Commissioner's Weekly Field Memo
Friday, November 20, 2015

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December 18: Student exit data calculation due (see [below](#))

Notes from Commissioner Wagner

1. PARCC results show need to focus on teaching and learning

On Tuesday we released the 2015 PARCC results, which confirm that improvements are needed in teaching and learning in English language arts and mathematics.

About 36 percent of students in grades 3 through 10 are meeting expectations in English language arts and about 25 percent of students are meeting expectations in mathematics. Approximately 75,000 students participated in the assessments, with approximately 80 percent completing the assessment on a computer.

These latest results track closely with previous data from other assessments such as the SAT and with college-readiness rates, and these results show, once again, that we have work to do. We must prepare our students for their futures with challenging coursework and great teaching tailored to their strengths and interests. If we stay focused and work together, we will be successful.

To advance this work, we will lead efforts to:

- invest in our teachers through high-quality preparation programs and continuous professional development;
- empower our principals to lead strong school communities;
- ensure that every student has access to rigorous coursework that builds upon their strengths and interests and prepares them for their futures; and
- partner with parents and families.

Our team at RIDE intends to visit every school district and charter public school in the state to build the partnerships that produce results.

Education Board Chair Barbara S. Cottam said: "The 2015 PARCC assessments results provide another data point telling the same story – we have a lot of opportunity for improvement and success. We now must provide all students with access to high-quality learning opportunities, from childhood through adulthood."

Elementary and Secondary Education Council Chair Daniel P. McConaghy said: "Our students need to meet the expectations of the Common Core State Standards in order to succeed throughout their schooling and to be ready for success beyond high school. Using these results as a starting point, the team at RIDE will collaborate with school leaders, families, and community partners to support students and teachers and to advance student achievement in English and mathematics."

As with previous statewide assessments, achievement or **opportunity gaps** persist between the results of the state as a whole and various student groups. In English, 6 percent of students with disabilities and 7 percent of English learners met

the expectations for their grade level. In mathematics, 4 percent of students with disabilities, 6 percent of English learners, 10 percent of Native American students, 10.5 percent of black students, 11 percent of Hispanic students, and 12 percent of economically disadvantaged students met the expectations for their grade levels.

Opportunity gaps persist as well between results in the core urban communities (Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket) and all other districts. In the core urban communities, 18 percent of students met expectations in English and 11 percent met expectations in mathematics; in all other communities, 43 percent of students met expectations in English and 31 percent met expectations in mathematics – leading to gaps of 25 percentage points and 20 percentage points, respectively.

Assessment **results varied across schools**. Of the 283 Rhode Island schools that participated in PARCC testing, 14 schools had 70 percent or more of their students meet or exceed expectations on the English language arts assessment and 4 schools had 70 percent or more of their students meet or exceed expectations on the mathematics assessment. Three elementary schools in South Kingstown – Matunuck, Peace Dale, and Wakefield – had 70 percent or more of their students meet or exceed expectations on both assessments.

In two PARCC subject-area mathematics tests, 25 percent of Rhode Island students met or exceeded the Common Core expectations in Algebra I and 14 percent met or exceeded expectations in Geometry. (Students took these mathematics assessments if they were enrolled in the appropriate course, regardless of their grade level in school.)

The 2015 results of the PARCC assessments give us a first look at whether Rhode Island students are meeting the expectations of the Common Core State Standards. These new learning standards, based on an international set of benchmarks, establish expectations for each grade level in literacy and mathematics. The standards are designed to prepare students for success in their next grade level, in postsecondary learning, and in career opportunities.

2. Hearing scheduled for Monday on school-day regulations

On Monday, RIDE will hold a public hearing on proposed revisions to the regulations governing the school calendar and the school day. The impetus for the proposed revisions was to provide you with greater flexibility in delaying school openings during inclement weather. Specifically, the revised regulations state that schools must provide at last 3 hours of instructional time to be considered a school day. (Under current regulations, if you delay opening by more than 1 hour it cannot be considered a school.)

The hearing will take place here at RIDE (80 Washington St./255 Westminster St., Providence), Room 501, on Monday (November 23), at 4:30 p.m.

