

Commissioner's Weekly Field Memo
Friday, January 2, 2015

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From other organizations

8. Guide published, webinar scheduled on [digital learning](#)
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Action Item Calendar

- Wednesday** (January 7): Deadline for [PARCC](#) registration
January 9: [Talent Pool](#) nominations due
January 11: [Student contact](#) data due
January 31: Create PARCC test sessions (see [below](#))
March 16: Update PARCC Personal Needs profiles (see [below](#))
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Notes from Commissioner Gist

1. Commissioner Gist highlights initiatives, prospects for 2015

I hope you had a wonderful holiday and that you and your team are ready for a terrific second half of the school year. As I noted to you in a Field Memo before the break, we have many important prospects before us in the coming months. Thanks to the Preschool Expansion Grant that the U.S. Department of Education awarded us last month, we will soon seek proposals to add new prekindergarten classes in our schools and communities. Working with our partners in the Office of Postsecondary Education, we have developed our first statewide regulations on dual enrollment, which will increase access for all students to courses that can earn them credit toward graduation as well as college credit. We anticipate that the Board of Education will approve these regulations in March. We have also embarked on the process of developing the next strategic plan for public education

in Rhode Island. The Council on Elementary and Secondary Education has selected a [great team](#) of 26 Rhode Islanders to develop and write the plan, and we will continue reaching out to you and to your communities for guidance and input throughout the development process.

In addition, I am confident that we are ready to launch the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessments in March. The trial run last spring and the paper-pencil version of the assessment that some of our schools used this fall have proceeded smoothly across all member states in the consortium. The PARCC assessments will provide us with good baseline data on student achievement levels in literacy and mathematics across all grades. One reason we are ready for PARCC is the near-completion of the Wireless Classroom Initiative. We anticipate that by March this initiative will bring wireless Internet access to nearly 100 percent of our classrooms.

As you know, Governor-elect Raimondo will take office on Tuesday. I am very excited that she has emphasized the importance of education and career preparation as cornerstones to her administration, and I look forward to working closely with her and her team as we continue striving to make our schools America's best.

2. U.S. Department of Education issues state reports on educator equity

Last week, the U.S. Department of Education issued a series of state-level [reports](#) on educator equity. The goal of these reports is to help states ensure that “every student in every public school is taught by excellent educators.” To move toward that goal, the U.S. Department of Education has asked all states to develop a

state plan to ensure that “poor and minority children are not taught at higher rates than other children by inexperienced, unqualified, or out-of-field teachers.” All reports are due by June 1.

The report that the U.S. Department of Education released on [Rhode Island](#) educator-equity data includes some troubling findings. Students in schools with the largest populations of economically disadvantaged students or of students of color are much more likely than students in other schools to have a first-year teacher as their classroom teacher. Similarly, students in schools with the highest percentage of poverty or highest minority populations are much more likely than students in other schools to have teachers who are not “highly qualified” as their classroom teacher or who are working without certification (i.e., with emergency certification). Fortunately, the overall numbers of teachers who are not highly qualified (1.3 percent) or who are working with emergency certification (0.4 percent) are low statewide.

The most troubling aspect of the report, however, is the information on teacher absenteeism. Based on data from the 2011-12 school year that the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights collects directly from LEAs, 40.6 percent of Rhode Island teachers are absent for more than 10 days during the school year. By way of comparison, the percent of teachers absent for more than 10 days in Massachusetts was 25 percent; in Connecticut, 29.9 percent. (These absenteeism rates do not include days approved for professional development or other school activities off campus, such as field trips.) The absentee rates are higher in the highest-poverty and highest-minority population schools – greater than 50 percent – but the absentee rates are far too high across the board.

I would be interested in hearing your thoughts on this matter, and I will be seeking your input over the next few months as we develop our plan for improving educator equity, which we will submit to the U.S. Department of Education.

3. Johnston man advocates for better access to public facilities for those with disabilities

Perhaps you saw the [story](#) that ran last week in the Providence Journal about a highly dedicated young man, Stephen Carroll, and his efforts to improve access to public facilities for people with disabilities. Stephen has established a website, www.EqualAccessRI.org, that describes his goals and accomplishments. One of Stephen's proudest accomplishments has been improving access for people with disabilities to the facilities in several schools in his home town, Johnston. Congratulations to Superintendent DiLullo for working with Stephen, hearing his concerns, and bringing about these positive changes! Stephen has indicated that he would like to work with other school districts toward improving access for those with disabilities, so if you have any interest in connecting with Stephen and his organization you can either contact him directly through his website or I can help to put you in touch with him.

