

**Commissioner's Weekly Field Memo
Friday, December 6, 2013**

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Action Item Calendar

Today (December 6): [Textbook-reimbursement](#) forms due
December 20: Deadline to sign off on cohort data (see [below](#))

Notes from Commissioner Gist

1. LEAs encouraged to review anti-bullying policies

Perhaps you took some time this week to read the four-part series in the Providence Journal, “Actually Andy,” by Karen Lee Ziner. The series tells the story of Andy Schulz, a transgender 16-year-old who lives in Warwick and is currently a senior at The Greene School. I’m so pleased that The Greene School has been a tolerant and welcoming environment for Andy. As you know, our Basic

Education Program (BEP) contains clear language about supportive and nurturing school communities:

Each LEA shall ensure that schools create a climate of safety, security and belonging for all students and adults, thereby establishing an environment that builds respectful relationships, enhances productive learning and teaching, promotes school engagement, and promotes academic success. Each LEA shall accomplish this goal by ensuring that each school:

- safe, respectful, and free of discrimination;
- establishes protocols for on-going student, family, and community engagement; and
- provides expanded learning opportunities and academic enrichment. (G-14-2)

This section of the BEP also sets forth expectations regarding freedom from discrimination, the right to a safe school, and the prevention of bullying and harassment. Through such initiatives as SurveyWorks, each LEA and each school is able to monitor our progress and our success in keeping all students free from bullying, harassment, hazing, and violence.

This moving story about Andy's adjustment to a new way of life and to his acceptance by his school and his community provides us with a great occasion to reflect on our own state anti-bullying policies. As Rhode Island educators, we can be proud that we have very strong policies against bullying in general and, in particular, against bullying based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. You may want to review with your leadership team our statewide anti-bullying policies and your own anti-bullying policies to help ensure we can continue making

our schools safe and secure places for teaching and learning for every one of our students (and staff members as well).

Here are links to some of our materials and policies on bullying:

Statewide Anti-Bullying Policy:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Students-and-Families-Great-Schools/Health-Safety/RI-Statewide-Bullying-Policy.pdf>

Board of Education Policy Prohibiting Discrimination Based on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity/Expression:

<http://www.thriveri.org/documents/RIDE%20Policy%20Statement%20on%20Discrimination%20Sexual%20Orientation.pdf>

Thrive website:

<http://www.thriveri.org/components/sexuality.html>

Youth Pride, Rhode Island: <http://www.youthprideri.org/>

GLSEN Model District Policy on Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Students:

http://transequality.org/PDFs/Trans_ModelPolicy_2013.pdf

GLAD Rights of LGBTQ Youth in Rhode Island:

<http://www.thriveri.org/components/sexuality.html>

2. R.I. schools get ready for Hour of Code

As I noted to you in a Field Memo last month, many schools across the country are marking Computer Science Education Week by participating in a national event called The Hour of Code.

The events kick off on Monday (December 9), and to date about 50 Rhode Island public schools have signed on to participate. This morning, I attended a school assembly on the Hour of Code at the Warwick Neck Elementary School, and it was great to see so much excitement and enthusiasm among the staff members and the students.

The national sponsor of the Hour of Code, a nonprofit organization called code.org, describes the initiative 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.”

It’s not too late to join this project, so 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/>

3. RIDE revises schedule for 2014 NECAP retake testing for seniors

As we await the results from the October 2013 NECAP assessments, I know that all of us hope that a large percentage of seniors who had to retake the assessment will attain partial proficiency or show improvement – and thereby satisfy this element of our Diploma System. Nevertheless, in anticipating that some students will still not have met this graduation requirement,

we have been scheduling a second NECAP retake for February and March 2014, exclusively for seniors who may still need to attain partial proficiency or show improvement on our assessments in mathematics and reading.

In response to questions we've received and to the concerns that many of you have expressed to us over the past several weeks, we are modifying the proposed retesting schedule. Rather than scheduling the 2014 NECAP retake at regional sites, we will offer you and your high-school team the opportunity to administer the 2014 NECAP retake within your own LEAs.

The 2014 retake testing will take place between February 25 and March 7, with additional dates reserved in case of snow days. RIDE will assign testing dates to LEAs, and our staff will work with you to confirm that those assigned days work with your schedule. Each LEA will be responsible for setting aside space for students to retake the test and for providing test proctors. Next month, we will schedule a training session for your test proctors.

