

**Commissioner's Weekly Field Memo  
Friday, August 7, 2015**

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August 21: School Prayer assurances due (see [below](#))

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**Notes from Commissioner Wagner**

- 1. Commissioner Wagner: Rhode Island is a great place to be for education right now**

I have enjoyed my first week as Education Commissioner, and I am pleased that so many people have welcomed me

to Rhode Island with such strong support for public education. During my first days here, I have been able to visit summer learning programs in Providence, met with the excellent team at RIDE, and joined the school principals at their annual summer conference. I look forward to meeting later this month with the superintendents' association.

All the pieces are in place for great things to happen in Rhode Island. Our Governor recognizes that education, coupled with economic development, should be our highest priorities. Our Governor and legislators provided funds for key education initiatives, such as early learning, early college experiences, and school construction. Our statewide Ambassador Design Team facilitated the draft of a five-year strategic plan based on input from thousands of Rhode Islanders. Our state is a great place to be for education.

I believe that everything in education starts with great teaching, high expectations for students, and family partnerships. We never really know what our kids can do until we hold them to high expectations.

I firmly believe that we make better decisions when we listen and learn from a diversity of perspectives, including those of teachers, other educational leaders, and students and their families. I look forward to this ongoing partnership.

## **2. Assurances on constitutionally protected prayer due by August 21 – *Action Item***

Each year, we must submit to the U.S. Department of Education a list of any LEAs that have not certified to us their compliance with the Guidance on Constitutionally Protected Prayer in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools, which you can find here:

[http://www.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/religionandschools/prayer\\_guidance.html](http://www.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/religionandschools/prayer_guidance.html)

This guidance provides information on current law concerning constitutionally protected prayer in public schools.

As you know, no policy or practice in this state in any way interferes with the constitutionally protected rights of schoolchildren.

Once you have read the guidance, it is required by law that you certify to me annually in writing that no policy in your LEA prevents or otherwise denies participation in constitutionally protected prayer in your schools.

Please send your certification to Elliot Krieger, in the Office of the Commissioner, at [elliot.krieger@ride.ri.gov](mailto:elliot.krieger@ride.ri.gov), using the subject line “School Prayer.” You may send a signed

attachment or you may send your certification in the body of an email. If you prefer to fax your certification, you can send the fax to 222-6178, attn.: Elliot Krieger.

Please submit your certification by Friday, **August 21**.

You may copy this language and use it to make your certification, and you may adjust the language as appropriate (for example, if your LEA was not in existence during the referenced years):

**Certification of Compliance with the  
Law on Constitutionally Protected Prayer**

This is to certify that no policy of my LEA prevents or otherwise denies participation in constitutionally protected prayer in public elementary and secondary schools as set forth in the “Guidance on Constitutionally Protected Prayer in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools,” issued February 7, 2003. This assurance applies to the school years 2013-14, 2014-15, and the coming school year, i.e, 2015-16.

Name:

Name of LEA:

Please feel free to contact Elliot if you have any questions on this matter.

## From RIDE

### ***Assessments:***

#### **3. RIDE to hold meetings on PARCC results release**

In preparation for the release of the PARCC results this fall, RIDE will be hosting PARCC Results Communication meetings. These meetings are designed to provide school and district leaders with communication resources designed for parents, educators, and the community. RIDE will provide information on timelines for the release and will share the resources and tools available. You will have the opportunity to review the materials and to discuss with other school leaders how you will customize and use the materials within your LEA.

Please register for one of the sessions listed below:

*Northern Rhode Island Collaborative (Room # 104B)*  
640 George Washington Highway, Lincoln

**August 19, 9 to 11 a.m.**

<https://www.eride.ri.gov/workshopReg/ViewWorkshop.aspx?workshopid=1303>

**August 19, 1 to 3 p.m.**

<https://www.eride.ri.gov/workshopReg/ViewWorkshop.aspx?workshopid=1304>

*New England Institute of Technology - East Greenwich*  
One New England Tech Blvd. (Room S216), East Greenwich

**August 25, 9 to 11 a.m.**

<https://www.eride.ri.gov/workshopReg/ViewWorkshop.aspx?workshopid=1305>

**August 25, 1 to 3 p.m.**

<https://www.eride.ri.gov/workshopReg/ViewWorkshop.aspx?workshopid=1306>

*Middletown - Oliphant Administration Building*  
26 Oliphant Lane (MSP Conf. Rm.)

