachers Recognize the Challenges Facing Their Students

Teachers in Rhode Island are keenly aware of the limitations of a high school diploma and the disconnect between students' current levels of achievement and the levels at which they must perform to achieve success beyond high school.

Specifically, in Rhode Island:

- Teachers are nearly unanimous in saying that a high school diploma is not enough for today's students. Ninety-eight percent of teachers in the state say that the most important goal of schools and teaching is to prepare students for success beyond high school (93% nationally).
- Eighty-five percent of teachers say that not all their students could leave high school prepared to succeed in a 2- or 4-year college (91% nationally).
- Only 13% of teachers strongly agree that students enter their classroom prepared for on-grade-level work; another 45% agree somewhat, (16% and 44% nationally).
- Only 25% rate the academic achievement of students at their school as "Excellent" (28% nationally).
- Only four in 10 (43%) of teachers agree that more than 75% of the students currently in their classes could leave high school prepared to succeed in a 2- or 4-year college (46% nationally).

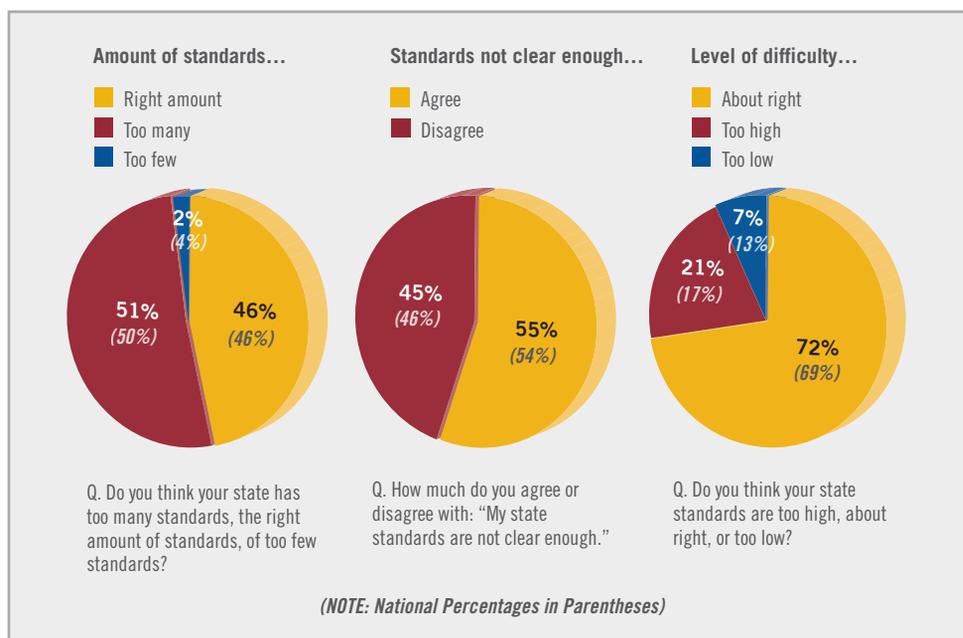
STATE AND NATIONAL STANDARDS

Rhode Island Teachers' Views on Current Rhode Island State Standards

As is the case with their peers across the nation, teachers in Rhode Island recognize the role of academic standards in improving student achievement and preparedness. They are divided, however, in their opinions on the amount and clarity of their state standards:

- Teachers are split in their opinions on the amount of state academic standards, with about half saying that Rhode Island has too many standards (51%) and half saying that the number of standards is “about right” (46%), (51% and 44% nationally, respectively).
- A very small number of teachers in Rhode Island (2%) believe that the state has too few standards (4% nationally).
- Rhode Island’s teachers align with teachers across the country on their opinions of the clarity of their state standards, with about half saying standards are clear enough (45%) and half saying they are not (55%).
- About seven in 10 teachers say the level of difficulty of their state standards is about right, which aligns with national data. In most states, however, the remaining three in 10 teachers are evenly split between thinking their state standards are too high and too low. In Rhode Island, three times as many teachers think their state’s standards are too high (21%) rather than too low (7%).

