

**Commissioner's Weekly Field Memo  
Friday, November 15, 2013**

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### **Notes from Commissioner Gist**

- 1. LEAs urged to review release policies in light of incident in Providence**

All of us are deeply concerned about the troubling incident in Providence this week, in which an elementary-school student was released to the custody of a man who was not listed on the student's emergency-contact form. The man – the child's uncle –

is now charged with sexually assaulting the student. As Superintendent Lusi noted, this is everyone's "nightmare scenario," and we must all be vigilant so as to ensure that this scenario never happens again. I urge you to review the release policies in effect in your schools, to update these policies if necessary, and to ensure that all staff members are well informed about release policies and that they are aware of the importance of strictly adhering to these policies. Nothing is more important to us than the health and safety of our students and our staff members.

## **2. LEAs encouraged to participate in OECD Test for Schools, webinar scheduled for November 26**

As I noted in last week's Field Memo, America Achieves and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) have invited Rhode Island high schools to participate in a new assessment, called the OECD Test for Schools, which will be the first assessment to measure the performance of individual high schools in the United States against the performance levels of other countries. The OECD administers the well-known *Program for International Student Assessment (PISA)*, and it has modeled the OECD Test for Schools on the PISA. This invitation provides us with an opportunity to check the performance of our students against the performance of the best students from around the world!

I am pleased that some of you have contacted me about participation in the OECD Test for Schools. Five Rhode Island districts (Central Falls, Chariho, East Greenwich, Pawtucket, and Westerly) participated in a pilot version of the test last year, and I have already heard from some who found the experience beneficial and who want to take part again. I encourage you to

talk with your colleagues to get a first-hand account about this initiative.

I want to remind you again that cost should not be a barrier to participation, as America Achieves has indicated that they can pay the expenses for the participation of at least 10 Rhode Island high schools.

If you are interested, please contact my executive assistant, Dana Wilson ([dana.wilson@ride.ri.gov](mailto:dana.wilson@ride.ri.gov)), as soon as possible and by Friday, **November 22**, at the latest to let her know of your interest. To provide you with more information about the OECD Test for Schools, we have scheduled a webinar with America Achieves, for Tuesday, **November 26**, from 4 to 5 p.m. We will send details on the logging in to the webinar to LEAs interested in participation. The webinar is for your information only does not commit your schools to participation.

For more information from America Achieves, see:

<http://www.americaachieves.org/oecd>.

### **3. RIDE to continue discussions on cage-busting leadership**

Two months ago, a terrific group of educators from across the state came together here at RIDE to engage in conversation with author Rick Hess about his views on education and his most recent book, *Cage-busting Leadership*. That visit has sparked further conversations about what it means to be a “cage-busting leader” and how we can break through some of the barriers that seem to stand in our way as we work together to transform education. Several of the Collaborative Learning for Outcomes consortia have taken up the topic of cage-busting leadership, as

these teams of LEA leaders grapple with issues such as curriculum, governance, and the overall implementation of our Race to the Top initiatives.

I would like to offer another forum for further discussion of cage-busting leadership, so I encourage anyone who participated in the conversation with Rick Hess – or anyone who would like to join this discussion – to contact me so that we can schedule a follow-up session to exchange ideas. Please e-mail my executive assistant, Dana Wilson ([dana.wilson@ride.ri.gov](mailto:dana.wilson@ride.ri.gov)), if you are interested in further discussion of Rick Hess's ideas on leadership – and please feel free to share this invitation with others on your team.

#### **4. Educators encouraged join weekly discussions on #EdchatRI**

I don't know if you've heard about #Edchatri, a weekly online exchange of ideas on Twitter among Rhode Island educators. If you're not familiar with this forum, I encourage you and others on your team to take a look and to participate. Two of our great principals – Don Miller, of Shea High School, in Pawtucket, and Alan Tenreiro, of Cumberland High School – are the founders and co-moderators of #EdchartRI. I joined the Edchats almost every week; and I've found the online conversations to be lively, thoughtful, and respectful – and I learn so much each time I participate. Thanks, Don and Alan, for managing such a great initiative!

#EdchatRI maintains a website, on which they archive past discussions:

<http://www.edchatri.org/>

Here's how the site introduces #EdchatRI:

#EdchatRI is an opportunity that all educators have to come together once a week to discuss all of the happenings in education and R.I. education in particular. It is a chance for all of us as teachers and administrators of the Ocean State to share best practices both in the classroom and the districts we work. Since there is little opportunity for educators to get away from their own school and view the great things that are going on in other parts of the state/country.

#Edchatri will take place every Sunday night @ 8 p.m. and will have a specific focus each week, which will be determined in the days leading up to the actual chat. If you think you have something valuable to offer or would just like to hear from some of the most amazing educators in the state and perhaps borrow or be resourceful and use some of the great and effective ideas you will hear about, then please join us each and every week.

### **From RIDE**

#### ***Educator Quality:***

#### **5. RIDE and partners develop materials to help sustain induction program beyond Race to the Top**

During the current school year, 196 beginning teachers in 31 districts and 6 charter or career-technical public schools are being coached by fully released induction coaches. Fully released

induction coaches, unlike mentors, meet with teachers every week to plan effective instruction, to observe and gather evidence for reflection, and to debrief in order to use data to inform instructional practice. The focus of the work is to increase student learning through developing effective teaching practices.

This high-quality induction program is funded through Race to the Top funds. Sustainability of this program is vital to increase the retention and the effectiveness of our newest educators.

