

**Commissioner's Weekly Field Memo
Friday, February 28, 2014**

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Notes from Commissioner Gist

1. RIDE prepares sample letter to parents regarding the PARCC Field Test

As you may be aware, the PARCC (Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers) Field Test begins on March 24, here in Rhode Island and in the 16 other PARCC-participating states. Because this field test is a practice run, we can anticipate that there will be problems and glitches with the test

administration. That's to be expected. This practice run of PARCC will provide the entire PARCC consortium with valuable information to ensure that we administer the test smoothly across all states when PARCC goes live in the spring of 2015. The practice run will also provide teachers and students with a valuable experience – the chance to engage with challenging problems in mathematics, reading, and writing and a first look at the type of assessments that we will be using across all grade levels, starting next year.

PARCC is designed to be administered on a computer device, although at least initially a paper-and-pencil version will be available. If your students will be taking the computer-based version of the field test, you will have a chance to assess whether your technology is ready for PARCC and, if not, what steps you may want to take before the initial PARCC assessments next year.

The practice run next month will take place in virtually every district, though only selectively – not in every school or every classroom. Please note that the field test is a trial run only; neither students, families, nor schools will receive individual or school-level results from the field test.

In an effort to assist you with notifying parents about the upcoming PARCC Field Test, RIDE has created a sample letter that you can modify to meet the specific needs of parents in your community. You can download a copy of the letter here:

www.ride.ri.gov/PARCC-FT-letter-template-doc

We have also scheduled several webinars to prepare your team for administration of the PARCC Field Test; the registration information is [below](#).

If you have any questions about the PARCC Field Test, please contact Dr. Kevon Tucker-Seeley (222-8494 or PARCC@ride.ri.gov).

2. Coventry educator named Rhode Island Outstanding First Year Principal

The Rhode Island Association of School Principals has named Kathryn Tancrelle, principal of the Hopkins Hill Elementary School, in Coventry, as the Outstanding First Year Principal. The association particularly recognizes Mrs. Tancrelle “demonstrates her commitment to learning by actively participating [in professional development] along with teachers, sharing best practices, seeking input, and leading discussions.” Congratulations, Kathryn, on a fabulous beginning to your career as an elementary-school principal!

3. RIDE announces new Chief of Fiscal Integrity and Efficiencies

This week I informed RIDE staff that Andrea Castañeda will become the new Chief of Fiscal Integrity and Efficiencies. I know that over the past four years, as Chief of Accelerating School Performance, Andrea has established excellent working relationships with you and your team. I will let you know about the timing of Andrea’s transition to her new assignment. Until you hear otherwise, Andrea is continuing with all of her current responsibilities. I am sure you will continue to work well with Andrea as she transitions to her new responsibilities. We have just posted as a job vacancy the position of Chief of Accelerating School Performance, and we will recruit for that position immediately.

From RIDE

Assessments:

4. NECAP Science test-coordinator workshops scheduled

The NECAP Science testing window is May 5 to May 22 this year, and all schools with grades 4, 8, or 11 are required to participate. Test materials will be delivered to schools during the week of April 20 and will be picked up after testing, on May 23. The assessment will include three sessions; the first two sessions are a written component similar to that in other NECAP assessments, and the third session is a performance assessment (the Inquiry Task), which is a “hands-on” task at grade 4 and a data-analysis task for grades 8 and 11.

Test-coordinator workshops have been scheduled to help prepare district and school test coordinators for the assessment. The workshops are scheduled for the following dates and times:

- April 15, at the Providence Marriott Downtown, 1 Orms St. (1 – 3:30 p.m.)
- April 16, at the Radisson Hotel, 2081 Post Rd., Warwick (9 – 11:30 a.m.)

Please note that both workshops cover the same material, so there is no need to attend both workshops.

Registration for that workshops can be done online by going to <http://iregister.measuredprogress.org>, selecting “New England

Common Assessment Program” from the drop-down menu, clicking “Enter” and selecting a workshop, and then following the online directions. On-site, in-person registration will also be available on the day of each workshop 30 minutes prior to the scheduled start time.

Workshop attendance is strongly encouraged, as the latest information on NECAP testing policies and procedures as well as information about test security will be provided.

