

Commissioner's Weekly Field Memo
Friday, March 7, 2014

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Action Item Calendar

Today (March 7): [School Health Profiles](#) due

March 28: Distinguished Educator recommendations (see [below](#))
March 28: Textbook lists due (see [below](#))

Notes from Commissioner Gist

1. RIDE seeks recommendations for Rhode Island Distinguished Educator Pool – *Action Item*

One important aspect of our work here at RIDE is making sure we have input from educators to help us develop policy and implement best practices. It's also my pleasure, from time to time, to be able to nominate educators for various awards and recognitions. To help ensure that we are well aware of the great work teachers and school leaders are doing across the state, we maintain a file of distinguished teachers and principals, based largely on nominations we receive from you. Throughout the year, we consider these educators for membership on advisory boards and task forces and also as candidates for special recognition programs. As in the past, I am requesting that you recommend to me up to three candidates who represent educators relatively new to the profession (5 to 12 years), who demonstrate strong instructional practices, and who positively affect students, colleagues, and the community. To submit recommendations, please click on this link:

<http://ride.ri.gov/educator-recognition>

When you submit your recommendations, please include:

- the Talent Pool Recommendation Form;
- a one-page narrative that addresses how the candidate meets the criteria; and
- a resumé of the recommended educator.

Please send the completed packet of information, by **March 28**, to Mary Keenan, at mary.keenan@ride.ri.gov.

2. RIDE shares results of mid-year surveys on educator evaluations

I am pleased that we have been working successfully in partnership to implement our system of annual educator evaluations across the state. The second year of full implementation has been proceeding smoothly. It is vital to us, however, that we continue to receive feedback and information from those directly involved in the evaluation process; this information helps us to make improvements to the evaluation system – always with the goal in mind of ensuring that we have excellent educators in our classrooms, excellent leaders in our schools, and a culture that continuously improves teaching and learning.

As part of the evaluation process, we have completed mid-year surveys on evaluations, and today we posted on our website a brief report on the statewide results from the surveys. The report includes data about educators' experiences with key aspects of the evaluation process, including: classroom observations and site visits, Student Learning Objectives and Student Outcome Objectives, the Rhode Island Growth Model, and the differentiated evaluation process for teachers. Over the next two weeks, we will be sending you individual reports on the results for

your LEA (except in cases of those with fewer than 10 completed surveys). I hope that you find both the analysis of the statewide results and, ultimately, the analysis of your own results to be helpful as you continue to refine and improve the implementation of educator evaluations in your LEA.

The report on statewide results of the mid-year surveys on educator evaluations is posted on our website, at:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/TeachersAdministrators/EducatorEvaluation.aspx>.

3. RIDE, Office of Digital Excellence announce adult-education agreement on digital-literacy training for adult learners

In partnership with the Rhode Island Office of Digital Excellence, we announced this week that the Broadband Rhode Island (BBRI) digital-literacy training curriculum will be implemented statewide in adult education programs. As we noted in our joint news release, for many adult learners in Rhode Island unfamiliarity with computer and Internet technology poses an obstacle to reaching their full potential in today's workforce. This initiative, which aligns with our statewide technology standards for adult learners, will improve adult education and workforce training. The goal of this initiative is to better prepare Rhode Island learners to obtain the technical skills they will need to compete in a global digital economy and to improve their lives.

One of the goals of our strategic plan, *Transforming Education in Rhode Island*, is to provide more high-quality educational opportunities for adult learners. Just as we are expanding the use of digital literacy in our elementary and secondary schools, it is important to bring digital literacy into our programs for adult

learners as well. Adult learners need computer and digital-literacy skills to further their education and to succeed in the workforce, and this initiative will help prepare our adult learners for success in their chosen careers.

4. RIDE issues annual report on career and technical education

As we continue our work toward transforming education in Rhode Island, our goal is to prepare all of our high-school graduates for success in college, careers, and life. Under our 2010-2015 strategic plan, *Transforming Education in Rhode Island*, we are committed to developing a full range of career pathways for students, issuing standards for career-technical programs, and building partnerships between our schools, the business community, industries, and the workplace. We have moved forward dramatically with these initiatives, especially in light of the Career and Technical Regulations of 2012, which give students access to any career-technical program in the state, regardless of location. Under these regulations, RIDE is ensuring that career-technical programs align with and promote workforce and economic development in Rhode Island.

This week, we sent to the General Assembly our Annual Report on Career and Technical Education for the 2012-2013 School Year, which provides a summary of career-technical initiatives over the course of that year. Our 120 RIDE-recognized career-and-technical education programs serve about 7,600 students across the state, providing students with the knowledge, skills, and credentials they will need for entry into the Rhode Island economy. With the Fiscal Year 2013 categorical funding, RIDE provided \$2.7 million to aid 17 school districts administering high-cost career-technical programs. In addition, RIDE distributed \$300,000 in start-up

funding (and leveraged more than \$100,000 in a cash match) through a competitive-grant process. These start-up grants provided funding to support new programs in state priority sectors.

