

Commissioner's Weekly Field Memo
Friday, August 9, 2013

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Notes from Commissioner Gist

1. Students benefiting from summer mathematics programs

As we approach the start of the 2013-14 school year, I am proud that every high school in Rhode Island has provided additional instruction and support to rising seniors who scored “substantially below proficient” on the NECAP assessments in their junior year. As you know, these students must show improvement when they retake the NECAP in their senior year (or show proficiency on one of the other approved assessments) in order to be eligible to earn a diploma and graduate with their class. Thank you for stepping up to support these students!

We have just concluded the Summer Success Program, which we have administered with our partners at the Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI). This program served about 100 students from three districts (Cranston, Providence, and Warwick) plus some charter public schools. The students not only received

support in mathematics; they also earned three transferable College Success credits, at no cost to them. The faculty at CCRI was extremely professional, competent, and accommodating throughout the entire program. This week, Rhode Island Public Radio ran a terrific [report](#) on this program, which I think you might enjoy listening to and reading.

Other summer mathematics programs are getting under way this month, including two involving faculty members at Rhode Island College. These programs and this level of support is unprecedented in our state – and would never have taken shape except for the higher expectations that form the foundation of the Rhode Island Diploma System. I believe that, with sufficient instruction and support, our students can improve their achievement and meet all graduation requirements. I am also sure that the students who are improving their skills in mathematics will be far more ready than they would have been for success beyond high school. Challenging as this initiative has been for all of us, in the end it will be in the best interest of our students, which is what really matters.

2. LEAs will receive notifications about participation in PARCC field-testing

I am very pleased to report to you that the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessments are on schedule for field-testing during the coming school year and for full implementation in the spring of 2015. As an active member of the PARCC consortium, I am confident that the PARCC assessments are of high quality, that they align with the Common Core State Standards, that they involve critical thinking and problem-solving, and that they will lead to timely

reports to families and teachers in order to guide instruction and advance student achievement.

To help ensure that our transition to the PARCC assessments proceeds smoothly, we have agreed that Rhode Island will participate in the PARCC field-testing in the Spring of 2014. I will be sending a letter, similar to this message, to all district coordinators, to provide information about our participation in the field-testing.

Approximately 28,000 Rhode Island students will participate in the field-testing; however, no student will be required to take an entire version of a test. Districts selected for field-testing will receive a letter from the PARCC consortium by the end of the month that will provide you with detailed information about the field-test selection process (including selected schools, grades, subject areas, number of classes, and assessment component) and some talking points about field-test administration. The letter will also include a survey link for you to complete to confirm your participation in the field-testing. PARCC will select some LEAs for administering online versions of the field-test; others will administer the paper-and-pencil version. The field-testing will take place from March 24 through April 11 for the Performance-Based Assessment and May 5 through June 6 for the End-of-Year Assessment . (Please note that there will be no field-testing of the End-of-Year Assessment in grades 4, 8, and 11 so as to avoid a conflict with the NECAP Science Assessments.)

Throughout the fall, LEAs selected for the field-test will receive information directly from Pearson, the vendor that is coordinating the field-testing. LEAs not selected for field-testing will have access to an online practice test at about the same time that field-testing occurs.

I want to assure you that, throughout the process of field-testing, the R.I. Department of Education staff will be available to provide you with support. Dr. Kevon Tucker-Seeley, of our Office of Instruction, Assessment, and Curriculum, will coordinate all aspects of the field-testing, and he will be your primary contact. If you have questions about the field-testing after you review the attached documents, please feel free to call Kevon, at 222-8494 or e-mail him at kevon.tucker-seeley@ride.ri.gov .

For the past three years, Rhode Island educators have been working hard on making the transition to the Common Core State Standards, and I am confident that the Rhode Island students and educators will be ready for the Common Core and for the assessments aligned with the Common Core. Successful field-testing next spring will help ensure that we are using world-class standards and assessments as we work together to transform education in Rhode Island.

3. Differentiated evaluations OK'd for Innovation Districts

Last week, I sent a notice in the Field Memo regarding the decision to allow the six districts using the Innovation Model for evaluations to use a “differentiated” evaluation model. Because of vacation schedules, some may have missed this notice, so I am repeating it in today’s Field Memo.

Here is the notice I sent on differentiated evaluations:

On Tuesday [July 30], 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.