3. Funding Formula Working Group to meet on Tuesday

The Funding Formula Working Group that Governor Raimondo appointed last month has set an ambitious schedule, and the members of the group will work hard over the next two months to come up with a set of recommendations on revising the formula. The group has held the first two (of its scheduled six) meetings and has discussed several key issues, including the

differences in financial obligations between traditional school districts and charter districts. The group has also developed two issue briefs: one on fixed and marginal costs, the other on the financial obligations of traditional school districts and public schools of choice. The next meeting of the group will take place on **Tuesday** (Novembe4 24), at 5 p.m., at the Northern Rhode Island Collaborative, Building B, Suite 104B, 640 George Washington Highway, Lincoln. All Working Group meetings are open to the public. You can find further information about the Funding Formula Working Group, including a schedule of meetings and the issue briefs, on the home page of our website or at:

http://www.ride.ri.gov/FundingFinance/FundingSources/StateEducationAid/FundingFormulaWorkingGroup.aspx

4. Council updated on career and technical education

On Wednesday, we briefed the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education on the progress under way in one or our priority areas: career and technical education (CTE). Across Rhode Island, many of us are focused on increasing the career-readiness of our high-school students and developing programs that support the needs of Rhode Island employers. Our work on career and technical education is about expanding options for students, not closing options. The programs need to include rigorous academic preparation as well as career preparation – our businesses and industries need students who have the full range of knowledge and skills.

Al Lubrano, Chair of the CTE Board of Trustees, joined us at the Council meeting and explained how his board is in the process of

defining clear standards of achievement in three initially defined priority sectors: construction, health careers, and manufacturing.

We also presented the Council with an update on another emerging CTE initiative, P-TECH (Pathways to Technology, Early College High School), which links secondary education, postsecondary education, and industry partners to prepare students for success. P-TECH is a six-year program, grades 9 through 14. When they graduate, P-TECH students will have a high-school diploma and an associate's degree, at no cost to the students or their families – as well as first-in-line consideration for job openings at the industry partner for their program. We are at present working with the Commerce Corporation to identify interested schools and industry partners to launch three P-TECH programs at the start of the next school year. Dan Sutton, from the Commerce Corporation, joined us for this presentation.

5. **Prepare RI update: Increasing number of students participating in dual, concurrent enrollment**

The RIDE team also briefed the Council on Wednesday on the current status of the Prepare RI (dual and concurrent enrollment) initiative, which the Board of Education launched with new regulations and eligibility criteria last April. Through funding from Governor Raimondo and the General Assembly, we have been able to ensure that all qualified public-school students could access dual or concurrent coursework this year – at no cost to the students or their families. (Dual enrollment entails high-school students taking courses on the postsecondary campus; concurrent enrollment entails college courses for credit that certified educators teach at the high school).

We are in the process of collecting data on participation in dual and concurrent enrollment programs. Preliminary data show a steady increase in access to early-college courses: for example, a 49-percent increase in enrollments for students at Central Falls High School, and an increase from 35 students last year to more than 100 participating students this year at Cranston High School East. We are working with the Office of Postsecondary Education to further expand course offerings for the next school year. In March, we plan to present the Board of Education with a full course listing and an update on participation rates.

6. **Report from U.S. Department of Education cites Rhode Island Race to the Top accomplishments**

The U.S. Department of Education has prepared a report on how states used their Race to the Top grants to support teaching and learning. The report, "Fundamental Change: Innovation in America's Schools Under Race to the Top," includes many references to accomplishments attained in Rhode Island in such areas as turning around low-performing schools, forming partnerships with school districts, developing model curricula, and improving evaluation processes. You can read the full report here:

http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/rttfinalrpt1115.pdf

7. **Rhode Island charter public school highlighted in report on blended learning**

The U.S. Department of Education [PROGRESS](#) blog recently reported on our ambitious plan to become the first state to adopt blended learning statewide. The post focuses on one school, [Village Green Virtual Charter School](#), created with the express

goal of "personalizing" learning for every student through a "blended learning" model of online curriculum and in-classroom teaching. The online curriculum allows students extra time to work on some subjects if they need to and it allows teachers to work with groups of students who all need help on a particular skill. You can read the blog post here:

http://sites.ed.gov/progress/2015/11/rhode-island-school-makes-learning-personal-for-students/

8. Providence school-meal programs featured in USDA blog

The U.S. Department of Agriculture blog post this week focuses on the work under way in the Providence Public Schools to use locally produced food in the school-meal programs. Good work, Providence! You can read the post – "Promoting Healthy Habits and Boosting Local Communities," here:

http://blogs.usda.gov/2015/11/18/go-local-promoting-healthy-habits-and-boosting-local-communities/

From RIDE

Instruction:

9. RIDE preparing to launch network for advanced coursework

Thank you to those who have provided feedback on the Notice of Intent to offer the Advanced Coursework Network beginning in the fall of 2016.

