

State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations  
**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**  
Shepard Building  
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Providence, Rhode Island 02903-3400  
[www.ride.ri.gov](http://www.ride.ri.gov)



Deborah A. Gist  
Commissioner

February 2013

Dear Friends of Education,

As educators and policy leaders, all of us are committed to ensuring that our students graduate from high school ready for success in colleges and careers. For too long, we have awarded diplomas to students who have not acquired basic proficiency in mathematics and reading. These graduates soon learn that they are not prepared for college or careers. Most students who enter CCRI must take remedial classes at their own expense and at the expense of an already overloaded higher-education system. Passing along graduates who are not ready for success is a shirking of our responsibilities and a disservice to our students.

Ten years ago, the Board of Regents implemented a new Diploma System that included the state assessments. Since that time, the Regents revised the regulations twice, each time clarifying or increasing the role of state assessments. The goal of our Diploma system is to maintain a high standard for graduation and to ensure that schools provide all students with adequate support and with ample opportunities to meet the graduation requirements. Our Diploma System is based on multiple measures, not on state assessments alone. I do not believe that one test score *alone* should determine whether a student is ready to graduate, nor do I believe that a test score *alone* is a reasonable way to measure student achievement. We must measure student growth and achievement using many sources of evidence, *including* state assessments.

One of our graduation requirements is scoring at least “partially proficient” on the NECAP high-school (Grade 11) assessments in mathematics and reading. This month, we released the results of the October 2012 NECAP assessments, which showed that about 4,100 students scored “significantly below proficient.”

These students will take the NECAP assessment again in October and, if necessary, once again in the spring of their senior year. If their results improve, they will meet this graduation requirement, even if they do not attain the level of “partially proficient.” Students also have the opportunity to substitute results from another approved test and to appeal decisions about graduation. In limited cases, students may also seek a waiver from this graduation requirement. To prepare students for graduation, our Secondary School Regulations require that schools provide additional, intensive support and instruction to all students who fall below partially proficient on the NECAP assessments. With good instruction and with the will to succeed, our students can learn, improve, and earn a meaningful high-school diploma.

I understand that our Diploma System demands a lot of our teachers, of our students, and of their families. I appreciate all that educators across Rhode Island are doing to prepare our students for success. We will not give up on our students. They represent our future, and their success today is the key to the future prosperity of our state.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Deborah A. Gist". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over the printed name and title.

Deborah A. Gist  
Commissioner

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