

**Commissioner's Weekly Field Memo
Friday, August 21, 2015**

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Today (August 21): School Prayer assurances due (see [below](#))

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Notes from Commissioner Wagner

1. School year gets under way

I enjoyed meeting with the members of the Rhode Island School Superintendents' Association on Wednesday morning, and I thank the members of RISSA for giving me the opportunity to highlight a few of the matters before us during the coming school year. The school year has already begun at some of our charter public schools, and several school districts will begin classes next week as well. I look forward to visiting many schools across Rhode Island this year to meet with you, the members of your team, and with students and families.

2. Lincoln educator named Superintendent of the Year

Congratulations to Georgia Fortunato, Superintendent of the Lincoln Public Schools, whose colleagues have selected her as the 2016 Rhode Island Superintendent of the Year.

As the Superintendents' Association notes in its news release, Georgia has served as the superintendent in Lincoln since 2007 and previously served the district as special education teacher, Transition Coordinator, and Director of Student Services. She is the Chair of the Northern Collaborate Board of Superintendents, a member of the Rhode Island College Alumni Board of Directors and of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges Advisory committee, and she is a guest lecturer at the Community College of Rhode Island, Providence College, and Rhode Island College.

Her nominators for the award describe her as “an organized, innovative, and effective leader, contributing valuable input on behalf of public education both locally and nationally while maintaining a clear educational vision upholding the most rigorous standards and expectations.”

As Georgia says of her work in Lincoln: “It is my quest to attain new heights in the Rhode Island educational community, and eventually in the nation, by implementing exemplary programs and initiatives which will result in increased student achievement and educational excellence.” That’s a worthy goal, and by all accounts Georgia is doing a wonderful job as the leader of the Lincoln schools. I look forward to a visit to Lincoln during the coming school year.

3. Resources available on parental engagement

As we prepare for the start of the school year, all of us recognize the importance of welcoming parents and families into our school communities and of encouraging parental engagement throughout the school year. Over the past few weeks, I have noticed several excellent resources for parents and family members who want to ensure that their children have a great year of learning. The U.S. Department of Education has posted this parent checklist:

<http://www.ed.gov/blog/2015/07/new-parent-checklist-empowers-families/>

Also, the Too Small to Fail organization, in coordination with the American Academy of Pediatrics, Sesame Workshop, and others has developed the Talking is Teaching initiative, which helps parents understand they have the power to boost their young child's vocabulary through everyday activities. Take a look at:

<http://talkingisteaching.org/> .

Like so many parents, teachers, and students, I am starting this new year with the belief that we can all enjoy a great year of teaching and learning. Let's work together to make sure that happens.

From RIDE

Assessments:

4. RIDE adds slots for PARCC workshops next week

In response to the numerous requests for additional slots at the Preparing for PARCC Results workshops next week, RIDE has increased the capacity from 50 to 75 at both sessions scheduled at New England Institute of Technology. In addition, we have added an afternoon session at the Middletown site. As a reminder, these meetings are designed to provide school and district leaders with communications resources designed for parents, educators, and the community. RIDE will provide information on timelines for the release and will share the resources and tools available. You will have the opportunity to review the materials and to discuss with other school leaders how you will customize and use the materials within your LEA. Please register for one of the sessions listed below using the links provided:

New England Institute of Technology - East
Greenwich
One New England Tech Blvd. (Room S216), East
Greenwich

Tuesday (August 25), 9 to 11 a.m.

<https://www.eride.ri.gov/workshopReg/ViewWorkshop.aspx?workshopid=1305>

Tuesday (August 25), 1 to 3 p.m.

<https://www.eride.ri.gov/workshopReg/ViewWorkshop.aspx?workshopid=1306>

Middletown - Oliphant Administration Building
26 Oliphant Lane (MSP Conference Room)

Thursday (August 27), 9 to 11 a.m.

<https://www.eride.ri.gov/workshopReg/ViewWorkshop.aspx?workshopid=1307>

Thursday (August 27), 1 to 3 p.m.

<http://www.eride.ri.gov/workshopreg/AdminConfirmWorkshop.aspx?workshopID=1319>

If you have any questions about these workshops, please contact Dr. Kevon Tucker-Seeley (kevon.tucker-seeley@ride.ri.gov or 222-8494).

Legal:

5. Reminder: Assurances on constitutionally protected [prayer](#) due today (August 21) – Action Item

Each year, we must submit to the U.S. Department of Education a list of any LEAs that have not certified to us their compliance with the Guidance on Constitutionally Protected Prayer in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools, which you can find here:

http://www.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/religionandschools/prayer_guidance.html

This guidance provides information on current law concerning constitutionally protected prayer in public schools.

As you know, no policy or practice in this state in any way interferes with the constitutionally protected rights of schoolchildren.

Once you have read the guidance, it is required by law that you certify to me annually in writing that no policy in your LEA prevents or otherwise denies participation in constitutionally protected prayer in your schools.

Please send your certification to Elliot Krieger, in the Office of the Commissioner, at elliot.krieger@ride.ri.gov, using the subject line "School Prayer." You may send a signed attachment or you may send your certification in the body of an email. If you prefer to fax your certification, you can send the fax to 222-6178, attn.: Elliot Krieger.

If you have not already done so, please submit your certification **today** (August 21).

You may copy this language and use it to make your certification, and you may adjust the language as

appropriate (for example, if your LEA was not in existence during the referenced years):

Certification of Compliance with the Law on Constitutionally Protected Prayer

This is to certify that no policy of my LEA prevents or otherwise denies participation in constitutionally protected prayer in public elementary and secondary schools as set forth in the “Guidance on Constitutionally Protected Prayer in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools,” issued February 7, 2003. This assurance applies to the school years 2013-14, 2014-15, and the coming school year, i.e, 2015-16.