Beginning in the fall of 2016, Rhode Island public secondary schools will have the opportunity to expand the advanced-level

coursework available to their high-school and middle-school students through a new initiative, the Advanced Coursework Network. This initiative is intended to build upon the work that many of you have already done in this area. Enriching experiences with advanced coursework helps students get a head start on postsecondary success, master the skills required of a lifelong learner, and be prepared for jobs in sectors critical to the future prosperity of Rhode Island; however, LEA and school ability to offer a wide variety of advanced coursework to meet the diversity of needs for all students is often limited by time and resources. The Advanced Coursework Network is designed to help districts and schools meet this need by creating opportunities for Rhode Island students to envision, pursue, and realize their individualized graduation pathway. As Network Members, schools and districts will enable students and their families to choose to enroll in formerly unavailable high-value academic- and career-focused courses while they remain enrolled at their public school, at no cost to the school, district, or family.

Districts and schools will have the option of joining the Network as Network Providers, in which they extend existing or new courses to students from other LEAs and/or as Network Members, in which they allow their students to enroll in coursework offered by the Network.

High-school courses will be offered in various modalities and middle-school courses will be offered in virtual delivery methods to encourage the greatest participation from students in schools and districts that have chosen to participate in the initiative in its first year. We anticipate the course offerings will include advanced science and mathematics courses, as well as Advanced Placement (AP[©]), world languages, and career-focused and dual/concurrent-enrollment courses. Coursework will be offered

by Rhode Island LEAs, community-based organizations, and institutions of postsecondary education.

Beginning as early as next month, you and your teams will be able to join as Network Members.

RIDE will host a series of informational webinar sessions to provide information about the Advanced Coursework Network and answer program questions. These webinars are intended for Superintendents, Assistant Superintendents, Curriculum Directors, Principals, and other district and school personnel. To register for a webinar, please use the following links:

>   December 1, 10 – 11 a.m.: Register [here](#).

>   December 11, 2 – 3 p.m.: Register [here](#).

>   December 14, 9 – 10 a.m.: Register [here](#).

We invite your comments on this new program to ensure that all considerations are made in the pilot year of implementation. Please submit all comments no later than **November 28**. The following are some questions intended to guide your comments:

>   The goal of the Network is to provide advanced opportunities for Rhode Island students in coordination with other initiatives already in place to support this work. Based on your existing coursework, student interest, or unmet needs, what type of coursework would you prefer to see offered in this Network?

>   Once the coursework is offered, would you prefer to select certain coursework and modalities from the Network to make available to your students or would you allow your

students to choose from the entire Network of courses (which will have been vetted by RIDE and a Network Provider Review Team)?

If you are interested in providing your students with this opportunity, when is the latest that you would be willing and able to introduce this Network to your students for fall 2016 coursework? Please keep in mind this will be an optional program for LEAs and thus not mandatory to introduce at all.

We are aware that logistical and other elements of this program will require administration accommodation, and we are working to address any necessary policy or guidance for schools that choose to be Network Providers or Network Members. Though we have an extensive list of considerations, we hope to get your thoughts to avoid anything being overlooked. What scheduling and logistical considerations would you like incorporated into the launch of this Network?

Would you be interested in extending course offerings at your schools to other students across Rhode Island (i.e., becoming a Network Provider) in exchange for a student tuition-rate payment from the state?

Address all comments about the intent to offer this program to Steve Osborn, Chief, Division of Accelerating School Performance, Rhode Island Department of Education, by email, [stephen.osborn@ride.ri.gov,](mailto:stephen.osborn@ride.ri.gov) or by phone, 222-8485.

Early Learning:

10.   RIDE seeking input from teachers on Kindergarten Entry Profile

As part of the Rhode Island Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge grant, we are planning to implement several initiatives that will focus on supporting kindergarten instruction, assessment, and transition practices. We will gather a broad and representative sample of kindergarten-teacher perspectives to guide this work during meetings on December 2 and 3.

A major component of the work is the development and use of a comprehensive Kindergarten Entry Profile (KEP), intended to support teachers and LEAs in better understanding children's development and learning upon entering kindergarten. This profile is designed to provide information to help teachers understand the developmental needs of their children in order to tailor instruction, to provide information that can be shared with parents, and to give us an overall snapshot of how our children are doing at kindergarten entry.

As we develop the KEP, it is important to understand the context within which kindergarten teachers are working and to determine how the KEP might be most helpful to them. We are looking for teachers who would be willing to engage in an hour-long facilitated discussion on December 2 or 3 about the work that they do and how RIDE can better support this work.

Please ask the kindergarten teachers in your LEA to RSVP rearding one of four sessions:

- Wednesday, December 2, from 3:30 to 4:30 p.m., in Lincoln ([Northern RI Collaborative)](Northern RI Collaborative)

- Wednesday, December 2, from 6 to 7:00 p.m., in Warwick (Greenwood Elementary School)
- Thursday, December 3, from 3:30 to 4:30 p.m., in Exeter (Wawaloam Elementary School)
- Thursday, December 3, from 6 to 7 p.m., in South Kingstown (Kingston Free Library)

If your staff members are unable to attend one of these focus groups but would still like the opportunity to provide input, please have them send their name, district, school, and RIDEMAP account username to Judi Stevenson-Garcia (Judi.Stevenson-Garcia@ride.ri.gov) and they will be added to an online community in the coming weeks, which will be used to continue the discussion with kindergarten teachers from across the state.

