

**Commissioner's Weekly Field Memo
Friday, November 1, 2013**

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Action Item Calendar

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November 12: Presidential Scholar nominations due (see [below](#))
December 6: [Textbook-reimbursement](#) forms due

Notes from Commissioner Gist

1. RIDE, district representatives present information on UCOA at national conference

Last week, several folks from RIDE and from several Rhode Island districts attended the Association of School Business Officials International Annual Meeting & Expo, in Boston, where they made a presentation on our reporting system and database on school finances, the Uniform Chart of Accounts (UCOA). By all accounts, the presentation was well received and led to a number of great follow-up questions. The delegates to the convention were intrigued by the depth of information available on our UCOA site and they were in awe about how our school districts are using the information, in combination with other data sets, to help ensure that we all are investing our tax dollars wisely to advance teaching and learning. We were proud to be able to showcase the great work being done, both in our districts and at RIDE, on behalf of students.

Our presentation team included representatives from three of our school districts: Paulina Silva, Director of Administration & Finance, Bristol Warren Regional; Raquel Pellerin, Director of Finance, Middletown; and Superintendent O'Brien, from Smithfield, as well as Jane Correia, Executive Director of RIASBO, who introduced the panel and presentation. Thank you for being part of this important work, which is helping us think about school financing dynamic new ways – and which is gaining recognition across the country as well. Building on these kudos, however, we are always trying to improve the UCOA system, including data collection, data validation, and the [public reporting](#) on our website. Cindy Brown, our Director of Statewide Efficiencies, is the contact for UCOA, and you can always e-mail her at

cynthia.brown@ride.ri.gov or you can send comments to our UCOA inbox: UCOA.efficiencies@ride.ri.gov .

2. Rhode Island gaining recognition for use of technology in schools

As you know, over the past two years we have made tremendous strides in Rhode Island toward introducing technology into our schools and across the curriculum. Our recent Innovation Powered by Technology Conference, as well as our two Innovation Powered by Technology Model School Grants, have gained us national recognition as a forward-thinking state in this transformative movement. Earlier this week, several RIDE staff members attended the 2013 iNACOL (the International Association for K-12 Online Learning) Blended and Online Learning Symposium: Transforming Education to Student-Centered Learning, where they led several workshops. One, in which RIDE staff members joined with Principal Gara Field of the Pleasant View Elementary School, in Providence, was on the topic of “Implementing Blended Learning.” Another an advanced workshop, in which we co-presented with representatives from Achieve and from the Kentucky Department of Education, was on the topic of “Shaping Policies to Advance Competency-Based Pathways.” As we move forward with such programs as our Wireless Classroom Initiative, which will bring wireless Internet Access to every classroom in the state, I appreciate your commitment to using technology to advance teaching and learning. It’s an honor to see that people in across the country are looking to Rhode Island to see some examples of best practices in the use of technology.

3. *Reminder: Presidential Scholar nominations due November 12 – Action Item*

The Commission on Presidential Scholars, of the U.S. Department of Education, has asked me to nominate students from Rhode Island as 2014 U.S. Presidential Scholars. I am seeking your help in selecting the best possible nominees from Rhode Island.

The Presidential Scholars Program honors outstanding high-school seniors who are selected on the basis of either outstanding scholarship (based on SAT or ACT scores) or accomplishment in the arts or creative writing. In order to expand the nominee pool, the Commission has asked me to nominate additional candidates:

...students who, while demonstrating outstanding scholarship, might not otherwise be nominated through the current SAT/ACT or arts-recognition processes.

To help me select these additional Rhode Island nominees, I ask you to nominate one male and one female high-school senior (who are citizens or legal permanent residents of the United States, graduating between January and June of 2014) from each high school in your LEA. In selecting U.S. Presidential Scholars from among the nominees, the Commission will consider:

- involvement and service, in school and community;
- leadership and character;
- writing samples;
- academic achievements; and
- extraordinary achievement, heavy work load, family responsibilities, or obstacles overcome.

Each student you nominate should prepare an application that includes:

- his or her resume, including home mailing address;
- a letter of reference from you or a school official that explains how the student stands out as having outstanding scholarship; and
- a brief (approximately 500 to 750 words) essay that responds to this question: “What special challenges or hurdles have you overcome while still achieving high academic success?”

Either you or your high-school principal(s) will be our contact in this process. I would ask either you or your principals (not the nominated students) to submit your nominations to Dana Wilson (dana.wilson@ride.ri.gov) by **November 12**.

From nominations we receive, I will select six nominees from Rhode Island (three male students, three female students).

The Commission will select finalists by mid-January 2014, and Scholars will be announced at the beginning of May. Scholars will receive an expense-paid trip to Washington, D.C., in June. For more information about the program, see:

<http://www2.ed.gov/programs/psp/index.html>

4. Chariho Career-Tech teacher named R.I. Teacher of the Year in the hospitality field

Congratulations to Linda Musch, a chef at the Chariho Regional Career and Technical Center, who has been honored by the Rhode Island Hospitality Association as the hospitality-industry Teacher of the Year. The association announced the award at its Stars of the Industry celebration. Keep up the great work, Linda!