With support from Governor Chafee, the General Assembly, and the Board of Education, we will continue to expand opportunities for students, to promote the establishment of career-technical programs in critical and emerging industries, and to prepare our graduates to succeed in their chosen careers and to contribute to the future prosperity of our state.

We have posted the [report](#) on the RIDE website.

5. RIDE issues annual report on virtual learning

As part of our ongoing work toward making Rhode Island schools America's best, we need to welcome technology into the classroom – not just as a tool or resource but as an essential element in the process of teaching and learning. Thanks to leadership from Governor Chafee, the General Assembly, and the Board of Education, Rhode Island school leaders and teachers are embracing technology and digital learning.

To further our partnership in this initiative, RIDE has just released the annual legislative report, "RI Virtual Learning." This report shows us how virtual learning and online instruction are transforming the way all of us think about schools, classrooms, teaching, and learning. In our Innovation Powered by Technology model schools – Pleasant View Elementary School, in Providence, and Wakefield Hills Elementary School, in West Warwick – students and teachers are creating learning environments that others are emulating. In many classrooms across the state, we see

teachers and students who are working in small teams and one on one, using technology to create and collaborate and to meet the individual learning needs of every student.

Among our accomplishments over the past year, as this report documents, 12 of our school districts are offering students a total of 235 online courses, 4 districts are offering hybrid or blended-learning opportunities, and 2 new blended-learning schools opened this fall. A year ago, fewer than 1 of every 4 classrooms had wireless access to the Internet; today, thanks to the Wireless Classroom Initiative that you have funded, we anticipate that all of our classrooms will have wireless access within the next two years. At least five school districts are moving toward providing every student access to computer devices.

The movement toward virtual learning is just beginning, but even at this early stage we can see the myriad opportunities technology and wireless communications offers for our students, teachers, and families. Let's continue our commitment to transforming education and empowering students through the use of technology.

We have posted the [report](#) on the RIDE website.

6. Federal lawsuit could affect special-education budgets

Deputy Commissioner and General Counsel David V. Abbott has informed the Rhode Island Association of School Committees that a plaintiff has filed a lawsuit in U.S. District Court, *K.S. v. R.I. Board of Education, et al.*, C.A. No. 14-77, that has the potential to affect budgets for the education of students with disabilities. This lawsuit argues that, under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, LEAs are responsible for providing a free,

appropriate public education to students until they reach the age of 22 (instead of ending services at the age of 21). The plaintiff is seeking to make this case a class-action lawsuit. The plaintiff's attorneys base the case on a recent ruling in the State of Hawaii. As the Board of Education is named in the lawsuit, we are doing legal research to see if the Hawaii decision could be applicable here, and I will keep you informed of any significant developments.

7. Central Falls teachers win regional Science Lab Challenge

Congratulations to David Upegui and Kerri Valentine, of Central Falls High School, the Region 1 Finalists in the 2014 National Science Teachers Association Shell Science Lab Challenge! This annual challenge “invites middle- and high-school science teachers (grades 6–12) in the United States and Canada (with special attention to urban and underrepresented groups) to illustrate replicable approaches to science-lab instruction utilizing limited school and laboratory resources.” As regional winners, David and Kerri will receive a \$1,000 grant from the Shell Oil Company to purchase lab equipment and science resources for Central Falls High, plus another \$2,000 worth of donated equipment and resources. They also become candidates to be among the five national finalists.

From RIDE

Health and Safety:

8. School-health programs regulations posted for public hearings

The Department of Health has posted for public hearing the proposed Rhode Island Rules and Regulations for School Health Programs on the Secretary of State website. See the posting at this link:

http://sos.ri.gov/documents/archives/regdocs/holding/DOH/SchoolHealthPrograms_2ndPublicHearingDraft_11Feb2014.pdf

Assessments:

9. RIDE prepares sample letter for Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking parents regarding the PARCC 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 Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking parents in your community. You can download a copy of the letter here:

Spanish-language version:

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

Portuguese-language version:

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

English-language version:

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

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

10. PARCC releases training modules for test administrators

Training modules are now available for test administrators to provide information needed to properly administer both paper- and computer-based PARCC assessments. You can access these and other useful resources to help prepare staff for the upcoming Field Test here:

<http://www.pearsonaccess.com>

In addition, RIDE has scheduled three “live” webinars with RIDE staff to provide updates, review important information and resources, and answer questions about on the PARCC Field Test administration (which starts on March 24). Registration information for each webinar is below. Space is limited:

- 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 the 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 other resources on the PARCC field test, please go to:

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

11. Alternate assessment student lists posted, must be updated by Tuesday

The pilot tests in English language arts and mathematics for the new alternate assessment, the National Center and State Collaborative (NCSC), dates will be April 14 through May 23. Lists of students sampled for the pilot test were posted on your eRIDE File Share, and e-mails were sent to LEA staffs along with instructions on how to submit any changes to the student lists. Completed files are due by the close of business on **Tuesday** (March 11) and should be posted to your eRIDE File Share folder. If you have questions or concern about this process, please contact Heather Heineke, at heather.heineke@ride.ri.gov or at 222-8493.

