



State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations
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NEWS RELEASE

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Deborah Gist Takes Office as Education Commissioner Announces Plan to “Hear the Voices of the People of Rhode Island”

Deborah A. Gist, the former State Superintendent of Education for the District of Columbia and an experienced classroom teacher, took office today (July 1, 2009) as the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Gist, who was appointed to the post in April by the Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education, succeeds Peter McWalters, who served for 17 years.

On her first day in office, Gist visited preschool students and their teachers at the Brown/Fox Point Early Childhood Education Center, in Providence. Later in the morning, she visited a Title I Reading Clinic and a Math Clinic, held at North Providence High School, where she talked with school officials, teachers, parents, and students. She also engaged in a “Youth for Change” dialogue sponsored by Youth in Action, in Providence, and she participated in a roundtable discussion on education policy, sponsored by Rhode Island Kids Count.

“We’re delighted to have Deborah Gist as our new Commissioner of Education,” said Robert G. Flanders, Jr., Esq., Chairman of the Board of Regents. “She brings to the job an impressive background as both a classroom teacher and a state-level administrator, and she brings a great deal of insight and enthusiasm. The Board looks forward to working with her this summer and for many years as we develop and implement education policies that will help our students and our state.”

“Since my appointment in April, I’ve been learning more about the great work that’s happening here in Rhode Island,” Commissioner Gist said. “While there’s been progress, none of us is satisfied with the progress that we’ve seen. My goal will be to draw on the entire community so that we can really focus on improving student achievement.”

As she stepped into the role of Commissioner, Gist announced an “Entry Plan” that will guide her during her first 100 days in office and enable her to “hear the voices of the people of Rhode Island, from students and parents to school and community leaders, as they speak about their success stories, their greatest challenges, and their aspirations for Rhode Island students.”

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Gist will visit schools and education programs across the state, she will visit community groups and faith-based groups, she will schedule meetings with parent groups and elected leaders, she will meet informally with neighborhood and community groups, and in particular she will meet with students.

She will use the information that she gathers from her meetings to develop “a strategic plan with specific and measurable action steps” that will guide the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education in its work toward improving student achievement.

“We’ll end up with a very specific plan that will be transparent,” Gist said. “I want people to hold me accountable for achieving the goals laid out in that plan.”

Gist encouraged groups that would like to schedule time with her to contact her by e-mail, at deborah.gist@ride.ri.gov