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NEWS RELEASE

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Embargo until: Thursday, April 10, 2008. 3 p.m.

Board of Regents to Extend Commissioner McWalters’s Contract through June 2009

The Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education will formally vote on April 23rd to extend the contract of Peter McWalters, Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education, through June of 2009, Robert G. Flanders, Jr., Esq., Chairman of the Board, announced today (April 10, 2008).

“I am pleased that Commissioner McWalters has agreed to stay on as Commissioner through June of 2009 so as to address the critical issues we are facing in Rhode Island,” Chairman Flanders said. “Since I joined the Board last year, I have worked closely with Commissioner McWalters on several critical topics of school reform. It is vital that we focus on this critical agenda over the course of the next year.”

“Commissioner McWalters has been a key ally and advocate as we work to improve public education in Rhode Island,” said Governor Donald L. Carcieri. “In this first year of our new state Diploma System and the first year of new high-school tests and science assessments, we need continued strong leadership. Commissioner McWalters will ensure that efforts will continue on behalf of all schoolchildren.”

The Board of Regents, as part of its annual review of the Commissioner’s performance, reached a consensus on the renewal of the Commissioner’s contract in an Executive Session during the March Board meeting. Commissioner McWalters, however, let it be known to the Board at that time that he was not seeking a two-year extension of his current contract, which lasts through the end of this year. At the request of the Board, he has agreed to stay on as Commissioner through June of 2009 so as to follow through on several key Regents’ initiatives:

- Implementing the new Regents’ Diploma System, with its emphasis on proficiency-based graduation requirements
- Continuing the improvements in the districts that have missed annual targets, particularly Central Falls and Providence
- Developing new methods for educator evaluation and for ensuring teacher quality
- Revising the State Basic Education Program, a set of regulations setting forth what academic and support services districts must provide in all schools.

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“I am honored to serve as Commissioner of Education in Rhode Island, and I thank the Regents for their endorsement of my commitment to public education and my ongoing work in Rhode Island,” said Commissioner McWalters. “I plan to work with the Governor and the Board over the next year to follow through on the many Regents’ initiatives currently under way and to ensure that we manage a smooth transition to new leadership.”

Commissioner McWalters came to the R.I. Department of Elementary and Secondary Education in 1992. Under his leadership, RIDE has:

- Adopted and published the first state standards (what students should know at each grade) in English, mathematics, science, and civics
- Implemented the nation’s first multistate testing system
- Created the state’s first statewide curriculum
- Put in place an entirely new Diploma System, in which students must demonstrate proficiency in order to graduate
- Established an accountability system that classifies schools and districts based on student performance
- Advocated for an equitable formula for the distribution of state aid based on district capacity and student need
- Ended the lifetime certification of teachers and pioneered a certification system based on individual learning plans for educators
- Initiated the SALT Survey of all students, parents, and teachers
- Published extensive reports on all public schools (Information Works!) and on school finances (In\$ite) to ensure greater accountability to the public
- Built a system of Progressive Support & Intervention to help schools in need of support and to intervene in schools, such as Hope High School, that are missing annual targets
- Supported the founding of 11 charter schools
- Established a Data Warehouse to collect and disseminate all education data
- Championed the “All Kids” agenda, with an emphasis on closing the achievement gaps that create inequities based on race, ethnicity, gender, poverty, and disability

During Commissioner McWalters’s tenure in Rhode Island, test scores of public-school students have shown steady improvement. On the National Assessment of Educational Progress (The Nation’s Report Card) Grade 4 tests, mathematics scores rose from 13 percent proficient in 1992 to 34 percent proficient in 2007. Reading scores rose from 27 percent proficient to 31 percent proficient.

On the state NECAP tests, which were first administered in Grades 3 through 8 in 2005, Rhode Island has seen three-year improvements at every grade level and among all student groups.

The Board is expected to vote on the Commissioner’s contract extension at its next scheduled meeting, on April 23rd at 4 p.m.