Later this month, we will provide you with your tentative dates and we will begin providing all LEAs with more details regarding the planning and coordination of the NECAP retest. Data collection for students taking the NECAP retest and the other approved assessments will provide us with registration data for the NECAP retest.

If you have questions about the NECAP retest at this time, please e-mail Cali Cornell (cali.cornell@ride.ri.gov), in our Office of Multiple Pathways, or Kate Schulz (kate.schulz@ride.ri.gov), in our Office of Instruction, Assessment, and Curriculum.

4. Discussion session on *Cage-Busting Leadership* rescheduled for January 29

As I noted in a Field Memo last month, 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.

We had scheduled a discussion session on Rick Hess's *Cage-Busting Leadership*, but we have to change the date of the event. The discussion session is now scheduled for Wednesday, **January 29**, 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 29 – and please feel free to share this invitation with others on your team.

5. U.S. Department of Education releases PISA results

On Tuesday (December 3), the U.S. Department of Education released its [report](#) on the results of the 2012 international PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) assessment. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development administers this assessment every three years to 15-year-old students in 65 education systems (including 34 countries) across the world. PISA tests student performance in mathematics, reading literacy, and science. This assessment measures problem-

solving and the application of knowledge, not accumulation of facts.

The results raised concerns about the performance of students in the United States:

- U.S. scores were significantly below average in mathematics, slightly below average in science, and average in reading; and
- scores of United States students have not changed measurably over time, dating back to the year 2000.

Only three states – Connecticut, Florida, and Massachusetts – participated as separate “education entities” on this assessment. Connecticut and Massachusetts significantly outperformed the nation as a whole, and Massachusetts ranks among the top 10 systems in the world in all subjects.

In his [remarks](#) following the release of the PISA results, Education Secretary Duncan noted that, to improve, the United States must adopt “the practices of other high-performing countries,” including:

- recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals;
- developing high-quality early-learning systems; and
- redesigning our high schools to develop college- and career-ready skills.

He also noted that “the vast majority of high-performing countries have both demanding and high-stakes assessments” and that

“[m]ost high-performing countries have gateway exams for entrance into postsecondary education.”

The good news is that, in Rhode Island, we are moving forward with these key practices. Let’s keep working together to make Rhode Island schools the best in the country and the envy of the world!

6. Educator Autonomy Working Group holds initial meeting

The first meeting of Governor Chafee’s 17-member Educator Autonomy Working Group took place at RIDE on Tuesday evening (December 3). The group met for two hours to discuss the charge from Governor Chafee: “To make specific recommendations on ways we can provide more flexibility for teachers, principals, and superintendents in order to improve the learning experiences to all Rhode Island students.”

When I was a teacher, I had a tremendous amount of autonomy in the classroom, and I treasured that, I told the members of the working group at the kickoff meeting. I hear from teachers all the time who share with me their frustrations about not having the ability to make decisions concerning students. At the policy level, we set what the expectations are. How it gets done should be left as close to the students as possible. I am confident that this working group will develop a set of recommendations and action steps that will break down barriers to change and will give teachers, school leaders, and district leaders the autonomy they need to advance student learning and achievement.

The Working Group will meet monthly, in public sessions. In June, the group will present Governor Chafee with recommendations for action. Milken Educator Award winner Yanaiza Gallant and the

2014 Rhode Island Teacher of the Year, Patricia Page, co-chair the group. Smithfield Superintendent O'Brien represents superintendents on the working group and Carolyn Sheehan, of the Blackstone Academy, represents leaders of charter public schools. A complete list of the members of the working group is [here](#). All meetings will be open to the public, so please feel free to attend and feel free to share this information with others in your community.

From RIDE

Data and analysis:

7. LEAs asked to review cohort data on exits, graduation, and verify by December 20 – *Action Item*

The Cohort Data Exit Review is now open in eRIDE. Instructions can be found at:

<https://www.eride.ri.gov/exitsupdate/instructions.asp>.

RIDE uses the cohort formula to determine the four-year graduation rate. LEAs need to review the cohort data, make any corrections, and sign off on the review by **December 20**. If you have any questions the cohort data, please contact the RIDE Helpdesk, at <https://support.ride.ri.gov>.

Webinars and training:

8. PARCC Field Test training session scheduled for January 7

The 2014 PARCC Field Test will begin on March 24. To prepare for both paper-based and online test administration, we will host an

in-person training workshop for the districts and schools that are participating in the field test. Please note that this workshop will focus on the *field test* administration only. This workshop will have two tracks: a technology track and a test administration track. Throughout the day, there will be plenty of opportunities for questions.