For more information on the NCSC pilot test, please visit our website:

www.ride.ri.gov/NCSC

Early Learning:

12. BrightStars participation incentives available to public-school early childhood education programs

To encourage programs to participate in the BrightStars quality rating and improvement system, one-time payments are available to public-school early care and education programs; apply before **April 1** to receive a \$500 incentive. Funding for the incentive comes from the Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge federal grant.

Information on how to apply to participate in BrightStars and be eligible for the incentive is available at:

<http://www.brightstars.org/providers/brightstars-quality-rating/child-care-centers-and-preschools/applying-to-brightstars.aspx>

Need help applying? Application sessions are scheduled for:

- **Wednesday** (March 12): 4 to 6 p.m., at 535 Centerville Road Suite 201, Warwick.
- March 17: 2 to 4 p.m., at 535 Centerville Road, Suite 201, Warwick
- March 17: 6 to 7:30 p.m., at Providence YMCA Youth Services Branch, 640 Broad Street.

Early-childhood leadership can also contact BrightStars with questions: 739-6100 or info@brightstars.org

Already applied to BrightStars? Programs that applied between July 1, 2013, and February 28, 2014, for a rating under the 2013 standards will receive the incentive.

Questions about the incentive program may be directed to Jael Lopes, at the Department of Human Services, 462-6410 or jael.lopes@dhs.ri.gov.

Textbooks:

**13. RIDE requests annual listing of textbooks by March 28
– Action Item**

Each year, RIDE collects and distributes a listing of textbooks used in all public schools in the state. The purpose of this list is to meet the requirements of General Laws 16-23-2 and 16-23-3, which provide for the loan of textbooks in the areas of mathematics, science, world languages, English language arts, and history or social studies, in grades kindergarten through 12, to nonpublic schools in Rhode Island.

LEAs are required to submit to RIDE a complete listing of all textbooks planned for use during the next school year (2014-15) by using the eRIDE system, the electronic process through which you manage your textbook lists by adding and deleting titles and other pertinent information.

RIDE will send a memo to all textbook coordinators and data managers requesting them to update their complete list of textbooks currently in use by **March 28**. The memo will include instructions for the use of the eRIDE system, including the details for uploading textbook titles and ISBN numbers, as well as frequently asked questions for textbook-list management. Once we receive updates from all LEAs, we will post the information on our website.

You can address any inquiries regarding the program to Lauren McCarthy, at 222-8463 or lauren.mccarthy@ride.ri.gov . Technical issues regarding the use of eRIDE should be directed to Mario Goncalves, at 222-8968 or mario.goncalves@ride.ri.gov .

Educator Evaluations:

14. RIDE previews summer training plans for evaluators

Throughout the summer, RIDE will be hosting new training sessions for returning personnel who will be evaluating teachers, support professionals, and building administrators. The summer training sessions are the next phase in the training continuum for evaluators, and they will be the last sessions funded by our Race to the Top grant. The training topics are being developed in consultation with the educator-evaluation advisory group and will also be based on data collected through the mid-year surveys and ongoing educator-evaluation focus groups. Our main goal is to make the best use of our remaining Race to the Top resources by focusing on the topics that will have the greatest impact on the implementation of educator evaluations in Rhode Island.

In addition to the two-day training for returning evaluators, we will also be offering a four-day summer academy for new evaluators and a one-day training for evaluators in non-Rhode Island Model districts (e.g., Innovation Consortium districts, Coventry, The Learning Community, and Achievement First).

Specific dates, locations, and registration information for the summer trainings will be shared through the Field Memo.

15. RIDE posts responses to frequently asked questions about the Support Professionals Evaluation and Support System

Responses to frequently asked questions about the Rhode Island Model Support Professional Evaluation and Support System have been added to the RI Model FAQs page on the RIDE website. We hope that the responses are helpful, but please feel free to contact us directly, at ed.eval@ride.ri.gov, with any additional questions or concerns.

To access the Support Professional FAQs, please go to the RIDE website at:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/TeachersAdministrators/EducatorEvaluation/RIModelFAQs.aspx>.

RIDE will post this field memo on Tuesday, at:

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