From RIDE

Early Learning:

5. RIDE launches new Early Learning and Development Standards website

RIDE is pleased to announce the launch of the new Early Learning and Development Standards website, which is located at:

www.rields.com.

This new site will house Early Learning and Development Standards resources, including: the standards themselves, a poster template, a technical paper, a Parent Guide, and Fun Family Activities cards, as well as links to professional development. It is important to ensure that early-learning educators are familiar with the current standards, as these have replaced the 2003 standards. The new standards went into effect this fall and will be used for future Kindergarten Entry Assessment development.

If you have questions about these standards, e-mail: Allison.Comport@ride.ri.gov, or call her at 222-8890.

Common Core:

6. Common Core State Standards mini-grant applications due November 9

RIDE is pleased to announce a mini-grant for Common Core State Standards implementation. All LEAs are invited to apply. RIDE will award multiple grants of up to \$20,000. The application should further your strategic plan for Common Core State Standards implementation, including building system-wide capacity and sustainability.

The application is due at RIDE on Friday, **November 9**. Grant awards will be announced on December 20. For the grant application and instructions, please go to:

www.ride.ri.gov/CCSS-mini-grants

You can direct questions about this grant to Kate Schulz, at kate.schulz@ride.ri.gov or 222-8489.

Educator Evaluations:

7. *Reminder: Rhode Island Growth Model reports for individual educators available Monday*

On **Monday** (November 4), all teachers who contributed to student learning in mathematics or reading in grades 3 through 7 will receive Rhode Island Growth Model reports via the Educator Performance and Support System (EPSS). These reports will include individual Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs) for the students the teacher taught in 2011-12 school year. They will also indicate the median SGP among this group of students. That is the number at which half of the students had a higher SGP and half had a lower SGP.

RIDE has created step-by-step directions for teachers and evaluators that explain the process for how to access the Rhode

Island Growth Model reports in the EPSS. Educators can download the directions from the RIDE website, at:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/EdEval>.

8. RIDE seeks sample Student Learning Objectives, Student Outcome Objectives

RIDE is issuing an “All Call” for teacher, building administrator, and support professional Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) and Student Outcome Objectives (SOOs) from the current school year. We will use these objectives to produce additional samples to illustrate possible approaches and best practices. Samples from all content areas and grade levels are welcomed and need not be “perfect” or represent the “best” samples in a school or district. Furthermore, all identifying information, such as names of schools, teachers, and students, will be redacted. Samples can be submitted through e-mail in Word or PDF files through December 31, to SLOsamples@ride.ri.gov. With your participation, we will all benefit from sharing our thinking and learning with one another.

Technology:

9. LEAs encouraged to schedule RIDE appointment to review vendor selection for Wireless Classroom Initiative

The RIDE Wireless Classroom Initiative (WCI) is on target to begin issuing grants within the next two weeks. LEAs that have received their proposals are encouraged to work with RIDE to complete their analysis and to schedule an appointment for an in-person meeting or conference call to review their vendor recommendation. Appointment requests should be sent to

wirelessinitiative@ride.ri.gov. Posted WCI documentation can be viewed at:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/FundingFinance/SchoolDistrictFinancialData/WirelessClassroomInitiative.aspx>.

Wireless Classroom Initiative (WCI) proposal opening and review sessions with LEA representatives continued this week. At this time, 80 percent of LEAs have had their proposal openings, 2 percent are scheduled, and the remaining LEAs are working with vendors to get their proposals in or to determine a review date. Next steps include continued detailed analysis of the proposals, both by LEAs and RIDE; clarification of questions with the vendors; and final selection of recommended vendors by the LEAs.

We know that you may be eager to begin implementation, so we encourage you to complete the proposal-review process as soon as possible. Please be assured that we are working on multiple parallel projects on our end to ensure that no delays are encountered in moving you forward to the grant-award stage. Questions regarding the WCI initiative can be addressed to Cynthia.Brown@ride.ri.gov or to the project mailbox, at wirelessinitiative@ride.ri.gov

Uniform Chart of Accounts:

10. Superintendents, Heads of School asked to check on status of UCOA submissions for Fiscal Year 2013

A number of LEAs have not completed their final UCOA submissions for the previous year (Fiscal Year 2013), which were to have been completed by September 30. Without submissions at a zero error level from all LEAs, it is impossible for us to provide comparative data for LEAs to use for budget planning and for

decision-making. Please check with your business administrator on the status of the file for your LEA. It is critical that we close out the process at this time.

