

Commissioner's Weekly Field Memo
Friday, November 22, 2013

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Notes from Commissioner Gist

1. How America Compares: OECD Test for Schools planned, PISA Day scheduled

How America's schools compare with high-performing schools around the world has become an increasingly significant topic in our field in recent years. You may be aware of a new book on this topic that has received really good reviews: *The Smartest Kids in the World*, by Amanda Ripley, a journalist who specializes in education issues. Ripley follows three American students who spend a school year in other countries (Finland, Poland, and South Korea), and she uses their stories to compare American education with education systems around the world.

We have an opportunity now to measure our own schools against the best in the world. As I have noted to you in recent Field Memos, 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!

A number of you have already contacted me about participation in the OECD Test for Schools, and it's not too late to consider participation. America Achieves will hold a webinar on the OECD Test for Schools on **Tuesday** (November 26), from 4 to 5 p.m. If you are interested in this informational webinar, please contact my executive assistant, Dana Wilson (dana.wilson@ride.ri.gov),

and we will send you details on logging in to the webinar. The webinar is for your information only and does not commit your schools to participation.

I want to remind you again that cost should not be a barrier to participation, as the folks at America Achieves have indicated that they can pay the expenses for the participation of at least 10 Rhode Island high schools. We'll give priority to the districts that participated in the pilot version of the assessment last year, but all who are interested are encouraged to join the webinar – we will certainly be able to include additional districts this year.

For more information from America Achieves, see:

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

If you are interested in learning more about the PISA assessment, about how the United States compares with other countries when it comes to school performance, and about the implications of these results for national education policy, the U.S. Department of Education and OECD invite you to participate in “PISA Day 2013: Learning Beyond the Rankings.” This program will run from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Tuesday, **December 3**, and the organizers will stream the program live to interested participants. For more information and to register, go to:

www.PISADay.org

2. RIDE to hold follow-up discussion on Rick Hess's *Cage-Busting Leadership*

As I noted in last week's Field Memo, Rick Hess's visit to Rhode Island two months ago 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. Quite a few educators have gotten back to me in response to my invitation to anyone who would like to come together to continue the discussion on cage-busting leadership. To keep the exchange of ideas among us going, we have scheduled a discussion session on Rick Hess’s *Cage-Busting Leadership* for January 15, at 4:30 p.m., in Room 501 here at RIDE (80 Washington St./255 Westminster St., Providence) – so hold the date.

Please e-mail my executive assistant, Dana Wilson (dana.wilson@ride.ri.gov), if you are interested in joining us on January 15 – and please feel free to share this invitation with others on your team.

3. RIDE, Business Innovation Factory, Youth in Action launch partnership for student-designed school

On Wednesday, along with the Business Innovation Factory and Youth in Action, we launched [Students Design for Education](#), a project in which 24 students will go through the design process to create a new school. We have been working together for several years to get this project off the ground, and I’m very pleased that we now have a team of students ready to embark on the design process and a great partnership with Saul Kaplan and the Business Innovation Factory to help transform the students’ vision into a reality. Once the students complete the design, I have pledged to work to open the student-designed school within two years. This project has the potential to be a life-changing not only for the students involved in the school design but for many Rhode Island students for years to come.

4. Rhode Island educators publish book on teaching chemistry

I am pleased to let you know that two of our great Rhode Island educators have published a book on teaching chemistry: *Who's the New Kid in Chemistry?: Exploring Uncharted Waters*. The authors are John W. Butler, the Director of Academic Planning and Logistics for the Village Green Virtual Public Charter School, and Jessica M. Waters, the 2013 Rhode Island Teacher of the Year, who joined the RIDE staff this week as an Education Specialist, working on our Race to the Top initiative. Both John and Jessica formerly taught at the Beacon Charter High School for the Arts. Their book "offers an unprecedented look at student engagement and teacher best practices through the eyes of an educational researcher enrolled as a public high-school student," according to the publisher's catalog. "Over the course of 79 consecutive days, John D. Butler participates in and observes Rhode Island 2013 Teacher of the Year Jessica M. Waters's high-school chemistry class, documenting his experiences as they unfold." The publisher is the University Press of America. Congratulations, John and Jessica!

5. Computer Science Education Week events scheduled for week of December 9

In order to mark Computer Science Education Week (December 9 through 15), a number of our schools are participating in a national event called The Hour of Code, which the sponsor, a nonprofit organization called code.org, describes as "a one-hour introduction to computer science, designed to demystify 'code' and show that anyone can learn the basics to be a maker, a creator, an innovator." I know that a number of Rhode Island schools are planning to participate in this event. Among local

organizations, the [Highlander Institute](#) and the [Business Innovation Factory](#) are supporting this initiative as well.

If you're interested in having your schools participate, more information on the Hour of Code is available at:

<http://csedweek.org/>

and:

<http://code.org/>

6. Teachers in Barrington, Smithfield honored for technology education

As we move forward together to support STEM education and innovations powered by technology in our schools, I'm please to let you know that he Rhode Island Technology & Engineering Educators Association has selected Mike Starring, of Smithfield High School, as the High School Technology Teacher of the Year; Gary Monuteaux, of Barrington Middle School, as the Middle School Technology Teacher of the Year; and the Barrington Middle School as the Middle School Technology Program of the Year. Congratulations to Mike, Gary, and all of the educators in the Barrington Middle School on his recognition!