Teachers' Views on Rhode Island State Standards



Rhode Island Teachers Support Clearer Standards, Common Across States

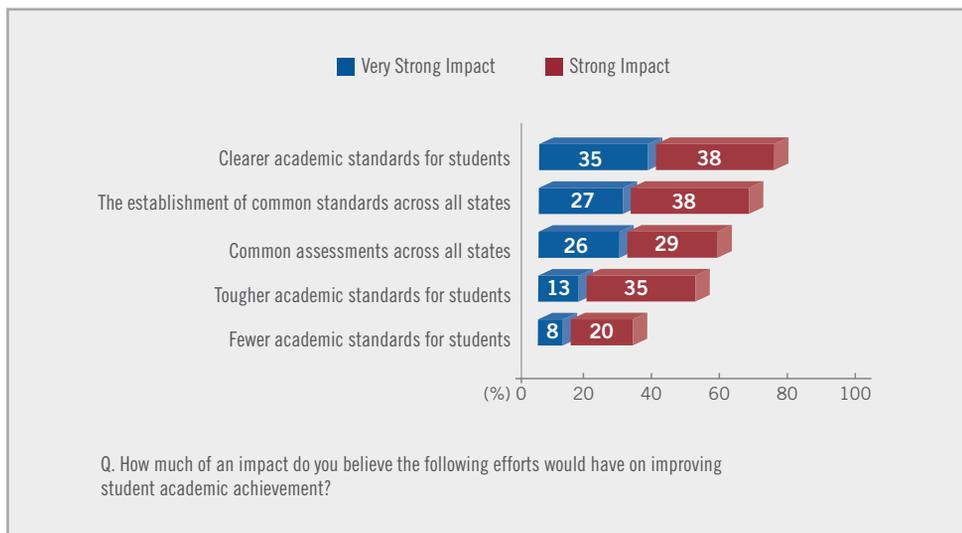
Rhode Island's teachers support the establishment of common standards across states to a slightly greater degree than their peers across the nation. They say the following measures would have a very strong/strong impact on improving student achievement:

- Clearer academic standards for students (73% in Rhode Island, 74% nationally)
- The establishment of common standards across all states (65% in Rhode Island, 60% nationally)

In keeping with the views of teachers across the country, Rhode Island's teachers are less certain that fewer and more challenging standards would make a strong or very strong impact on improving student achievement:

- Tougher academic standards for students (48% in Rhode Island, 45% nationally)
- Fewer academic standards for students (28% in Rhode Island, 34% nationally)

Rhode Island Teachers' Views on the Impact Changes to Current Standards Would Have on Improving Academic Achievement



EVALUATING STUDENT AND TEACHER PERFORMANCE

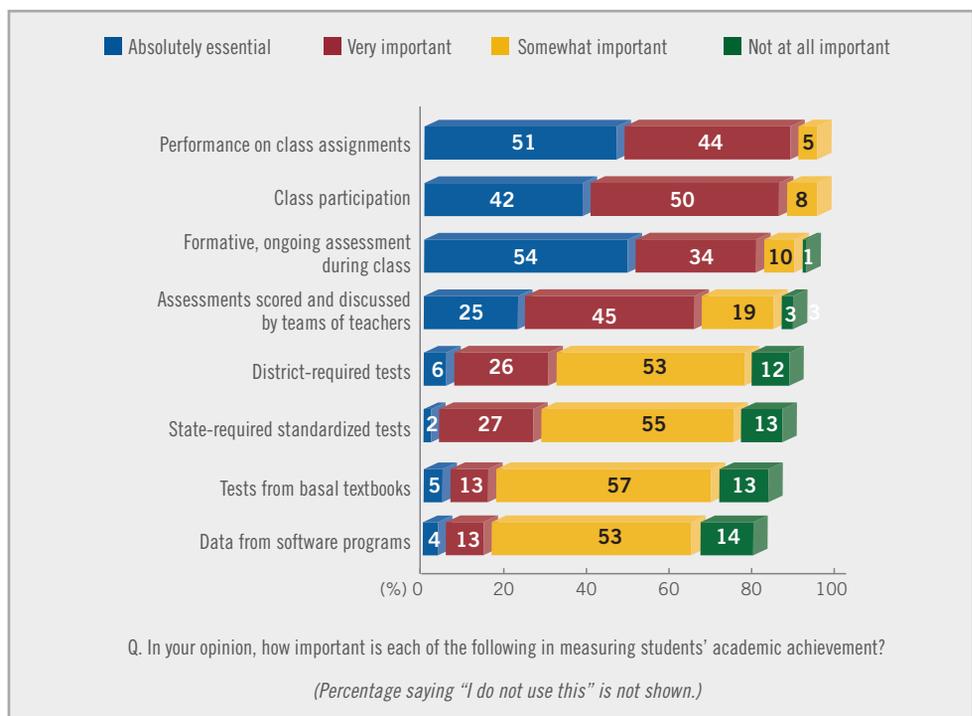
Rhode Island Teachers' Views on Evaluating Student Performance

