

CONNECTICUT RISE NETWORK

THE RISE NETWORK BY THE NUMBERS

- 10 HIGH SCHOOLS
- 9 DISTRICTS
- 13,774 STUDENTS
- 65% BLACK OR LATINX STUDENTS
- 14% ENGLISH LEARNERS
- 18% SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS

The Connecticut RISE Network represents a partnership among teachers, counselors, and administrators from 10 public high schools that serve nearly 14,000 students across nine Connecticut school districts. As a networked improvement community, RISE educators collaborate to ensure all students succeed as they transition to, through, and beyond high school.

The RISE Network was launched in 2015 in response to low graduation and college readiness rates and stark inequities for students of color. By using improvement science methods to pinpoint grade 9 on-track attainment as pivotal to achievement, high schools improved their graduation rates from 78% in 2016 to 87% in 2019. In comparison, statewide graduation rates remained relatively constant, improving by one percentage point.

THE PROBLEM

Connecticut's youth are entering an economy that demands skilled workers and critical thinkers, which threatens to make even more stark the persistent opportunity gaps that exist for students from low-income households and students of color. While the vast majority of students and their families aspire to a postsecondary degree, too few achieve their dreams of a higher education. In Connecticut, 25% of students from low-income households fail to graduate from high school within four years, and only 20% of those who do graduate will earn a postsecondary degree within six years. Comparatively, 54% of their more affluent peers will do so.¹

High school is a pivotal time for all students, particularly the key moments of transition both into and out of high school that have an outsized impact on a student's future. Of particular importance is the middle-school-to-high-school transition because research shows that grade 9 on-track achievement (i.e., earning enough credits to attain on-time promotion to sophomore year) is the single best predictor of whether a student will graduate from high school within four years—more so than test scores, family income, or race/ethnicity.² Indeed, data show that freshman year challenges contribute to stark gaps in high school completion and college access.

When the RISE Network started up, 91% of on-track freshmen went on to graduate within four years, with only 35% of off-track freshmen doing the same. Helping more students be successful through this transition, and thereby improving postsecondary readiness, is fundamental to increasing employment, decreasing incarceration, and improving the general economic prosperity for both individuals and the state of Connecticut.

1 ConnCAN. (2018). Field Guide to Education. Hartford, CT: Author. <https://conncan.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/16/2018/03/2018-ConnCAN-Field-Guide-to-Education-in-Connecticut.pdf>.

2 Allensworth, E.M., & Easton, J.Q. (2007). *What Matters for Staying On-Track and Graduating in Chicago Public Schools*. Chicago, IL: UChicago Consortium on School Research. <https://consortium.uchicago.edu/publications/what-matters-staying-track-and-graduating-chicago-public-schools>.

SOLVING THE PROBLEM

Launched in 2015, the RISE Network brings together educators in different communities to address shared goals, thereby amplifying their collective impact. As a community, the network uses data to pinpoint needs, form hypotheses regarding potential improvements, and pursue ideas to advance student achievement. Each school pursued different but related innovations, and the network learned what worked under specific conditions. This led to the adoption of five broadly defined networkwide strategies to increase on-track achievement. Known as “RISE by 5,” these strategies—which are informed by national research, local data, student voice, and educator expertise—include summer bridge programming, on-track data teams, on-track coaching, college and career supports, and classroom innovations. Each school team customizes its design and implementation to reflect local context and priorities. Local expressions of the RISE by 5 strategies are “tested into success,” and these variations across schools accelerate continued learning as a network community.

In addition to these core strategies, RISE provides partner schools with secure data dashboards. Such tools update nightly and support educators in taking a data-driven approach to continuous improvement. The data inform educator decisions and student interventions, and RISE staff refine these tools based on educator feedback and input. As the network hub, RISE convenes educators through monthly role-alike collaboratives and cross-functional, goal-oriented sessions to promote learning and sharing across schools. Educators also benefit from on-site RISE staff coaching and support, a practice that recognizes improvement work as highly contextualized.

KEY LEARNINGS

As a learning organization, the RISE network regularly reflect on its work and apply learnings to strengthen its practice. The list below highlights several learnings that have emerged.

- **Data visibility is imperative for any improvement effort.** RISE provides educators with secure data dashboards and data for improvement purposes, which allows the network to pinpoint growth areas and target its efforts accordingly.
- **As professionals, educators deserve actionable tools and information.** Educators receive resources, data, and space to collaborate.
- **New tools do not guarantee shifts in practice.** In addition to data tools and professional development, educators benefit from ongoing and embedded coaching and support.
- **It’s okay when strategies do not yield the desired results.** In order to innovate, educators must have the space to take risks, but doing so will necessarily bring some failure with it. Innovating within the shared guiding theory of improvement, in which learning can be had from both successes and failures, helps the network achieve its aim.
- **Many educational policies and practices perpetuate inequities and opportunity gaps.** Policies and practices are the building blocks of a system. Therefore, these must be addressed to disrupt inequities and ameliorate opportunity gaps.

OUR MISSION

The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching is committed to solving long-standing inequities in educational outcomes. The foundation addresses problems that impact large numbers of students, tests innovations on the ground; understands what works, why it works, and in what contexts; and shares what it learns for use by others. In so doing, Carnegie integrates the discipline of improvement science and the use of structured improvement networks to build the education field's capacity to improve.

THE SPOTLIGHT STORY

In pursuit of its mission, the Carnegie Foundation launched the Spotlight on Quality in Continuous Improvement program in 2017 to elevate clear and compelling examples of how the rigorous application of improvement principles, methods, processes, and tools solve educational problems. The Spotlight program provides educational organizations and improvement networks with the opportunity to learn about excellence in continuous improvement, assess their own progress, gain access to resources and education that support improvement, and be recognized for their proven quality practices within the field of education.

The Connecticut RISE Network is spotlighted for its use of improvement methods in generating demonstrable improvement of 9th grade on-track achievement and four-year graduation rates for students of color and students from low-income households through the use of a networked improvement approach. Built around networks of schools that predominantly serve these groups, RISE brought together teachers, counselors, school administrators, and central office leaders who were already working in these communities with an improvement mindset to advance shared goals and ensure all students experience success. Based on these efforts, the graduation rates of the RISE network's schools increased from 78% in 2016 to 87% in 2019, while statewide graduation rates remained constant.

THE RISE NETWORK: OUR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT JOURNEY

As a network, we have more work to do to ensure all students are on-track in grade 9 and therefore building toward college and career readiness. When we started our improvement journey, we established postsecondary success as our north star. We quickly identified grade 9 on-track as a high-leverage intervention point, and we have made steady progress in this area. Moving forward, we must take a similar approach—using data, educator collaboration, and the testing of change ideas—to focus on additional areas in our efforts to promote postsecondary success. We are excited to continue this journey because we see the power, potential, and impact of data-driven, cross-school collaboration.