

**Commissioner's Weekly Field Memo**  
**Friday, February 19, 2016**

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### **Notes from Commissioner Wagner**

#### **1. Registration deadline extended for conference February 27 on African-American history in R.I.**

In June 2014, the State of Rhode Island General Assembly established the [1696 Historical Commission](#) to develop an African-American History curriculum, encompassing the historical period from 1696 to 2015, for use in all Rhode Island public schools. The commission's name recognizes the first documented group of enslaved Africans who landed aboard the brig *Seaflower* in Newport in 1696. The charge of the commission was, according to Representative Joseph S. Almeida (D-Dist. 12, Providence), to ensure "teachers have the tools and resources they need to teach a well-rounded, inclusive view of the people and events – both the honorable ones and the shameful chapters – that brought our nation and our state to where it is today." To ensure the youth of Rhode Island recognize and appreciate the contributions made by African-Americans and the integral role they played in the history of the Ocean State, the work of the commission will continue under the guidance of a task force headed by the Rhode Island Historical Society.

In honor of the work of the 1696 Historical Commission, Rhode Island's Delta Kappa Gamma Society for Key Women Educators Epsilon Chapter

and Rhode Island College's Feinstein School of Education and Human Development invite you and all teachers to attend:

*First Steps: An Exploration of African-American History in Rhode Island*

Saturday, **February 27**, from 8 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.  
Rhode Island College, Alger Hall 110

Through a series of interactive workshops, First Steps will provide teachers with resources and strategies they can use to integrate African-American History into their instruction. The schedule for the day includes:

8 - 8:30 a.m.: Registration

8:30 - 9 a.m.: Welcome

9 – 10 a.m.: Workshop I: *Using Online Sources Integrating African American Topics in the Study of US and Rhode Island History*, by Keith Stokes

10:05 - 11:05 a.m.: Workshop II: *Using Drama and Storytelling in Teaching Youth History*, by Valerie Tutson and Sylvia Soares

11:10 a.m. - 12:10 p.m.: Workshop III: *Introducing an App to Engage Youth in an Interactive Study of African American History*, by Theresa Moore

12:15 - 1:30 p.m.: Luncheon and Keynote Speaker,  
Commissioner Ken Wagner

Participants will have the opportunity to attend all three workshops. Each workshop will consist of a presentation followed by time for group and team discussions. We encourage you and a team of your teachers to join teachers from throughout the state as together we take these "First Steps." The application deadline has been extended. Please use the Registration Form found [here](#) to register each

team member. Please inquire about fee waivers for students interested in attending.

## **2. 2015 graduation rates to be released Wednesday**

We plan to release the 2015 graduation rates – statewide and by high school – on Wednesday at 11 a.m. At that time, we will post a link to the data on graduation rates on the home page of our website.

## **3. *Reminder*: Conference on blended, personalized learning scheduled for April 2**

On April 2, the Highlander Institute and the Christensen Institute are showcasing the best blended-learning implementers from across the nation, in Providence, at the 5th Annual [Blended & Personalized Learning Conference](#).

The Highlander Institute notes that this will be a chance for leaders and educators to discuss blended learning as it exists today on the ground – both in terms of the day-to-day in blended classrooms and the strategies that systems have successfully used to implement blended learning across numerous schools and classrooms.

This conference will feature a mix of expert presenters answering questions in small, intimate fireside chats along with tactical and hands-on workshops showcasing the step-by-step practices that have led to these successful implementations across the country.

Several educators and experts in blended learning will speak at the conference, including:

- Richard Culatta, Chief Innovation Officer at the R.I. Office of Innovation

- Beth Rabbitt, Partner at The Learning Accelerator
- Alex Hernandez, Partner at the Charter School Growth Fund (CSGF)
- Julia Freeland Fisher, Director, Education at Clayton-Christensen Institute
- Phyllis Lockett, CEO at LEAP Innovations

Help spread the word to Rhode Island educators so that we can fill the Rhode Island Convention Center with school-committee members, district leaders, building principals, and teachers all working together to bring a more personalized learning experience to students through the use of blended learning.

#### **4. Seventeen schools recognized as R.I. Commended Schools**

On Tuesday, we recognized 17 schools as Rhode Island Commended Schools, based on performance data from the previous school year (2014-15). Commended Schools are recognized because of their high achievement levels on state assessments, narrow achievement gaps, and progress made over time. All Commended Schools must also have participation rates of 95 percent or better on state assessments.

As we continue our transition to PARCC assessments, we will have more and better information regarding student progress, closing achievement gaps, and school improvement. We encourage all of our school leaders to help their communities understand the importance of comparable statewide measures of student progress. Going forward, we plan to introduce additional measures beyond state assessments to help us improve the process for determining school classifications.