Rhode Island's teachers are similar to the nation's teachers in their firm belief that student assessment should be driven by in-classroom experiences, including formative ongoing assessments, class participation and performance on class assignments.

The percentage of Rhode Island's teachers who say performance on class assignments is absolutely essential in measuring student achievement is significantly higher than the percentage of teachers nationally who say the same (51% in Rhode Island, 37% nationally).

Teachers in Rhode Island also see value in standardized tests as a way to evaluate student performance. Only 12% and 13% of teachers say district- and state-required tests, respectively, are "not at all" important in measuring student academic achievement (11% and 16% nationally).

Rhode Island Teachers' Views on Importance of Student Performance Measures



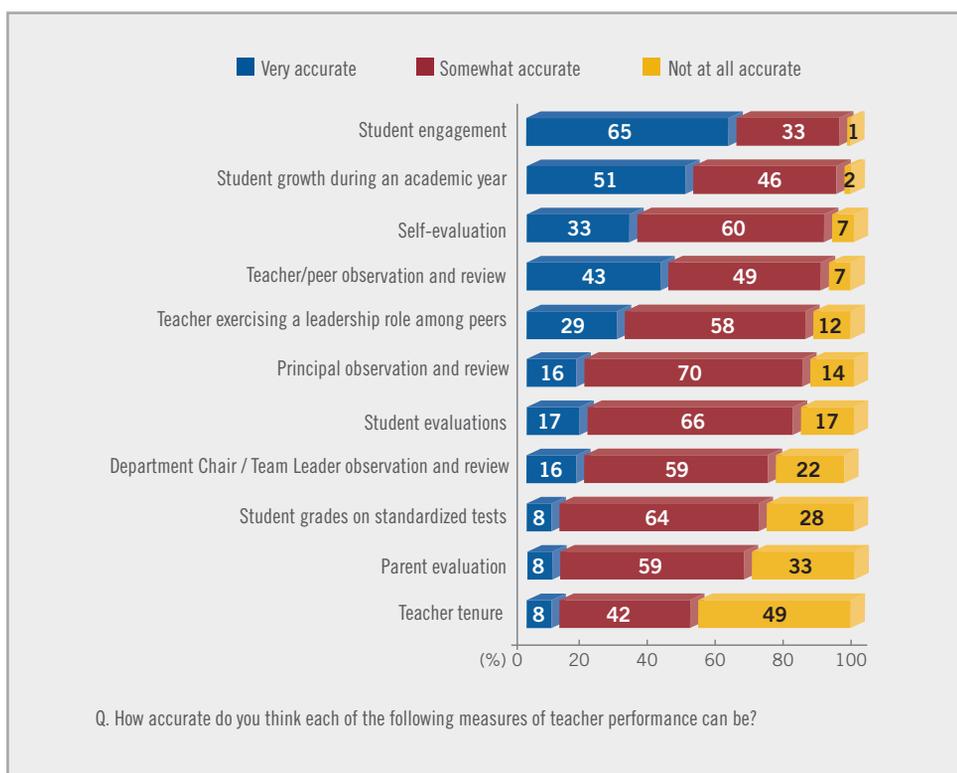
Further, as noted on page 4, 55% of Rhode Island's teachers say common assessments across states would make a very strong or strong impact on improving student achievement.