At a principals' association meeting this week, I received some questions about the differentiated evaluation model. Please keep in mind, as noted above, that effective teachers who receive fewer classroom observations under the differentiated model will go back to the full required number of observations after three years or if they have a change in their summative evaluation during the three-year cycle.

4. Race to the Top Steering Committee to celebrate Year 3 accomplishments

As we near the end of Year 3 of our Race to the Top initiative, we are engaged in preparing our annual report on the progress we have made to date on all the initiatives that the grant supports. Along with Colleen Jermain and Neil Steinberg, co-chairs of the Race to the Top Steering Committee, we invite you to attend the next Race to the Top Steering Committee meeting. At this meeting, we will celebrate our achievements during the third year of our four-year grant and we will engage in a discussion on what lies ahead in Year 4 and beyond. The meeting will take place at the Rhode Island Foundation, 1 Union Station, Providence, in the Rhode Island Room, on Monday, August 19, from 4:30 - 6:30 p.m. All of you have worked incredibly hard to implement the major policy initiatives and the teaching and learning practices that our Race to the Top funds support, and we would like to recognize your contributions and commitment.

All Race to the Top Steering Committee meetings are open to the public, so members of your team and your community who would like to attend are welcome as well.

Responses are not required, but in order to help Steering Committee get a head count for planning, please RSVP here:

<<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/RTTSCAUG2013>>

From RIDE

Legal:

5. RIDE issues decisions, advisory on life certification, residency

RIDE has issued these two decisions and this advisory from the Deputy Commissioner and General Counsel:

Teacher has not established that certain courses were the equivalent of graduate-level coursework needed for qualifying for life certificate:

http://www2.ride.ri.gov/applications/RideDirectory/DOCS/2013/006-13_S.Pamula_v._RIDE_073013.pdf

Residency determination was not based on student's best interests but rather on location of domicile:

http://www2.ride.ri.gov/applications/RideDirectory/DOCS/2013/018-13_RE_Residency_of_B._DOE_073013.pdf

Advisory from Deputy Commissioner regarding resolution of school-residency issues:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Inside-RIDE/Legal/Commissioners-Advisories/Residency-Memo-7-30-13.pdf>

Surveys:

6. Kindergarten-entry practices survey deadline extended to Wednesday (August 14) – *Action Item*

The deadline to complete and submit the kindergarten-entry practices survey has been extended to **Wednesday** (August 14). Your input is critical, as RIDE will use the information provided to inform the development of a new Kindergarten Entry Assessment tool. The survey should be completed by the administrator or curriculum coordinator most familiar each school's current kindergarten-entry policies and practices.

RIDE e-mailed the survey directly to district and school administrators on July 30. The survey should take no more than 20 minutes to complete, and the data will go directly to EDC, which will analyze the data and report findings back to us. The results of the study will be available this fall. Please complete and submit the survey by Wednesday (August 14). If you have questions about the survey, please contact Judi Stevenson-Garcia, at 222-8176 or Judi.Stevenson-Garcia@ride.ri.gov.

Technology:

7. Wireless Classroom Initiative team contacting LEAs that have received at least 3 vendor proposals

The Wireless Classroom Initiative team is now contacting LEAs for whom at least 3 vendor proposals have been received. A meeting

to review and score received proposals will be scheduled. Given that the August 1 deadline has passed, any outstanding proposals will be considered late, unless the vendor has received a formal extension from the LEA and RIDE. Please do not hesitate to contact Cindy Brown, at Cynthia.Brown@ride.ri.gov , or our project mailbox, at WirelessInitiative@ride.ri.gov ,if you have any questions about the Wireless Classroom Initiative.

Evaluations:

8. The 2013-14 evaluation forms in EPSS are available

All evaluation-related forms (e.g., Student Learning Objective form, classroom-observation form) are now available in the Educator Performance and Support System (EPSS) for LEAs that have confirmed their intent to fully use the system during the coming school year. To date, approximately 30 LEAs have confirmed. Please note that LEAs that have not confirmed with RIDE will not have access to the forms. If you intend to use the EPSS this year but have yet to officially confirm, please e-mail Greg.Stewart@ride.ri.gov.

For LEAs that do not plan on fully using the EPSS to help manage the evaluation process, Word versions of the forms will be available next week on the RIDE website. You will be able to access the Word versions of the forms at:

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

RIDE will post this field memo on Tuesday, at:

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