Congratulations to the 17 Commended Schools: Sowams Elementary School and Barrington Middle School (Barrington); Rockwell School – four years as a Commended School (Bristol Warren); Hope Valley

Elementary School (Chariho); Orchard Farms Elementary School and Stone Hill School (Cranston); Archie R. Cole Middle School (East Greenwich); Jamestown School – Melrose; Brown Avenue School (Johnston); Lincoln Central Elementary School; Matunuck, Peace Dale, and Wakefield Elementary Schools (South Kingstown); Fort Barton School – four years as a Commended School (Tiverton); Blackstone Valley Prep Mayoral Academy Elementary School 2 and High School; and The Compass School.

## **5. High-school students to elect representatives on Student Advisory Council**

We will send this message to all high-school principals later today:

State law calls for the establishment of a student advisory council to the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education. The [legislation](#) (R.I.G.L. §16-60-2[c]) states that the student advisory council shall consist of one elected high-school student representative from each public secondary school in Rhode Island.

According to the law, each public secondary school shall hold elections for its representative no earlier than March 1 and no later than the end of the second full week in April (this year, April 15). Each high school shall elect one representative, and that student must be enrolled as a student in grade 9, 10, or 11. Members of the student advisory council will serve from May 1 of the year that they are elected until the last day of April of the following year.

I encourage you to begin the election process in your school as soon as possible. By **April 22**, please forward the name and email address of the elected student as well as the name and email address of a point of contact at the school to Angela Teixeira

([angela.teixeira@ride.ri.gov](mailto:angela.teixeira@ride.ri.gov)), in the Commissioner's Office at RIDE. Once we receive the names of all of the elected students, we will plan for an organizational meeting in May.

Finally, the law also stipulates that, before June 1, the student advisory council shall elect a chairperson from among its members. During the week of April 25, we will seek the names of those who wish to be considered for the position of chairperson. The chairperson will serve as an ex-officio and nonvoting member of the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education for a term of one year, beginning on June 1.

Please feel free to call Angela Teixeira, at 222-8435, if you have questions or would like additional information about the student advisory council.

## **6. Amazon developing a platform for Open Education Resources**

Amazon Education has announced that it is working on a new platform that will allow schools to upload, manage, share, and discover Open Education Resources. The platform is in the testing phase, and Amazon hopes to release the platform publicly within the next three months. Amazon is looking for districts to become partners on this initiative during the testing phase. You can read more about this initiative here:

<https://marketbrief.edweek.org/marketplace-k-12/amazon-education-to-launch-new-website-for-open-ed-resources/>

## **7. Four student volunteers honored**

The Prudential Spirit of Community Awards, which honor young people for outstanding acts of volunteerism, have named the two top youth volunteers of 2016: Zachary Librizzi, of Warwick, and Sarah Coutu,

Pawtucket. Zachary, who attends Saint Raphael Academy, has helped raise more than \$1 million for diabetes research through a charity golf tournament. Sarah, who attends St. Cecilia School, makes and sells craft items to buy supplies at no-kill shelters for animals. The awards, conducted by Prudential Financial and the National Association of Secondary School Principals, also named two distinguished finalists for 2016: Zach Ribas, of South Kingstown High School, who is a volunteer emergency services provider at South County Hospital, and Robbie Thorp, of Cumberland High School, who has raised money to support epilepsy research. Congratulations to each of these dedicated student-volunteers.

#### **8. RISSA names Champlin Foundations as recipient of Paul W. Crowley Award**

The Rhode Island School Superintendents' Association 9<sup>th</sup> annual Paul W. Crowley Award will be awarded to the Champlin Foundations. The award presentation will take place in the State Room of the State House, at 3 p.m. on March 2. This is the first time the award will recognize an organization, not an individual.

The award is given each year by the Rhode Island School Superintendents' Association to a Rhode Island citizen or organization who, in his or her professional and personal capacity, has demonstrated a long-standing commitment to improving the quality of education for the children of Rhode Island as did Representative Paul Crowley throughout his career as a state representative from Newport.

The Champlin Foundations were founded in 1932 by members of the Champlin family. In the 83 years since, \$535 million has been distributed to more than 900 recipients, benefiting every community in Rhode Island. The Foundations make direct grants, the overwhelming

majority of which are for capital needs, to non-profit organizations located in the state.

## From RIDE

### ***Instruction:***

#### **9. School leaders asked to respond to questionnaire on computer-science courses by March 1**

In her State of the State address, Governor Raimondo pledged to make it a priority to provide more Computer Science opportunities for the students of Rhode Island. The Office of Innovation and RIDE are seeking information from schools in Rhode Island to understand the current Computer Science learning opportunities that are offered and the goals of school leaders in respect to providing additional Computer Science opportunities. This questionnaire is also intended to help understand the level of effort that will be necessary to implement Computer Science for all students based on each school's current technical and human capacity. If you have any questions about this initiative, please email [MaryAnn.snider@ride.ri.gov](mailto:MaryAnn.snider@ride.ri.gov) or [Octavia.Abell@innovate.ri.gov](mailto:Octavia.Abell@innovate.ri.gov).

