

**Commissioner's Weekly Field Memo**  
**Friday, May 16, 2014**

**Notes from Commissioner Gist**

1. 93 percent of current senior class meets [graduation requirements](#)
2. LEAs have authority to make [waiver](#) decisions
3. Highlander Institute announces [blended-learning fellowship](#); application deadline is **May 24**
4. Students seeking information about courses in [financial literacy](#)
5. Rhode Island students honored for [volunteer service](#)

**From the R.I. Department of Education (RIDE)**

***Assessments:***

6. [PARCC](#) posts K-2 Model Content Frameworks and K-1 Formative Tasks for educator feedback
7. Eighth-grade [technology-assessment testing](#) window closes **May 23**; webinars on reading, interpreting results scheduled for June
8. By **May 30**, RIDE seeks reports on number of students to take PARCC [by computer, on paper](#) – ***Action Item***

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## Action Item Calendar

**Today** (May 16): School [calendars](#) due  
**Thursday** (May 22): [Asset protection](#) plans due  
May 27: [Classifications data](#) clean-up due  
May 30: District [Teacher of the Year](#) nominations due  
May 30: Reports on students taking PARCC due (see [below](#))  
June 2: Preliminary academic or [behavioral-intervention data](#) due  
June 20: School [Health](#) Reports due  
June 20: [Roster verification](#) to be completed  
June 23: Academic or [Behavioral-intervention final](#) data due  
July 14: [Educator-evaluation data](#) due  
July 15: [Housing aid](#) forms due  
July 18: [UCOA](#) preliminary data due  
September 30: [UCOA FY 2014](#) data due

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## Notes from Commissioner Gist

### **1. 93 percent of current senior class meets graduation requirements**

I was very pleased on Monday to provide the Board of Education with our monthly update on the Diploma System. I want to thank all of you for providing data for this report. The report was based

on data we received from you and your team members, including data managers, high-school principals, and school counselors, all of whom were very detailed and thoughtful about these records.

We should all be incredibly proud of the amazing work over the past year across the state in implementation of the system, and we now have results to measure our success. As of May 1, 93 percent of the currently enrolled seniors (8,524 students) have met the state-assessment component of the Diploma System; only 7 percent of the enrolled seniors have not yet met this requirement: 36 students will be retained in grade 12 and the other 625 students are still in progress toward earning their diploma. I am sure that a number of the remaining 625 seniors will earn a diploma through the waiver process, as many of you now in the midst of considering waivers. Of the 8,524 seniors who are now eligible to earn a diploma this spring, 84 percent of the senior class (7,724 students) met the graduation requirement by attaining partial proficiency or better or making significant growth on the NECAP mathematics assessments. Only 3 percent of the seniors (305 students) met the requirement by passing one of the other approved assessments and to date only 5 percent (495 students) have met the requirement by attaining a waiver.

Among student groups, 87 percent of economically disadvantaged students (2,693 seniors), 74 percent of English learners (248 students), and 73 percent of students with disabilities (752 students) have met the graduation requirement and are eligible to graduate this spring.

Further, our data show that the dropout rate for the Class of 2014 continues to be lower than is typical up to this point in the senior year. Based on the most recent assessment results, we also know that the rising senior class, the Class of 2015, is on track to be the

best-prepared class since we began administering the NECAP assessments in high school seven years ago.

In short, through your extraordinary commitment to providing extra support to students, we have shown that the vast majority of students, including students with disabilities and English learners, are fully capable of improving achievement in mathematics and showing what they know on a standardized assessment.

As we complete this first year of implementation of the Diploma System, we have received feedback from many in the education field, including teachers, school counselors, and you and your colleagues in administration. I am committed to working with you to make the improvements that we need to make in the process, including streamlining the administration of assessments, improving the waiver process, reducing the wait-time for students, and minimizing unintended student and system stress.

## **2. LEAs have authority to make waiver decisions**

As noted above, you and your teams have made tremendous progress this year in implementing the Diploma System and in preparing your students for college and careers. As anticipated, the vast majority of students have met the Diploma System requirements through success on the NECAP assessments, with only 5 percent of our students meeting these requirements through the waiver process, as of May 1. I realize, however, that you may be in the early stages of implementing the waiver process in your LEA. Therefore, I want to take this opportunity to clarify a few key points about the criteria for waivers, the waiver process, and the role of RIDE relative to monitoring the process.

*Decisions about whether and when to grant waivers are yours to make.* The waiver process is designed to be a local decision, made as close as possible to the students and to the educators who are best able to ascertain student proficiency. The Secondary School Regulations require that students demonstrate their proficiency on our 9-10 grade-span standards. Schools and districts have the authority to determine whether students have met these 9-10 grade-span standards in each core subject area, including mathematics and reading.

The Secondary School Regulations also afford you with wide latitude as you make your decisions about granting waivers. RIDE has issued broad guidance intended to aid in your decision-making process. That guidance gives examples of some of the means through which you can make waiver decisions; the guidance does not obligate you to a single process or a single set of criteria for granting waivers.

You are required to keep records on your waiver process and on the students who have received waivers. We know that, at this time, the granting of waivers is relatively rare. In the future, as part of an overall review of the Diploma System, we may seek to collect data from you on waiver implementation. We do not intend to use data on the granting of waivers to describe or to categorize the performance of any individual LEA.

