

**Commissioner's Weekly Field Memo
Friday, December 18, 2015**

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

Notes from Commissioner Wagner

1. RIDE to continue discussions with superintendents, other stakeholders on re-imagining high schools

The RIDE team is glad that we had an opportunity to meet with you for an initial discussion about re-imagining our high schools and about the opportunity to redesign our diploma system, especially in regard to the use of statewide assessments as a component of the graduation requirements.

Last week the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education discussed the need to change the date by which students must succeed on state assessments in order to earn a high-school diploma. Under the current [Secondary Regulations](#), students will have to meet a state-assessment requirement beginning with the Class of 2020 – students currently in grade 8. Because some of these students will be taking high-school assessments this spring, before we will have finalized any potential changes to the graduation requirements, we are proposing that the Council hold back on implementing the regulations at least until the Class of 2021.

In our meeting with you on Wednesday morning, we exchanged a number of proposals and ideas. It will be important to continue this discussion among us over the coming weeks, and we are committed to doing so. We have also scheduled meetings with a number of stakeholder groups so as to get a broad spectrum of

input and ideas from many Rhode Islanders as we consider how to open opportunities and pathways for our students while maintaining academic rigor and high expectations for student achievement.

2. RIDE issues RFP for schools, districts interested in provided courses through Advanced Coursework Network

As noted in a Field Memo last month, beginning in the fall of 2016 our public secondary schools will have the opportunity to expand the advanced-level coursework available to their students through a new initiative, the Advanced Coursework Network. Students in schools and districts that join the network will be able to take advanced-level, credit-bearing courses offered by a wide range of approved providers at no cost to themselves or their families, subject to available state and district funds

We have just issued a Request for Proposals for those interested in providing courses through the Advanced Coursework Network. If you are interested, please go to www.ride.ri.gov/advancedcoursework to download a Network Provider Application Kit.

Enriching experiences through 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. Because of limited time and resources, however, districts and schools have often been unable to meet the diversity of needs for all students. The Advanced Coursework Network will build upon other district efforts, such as Prepare Rhode Island and blended-learning initiatives, to provide another tool to help you meet this need by

creating opportunities for Rhode Island students to envision and pursue their own pathway toward graduation and success.

If you have questions about the network, please contact Steve Osborn, Chief of our Division of Accelerating School Performance, at Stephen.Osborn@ride.ri.gov.

3. RIDE partners with DLT to lead Build Skills session at Governor Raimondo's Make it in RI Summit

Thank you to those who were able to join us on Wednesday at Governor Raimondo's Make it in RI Summit: Year One – It's Working. We partnered with Scott Jensen, the director of the Department of Labor and Training, for an informative breakout session on Building Skills – preparing students for success in postsecondary education and challenging careers and aligning our career-preparation programs with the anticipated needs of the Rhode Island economy. We appreciate suggestions offered during our breakout session, and we and Governor Raimondo are eager to receive further ideas and feedback on how to prepare our students for career success. You can see further information about the summit here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Si599wRaW5E&feature=youtu.be>

4. LEAs reminded to complete review, update of school-safety, emergency-response plans and to notify RIDE of completion

Last year, legislation passed that requires all school committees to review and update their school-safety and emergency-response plans every year. You are expected to complete these reviews

annually by November 1. If you have not done so already, please make sure to go to e-RIDE and indicate when your LEA has complied with this law. (RIGL 16-21-25)

By end of the year, RIDE must report to the Speaker of the House, the Senate President, and the Governor that all LEAs have completed these required updates and review.

I also want to remind you that two other bills passed last year dealing with emergency drills and the public records act.

One statute requires schools to conduct emergency-egress drills every month. (Schools must not conduct these drills at the end of the year; they must conduct at least one drill each month while school is in session.) Schools must also conduct two lockdown drills, one in September and one in January. Your schools should coordinate these lockdown drills in conjunction with local police “whenever possible.” (RIGL 16-21-4[a]).