Rhode Island Teachers' Views on Measuring Teacher Performance

In qualitative conversation, teachers stress a desire for their performance to be based on factors they can impact directly—like student growth and student engagement—and not on factors that fail to consider the realities of individual students in individual classrooms.

This is clearly borne out in *Primary Sources* data at both the national and Rhode Island levels. By far, teachers say that student growth over the course of an academic year and student engagement are the most accurate measures of teacher performance.

Rhode Island Teachers' Views on the Degree of Accuracy of Measures of Teacher Performance



TEACHER RETENTION

Rhode Island Teachers' Views on Factors Impacting Teacher Retention

Teachers who participated in *Primary Sources* were asked to evaluate the importance of nine different factors in retaining good teachers. This information provided insight on the things teachers most value in their profession.

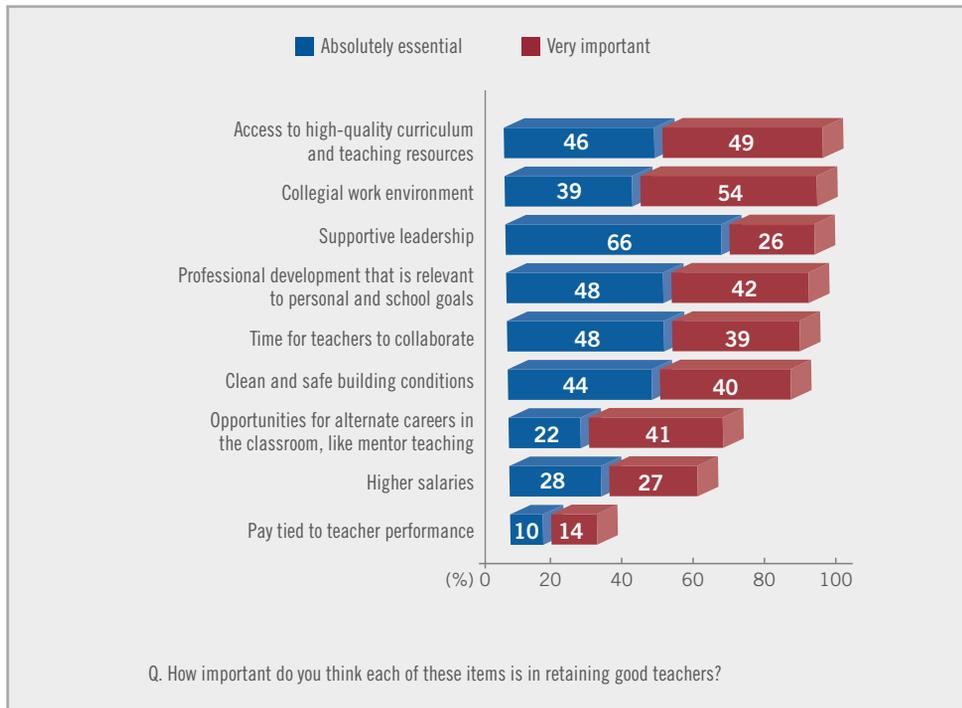
At the national level, the general trends place supportive leadership solidly in the top-ranked slot, followed by other, non-monetary measures like access to high-quality curriculum and teaching resources and a collegial work environment. Higher salaries generally fall in the middle tier of importance while opportunities for alternate careers and pay for performance fall in the lowest tier.

Rhode Island's teachers have a different view on the relative importance of many of these factors: Higher salaries is clearly in the lowest tier of importance, while multiple non-monetary factors are grouped together in the highest tier of importance.

