

**Commissioner's Weekly Field Memo  
Friday, August 2, 2013**

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School Safety Assessment Final

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August 9: [Kindergarten-entry practices](#) survey due  
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### **Notes from Commissioner Gist**

#### **1. Innovation districts given approval for differentiated evaluations**

On Tuesday, I wrote to the superintendents and union leaders from the Rhode Island Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals in the six districts that are using the Innovation

Model for educator evaluations (Central Falls, Cranston, Pawtucket, Providence, West Warwick, and Woonsocket) regarding their proposal for a “differentiated” evaluation model. I am pleased to let you know that, after listening to input and feedback from the teachers and leaders in the Innovation districts and after considering the merits of their proposal, I have agreed to allow the Innovation districts to move to a differentiated evaluation system, similar to the differentiations in place in the Rhode Island Model for educator evaluations.

Under the differentiated evaluations that Innovation districts may use, all teachers who have received evaluations of effective or highly effective will receive going forward only one observation of classroom practice. Teachers will return to the full cycle of evaluation after three years or if they have a change in their effectiveness rating during the three-year cycle. I have encouraged the Innovation districts to analyze evaluation data for teachers in the lower half of the “effective” tier to determine if they may need additional observations or support, noting “teachers who have practice scores that placed them in the lower half of the Effectiveness rating would be well served by having more frequent opportunities to be supported by the observation process.”

All of us agree, however, on the importance of educator evaluations as a key initiative in providing feedback and support to all educators. We are committed to ensuring that we have excellent teachers in every classroom and excellent leaders in every school, and I look forward to continued conversations with our partners in the Innovation districts about how the evaluation process is working in our schools throughout the coming school year.

## 2. Resources available to teach children about online safety

The recent events in Portsmouth, in which a 14-year-old girl was allegedly abducted from her home by a 27-year-old man whom she had met on the Internet, serve as a painful reminder to us that we must help our students be vigilant about their safety and aware of the proper use of the Internet and social media.

Middletown Superintendent Kraeger has thoughtfully provided me with links to some websites that offer helpful information on talking with children and families about safety online:

### Safety

Tips: <http://www.ccu.ri.gov/childsafety/justforkids.php>

### Online Communication

Safety: <http://www.ccu.ri.gov/computingsafely/communicationsafety.php>

### On Guard

Online: <http://www.onguardonline.gov/articles/0012-kids-and-socializing-online>

### PDF download Chatting with Kids About Being

Online: <http://www.onguardonline.gov/articles/pdf-0001.pdf>

### PAVE

Program: <http://www.partnershiptoaddressviolence.com/index.htm>

At RIDE, we have added a section devoted to online safety to the home page of the [thrive](#) website (which we manage in partnership with the Department of Health). My team at RIDE and

I will continue to look for ways to share resources regarding teaching children about online safety.

### **3. LEAs informed about safety assessments, model plan for school safety**

Please see this message from Jamia R. McDonald, Executive Director, Rhode Island Emergency Management, and me, which we will also send to all police and fire chiefs:

In response to the tragic events in Newtown, Connecticut, in December, Governor Chafee gathered members of his Cabinet with responsibility for education and public safety to perform a review of school safety in Rhode Island. Additionally, the General Assembly has addressed this important issue and passed legislation, which the Governor recently signed into law.

It is now critically important that we have state and local education and safety officials move forward together to assure that our combined expertise, efforts, and resources are used to make sure that if such a horrific crime were attempted in Rhode Island we would be prepared to take immediate action to protect our students, school personnel, and public safety personnel.

We ask that you please familiarize yourself with the recently passed school safety legislation (2013 - H 5941 Substitute A, and 2013 - S 0801 Substitute B). The comprehensive legislation includes two significant requirements: 1) a school safety assessment, and 2) a model school safety plan.

*School Safety Assessment*

The first requirement that has been enacted is that each school district conducts a school safety assessment in conjunction with local police, fire, school safety team, and any other expert(s) as necessary within 30 days of passage of the act. Please note that assessments conducted within the year prior to passage of this legislation (July 11, 2013) shall satisfy this requirement. In our ongoing efforts to support our districts, we have developed a standard format for this assessment to support compliance. The Rhode Island School Safety Assessment form is attached. We recognize the need to complete this work as quickly as possible and are committed to working with you and local safety officials in the coming months.