**August 27, 9 to 11 a.m.**

<https://www.eride.ri.gov/workshopReg/ViewWorkshop.aspx?workshopid=1307>

***School Construction:***

**4. Governor Raimondo to launch School Building Authority at event on Tuesday (August 11) at 11 a.m. (new start time)**

RIDE invites you to join Governor Gina M. Raimondo, Commissioner Ken Wagner, and others for the launch of the School Building Authority (SBA) and the release of the \$20-million Capital Fund application, which will take place on **Tuesday** (August 11), at Kickemuit Middle School, 525 Child St., Warren. Registration, auditorium tours, and student workshops will occur between 9:30 a.m. and 11 a.m. Governor Raimondo's launch of the new \$20-million Capital Fund will take place in the auditorium at **11 a.m.** *(Note that this is a new time for this event)*

A technical-assistance session focusing on the new application process and School Building Authority Capital Fund will be held from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Superintendents, business managers, and facilities managers are encouraged to attend the technical-assistance session. You can find more information at:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Funding-and-Finance-Wise-Investments/School-Facilities/School-Construction-Program/SBA-Launch-agenda.pdf>

***Data Collection:***

## **5. Personnel Assignment Submission opens**

RIDE is pleased to announce the opening of the Personnel Assignment Submission (PAS) for the reporting school year of 2015-16. Please review and update the work assignments for your certified staff in the PAS portal, located in eRIDE. Beginning in October, RIDE will review the assignment information for accuracy.

Please submit a ticket to the RIDE helpdesk (<http://support.ride.ri.gov>) if you have any questions about the PAS.

### ***Evaluations:***

## **6. Reminder: Four-day workshop for new evaluators scheduled for August 17-20**

All staff members new to the Rhode Island Model and planning on evaluating teachers or support professionals in the coming school year are required to successfully complete the RIDE academy on evaluations. The training at the four-day workshop will focus on preparing evaluators to accurately observe and rate practice, to lead professional feedback conversations, to set and approve Student Learning/Outcome Objectives, and to engage with the Educator Performance and Support System. The academy will be held from August 17 through 30 in the

conference room of the Coventry Administration Building, at 1675 Flat River Road. Register at:

[https://www.eride.ri.gov/default\\_secure.asp](https://www.eride.ri.gov/default_secure.asp).

If you have any questions about this academy, please contact Lauren Matlach, at [lauren.matlach@ride.ri.gov](mailto:lauren.matlach@ride.ri.gov).

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

### **7. Education, Agriculture Secretaries provide information on free breakfast, lunch programs**

Please see this August 5 letter from Education Secretary Arne Duncan and Agriculture Secretary Thomas J. Vilsack on the Community Eligibility Provision of the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs:

Dear Superintendents:

The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and the School Breakfast Program (SBP) nationwide now include a new universal meal service option, the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), which has been phased in by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) over the past several years. CEP was created through the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 and allows qualifying high-poverty local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools to offer breakfast and

lunch at no cost to all students without requiring families to complete an annual household application. CEP is a powerful tool to both improve child nutrition and reduce administrative burdens at the LEA and school levels. We applaud the thousands of LEAs already participating in CEP for providing the nutrition and energy children need to be healthy and ready to learn. In addition, we would like to take this opportunity to encourage all eligible LEAs to consider CEP for the 2015-16 school year.

As of the 2014-15 school year, the first year that the provision was available nationwide, CEP has been successfully implemented in approximately 14,000 schools, reaching more than 6-million students. The feedback from teachers, administrators, parents, and students has been overwhelmingly positive. Participating schools have had few administrative burdens and simultaneously experienced benefits including higher school meals participation.