The technology-track sessions are designed for LEA test coordinators, special education directors, and technology directors, and the test coordinator from each school in the field test. This track will have two sessions. The morning session of the workshop will focus on online test administration procedures and both the online and paper-based set-up process through the *PearsonAccess* system (as well as accessibility and accommodations). In the afternoon, there will be a session on technology requirements and set-up for online field-test administration. LEA leadership teams may want to send a team member to the administration track for part of the day (see below). In that instance, that individual should register for both the technology track and either a morning or afternoon session of the test-administration track.

Space is limited, so please contact PARCC@ride.ri.gov if you would like to have additional team members (district or school) attend this track. Please register your team as soon as possible.

The eRIDE registration link for the full-day technology track is posted at:

<https://www.eride.ri.gov/workshopReg/viewWorkshop.aspx?workshopid=895>

The test-administration track will be one session focusing on test administration for the field test. Details about this session will be provided in next week's Field Memo. This session will be offered in both the morning and the afternoon. School test coordinators and test administrators in field-test schools should sign up for *one* session.

Space is limited to 2 or 3 participants from each school that is participating in the PARCC field test. Please register your team as soon as possible.

The eRIDE registration link for the morning session is posted at:

<https://www.eride.ri.gov/workshopReg/ViewWorkshop.aspx?workshopid=896>

The eRIDE registration link for the afternoon session is posted at:

<https://www.eride.ri.gov/workshopReg/ViewWorkshop.aspx?workshopid=897>

The workshop will take place on Tuesday, **January 7**, from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., at the CCRI Knight Campus – The Bobby Hackett Theatre, 400 East Ave., Warwick.

Please note: There will be a one-hour break for lunch. Snacks and lunch will *not* be provided at this event, however.

All of the information provided in this workshop will also be posted as training modules to the PARCC Training Management Site (TMS) later this year. RIDE is also planning several opportunities (webinars) to supplement this workshop that will take place closer to the field-test window.

If you have any questions about these workshops, please send them to PARCC@ride.ri.gov. This announcement will be sent to the principals' listservs next week.

From the U.S. Department of Education

9. White House announces student video contest

Please see this notice from the U.S. Department of Education Office of Communications and Outreach:

The White House has announced its first-ever [video contest for K-12 students](#). Submissions must be under three minutes and spotlight at least one of the following themes: how technology is currently used in the classroom or school or what role technology will play in education in the future. Submissions are due **January 29**. Finalists will have their films shown at the White House. Final videos may also be featured on the White House website, YouTube channel, and social-media pages.

From other organizations

10. GED Testing Service releases new test-preparation materials

Please see this notice from the GED Testing Service:

The GED Testing Service announced on December 4 that registration and new cutting-edge resources to help prepare for the 2014 GED test are now available with the launch of the organization's new MyGED website. MyGED – which can

be found online at GED.com – is a free site that will help adults register for, take and be better prepared for the GED test. Beyond the basics of testing, it will help students identify career pathways, and more easily navigate to jobs and into college training programs required for most of today's job openings.

The new GED program, which will launch on January 2, was overhauled to better prepare adults without a high school diploma for higher education and the workforce. The comprehensive, start-to-finish 2014 program uses technology to help students prepare for, pass, and progress beyond the GED test to find better jobs with better wages. The 2014 GED test is the only high school equivalency program [fully aligned to state college and career readiness standards](#).

Some of the new features students can use on the new GED.com website include:

- a one-stop resource for registration, preparation, and more.
- Tools to develop personalized study plans and find study materials or in-person classes;
- a skills assessment to help test-takers match skills with possible careers, and focus on career plans to get to better jobs with better wages;
- access to information and resources to help test-takers apply for college or training programs and fill out financial aid forms; and
- an official practice test that shows test-takers their strengths and where they need to improve, including

specific pages to study in their training materials at home and online.

For more information about the MyGED website, visit www.GED.com.

Download the [fact sheet](#) for more information about the 2014 GED program.

11. Lifespan accepting applications for summer youth employment

Please see this message from Lifespan Human Resources, and feel free to share this information with your high-school team:

The Lifespan Summer Youth Employment Program is now accepting applications for Summer 2014. Please visit www.lifespanyouth.org. Click on the “summer youth employment” link for more information and to submit an on-line application. Please contact Kelly Estes by email kestes@lifespan.org or phone 793-4905 if you have further questions or concerns.

RIDE will post this field memo on Tuesday, at:

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