### *Model School Safety Plan*

The second requirement is for the state to develop a model school safety plan for use by the local districts. The Rhode Island Emergency Management Agency will assemble a work group of local, state, and national experts and stakeholders to begin this process. This will be a comprehensive model plan. This model plan will provide the guidance necessary in order that each district and school can tailor the best preparation, response, and recovery activities as is suited to that individual setting and it will help you determine what, if any, infrastructure issues may need to be addressed. It is our intent to have the model plan completed early this fall.

We are currently in our planning stages, and we are identifying the best means to assure your involvement and keep you all informed of our progress. Please expect further communications on these topics. In the interim, if you have any comments, questions, or concerns, please contact Stephen Conard, School Safety Coordinator, Rhode Island

Emergency Management Agency, at 946-9996 or [stephen.a.conard.nfg@mail.mil](mailto:stephen.a.conard.nfg@mail.mil) .

#### **4. RIDE provides guidance on Diploma System waiver policies**

The Rhode Island Diploma System is designed to ensure that students who earn a high-school diploma are ready for success in postsecondary education and in challenging careers. One of the components of our Diploma System is the requirement that high-school students must succeed on the state assessments (NECAP) – attaining the level of partial proficiency on 10<sup>th</sup>-grade standards *or* demonstrating improvement when they take the test again in their senior year – in order to earn a diploma. We do understand, though, that for some students a statewide assessment may not be the most appropriate way to measure their proficiency, and we certainly have no intention of withholding a diploma from any student who is ready for success beyond high school. For that reason, our regulations also include the opportunity for students to seek a waiver from the requirement that they succeed on state assessments.

Under our regulations, LEAs are responsible for developing and implementing a waiver process. As part of this responsibility, LEAs must:

- adopt, publish, and communicate a waiver protocol, as part of their graduation policy;
- establish roles and responsibilities; and
- evaluate the fairness and consistency with which they apply the waiver protocol to all eligible students.

To help you comply with these provisions, we have developed [guidance](#) and model documents. These documents can provide you with a waiver policy that you can adopt, or you can use these documents as guidance in developing your own waiver policy. In the coming weeks, we will provide additional guidance, including sample profiles of students who are and who are not eligible for a waiver, information around the use of the ACCESS for ELLs test as part of the evidence in determining eligibility for a waiver, and other technical assistance.

We are providing you with this guidance well in advance of your granting any waivers so as to give you time to adopt a waiver policy and to establish waiver processes.

Please keep in mind that, except in rare cases, students are *not* eligible to seek a waiver until they have been through two administrations of the state assessment and have participated in the intervention activities described in their progress plan. The earliest that students may apply for a waiver is after they receive the scores from the second administration assessments, that is, in early spring of their senior year. Please also note that any student who seeks a waiver:

- must have met all other graduation requirements,
- must demonstrate the required level of proficiency in mathematics or reading; and
- must have valid evidence demonstrating the required level of proficiency.

The authority to make the final decision to grant a waiver rests with the Superintendent, Head of School, or Charter Director. Families and students may appeal waiver decisions through the established appeals process. RIDE may review LEA waiver policies and protocols as part of our Diploma System Review process.

I hope that you find this guidance that we are providing to be helpful, as we continue working together to prepare all of our students for success.

You can access the guidance on our website, at:

[http://www.ride.ri.gov/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Diplo  
ma-System/Waiver-Protocol-Final.pdf](http://www.ride.ri.gov/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Diplo<br/>ma-System/Waiver-Protocol-Final.pdf)

## From RIDE

### ***Educator Evaluations:***

#### **5. New online module provides overview of Support Professionals Evaluation and Support System**

A new online module that provides an overview of the Rhode Island Model Support Professionals Evaluation and Support System is now available on the RIDE website. The objective of the module is to introduce evaluators to the model and clarify expectations for gradual implementation. A brief survey follows the module and allows participants to provide feedback on future training needs. The training can also be shared with support professionals, and it complements the recently released Support Professionals Guidebook.

The *Introduction to the Support Professionals Model* online module is available on the RIDE website, at:

[http://www.ride.ri.gov/TeachersAdministrators/EducatorEv  
aluation/OnlineModules.aspx](http://www.ride.ri.gov/TeachersAdministrators/EducatorEv<br/>aluation/OnlineModules.aspx).

#### **6. Evaluators encouraged to attend training sessions**

RIDE recently sent all superintendent, heads of school, and charter-school leaders their evaluation-training data. To date, attendance at training sessions has been strong and the feedback on the quality of the various trainings has been extremely positive. We are halfway through the training schedule, and seats remain available at almost all of the training sessions, including the voluntary workshops for teachers. RIDE encourages all school and district leaders to monitor their evaluation-training data closely and to ensure that evaluators, in particular, attend the necessary training sessions.