On May 1, 2015, each state released a list of schools eligible to participate in CEP (available at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/community-eligibility-provision-status-school-districts-and-schools-state>). We encourage you to review this list, and the data available to you from your school nutrition department, and determine whether CEP is

a good fit for schools in your LEA. Many administrators have found it helpful to speak to another LEA that has successfully implemented CEP. This could be beneficial to you as you make the decision. If you have already implemented CEP in some of your schools, consider bringing in more schools to expand access to school meals for children in your LEA. LEAs must apply to their state-level agency administering the federal school-meal programs by **August 31** to ensure implementation of CEP for the 2015-16 school year. LEAs that need more time to transition to CEP may contact their state agency to find out if it will accept a mid-year application as permitted by USDA.

Eligible schools or LEAs that choose to participate in CEP receive the federal free reimbursement rate for up to 100 percent of meals served, depending on the school's or LEA's percentage of "identified students"—students who automatically qualify for free meals based on their family's enrollment in other programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Head Start. If enrollment in your schools or LEA comprises 40 percent or more identified students, they are eligible to participate in CEP. A higher percentage of identified students results in additional federal funds, which may be necessary to allow your school to serve all students without additional local funds. Eligibility

may be determined on a district-wide basis, for a group of schools within an LEA, or for individual schools.

Although the USDA administers federal school-meal programs, we recognize that NSLP data are used in a variety of contexts under programs administered by the U.S. Department of Education (ED), and CEP has implications for those uses. Perhaps most significantly for schools, programs operated under Title I, Part A (Title I) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended, often use NSLP data to carry out certain Title I requirements, including in determining school eligibility and allocations. ED has developed, and recently updated, guidance (available at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/updated-title-i-guidance-schools-electing-community-eligibility>) to help LEAs understand how they can successfully implement Title I requirements using NSLP data that incorporate CEP data. Fortunately, a variety of schools across the country have successfully navigated this issue, and our staff have best practices they can share with you. If you have questions about how this guidance applies to your circumstances, please send them to [OESEguidancedocument@ed.gov](mailto:OESEguidancedocument@ed.gov). ED has also developed guidance regarding CEP and Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (available at <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/idea/memo>

[sdcltrs/school-lunch-program.pdf](#)). This guidance clarifies that when allocating the portion of LEAs' IDEA Part B subgrants based on “the relative numbers of children living in poverty,” states may continue to use NSLP data for LEAs in which all or some schools participate in CEP. In addition, the guidance clarifies that states continue to have the discretion to use other methods for measuring poverty.

We encourage eligible LEAs to visit USDA's website for additional tools and resources, including updated guidance on a range of CEP-related policies and practices. Resources are available on Title I, as well as on the federal e-rate program, state and local funding issues, and strategies for successful implementation of CEP (available at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/school-meals/community-eligibility-provision>). As schools and LEAs elect to participate in CEP, these materials can serve as a resource to engage with local officials and the whole school community about plans to elect CEP. Additionally, your state educational agency and state Child Nutrition Offices are good resources for specific CEP eligibility questions.

USDA and ED strongly support CEP, which gives students the opportunity to learn and thrive by ensuring that every needy child receives healthy school meals at no charge. Thank you for your attention to this critically important issue, and, to

each of you, best wishes for the upcoming school year.

Sincerely,

Thomas J. Vilsack  
Secretary of Agriculture

Arne Duncan  
Secretary of Education

### **From other organizations**

#### **8. BANANAGRAMS announces its 2016 School Challenge**

Please see this message from the makers of BANANAGRAMS:

The BANANAGRAMS Challenge provides students with an enjoyable and interactive way to develop language skills as they play and learn with words. Fully supported by the makers of the word game BANANAGRAMS, the Challenge is open to students in grades 4, 5, and 6 and is completely free to enter for any Rhode Island school.

For more information and to register your school for the Challenge, which will run in January and February, go to:

<http://bananagramschallenge.com/>

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

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