### **3. Highlander Institute announces blended-learning fellowship; application deadline is May 24**

We at RIDE have been working closely with The Highlander Institute to advance the use of technology, digital learning, and blended learning in Rhode Island schools. The Highlander Institute has launched [Fuse RI](#) – a statewide initiative for sharing,

implementing, evaluating, and scaling technology usage and blended learning in schools across the state. Created by, with, and for Rhode Island educators, the project will curate and disseminate best practices and resources emerging from our state.

In order to scale this work to all LEAs across Rhode Island, the Highlander Institute is launching a two-year blended-learning fellowship called the Fuse RI Fellowship. I encourage all interested Rhode Island educators to apply online, at:

[www.highlanderinstitute.org/fuseri/](http://www.highlanderinstitute.org/fuseri/).

Applications are being accepted now through Saturday, **May 24**.

This project is supported by [The Learning Accelerator](#) and aims to develop expertise and enthusiasm among Rhode Island teachers and to encourage LEAs to incorporate blended learning and technology into their classrooms and curricula.

#### **4. Students seeking information about courses in financial literacy**

I recently had the pleasure of meeting with some wonderful students from East Greenwich High School who are interested in spreading the word on the importance of financial literacy. These students have been consulting with Pat Page, a business educator at East Greenwich High and our 2014 Teacher of the Year. I think we can agree that knowledge and skills about personal finance, savings, and investments will certainly prepare students for success in life beyond high school. I am open to ideas for expanding opportunities to study financial literacy in our schools, though I believe that adding financial literacy to your course

offerings or incorporating this topic in your curriculum should be a local decision. To help the students and me gather more information about opportunities available to study financial literacy across the state, may I request that you answer a few brief questions in a survey? (Including the name of your LEA is optional, but we would love to have your LEA name in case we want to follow up for further information.) You can access the survey at:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/5YFH6CN>

## **5. Rhode Island students honored for volunteer service**

Two Rhode Island students have received recognition this year from the Prudential Spirit of Community Awards, which recognize outstanding volunteer service among students in high school and middle school. Kelly Graziano, a 6<sup>th</sup> grader at the Nicholas A. Ferri Middle School, in Johnston, was honored for organizing a team of students that raised nearly \$6,000 for the Providence Animal Rescue League. John Perino, a sophomore at Westerly High School, was honored as a co-founder of Turn Grease Into Fuel, which collects cooking oil from restaurant and has donated more than \$100,000 in biofuel to keep more than 200 families warm through the winter. Congratulations, Kelly and John, on your outstanding volunteer service to the community!

**From RIDE**

***Assessments:***

## **6. PARCC posts K-2 Model Content Frameworks and K-1 Formative Tasks for educator feedback**

Last Tuesday, the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) released for public feedback a set of draft K-2 Model Content Frameworks. These frameworks will assist educators who wish to use them in implementing the Common Core State Standards in the early grades, and the frameworks also will guide the development of formative tasks and diagnostic tools. The frameworks – one for mathematics and one for English language arts/literacy – were developed by PARCC state representatives, the PARCC Inc. staff, educators, and experts in standards and formative assessments.

The frameworks serve to clarify areas of emphasis in each grade and also to clarify what changes in the standards from one grade to the next. PARCC had previously published frameworks for grades 3 through 11 in English language arts/literacy and in mathematics, which served as foundational documents to guide assessment development. In grades kindergarten through 2, the frameworks will serve as guides for developing diagnostic tools and formative tasks that teachers can use to get real-time data on how their students are doing and on where they need help or enrichment.

PARCC also developed and has now released K-1 Formative Task Prototypes for feedback. More information, including background white papers on the formative-task prototypes, can be found on the PARCC website.

To review the frameworks and the formative-task prototypes, please visit the PARCC website, at:

[www.parcconline.org/parcc-model-content-frameworks](http://www.parcconline.org/parcc-model-content-frameworks) .

Feedback on the model content frameworks and on the formative-task prototypes will be accepted through the feedback surveys on the PARCC website until **May 30**.

**7. Eighth-grade technology-assessment testing window closes May 23; webinars on reading, interpreting results scheduled for June**

All students take the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills Assessment one time during the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. LEAs are reminded that the testing window for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills Assessment closes on **May 23**.

Two webinars will be held on June 4 to help proctors retrieve the appropriate level of student, class, school, or district reports; read and interpret 21st Century Skills Assessment data contained in the reports; and apply the results to instructional or programmatic decision-making. Click the links below to register for one of the webinars:

- [8 a.m. - Wednesday, June 4, 2014](#)
- [3 p.m. - Wednesday, June 4, 2014](#)

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

Further information about the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills Assessment can be found on the [RIDE website](#).

**8. By May 30, RIDE seeks reports on number of students to take PARCC by computer, on paper— *Action Item***

In preparation for our first operational administration of PARCC assessments during the coming school year (2014-15), RIDE is requesting that all LEAs submit information on the number of students in each school who will be participating in paper- and computer-based testing. An excel file and instructions can be found at:

[www.ride.ri.gov/PARCC](http://www.ride.ri.gov/PARCC).

Please submit completed files to [PARCC@ride.ri.gov](mailto:PARCC@ride.ri.gov) by **May 30**. If you have any questions about this request, please contact Phyllis Lynch, at 222-4693 or [PARCC@ride.ri.gov](mailto:PARCC@ride.ri.gov).

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

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