From RIDE

Board of Education:

7. Board of Education to hold public forums on governance

In partnership with the Office of Higher Education, RIDE sent this news advisory to all media this week. Please share this information with your community:

The Rhode Island Board of Education has scheduled four forums to receive input from the public on a draft plan for a governance structure for the Board.

Last year, the General Assembly passed The Rhode Island Board of Education Act (Rhode Island General Laws, Title 16, Chapter 97), which replaced the Board of Governors for Higher Education and the Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education with the 11-member Board of Education. The act also abolished the Office of Higher Education, effective July 1 of next year, and called upon the Board to develop a plan “for the permanent administrative structure for higher education” and to “provide greater articulation” of the responsibilities of elementary, secondary, and higher education.

Working with local and national experts, the Board has prepared a draft plan to meet this obligation. Following a series of reports on governance at recent public meetings of the Board, the Board has now scheduled public forums to receive input on the draft plan. Copies of the plan will be presented at each of the forums.

The forums will be held on:

- **Tuesday** (November 26), at 6 p.m., at the Newport Public Library, 300 Spring Street;

- Monday, December 2, at 5 p.m., at the Community College of Rhode Island Flanagan Campus, Auditorium, 1762 Louisquisset Pike, Lincoln;
- Tuesday, December 3, at 5:30 p.m., at Rhode Island College, Alger Hall – Room 100, 600 Mount Pleasant Avenue, Providence; and
- Wednesday, December 4, at 5 p.m., at the University of Rhode Island, Alumni Center, 73 Upper College Hill Road, Kingston (parking available in Lot #1, directly behind the Visitor’s Center).

At each forum, there will be a brief presentation of the proposal followed by ample time for public comment.

The Board intends to review all feedback and to endorse a final plan next month. The Board will then present the plan to Governor Chafee and to the General Assembly for consideration during the next legislative session.

World-Class Standards:

8. *Reminder: Free community-outreach opportunities on the Common Core available to districts*

RIDE received a grant from the GE Foundation to help parents and the community understand what the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) mean for our students and our classrooms and how the CCSS prepare our students for college and for challenging careers. As part of this grant, throughout the current school year, RIDE will be conducting outreach to help promote increased understanding of the CCSS throughout the state. We are developing materials and CCSS videos, and we are scheduling outreach events throughout the state.

On our behalf, representatives from a firm called PCG Education have begun reaching out to you to schedule and plan informational outreach events in your community. At these events, members of Rhode Island Common Core Ambassadors team, a group of experienced Rhode Island educators, will work with local educators to plan a visit to your community and to provide information as to how the CCSS will affect teachers and students in Rhode Island schools. The ambassadors are available to present on the CCSS at no cost to your LEA.

We welcome you to join us in helping Rhode Island to successfully transition to the Common Core. Please support us in planning these events and in helping to spread the word about the CCSS. Common Core resources can be found at:

www.ride.ri.gov/Transition-CCSS

You can also find an outreach handout at:

www.ride.ri.gov/CCSS-Outreach

If you have any questions about this outreach, or to schedule an outreach event for parents and for your community, please contact Lauren Bryar, at CommonCoreRI@pcgus.com. RIDE will forward this announcement on Tuesday to the principals' list-servs.

Educator Excellence:

9. New educator-preparation program standards posted on RIDE website

On November 13, the Board of Education approved new Rhode Island Educator Preparation Program Standards. The final, approved standards represent a culmination of months of ongoing dialogue with programs and educators within the state. We have posted the standards here:

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

The standards align to the educational priorities in our PK-12 system and will drive the program-approval and improvement processes within the state. The RIDE team is grateful to all educators and students who provided feedback during the public-comment period.

From federal agencies

10. Federal grants available to integrate academic, career-focused learning in high schools

This week, the U.S. Department of Labor announced the Youth CareerConnect grant program, which “is designed to encourage America’s school districts, institutions of higher education, the workforce investment system, and their partners to scale up evidence-based high-school models that will transform the high-school experience for America’s youth. The program will use up to \$100 million to provide up to 40 grants to LEAs, “local workforce entities,” or nonprofit organizations with education-reform experience. Information on the Youth CareerConnect grant program is available on the U.S. Department of Labor website, at:

<http://www.doleta.gov/ycc/>

From other organizations

11. NBC News develops, posts education toolkit for parents

NBC News Education Nation has created a Parent Toolkit to help parents participate in their children's academic success and personal growth. The Parent Toolkit includes:

- a “growth chart” containing grade-by-grade academic benchmarks for Pre-K through 12th grade in mathematics and English Language Arts;
- tips and resources for parents to support their children's learning for Pre-K through 12th grade;
- a guide to parent-teacher conferences and school counselor meetings; and
- a newsfeed with stories, blog posts, and videos from a variety of sources

The goals of this toolkit are to establish for parents a clear understanding of what is expected of their children at each step in their academic journey and to provide a comprehensive set of tips and tools to help parents engage in and monitor their children's academic development. NBC News enlisted a number of experts, from academics to classroom teachers to parents from across the country, to help review all the content. You can visit the site, at:

www.ParentToolkit.com.

RIDE will post this field memo on Tuesday, at:

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

