



Welcome to

Ponaganset High School

Glocester, Rhode Island

A school on a path toward equitable, personalized learning for all.

How They Came to Be

Ponaganset's XQ Super School Journey

In 2019, XQ and the Rhode Island Department of Education launched the XQ+RI Challenge as part of XQ's first statewide partnership. All 64 school communities across the state were invited to re-imagine and redesign high school to expand educational equity and prepare today's students for tomorrow's world. Twenty high school teams received planning grants and began an intensive, design process. Recognizing that the Ponaganset school community had not served all students equally, the Ponaganset team produced a school design that focuses on helping students pursue their own personal pathways. This design builds on six years of work to design college and career pathways that lead to college credit and/or industry certification. These pathways were explicitly developed to honor student voice and choice and the economic needs of Rhode Island. More than 250 out-of-district students, representing 13 communities across the state, currently access the school's pathways along with 680 students who reside in the district. Ponaganset is one of two Rhode Island schools chosen to become XQ schools and serve as beacons for what's possible in America's smallest state.

Ponaganset High School students experience rigorous learning that connects with their interests and passions.



Discover Ponaganset High School

Ponaganset High School sits on a rural, 100-acre campus and attracts students from across Rhode Island. Educators at Ponaganset created a program of choice that offers industry-specific college and career pathways. These pathways help students earn college credits and industry certifications, giving graduates a competitive edge and empowering them to be designers of their own futures. Known as a leader for project- and work-based learning, the staff at Ponaganset offers programs as diverse as agriculture and animal sciences, engineering and robotics, materials and manufacturing, and biomedical sciences. Through partnerships with post-secondary institutions, students can enroll in courses that prepare them for high-demand, high-wage employment sectors.

Ponaganset High School is a rural, comprehensive, district public school that serves students in grades 9-12 with a total enrollment of 934 students.

Ponaganset Design Features

1. Co-creating Personalized Learning Pathways and Real-World Experiences

At Ponaganset High School, students pursue their passions through self-selected learning pathways designed to prepare them for success in college and careers. Pathways include agriculture, animal science, plant science, biomedical science, business, computer science, criminal justice, health and fitness/EMT, construction and manufacturing, music performance/music education, music technology, pre-engineering, and visual arts. Each pathway is supported by a Partnership Team—parents, business leaders, higher education representatives, community members, teachers, and school/district administrators—who advise and support. Students earn post-secondary recognized credits via academic, career, online, self-paced, and independent college classes, competency-testing, and out-of-school learning. School leaders have intentionally built personalization blocks in the school schedule that provide time and flexibility for students to exercise voice and choice.



Hi, I'm Alfred

“Taking the EMT course through my biomedical science pathway prepared me to volunteer at COVID-19 vaccine distribution centers and give back to my community.”

2. A Collaborative and Inclusive School Culture

The Ponaganset High School community is committed to building an inclusive culture that ensures that every voice is heard, valued, and empowered. In the past, the school came to the painful realization that it was not serving all of its students—particularly economically disadvantaged students, male students, and students receiving special education services. Ponaganset staff also realized it was not supporting and elevating the voices of all students, championing inclusivity adequately, or empowering all students to lead their own education. Ponaganset staff took action by dramatically expanding their personalized learning pathways, creating a student advisory committee to capture authentic student voice in school decisions, launching a new diversity task force, and collecting and analyzing data to address equity gaps. At Ponaganset, students and adults are supported through an equitable allocation of resources, comprehensive school counseling, individual learning plans, flexible block scheduling, a personalization period, and connections to parents, community, business, and higher education institutions. They're building a school where, regardless of a student's academic achievement level, race or ethnicity, economic status, or gender identity, every student feels safe and empowered to be themselves, find their voice, and work for positive change in the world.



Hi, I'm Lily

"Inclusion at Ponaganset is as integral as the curriculum. Our culture is based on the principle that equal opportunity and treatment is a necessity. Unified sports and extracurricular groups such as Diversity in Action and the Gay-Straight Alliance are some of the several representations of that idea. By illustrating the role that collaboration and inclusion play within a school atmosphere, students like me will bring these beliefs forward to improve our futures."



Hi, I'm Maggie

"Our teachers and administrators really do want to hear from students...to listen and get feedback that means something."



Michael Barnes

Superintendent

"Our desire to close our equity and opportunity gaps serves as a call to action to meet the needs of our students, to reconnect and engage disenfranchised youth, and to enhance the performance of all students better. While we are a rural school, we want our students to be globally competitive and proof points for that concept."



Katie Cioe

English Teacher

"We're using a data-driven approach to bridge equity gaps that exist within our school community."