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

5. RIDE offers four webinars on the PARCC Field Test

RIDE has scheduled four “live” webinars with RIDE staff to provide updates, review important information and resources, and answer questions about on the PARCC Field Test administration next month. Registration information for each webinar is below. Space is limited:

- PARCC Field Test – Accessibility and Accommodations:
Thursday (March 6), from 9:30 to 10:30 a.m.
Register at:
<https://www3.gotomeeting.com/register/231050438>
- PARCC Field Test – Test Administration for Principals:
Thursday, March 13, from 9:30 to 10:30 a.m.
Register at:
<https://www3.gotomeeting.com/register/372256966>
- PARCC Field Test – Test Administration for Teachers:

- Thursday, March 20, from 2:15 to 3:15 p.m.
Register at:
<https://www3.gotomeeting.com/register/341168678>
- Thursday , March 20, from 3:30 to 4:30 p.m.
Register at:
<https://www3.gotomeeting.com/register/702569022>

Note: Please register for only *one* of these two time slots for Test Administration for Teachers webinar; the presentations will be exactly the same.

After registering, you will receive a confirmation e-mail containing information about joining the webinar.

For webinar links, as well as resources on the PARCC field test, please go to:

www.ride.ri.gov/PARCC-field-test.

The PARCC training modules for test administrators (computer-based testing and paper-based testing) will be available early next week, at:

<https://parcc.tms.pearson.com/>

Each training-module presentation is approximately 26 minutes long.

From the U.S. Department of Education

6. Secretary Duncan issues letter on FAFSA applications

Education Secretary Arne Duncan sent this communications to all superintendents on Wednesday:

Dear Colleagues,

You've probably seen the projections—in our global economy, 6 out of 10 jobs will require some form of postsecondary education beyond high school by 2020. And as you know well, the financial cost of obtaining a bachelor's degree, associate's degree, or industry-recognized certificate can be daunting for students and their families. Too many feel college is out of reach for them, and some doubt its value—even when the evidence is clear that postsecondary degrees lead to increased earnings and stronger engagement in graduates' communities.

As you and your colleagues work to create pathways for students from high school to college, I want to inform you of some new resources from the U.S. Department of Education that are designed to increase the number of students filling out the one form that is the gateway to a diverse set of postsecondary opportunities: the [Free Application for Federal Student Aid \(FAFSA\)](#). Studies have found that FAFSA completion correlates strongly with college enrollment, particularly among low-income students. The FAFSA takes an average of only 23 minutes to complete online, and it's entirely free and secure.

In our efforts to expand college access and success and to increase the number of FAFSA applications, the Department offers two new digital tools to help your high school

principals and counselors identify which students need to fill out the FAFSA and to encourage students and parents to fill out the FAFSA together.

The [FAFSA Completion Tool](#) was created to help financial aid professionals, school administrators, and practitioners track and increase FAFSA completions. The Tool—updated biweekly throughout the spring—provides every high school in the United States whose students have completed five or more FAFSAs with information about how many applications were submitted and completed for the 2014–15 application year as well as comparison data from the 2013–14 FAFSA application year. When I was CEO of Chicago’s schools, we found that school-by-school data was a great way to encourage healthy competition among our high schools. Coming online soon will be a new resource for states to provide counselors with information to see if particular students have filled out their FAFSA.

The second tool, the [Financial Aid Toolkit](#), is designed to assist educators, counselors, and others by consolidating financial aid resources in one place, making it easier to find and access information to help students and parents understand the financial aid process, apply for aid, repay loans, and generally prepare for college. For instance, there are tips on how to host a [FAFSA completion workshop](#)—something First Lady [Michelle Obama and I did recently](#) with families in Virginia. The toolkit also contains links to sample [tweets](#), [Facebook posts](#), videos, blog posts, infographics, and [other resources](#) that can be used to encourage and help students and parents to fill out the FAFSA.

Last year, roughly one million high school seniors did not submit the FAFSA, making them ineligible for federal grants and loans as well as most state-based and institutional aid. When students complete the FAFSA, they help themselves *and* make a positive contribution to their school, communities, and states. In Michigan, for example, the governor and legislature leveraged an investment of \$2 million to build a statewide college access infrastructure. More than 50 Michigan communities have organized around a common dashboard to increase college enrollment. Since more than 90 percent of high school graduates attend Michigan higher education institutions, the state hopes its emphasis on FAFSA completion and other metrics will result in tens of millions of dollars in additional student aid for the state, its colleges, universities, and students.