You can access the Computer Science questionnaire here. We ask that you please complete the survey – which should take only a couple of minutes – by Tuesday, **March 1**:

[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1Fumt4TwLwinDdw6-kEPsJAIRVNXbXBjN\\_EfW7o38\\_IU/edit?usp=sharing\\_eid&ts=56c1e378](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1Fumt4TwLwinDdw6-kEPsJAIRVNXbXBjN_EfW7o38_IU/edit?usp=sharing_eid&ts=56c1e378)

### ***Statewide Efficiencies:***

**10. Informational session on the Statewide Facilities Assessment, SBA Capital Fund Invoicing Process scheduled for March 1**

The School Building Authority at RIDE has as one of its responsibilities management of a system with a goal of ensuring equitable and adequate school housing for all public-school students. On Tuesday, March 1, the School Building Authority will hold an information session on the Statewide Facilities Assessment process and the School Building Authority Capital Fund invoicing process.

Beginning at 2 p.m., the School Building Authority will introduce the educational-facility planning team and provide an overview on the statewide facility-condition assessment and statewide master plan. This process will help direct long-range capital planning for improvement efforts and investment across the state.

For LEAs with projects funded through the School Building Authority Capital Fund, an invoicing session will be held at 3 p.m. Members of the School Building Authority (SBA), Rhode Island Health and Educational Corporation, and the RIDE Capital Fund Manager will outline the approval process and answer questions regarding progress-payment requests.

The event will take place at RIDE (255 Westminster St./80 Washington St., Providence), in room 260. We intend to film and post the event on our website for anyone unable to attend. If you have any questions about this event, please contact Joseph da Silva, Ph.D., at 222-4294 or via email, at [joseph.dasilva@ride.ri.gov](mailto:joseph.dasilva@ride.ri.gov).

***Legal:***

**11. Commissioner's decisions issued on school-health policy, nonrenewal of contract**

RIDE has issued these two Commissioner's decisions:

The Appellant's request for an Order requiring the West Warwick School Committee to adopt a "no nit" policy to control the spread of head lice in school is denied. The current Policy and Procedures constitute a reasonable exercise of discretion in how to respond to cases of head lice; however, the School Committee must clarify the Policy and Procedures so that they can be effectively and consistently implemented within the district.

[http://www2.ride.ri.gov/applications/RideDirectory/DOCS/2016/004-16\\_Priscilla\\_Lucianno\\_Vs\\_W\\_Warwick\\_S\\_D\\_021216.pdf](http://www2.ride.ri.gov/applications/RideDirectory/DOCS/2016/004-16_Priscilla_Lucianno_Vs_W_Warwick_S_D_021216.pdf)

and

In a remanded decision from the Superior Court, the Commissioner found that the Superintendent's recommendation of nonrenewal of Ms. Campbell's contract, and the Cranston School Committee's vote to accept his recommendation, was based exclusively on conditions of financial exigency as they existed in 2008, when her position as Administrative Coordinator of Educational Reform and Special Projects was cut from the school budget.

[http://www2.ride.ri.gov/applications/RideDirectory/DOCS/2016/005-16\\_Jean\\_Campbell\\_v.\\_CranstonS.C.\\_Supplemental%20Decision\\_021016.pdf](http://www2.ride.ri.gov/applications/RideDirectory/DOCS/2016/005-16_Jean_Campbell_v._CranstonS.C._Supplemental%20Decision_021016.pdf)

**From the U.S. Department of Education**

## **12. Obama proposes funds for computer science, diversity**

President Obama's annual budget request contains several funding proposals for increasing equity and excellence in education that may be of particular interest to Rhode Island educators, including:

- \$4 billion in mandatory funding for a new [Computer Science for All initiative](#), which would support state efforts to expand access for all students to computer science instruction and programs of study, as well as \$100 million in discretionary funding for grants to districts to promote innovative strategies to provide high-quality instruction and other learning opportunities in computer science; and
- \$120 million for new [Stronger Together Grants](#), which would encourage the development of ambitious, innovative plans to increase socioeconomic diversity through voluntary, community-supported strategies and expand on existing efforts in states and communities.

### **From other organizations**

## **13. NPLI seeks applications for innovation award; summer institute registration opens**

The National Principals Leadership Institute (NPLI) encourages schools that serve as models for innovation and change to apply for the \$10,000 2016 NPLE School Innovation and Change Award. Application information is on the NPLE website, at [www.npli.org](http://www.npli.org) ; the deadline is **April 1**.