Name:

Name of LEA:

Please feel free to contact Elliot if you have any questions on this matter.

Data Collection:

- 6. LEAs asked to submit 2015-16 TCS data as soon as possible**

Please submit your 2015-16 Teacher, Course, Student (TCS) data as soon as possible. The TCS collection is a daily collection; therefore, we continually update the data and the data do not need to be perfect or complete on the initial upload. The TCS data are important as these data form the foundation for many data verifications and technology systems, including the Instructional Support System.

If you have any questions about the TCS data, please submit a help desk ticket, at:

<https://support.ride.ri.gov>.

7. LEAs asked to inform staff members about updated guidance on reporting discipline data

The discipline data collection provides us with information about disciplinary infractions that result in suspensions or removals. We have released updated [guidance](#) on how to report this information. This data collection is required to be uploaded on a daily basis because the accuracy of the data diminishes as time passes and we need to have timely data in the Early Warning System and in other systems. Your staff members who perform this data entry should be educated on the updated guidance regarding the reporting of discipline data.

If you have any questions about the discipline data, please submit a help desk ticket, at:

<https://support.ride.ri.gov>.

8. Three data collections open September 1 – *Action Item*

The following data collections open on September 1:

- [Graduate and Dropout Reporting via Enrollment Census](#)
- [Monthly Reimbursements for Nutrition Programs](#)
- [Summer Exits Through Enrollment Census](#)

Information about upcoming data collections can be found on the [data collection calendar](#). Weekly collection [webinars](#) provide details regarding upcoming collections, along with a question-and-answer period.

If you have any questions about the weekly collection webinars, please submit a help desk ticket, at:

<https://support.ride.ri.gov>.

9. *Reminder:* Renaissance data-sharing agreement must be renewed at start of new school year

Your data extraction information is valid only for one year. Each year, the information you have extracted will be cleared on July 31. At the beginning of each school year (any time after August 1), you will need to accept the data-sharing agreement again and make your current data-sharing selections.

We have discovered a glitch with the Renaissance data transfer process, and we believe that the data managers have remediated the issue. If you have signed the data-sharing agreement and do not see your data in the Instructional Support System within a week, please submit a help desk ticket, at:

<https://support.ride.ri.gov>.

From the U.S. Department of Education

10. Education Secretary Duncan offers back-to-school advice

Please see this message from Education Secretary Arne Duncan:

Some students are already back to school. Others will be headed back soon. In an early-August blog post, "[Start Now, to Start the School Year Right](#)," Secretary Duncan detailed "lots of ways to gear up for a great school year," including:

- *Start adjusting early.* Start bringing meal times, bed times, and morning routines back in line with the school year schedule. Read before bedtime, get enough sleep, and have a reliable weekday routine. All these activities contribute to a student's readiness to do well in school from day one.
- *Brush up on skills and complete any summer assignments.*
- *Make a back-to-school to-do list, and start checking off tasks.* With less than a month to go, create a plan to take care of everything that is needed for a great first day of school. This includes scheduling remaining health check-ups, like dental and vision screenings; completing all necessary forms; taking care of any insurance, meal plan, and enrollment requirements; and stocking up on supplies and clothes.
- *Plan a learning adventure.*
- *Help to beautify your school.* This month, many schools will host events to get their buildings looking great for the first day, from planting flowers and picking up trash to painting walls and cleaning classrooms. It is a great way to learn about service together and help create a welcoming environment for the whole school community.
- *Make space for study and creativity.*

- *Set some clear, achievable goals for the year.* By setting and meeting academic goals, students do more than improve their performance in school. They also gain confidence, motivation, and pride in their accomplishments. Set clear goals, such as improving vocabulary or math, along with timeframes and concrete steps for reaching them.
- *Get connected and stay in touch.* Reach out to your school, and get to know your child's teachers. Start a calendar for parent-teacher conferences and other school events. Plan ways to keep track of your child's progress, help with homework, and provide support during the year. Consider serving on your local parent-teacher organization or joining in other activities that help support great teaching and learning. Check out our [month-by-month toolkit](#).
- *Talk about what to expect and focus on skills for life.*

“Working together, parents and children can help make sure the new school year is filled with progress, achievement, and the wonder of learning,” the Secretary concluded.

11. Webinar scheduled on engaging immigrant parents, families

Please see this notice from the Office of Communications and Outreach:

On **Thursday** (August 27), at 2 p.m., the U.S. Department of Education Offices of English Language Acquisition and Elementary and Secondary Education will sponsor the latest in a series of webinars from the White House Task Force on New Americans. “[Engaging Immigrant Parents, Families, and Concerned Adults](#)” will feature a panel of experts who will share current research and promising practices on how schools might engage immigrant communities to support successful educational outcomes for children and adult economic success. (Note: Previous webinars are archived [here](#).)

From other organizations

12. Resources available for educators on alternatives to dissection in science instruction

Please see this message from the National Anti-Vivisection Society:

The National Anti-Vivisection Society (NAVS) has developed the Biology Education Advancement Program (BioLEAP), www.bioleap.org.

BioLEAP is a comprehensive resource for teachers and school districts looking to introduce dissection alternatives into their curricula, as well as for students who do not wish to take part in classroom dissection exercises. Here, you can find up-to-date information about innovative dissection alternatives, a student choice resource toolkit, a breakdown of cost savings associated with dissection alternatives and much, much more.

By compiling all of these important resources in one location, we hope to raise awareness of the availability of widely respected alternatives and the advantages of using these methods to teach the life sciences, including a long-term savings through the one-time purchase of reusable “specimens” instead of having to purchase animal specimens every year.

RIDE will post this field memo on Tuesday, at:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/InsideRIDE/FieldMemos.aspx>