Don't let your students leave money on the table, money that could help them achieve their dreams of college. Please make your principals, counselors, parent association leaders, and other colleagues aware of these tools and encourage completion of the FAFSA for all of your graduating students this year.

Many thanks,

Arne Duncan
U.S. Secretary of Education

P.S. A terrific way to celebrate your students getting into college is with a "signing day ceremony." You can learn more about these inspiring (and easy) events in [this blog](#) posted on ED.gov.

7. U.S. Department of Education releases guidance on student privacy

The U.S. Department of Education Privacy Technical Assistance Center released new guidance on Tuesday to help school systems and educators interpret and understand the major laws and best practices protecting student privacy while using online educational services.

The guidance summarizes the major requirements of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and the Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment that relate to these educational services, and urges schools and districts to go beyond compliance to follow best practices for outsourcing school functions using online educational services, including computer software, mobile applications and web-based tools.

“As an education community, we have to do a far better job of helping teachers and administrators understand technology and data issues so that they can appropriately protect privacy while ensuring teachers and students have access to effective and safe tools,” said U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. “We must provide our schools, teachers and students cutting-edge learning tools—and we must protect our children's privacy. We can accomplish both—but we will have to try harder to do it.”

Recent advances in technology and telecommunications have dramatically changed the landscape of education in the United States and resulted in the proliferation of student data. Today's classrooms increasingly employ on-demand delivery of personalized content, virtual forums for interacting with other students and teachers, and a wealth of other interactive

technologies that help foster and enhance the learning process. While these technologies have the potential to transform the educational process, they also raise new questions about how best to protect student privacy.

The U.S. Department of Education is issuing this guidance to answer questions from schools, districts and vendors about how student data can and should be used, what steps are necessary to protect students' privacy and how to prevent the misuse, abuse and commercialization of students' information. The guidance addresses a range of concerns regarding the security and privacy of student data. For example: "What does FERPA require if personally identifiable information from students' education records is disclosed to a provider?" and, "Do FERPA and PPRA limit what providers can do with the student information they collect or receive?"

The guidance is online, at

<http://ptac.ed.gov>.

8. Education resources available for use during Women's History Month

Please see this message from the U.S. Department of Education Office of Communications and Outreach:

March is Women's History Month. Need help planning education activities? The Federal Resources for Educational Excellence ([FREE](#)) website offers more than 1,500 free teaching and learning resources from dozens of federal agencies, including 39 resources specifically highlighted for this month.

From other organizations

9. Rhode Island League of Charter Schools to hold conference on excellence in education

Please see this notice from the Rhode Island League of Charter Schools:

The Rhode Island League of Charter Schools “Excellence in Education Conference” is set for Tuesday, March 11, from 4 to 7:30 p.m. (3:30 p.m., registration and refreshments) at Rhode Island College.

This year’s conference will include a session on proficiency-based senior projects and graduation portfolios, presented by a team from North Providence High School.

All educators are invited to attend this conference.

To register, go to:

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/2014-excellence-in-education-conference-tickets-10386475227>

For more information on the conference, see:

<http://www.richarterschools.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/2014-Conference-Information.pdf>

10. Brown University invites Rhode Islanders to celebrate its 250th anniversary

Please see this message from Brown University:

On Friday and Saturday, March 7 and 8, Brown University is kicking off 15 months of festivities to celebrate its 250th anniversary. The weekend's celebration features cake, fireworks, robots, and more. Brown University welcomes the Rhode Island community to be part of this historic occasion, especially the Friday evening Celebrate 250+ Open House and Saturday's open house, which will offer educational programming for all ages. Educators may be especially interested in the President's Colloquiums on Saturday. For a complete schedule of events and other information about the celebration, see 250.brown.edu.

11. Salve Regina, Providence Journal announce student filmmaking contest

High-school and undergraduate college students are being challenged to address the pressing issue of childhood poverty in a filmmaking contest. The competition is part of Story in the Public Square, a joint initiative of the Pell Center at Salve Regina University and The Providence Journal.

The maker (or makers) of the winning film will receive \$1,000 and two other films will be selected for honorable mention. All three will be honored during this year's Story Day conference, April 11, when participants will explore the theme of Moving Images: Public storytelling in film, video, TV, and animation. Winning

productions will be published online by the Pell Center. For more information about the initiative, please visit www.publicstory.org.

RIDE will post this field memo on Tuesday, at:

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