

**Commissioner's Weekly Field Memo
Friday, June 14, 2013**

Notes from Commissioner Gist

1. Commissioner releases statement of [Birch Vocational](#) program settlement agreement
2. Superintendents urged to share information about [differentiated evaluation model](#)
3. Date to be determined for release of 2013 [School Classifications](#)

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

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From the U.S. Department of Education

6. U.S. Department of Education announces [Principal Ambassador Fellowships](#)

Attachments to this Field Memo

Action Item Calendar

- June 25: [EIS data](#) report due
 - June 25: [Final Title I](#) eRIDE report due
 - June 25: [Final homeless](#) data due
 - June 25: Principal [roster-verification](#) deadline
 - July 1: [Evaluation](#) surveys due
 - July 15: [Housing-aid reimbursement](#) forms due
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Notes from Commissioner Gist

1. Commissioner releases statement of Birch Vocational program settlement agreement

I released this statement after we signed a settlement agreement regarding the education of students with developmental disabilities at the Birch Vocational program, in Providence:

As Commissioner of Education in Rhode Island, I remain committed to providing all of our students with multiple pathways that lead toward graduation or toward earning certificates that will prepare them for careers. I am glad that, along with several of our partner agencies, we have signed an agreement with the U.S. Department of Justice to

ensure that the Providence Public Schools provide opportunities and support to help students with developmental disabilities in their quest for lives of independence, dignity, and accomplishment. We take our commitment under this agreement seriously, and we will continue to work with the Providence School Department to make sure that all students receive the education and career preparation that they need and deserve.

Over the past 10 years, we at the R.I. Department of Education have made two formal site visits to the Birch Vocational program at Mount Hope High School, in Providence. In our Providence report (2012) on School Support Systems for students with disabilities, we found that the Birch Vocational program at Mount Pleasant High School “provides students with an individualized education program” aligned with Rhode Island standards and that the program “provides students with functional vocational and career-related skills.”

We commended the program for its “individualized curriculum” based on Rhode Island standards, for the “collaborative and supportive staff in a small, community-like environment,” and for active parent involvement and outreach.

Though we did find that students had access to some community-based vocational experiences, we expressed concerns about the “lack of opportunities for students to access typical peers” and the limited number of vocational-workshop and community-based sites available to Birch students.

Although properly managed vocational workshops in schools violate no laws or regulations, we have discussed with the Providence School Department the fact that school-based vocational workshops are no longer considered a best practice in preparing students with disabilities for success beyond high school, and we have encouraged the school district to develop more partnerships that will prepare students for jobs and careers in growing fields in the Rhode Island economy.

To support this transition, RIDE has provided resources and services, including funds for a Regional Transition Coordinator and a seed grant to begin a Transition Academy for Providence students (housed at Johnson & Wales University). Since the Department of Justice began its investigation of sheltered workshops in Rhode Island, we have been working closely with Providence special education officials to address the issues at Birch and to provide supports and information for the students at Birch and for their families. We have assisted the district in identifying an employment agency to help students exiting Birch with securing employment, and we have connected the district to the transition-planning services for parents that the Rhode Island Parent Information Network provides.

The responsibility of the public school system is to provide academic and skill-preparation programs for students with disabilities to help them transition from school to independent living in the community. Throughout our state, there are innovative and high-quality transition programs that assist students. Rhode Island has received recognition for the quality of these programs and for effective partnerships with parent organizations that support

students through the transition process. Our goal is to ensure that all students with disabilities have access to the programs and support systems that they meet their individual needs and attain their aspirations.

2. Superintendents urged to share information about differentiated evaluation model

As professional educators committed to ensuring that we have excellent teachers in every classroom and excellent leaders in every school, I know that we agree about the importance of annual evaluations that provide all educators with guidance and feedback to improve teaching, learning, and leadership.

As a result of feedback from educators and in the spirit of partnership, we have worked together with the Rhode Island Model districts over the past several months to develop a differentiated model for educator evaluations that would maintain annual evaluations for all teachers but would establish new minimum requirements for classroom observations and evaluation conferences. Under this differentiated model, the minimum number of classroom observations and evaluation conferences is primarily determined by the teacher's final effectiveness rating from the previous year. We released this model last month.