From the U.S. Department of Education

11. USDA issues standards on snacks sold in schools

Please see the following letter from U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Thomas J. Vilsack and U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan regarding ways to ensure a healthy nutrition environment in schools:

Dear Colleague,

As the school year gets under way, we would like to thank you for all of the efforts that you and your staff are making to ensure a healthy nutrition environment in schools. Your ongoing efforts to implement the [new school meals nutrition standards](#) are enhancing the health and nutrition of our nation's children in schools across the country.

We would also like to take this opportunity to brief you on another critical element of our joint efforts to promote a healthy school environment and to request your support. In order to implement additional mandates by the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, the Department of Agriculture (USDA) recently published the "[Smart Snacks in School](#)" standards for all foods sold in school outside the school meals programs. These are practical, science-based standards for foods sold in vending machines and à la carte lines — standards that make the healthy choice the easy choice for students.

Highlights of the “Smart Snacks in School” nutrition standards include:

- *More of the foods we should encourage.* Like the new school meals, the standards require healthier foods, including more whole grains, low-fat dairy products, fruits and vegetables, and leaner protein.
- *Less of the foods we should avoid.* The standards require food items that are lower in fat, sugar, and sodium and provide more of the nutrients children need.
- *Targeted standards.* The standards allow variation by age group for factors such as portion size and caffeine content.
- *Flexibility for important traditions.* Parents may still send their children to school with homemade lunches, or treats for activities such as birthday parties, holidays, and other celebrations, and schools can continue traditions such as fund-raisers and bake sales.
- *Reasonable limitations on when and where the standards apply.* Standards affect only foods that are sold on the school campus during the school day. Foods sold at after-school sports events or other activities will not be subject to these requirements.
- *Flexibility for State and local communities.* The standards allow for significant local and regional autonomy by establishing only minimum requirements for schools. States and schools that have stronger standards will be able to maintain their own policies.

Since the new standards become effective in the next (2014-15) school year, schools have ample time to make any changes that the standards require. A team approach will be very important, as successful implementation will require support not only from school nutrition personnel but also school administrators, sports teams, clubs, and others involved in food sales. USDA will support your efforts with training and technical assistance.

More specifically, we suggest that you:

- *Reach out to your school district leadership* to discuss the new standards and ensure that the leadership team understands that the standards will affect all venues in which foods are sold in your schools, including the cafeteria, vending machines, school stores, etc. (but not including food related to the school lunch program). Compliance with the new standards is not limited to foods sold by school food service and so is likely to impact other members of the school community, potentially including school administrators, sports teams, clubs, and parent organizations.
- *Plan procurement activities accordingly.* In many cases, food purchasing activities for the next school year begin this year. Please ensure that purchasing plans reflect the new standards and that any needed revisions in light of product specifications and other procurement procedures are addressed. In addition, school districts should consult with their state education agencies regarding state guidance on food fund-raiser policies.

- *Develop a plan for ensuring compliance in the coming year.* The plan should include all those involved in food sales and should identify appropriate roles and responsibilities for implementing the new standards.
- *Communicate widely about the new standards.* This is an opportune time to develop a communications plan for conveying the upcoming changes to students, parents, school organizations, and school staff. A key component of such a plan will be communicating to your school leadership and the community at large the many ways in which these changes will positively benefit our schoolchildren. Your messaging can publicize that the revised meal-pattern changes coupled with new snack standards will support students in developing a lifelong habit of healthier food choices. Recent research indicates that a large majority of parents support nutrition standards for snacks sold in schools.

As a result of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, America's students now have healthier and more nutritious school meals. With the addition of "Smart Snacks in School," students will have healthier choices available wherever food is sold to them at school. The Act supports healthier students and staff through stronger local school-wellness policies as well as the development of strong professional standards and training resources for school nutrition personnel. These policies must address nutrition education, physical activity, and other school-based activities to promote student wellness. Specific information on USDA's local school-wellness policies, including implementation guidelines, examples of model policy language, and links to related resources, can be found on the [USDA Web site](#). This

will also be the future site for USDA's proposed school-wellness policy regulation.

We also encourage you to learn about and share information on related federal activities. The Department of Education's Carol M. White Physical Education Program (PEP) grants promote innovative educational approaches to nutrition education and helping more students meet their state standards for physical education with the ultimate goal of teaching children about the value of lifelong physical activity and healthy eating. PEP grant activities must support and complement USDA-required local wellness policies. The U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools recognition award honors schools and districts that, among other activities, are exemplary in improving the health and wellness of students and staff. Finally, [Let's Move!](#) is a comprehensive federal initiative dedicated to solving the problem of obesity within a generation, so that children born today will grow up healthier. As well as promoting increased physical activity, the initiative offers parents and educators tools, support, and information they need to instill healthy eating habits in children that will last a lifetime.

We appreciate your continuing dedication to creating a healthy school environment and improving children's health. Thank you for your attention to this critically important issue.

Sincerely,

Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture

Arne Duncan
Secretary of Education

RIDE will post this field memo on Tuesday, at:

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