Our Induction Sustainability Committee has created a document for you to use to begin conversations about sustainability in your LEA. You can view the document on our website, here:

<http://ride.ri.gov/Induction-Sustainability>

Representatives from RISSA, RIASC, RIASBO, the Rhode Island Collaboratives, and RIDE, as well as Rhode Island induction coaches, have created this document to assist you with budget planning for the next school year. Future correspondences from this committee will provide more details on the options this document introduces. We look forward to your partnership as we work together to continue this level of induction for our newest educators.

### ***Charter Public Schools:***

#### **6. RIDE accepting proposals for charter public schools to open in 2015**

RIDE is accepting proposals for new charter public schools that would like to open for enrollment in the fall of 2015. We fully support the establishment of new high-quality charter public

schools in our state, and we welcome proposals from individuals and groups who are committed to excellence and to innovation in public education. The RIDE staff will accept, review, and evaluate applications from new providers or current providers, and we will place a priority on applications that focus on enrolling and serving traditionally underserved students or special populations of students.

By the end of the day (Friday, November 15), we will post proposal instructions and other materials on the [Charter Schools](#) page on our website.

***Using Data:***

**7. RIDE to issue second annual award for excellence in data quality**

One of the priorities in our strategic plan for transforming education in Rhode Island is to develop user-friendly data systems – and we are making great progress toward meeting this objective! Every day, school leaders, teachers, and support staff at all levels work tirelessly to collect, maintain, and support data-submission efforts in all schools and districts. To recognize the important work going on across the state toward building and maintaining data quality, we are pleased to announce the second round of nominations of the Rhode Island Data Quality Award Program. This award will recognize the commitment and effort you and your team members make to ensure that our educators and the public at large have access to high-quality data and that we use data for wise decision-making to improve teaching and learning.

Through **December 2**, we will accept nominations of individuals who have demonstrated outstanding leadership and commitment to excellence in data quality. In the beginning of January, we will present the second annual Data Quality Award at a special ceremony honoring the recipient.

You can find the nomination forms on our website, at:

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

For more information about the award program, please contact Lee Rabbit, at [lee.rabbit@ride.ri.gov](mailto:lee.rabbit@ride.ri.gov) or 222-8495.

### **From other state agencies**

#### **8. Community forums scheduled on governance of higher education**

Please see this notice from the Office of Higher Education, and please feel free to share this notice in your community:

The Office of Higher Education has scheduled four community forums to discuss and to receive public comment on the proposed new governance structure for higher education. The meetings are scheduled for:

- Tuesday, November 26, from 6 – 8 p.m., at the Newport Public Library, 300 Spring St.
- Monday, December 2, from 5 - 7 p.m., at the Community College of Rhode Island Flanagan Campus, Auditorium, 1762 Louisquisset Pike, Lincoln

- Tuesday, December 3, from 5:30 - 7:30 p.m., at Rhode Island College, Alger Hall, Room 110, 600 Mount Pleasant Ave., Providence
- Wednesday, December 4, from 5 -7 p.m., at the University of Rhode Island (exact location to be determined), Kingston

### **From other organizations**

#### **9. Student summit on distracted driving scheduled for March 14**

Please see this invitation from the Massachusetts Distracted Driving Summit Team, and please feel free to share this invitation with your high-school principals:

My name is Brian Salit. I am a junior at Seekonk High School in Seekonk. As a national advocate for teen traffic safety, I am pleased to invite your high schools to attend the Southern New England Teen Distracted Driving Leadership Summit (2nd Annual Massachusetts Teen Distracted Driving Leadership Summit).

Two years ago, a tragedy struck a neighboring community when a track athlete I competed against was killed by a texting driver on his way to school. The horrific crash devastated his community, and it had a profound impact on me. My brothers and I were only freshmen in high school, but the frailness of life suddenly appeared so evident. We were determined to make a change.

We decided to host a texting and driving prevention campaign in our school. It was very successful, and drew the attention of NOYS, the National Organizations for Youth Safety. This coalition of youth serving organizations is dedicated to promoting the safety of teenagers across all aspects of daily life. We were invited to attend the 2012 NOYS National Teen Distracted Driving Summit in Washington, D.C., where we learned about nationwide efforts to end the epidemic of distracted driving.

Upon returning home to Massachusetts, we were inspired to host the 2013 Massachusetts Teen Distracted Driving Leadership Summit last May at the Massachusetts State House. The entirely youth-led, youth-inspired event drew 25 schools and 250 students from around the state to learn about effective methods to expand the message of safe teen driving. The event featured many national speakers, including Wil Craig, a texting and driving victim and a national spokesperson for AT&T's *It Can Wait* campaign after his feature role in the documentary *The Last Text*. Through our grassroots efforts, the message of safe teen driving will reach 30,000 students around Massachusetts over the next year.

We have also presented across the nation about our efforts to end distracted driving and promote teen traffic safety. Currently, we are working to expand legislation in the next federal highway bill to allow funding from the government for similar peer-to-peer education models in all 50 states.

We are extremely passionate about the issue of safe teen driving, and we would be honored to have your high schools

attend our event at the Hilltop Hotel and Conference Center, in Seekonk, on **March 14**, 2014. This year's invitation has been extended to Rhode Island schools. The event is free of charge, and lunch is provided.

Please send this message along to the appropriate schools, who are reminded to apply as soon as possible.

The application can be accessed here:

[application | massdistracteddrivingsummit.](#)

Please direct any questions to [ddsubmitma@gmail.com](mailto:ddsubmitma@gmail.com)

Sample video from Act Out Loud competition  
Last year's winning video:

<http://www.actoutloud.org/contest-scoop>

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

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