I recognize that initiatives to improve access may be difficult at this time, especially in light of the current moratorium on school construction. I would be interested in hearing from you regarding any suggestions you might have, based on experiences in your community, toward improving access for those with disabilities in our school buildings.

From RIDE

Data Collection:

4. *Reminder: Student Contact collection due by January 11 – Action Item*

We collect Student Contact data to survey students with disabilities. We also use the data in order to communicate important information to students and families. You should submit Student Contact data at the beginning of the school year, and you should keep the data up to date throughout the school year, with resubmissions in January and June. Student Contact data can be submitted through eRIDE (www.eride.ri.gov) using the Enrollment Census application or through the Automated Data Transfer (ADT) agent; for more information regarding this data collection, please refer to the collection [documentation](#). If you have any questions or concerns about Student Contact data, please contact Greg Martin, at Gregory.martin@ride.ri.gov or 222-8495.

5. *Reminder: LEAs still using version 1.0 asked to migrate to new version of SCED as soon as possible*

RIDE has identified LEAs that are still using version 1.0 of the School Courses for the Exchange of Data (SCED) codes for some or all of their courses. LEA-specific crosswalk files have been loaded to District Exchange for each LEA to help facilitate the migration from version 1.0 to version 2.0 SCED codes. It is vital that you migrate these codes as soon as possible; the deadline for doing so has passed. If you have any questions about this transition, please e-mail Greg Martin, at Gregory.martin@ride.ri.gov, or input a request for assistance, at:

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

Assessments:

6. *Reminder: Deadlines extended for PARCC student registration*

The Performance-Based Assessment (PBA) student-registration (enrollment) deadline for the spring Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) testing has been extended to **Wednesday** (January 7). It is recommended that LEAs complete student registration as soon as possible to ensure the timeliness and completeness of the data. If you have any questions or concerns about PARCC registration, please contact Greg Martin, at Gregory.martin@ride.ri.gov or 222-8495, or input a request for assistance, at:

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

7. LEAs asked to import student Personal Needs Profiles and update by March 16, create PARCC test sessions by January 31 – *Action Item*

As the first administration of PARCC assessments approaches, we would like LEAs to be as prepared as possible for the beginning of the spring assessment. You should get your student-registration data imported by Wednesday (January 7); however, the student Personal Needs Profile (PNP) import should be worked on and can be imported at any time up to the beginning of the assessment period (March 16). When importing these files, please be aware of the assessment for which you are uploading the data. To import the files correctly, please check the assessment period in

the top right of the pearsonNext.com screen. You should also be conducting teacher preparation on the Pearson TestNav tool, and test coordinators should be creating test sessions within the pearsonnext.com site by **January 31**. If you have any questions or concerns about PARCC technology preparedness, please contact Greg Martin, at Gregory.martin@ride.ri.gov or 222-8495.

From other organizations

8. Guide published, webinar scheduled on digital learning

Please see this message from the State Educational Technology Directors Association:

The State Educational Technology Directors Association (SETDA), the principal membership association of U.S. state and territorial educational technology leaders, has announced the launch of [*The Guide to Implementing Digital Learning*](#) (GIDL), a free, Web-based resource to support school and district leaders as they work to ensure that investments in digital learning spark positive results.

The Guide to Implementing Digital Learning is free to access at:

<http://digitallearning.setda.org>.

SETDA also will host a free webinar for educators and other interested parties on January 15 at 2 p.m., which will feature the insights of state educational technology leaders on effective digital learning implementation and on how to best use *The Guide to Implementing Digital Learning*. Reserve your seat today by visiting <http://tinyurl.com/setda->

[digitalllearning.](#)

GIDL was developed through the input of state educational technology leaders who collaborated across state lines to develop guidance and aggregate resources for, and examples of, effective digital learning implementation. GIDL includes six topic areas: planning, professional learning, content and software, broadband, devices and tech support. Each topic's section includes background information, key considerations for implementation, resources and exemplars of digital learning in action.

For more information about the association, please visit:
[setda.org.](#)

RIDE will post this field memo on Tuesday, at:

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