3. Start, Stay, and Finish Strong Programs

How many school campuses can boast they have a CNC plasma cutter, a live animal care facility, a fully operational greenhouse, and a robotics lab? Students have access to those resources at Ponaganset but even the most engaging and innovative environment isn't sufficient unless students are supported to succeed. Ponaganset staff provides that support through its Start, Stay, and Finish Strong program that ensures that all students have the benefit of a comprehensive system of academic, career, and social services to help them stay focused on the future, make yearly progress, and successfully complete college and career preparatory classes. Recognizing that the transition to high school is a particularly critical period, Ponaganset educators ensure alignment with students' middle schools.



Sarah Metro
School Counselor

"We view the transition from middle school to high school as a process and not an event. We are building a proactive on-boarding program to ensure a successful transition to high school for all of our students."



Michael Barnes

Superintendent

“Cameras, bluetooth speakers, and video conferencing software are used to enable students in the classroom and at home to learn, discuss, interact, and engage with each other and teachers in learning experiences that develop foundational knowledge and transferable skills.”

4. An Aligned Instructional System

Ponaganset educators take pride in preparing students for the future of their choosing. While one student is engaged in an internship at an elementary school, another is completing a financial literacy class at a local college, while another is deeply collaborating with teachers in the construction and manufacturing pathway—all based on their personal passions and interests. The school supports meaningful and engaged learning in and out of school through an aligned instructional system that progressively develops foundational knowledge and transferable skills, expressed in Ponaganset’s [Vision of a Graduate](#). Each student assembles a personalized, digital portfolio, where they demonstrate their readiness for an ever-changing world. The portfolio includes a system of digital badges that tracks a student’s progress towards several achievements, including the completion of the Vision of a Graduate; external certifications or designations; a showcase of specific skills through evidence and experiences both in and out of school; and personalized pathway badges that allow students to define their own pathway majors beyond the existing formalized CTE pathways. The school prioritizes system enablers, like comprehensive school counseling, individual learning plans, flexible block scheduling, personalization period, and connections to parents, community, business, and higher education.

Theory Into Action

An Eco Greenhouse: Real-world, project-based learning on display at the RI Home Show

Representatives from the Annual Rhode Island Home Show—the largest and longest-running exhibition of its kind in New England—were well aware of Ponaganset’s statewide reputation for real-world, hands-on learning and approached the school to create a featured attraction for the event. Students from the Construction and Manufacturing Pathway, which includes materials processing, carpentry, advanced manufacturing, and engineering design and development, jumped at the opportunity to apply their interdisciplinary learning to the project. Flexing their mathematics and construction skills with attention to environmental considerations, students designed, constructed, installed and exhibited their creation at the Rhode Island Convention Center: a 16-foot-long eco greenhouse, created in modular sections for easy assembly and breakdown, fully decorated with plantings from the Plant Science Pathway. After a successful event, the students disassembled the greenhouse and permanently installed it as a learning fixture at the Ponaganset Middle School for use by students for years to come.

Competencies Met:

- ✓ Communicator: Collaborates effectively and respectfully
- ✓ Thinker: Identifies complex problems.
- ✓ Citizen: Participates in and contributes to the enhancement of community life

State Standards Met: Common Core Mathematical Practice

- ✓ MP.1 Make sense of problems and persevere in solving them.
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- ✓ MP.5 Use appropriate tools strategically.
- ✓ MP.6 Attend to precision.

Common Core Mathematical Standards and Common ELA Standards

- ✓ G.MG.3 Apply geometric methods to solve design problems (e.g., designing an object or structure to satisfy physical constraints or minimize cost; working with typographic grid systems based on ratios).
- ✓ RST.9-10.7 Translate quantitative or technical information expressed in words in a text into visual form (e.g., a table or chart) and translate information expressed visually or mathematically (e.g., in an equation) into words.



Anti-racism and social justice

With a rural school community that is predominantly White, Ponaganset is working hard to educate its students, faculty, and staff on issues of anti-racism and social justice. In October, the school held a [week-long anti-racism forum](#) featuring a panel with Black community leaders discussing their experiences with racism, which was covered by Rhode Island's Channel 10 News. See the program guide.

Student data

Grand Rapids serves 198 students in grades 9-11 this school year.

94%	White	8%	Free Lunch
3%	Black	8%	Special Education
1%	Latinx	1%	English Language Learners
1%	Asian		
1%	American Indian or Alaska Native		

Blogs and Media

- [Teacher Strategies: Learning and Teaching During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)
- [Rhode Island Students Share Powerful Learnings on Educational Justice and the Future of Learning](#)
- [How Rhode Island Is Using Remote Learning Insights to Rethink High School](#)
- [XQ + RI Update: 2 New XQ Schools and 18 Awards in High School Design Challenge](#)

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