The NPLI summer institute, “Describing & Delivering the Leadership We Need,” will take place from July 9 – 14, in New York City. Registration information is available on the NPLI website. The early-bird registration deadline is **March 15**.

**14. ACT announces test dates for district testing for the 2016-17 school year**

ACT has announced testing dates and sign-up deadlines for school districts that wish to administer the ACT<sup>®</sup> test to all students during the school day as part of their districtwide testing program.

Enrollment is now open for one test date in the fall of 2016 (September 27) and two test dates in the spring of 2017 (February 28 and April 19). The enrollment deadline for the fall date is **March 18**. For the two spring dates, the deadline is June 10.

Online testing is available as an option to schools testing on any of these dates. Districts may decide if they wish to let their schools choose between paper or online administration of the ACT test, although all students must take it the same way within each school.

Details of the program are available on the ACT website at [www.act.org/state-and-district-testing](http://www.act.org/state-and-district-testing).

**15. High-school seniors encouraged to apply for McKenna Memorial Scholarship; deadline, April 29**

The 1SG P. Andrew McKenna, Jr. Memorial Scholarship will be awarded to a graduating high-school senior in the state of Rhode Island. The applicant must be a legal U.S. citizen and a resident of the state of Rhode Island who has been accepted into an accredited two- or four-year college or university as a full-time student. He or she must have

demonstrated academic excellence with a GPA of 3.0 or higher. The applicant must also meet one or more of the following criteria:

- a member of the JROTC or ROTC;
- a member of their high-school track or cross-country team for at least 2 years;
- has a parent, guardian, or sibling who is actively serving in the U.S. Armed Forces; or
- has a parent, guardian, or sibling who served honorably overseas.

All applicants must include one letter of recommendation from a Head Coach, Assistant Coach, or teacher that details his or her character as a person or an athlete.

*Application Deadline:*

All completed applications must be submitted electronically to [1sgpam@gmail.com](mailto:1sgpam@gmail.com) or by USPS mail to 1SG P. Andrew McKenna, Jr. Memorial Scholarship, 31 River St., Bristol, R.I., 02809 by the end of the day on **April 29**. Incomplete applications will not be accepted for consideration.

*Value Of Award:*

The 1SG P. Andrew McKenna, Jr. Memorial Scholarship recipient will receive one scholarship in the amount of \$1,500. The award will be presented at Class Awards Night and will be made payable to both the recipient and the college or university they will be attending. This is not a needs-based scholarship.

The application shall consist of a student-information sheet containing the name, address, telephone number, email address, and date of birth of the applicant; a list of the applicant's teams, clubs, and activities; the

applicant's GPA; indication as to whether the applicant is a member of ROTC, cross-country, track, or has a parent, guardian, or sibling actively serving in the military or who has served honorably overseas (include name and enlistment information); the name and address of the college or university at which the scholarship will be used and indication if accepted; if not accepted to college, the top-three college choices; and course of study to be pursued.

Applicants must also respond to this essay question:

On August 7, 2015 1SG P. Andrew McKenna, Jr. came under fire from Taliban forces while defending Camp Integrity in Kabul, Afghanistan, and made the ultimate sacrifice for his comrades and his country. He is a man who once described selfless service as "the most important thing." Who once said: "The act of putting the well-being of others ahead of your own is the ultimate of showing what you're made of. It's not often brought out, but when it is, it can be unparalleled. The decision to rush forward, placing your life at risk for the welfare of a teammate or the rest of the team says more about a man in my book than anything else. What we have done for ourselves dies with us. What we have done for others and the world remains and is immortal."

1SG P. Andrew McKenna, Jr. has been labeled and credited as a leader and a hero, with bravery, honor, courage, and selfless traits. Please describe in your own words (*250 words or more*) what it means to possess the qualities and traits of 1SG P. Andrew McKenna, Jr. What does making the ultimate sacrifice for your team or your country mean to you? Feel free to use any and all personal experiences.

**16. High Expectations Conference seeks proposals for workshop sessions**

Call for workshop presenters: Share your knowledge and experience as a presenter at the 2016 High Expectations Conference: College and Career for All, to be held May 7.

Blackstone Valley Prep Mayoral Academy, the Central Falls School District, and the Rhode Island Mayoral Academies are seeking creative, thoughtful proposals for sessions on the topics most critical for teachers, school leaders, families, and community members. To learn more, please visit the [conference website](#). To submit a workshop proposal by **March 4**, please use [this form](#). The High Expectations Conference delivers exceptional learning and networking opportunities for every participant. With inspirational keynote speakers and engaging sessions, this event has something for everyone who believes in high expectations for all.

***RIDE will post this field memo on Tuesday, at:***

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