Additional information about the available evaluation training sessions, and workshops, including direct links to registration, are available on the RIDE website, at:

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

#### **7. LEAs asked to confirm if they will use EPSS in coming school year**

On July 19, the 2012-13 evaluation cycle in the Educator Performance and Support System (EPSS) closed through an automated process. Any forms that were not completed were automatically finalized at this time. Teachers and administrators will maintain access to their own records when the system goes live, but they will no longer be editable by the educator or by any assigned evaluators. Evaluation forms for the coming school year (2013-14) will go live in the EPSS next week, and priority will be given to charter public schools, state-operated schools, and districts that have already confirmed their intent to use the

system. If you intend to use the EPSS next year, but have yet to officially confirmed this, please e-mail [Greg.Stewart@ride.ri.gov](mailto:Greg.Stewart@ride.ri.gov).

As a reminder, all LEAs are required to use some features of the EPSS (e.g., Roster Verification and viewing teacher growth scores). LEAs that are undecided about using the EPSS next year and would like additional information may contact [Sandra.Forand@ride.ri.gov](mailto:Sandra.Forand@ride.ri.gov). RIDE has also created a one-page document that highlights the improvements to the system for the coming school year. To download the EPSS Improvements document, please go to the RIDE website, at:

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

For additional information about the EPSS closeout and the transition to the 2013-14 school year, please see the two-page overview on the RIDE website, at:

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

### ***Assessments:***

#### **8. NECAP test-coordinator training workshops scheduled**

Next month, RIDE will offer three face-to-face workshops for district- and school-level test coordinators. The workshops will provide the important details associated with the coordination and administration of the October 2013 NECAP tests for grades 3 through 8 and 11. These workshops will also provide attendees with updates on test-security policies and procedures as well as

with opportunities to ask questions. Dates, times, locations, and registration instructions for the test-administration workshops are included below. Please sign up for only one workshop:

- September 9 @ 1 – 3 p.m., Providence Marriott Downtown, 1 Orms St.
- September 10 @ 9 – 11 a.m., Crowne Plaza Hotel, 801 Greenwich Ave., Warwick
- September 10 @ 1 – 3 p.m., Crowne Plaza Hotel, 801 Greenwich Ave., Warwick

To register for a workshop, go to:

<http://iregister.measuredprogress.org/SessionList.aspx>

You may also register in person on the day of each workshop 30 minutes before the scheduled start time.

For those unable to attend one of the face-to-face workshops, we will schedule an interactive WebEx online workshop at a later date, and we will also post the WebEx on the RIDE website for later viewing. We will announce this workshop in the Field Memo once details are finalized.

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

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

## 9. Application, materials posted for 2013 Race to the Top – District competition

The U.S. Department of Education has posted the final application and other materials for the 2013 Race to the Top-District competition at <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-district/>.

The purpose of this approximately \$120-million program is to build upon the lessons learned from previous state- and district-level competitions and to support bold, locally directed improvements in teaching and learning that will directly improve student achievement and educator effectiveness. Applicants are invited to demonstrate how they can personalize education for all students in their schools. The U.S. Department of Education plans to support high-quality proposals from applicants across a varied set of school districts, including rural and non-rural as well as those already participating in a Race to the Top grant and those not currently participating.

Webinars will be offered over the coming weeks to provide technical assistance (a schedule will be posted at <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-district/>), and interested districts are requested to submit their intent to apply by August 23. Applications are due **October 3**. Awards will be announced no later than December 31.

Any questions may be directed to [2013.racetothetop.district@ed.gov](mailto:2013.racetothetop.district@ed.gov).

**From other state agencies**

**10. Boards of Canvassers to recruit high-school students to work at polls during primaries, elections**

Please see this message from Robert Kando, Executive Director of the Board of Elections:

To promote awareness of the election process and expand the prospective pool of election officials, “Rhode Island General Law 17-11-12.1 High school election officials” was enacted. The statute authorizes the use of qualified high-school juniors and seniors as poll workers.

The Board of Canvassers in each community is seeking to recruit students who meet the statutory criteria to work as poll workers. Students will be compensated as poll workers for attending the training class and working the day of the election, except for those students who wish to take on this assignment to complete their community-service graduation requirements. A statewide primary is scheduled in September of 2014, followed by the November general election.

The Board of Canvassers in your community will contact your office in the spring of 2014, to request the name of the high-school principals and teachers and their contact information, including e-mail addresses, to begin the recruitment drive.

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

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