Specifically, the following percentages of teachers in Rhode Island and teachers nationally say each item is absolutely essential or very important in retaining good teachers:

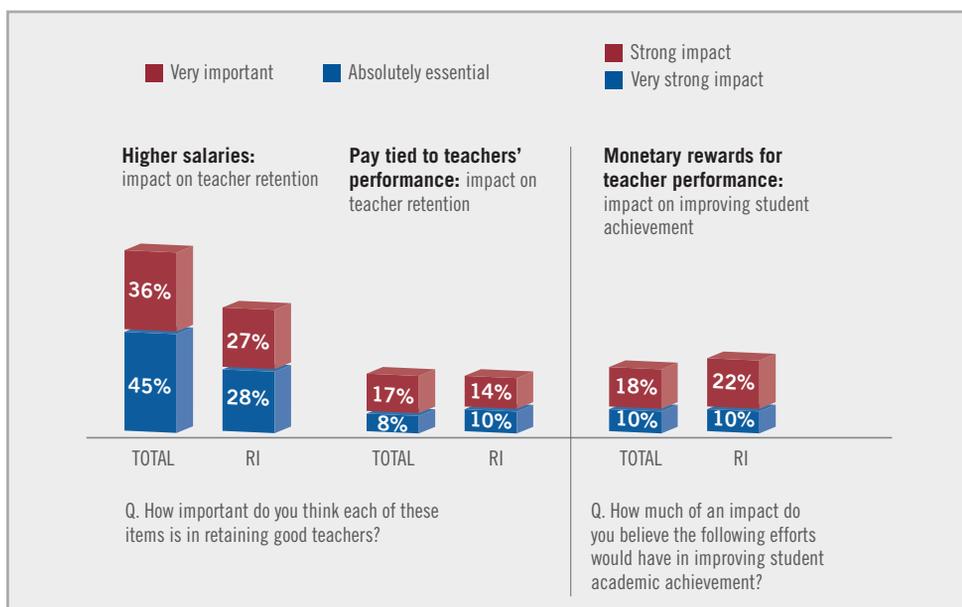
- Collegial work environment (93% in Rhode Island, 85% nationally)
- Opportunities for alternate careers in the classroom, like mentor teaching (63% in Rhode Island, 53% nationally)
- Higher salaries (55% in Rhode Island, 82% nationally)

Rhode Island Teachers' Views on Factors Impacting Teacher Retention



Teachers in Rhode Island are no more or less likely to say that pay for performance is a critical component of retaining good teachers. One in three (32%) say that monetary rewards for teacher performance would have a very strong/strong impact on improving student academic achievement.

Rhode Island Teachers' Views on Monetary Issues



Methodology

This report is based on the responses of the 117 teachers in Rhode Island who participated in the national survey for *Primary Sources: America's Teachers on America's Schools*. The data reflect a cross-section of Rhode Island's teachers across many teacher and school characteristics, including grade level(s) taught, years of teaching experience and community income.

Please note: conclusions about data among Rhode Island's teachers differing from data among teachers nationally are based on statistical significance testing at the 90% confidence level. Nonetheless, because the sample of Rhode Island teachers is relatively small, we encourage that these data be used as part of wider base of knowledge about Rhode Island teachers.

The fieldwork for this survey was conducted in March through June of 2009 by phone (n=46) and online (n=71). For more details on the methodology of this study, please see the full *Primary Sources* report at: www.scholastic.com/primarysources.

“This job doesn't pay much but I always want to go to work”

“Teaching is not like any other job. It's a passion.”

“Value should be placed on education. Every job, career, and occupation starts here.”

“Standards are about equity and expectation.”

PRIMARY SOURCES is the beginning of an ongoing dialogue with America's Teachers.

We welcome your thoughts and opinions on the report at www.scholastic.com/primarysources.

“If you're not tech-savvy, you can't compete in the global marketplace.”

“Role model the skills, believe in the students, and never give up.”

“If we are going to compete as a nation we should be learning as a nation.”

“We have a great system for getting them through the system. We don't have a great system to teach them to think outside the box.”