11. LEAs asked to add Educational Lead for preschool programs to school profiles

To support the Early Learning Program Search on the Exceed website, we are asking you to report information about the Educational Leads for your preschool programs. An Educational Lead is the person responsible for the educational leadership for the preschool classrooms. This information will include name, email address, and telephone number. Please enter this information as part of your school profile.

The Early Learning Program Search is a centralized location for families in Rhode Island to find information about early learning programs and their quality. You can search for your preschool by going to http://exceed.ri.gov and clicking the button that says "Start Your Search Here."

If you have any questions about adding an Educational Lead to your school profile, please submit a help desk ticket, at:

https://support.ride.ri.gov.

Data Collection:

12.   *Reminder:* Several data collections are open or due in the next month

The following are the data-collection deadlines for December:

- December 1: Reviewing Student Exit Data for Calculation of Cohort Graduation Rates – Opens
- December 3: Special Ed Census Reporting - Opens
- December 8: December Collection - Special Ed Census - Due
- December 8: December Reporting - Special Ed Census - Due
- December 10: Duplicates Resolution - Special Ed Census - Closes
- December 10: Duplicates Resolution - Special Ed Census Reporting - Closes
- December 18: Review Student Exit Data for Calculation of Cohort Graduation Rates - Due

Information about upcoming data collections can be found on the data collection calendar. Weekly collection webinars provide details regarding upcoming collections, along with a question-and-answer period.

From the U.S. Department of Education

13.   U.S. Department of Education issues guidance, shares resources on the education of students with disabilities

To commemorate the 40th anniversary of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the U.S. Education Department has released [guidance](#) aimed at ensuring that America's 6-million children and youth with disabilities have the same opportunity for a quality education as their nondisabled peers.

"In the 40 years since this law was enacted, we have moved beyond simply providing children and youth with disabilities access to the school house," said U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. "Today, we want to assure that these students have no less than the same equal shot at the American dream as their nondisabled peers."

The guidance clarifies that students with disabilities should not only have access to a free appropriate public education, but also they should have individualized education programs (IEPs) that are aligned with state academic content standards for the grade in which a child is enrolled. This will help to ensure that all students receive high-quality instruction that prepares them for success in college and careers.

In addition to the guidance, the U.S. Department of Education also has shared resources for parents and educators aimed at helping students with disabilities succeed in school careers and life:

- *Website Featuring Best Practices from the Field:* a [new website](#) to house resources developed by its grantees on effective IEPs, instructional practices, assessments, student engagement, school climate, home and school partnerships, and post-school transition;
- *Classroom Strategies for Teachers:* [tips for teachers](#) with evidence-based, positive, proactive and responsive

classroom behavior intervention and support strategies; the techniques are aimed at helping capitalize on instructional time and decrease disruptions;

- *Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS) Implementation Blueprint for Educators:* The National Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports prepared a new two-part blueprint on teaching behavioral expectations throughout schools; and
- *Tip Sheets for Parent:* tip sheets developed by the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition in collaboration with the Center for Parent Information and Resources that are meant to help children with disabilities successfully reach adulthood; the tip sheets include information on financial management, healthcare and independent living.

From other federal agencies

14.   National Science Foundation seeks entries in nanotechnology challenge

The National Science Foundation seeks entries from high-school students in the Generation Nano Challenge. Entries consist of a written explanation of a superhero and nanotechnology-driven gear , with a 90-second video, or a one-page comic introducing the superhero and the student's nanotechnology gear. Entries accepted through February 2. See:

http://www.nsf.gov/news/special_reports/gennano/

From other organizations

15.   Newport Jazz Assembly offers to perform in elementary schools

The Newport Jazz Assembly seeks to connect professional musicians to schools with minimal or no music programs. These musicians will perform jazz concerts for students who may not have had the experience of being at a live concert. This program gives students the opportunity to experience a high-energy, interactive, and fun live jazz concert.

The organization – which is part of the Newport Festival Foundation – would like to perform in our elementary schools: Each concert is 35 - 40 minutes long. The set will consist of several short musical segments that span the timeline of jazz history. The program ranges from music written in the early 1900s, through the jazz of today.

Next week we will send information about this opportunity to all elementary-school principals.

RIDE will post this field memo on Tuesday, at:

http://www.ride.ri.gov/InsideRIDE/FieldMemos.aspx