In some of my recent conversations with teachers, however, I have become aware that many teachers are unaware of the differentiated model. If your LEA is using the Rhode Island Model for evaluations, I hope that you will share this information about the differentiated model with teachers in your community.

I am confident that these modifications leave intact the essential goals of the evaluation process, which include focusing on teaching and learning, emphasizing growth and achievement, improving student and educator performance, and annually measuring educator effectiveness. I am sure that we can continue working together to transform education in Rhode Island and to prepare all of our students for success.

A detailed description of all the modifications that we have agreed to implement (Differentiated Evaluation Process 5-17-13) is attached to this Field Memo.

3. Date to be determined for release of 2013 School Classifications

As you know, we had initially planned to release our 2013 School Classifications today (June 14). In last week's Field Memo, I notified you that we are postponing the release of classifications by two weeks. At this time, however, we have not set a date for the release of the classifications, so please keep your classification results confidential until we release the statewide information, at a date still to be determined.

Our Accountability and Classification System enables us to:

- focus on achievement gaps;
- diagnose school performance by identifying specific shortcomings and achievements at each school;
- provide each school with the specific support or intervention needed to improve student achievement and to close achievement gaps; and
- provide these schools with the ability to select interventions that respond to their context and their needs.

Our goal is to use the information we derive from our Accountability System to keep the public informed about our progress and to continue accelerating all schools toward greatness. I will inform you as soon as possible once we set a date for public release of the 2013 School Classifications.

From RIDE

Finances and grants:

4. RIDE seeking public comment on request to extend period of availability for SIG funds

You now have the opportunity to comment on our waiver request to extend the Fiscal Year 2009 School Improvement Grant (SIG) 1003(g) funding availability through the next (2013-14) school year. Specifically, RIDE is requesting a waiver of section 421(b) of the General Education Provisions Act (20 U.S.C. pp 1225(b)) to extend the period of funds availability of the Fiscal Year 2009 SIG 1003(g) funding.

We have posted our waiver request here:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Inside-RIDE/Transformation/SIGNoCostExtension-RhodeIsland-6.5.13.pdf>

Please submit comments on our request for this waiver to Courtney A. Paulding, at Courtney.Paulding@ride.ri.gov, no later than **June 21**.

Instruction:

5. RIDE seeks reports on mathematics interventions, reminds LEAs of Virtual Learning Math Modules opportunity

As a follow-up to our recent high-school visits, next week RIDE will ask each high school to send us another update on the mathematics-intervention strategies the school is providing for all students who received a 1 (substantially below proficient) on the math NECAP. This request for information will focus on your planned summer programming.

As you may be aware, one of the available strategies for mathematics support and instruction is the Virtual Learning Math Modules (VLMM), an online instructional tool that RIDE has developed. To make VLMM readily accessible to site coordinators and their students, our Office of Multiple Pathways has created a listserv to ensure regular and timely communication. This listserv will convey important information, timelines, and resources and it will also provide a forum sharing best practices. LEAs should be thinking now about scheduling students this summer and in the fall for participation in both the modules and in tutoring opportunities. The VLMM is a free resource that provides a much-needed math intervention strategy for all high-school students who have not yet met their state-assessment graduation requirements.

From the U.S. Department of Education

6. U.S. Department of Education announces Principal Ambassador Fellowships

Please see this notice from the U.S. Department of Education, and feel free to share this information with principals in your community:

The U.S. Department of Education is proud to announce that the first-ever Principal Ambassador Fellowship has officially launched!

The Principal Ambassador Fellowship has been modeled after the [Teacher Ambassador Fellowship](#) that the U. S. Department of Education has offered since 2008. Like the U.S. Department of Education Teaching Ambassador Fellows, Principal Ambassador Fellows will spend a year gaining greater knowledge of the content of key federal programs and policies and will share their expertise with federal staff members.

[Learn more about the fellowship and how principals can apply](#) before the **July 16** deadline.

From other organizations

RIDE will post this field memo on Tuesday, at:

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