Schools must also provide written reports to RIDE upon completion of these emergency drills. The fire marshal, assistant deputy fire marshal, or a local fire official may require that a fire drill be conducted in his or her presence. (RIGL 16-21-4[f])

Other legislation passed last year exempts from the public records and the open meetings acts all meetings of school-safety teams and documents that these teams produce. (16-21-25)

5. Students, teachers receive Civics Day Awards from Generation Citizen

RIDE congratulates the students and teachers who received Civics Day awards from Generation Citizen – Rhode Island. Anyla Lee,

from DelSesto Middle School (Providence), received the Student Change Maker Award, and Ryan Connole, also from DelSesto, received the Teacher Change Maker Award. Class Change Maker Awards went to the Roger Williams Middle School (Providence; teacher: Juanita Montes de Oca), which has advocated more English Language Learner certifications in the Providence schools, and to E Cubed Academy (Providence; teacher: Nancy Cresser), which has addressed disparate opportunities, particularly regarding education funding.

Other awards went to John Lancellotta and his students at DelSesto for their work on youth unemployment, Nancy Cresser and her students at E Cubed for their work on pedestrian safety during snow removal, Todd Creel and his students at Mount Pleasant High School (Providence) for their work on student-loan forgiveness, Fran Paradis and her students at Samuel Slater Junior High School for their work on counselling services to reduce bullying, and Tricia Webb and her students at Roger Williams Middle Schools for their work on social and emotional learning.

Generation Citizen is a nonprofit organization that works to empower youth across Rhode Island to become active and engaged citizens in their neighborhoods, cities, and state.

6. Tech publication provides information for students on advanced Google searches

The daily “tech news and innovation” publication eSchool News has published an article that provides tips and information on “the advanced Google searches every student should know”:

<http://www.eschoolnews.com/2015/11/23/how-search-google-592/>

From RIDE

Assessments:

7. RIDE schedules sessions on understanding PARCC ELA/literacy expectations

RIDE announces opportunities for professional development regarding understanding PARCC ELA/literacy expectations. These sessions will provide educators the opportunity to strengthen their understanding of the PARCC ELA/literacy data that are available to them and also explore the PARCC released items and how these items (literary or informational) foster a deeper understanding of the standards.

Open Sessions for Understanding PARCC ELA/Literacy Expectations are scheduled throughout Rhode Island for individual educators or groups of educators from districts to attend. To help narrow the instructional focus, we will offer sessions that are focused on either literary *or* informational texts. You can register for the sessions here:

<http://www.eride.ri.gov/workshopreg/main.aspx>

As in the past, if your LEA is interested in hosting a workshop for your educators, District Administrators are encouraged to contact Colleen O'Brien, at colleen.obrien@ride.ri.gov, to schedule a date and begin planning for the session.

Coming soon: PARCC mathematics sessions!

Instruction:

8. Literacy professionals invited to join Rhode Island Literacy Cohort

Next week our 2016 Rhode Island Teacher of the Year Tracy L. LaFreniere will send this invitation to all literacy professionals, which you may feel free to share with literacy professionals in your school community:

As the 2016 Rhode Island Teacher of the Year, I have the unique honor and opportunity to represent all Rhode Island educators. As someone who has been working for 18 years as a Reading Specialist, I am particularly excited to connect with other literacy professionals throughout the state. One of my goals for this year is to create the Rhode Island Literacy Cohort, a cohort of literacy professionals, and this letter is an invitation to join this cohort.

Although we are the smallest state in the nation, we rarely have the opportunity to collaborate from district to district. My best hope is that this cohort will offer all Rhode Island literacy professionals a network of support while offering ongoing opportunities for professional growth. As we meet together to share the successes we celebrate and the challenges we face, we will create a community that engages in the active problem-solving needed to make a real difference for our struggling readers and writers.

Currently, there are many exciting initiatives that are aimed at supporting teachers in helping students to become successful readers. The adoption of the new Rhode Island

Strategic Plan and the launch of the Rhode Island Campaign for Grade Level Reading are two initiatives that will guide future conversations about literacy teaching and learning. Joining together as a cohort will not only inform us about these initiatives, but will also allow us to offer expertise, experience, and voice to those conversations.

We are hoping you can join us for our first meeting on January 7, at the Rhode Island Foundation, from 4 to 5:30 p.m. To RSVP, please complete this [electronic survey](#).

Although I have done my best to distribute this invitation, please forward to any Rhode Island Reading Specialist or Literacy Coach you feel would be interested in joining. I truly look forward to collaborating with you this year to make a difference for our students. Learning to read, and learning to love reading, is the right of every student and together we have the power to make that happen. If you have any questions at all, please don't hesitate to contact me, at Tracy.Lafreniere@ride.ri.gov.

From the U.S. Department of Education

9. U.S. Department of Education issues Dear Colleague letter, request for information on transition to ESSA

The [U.S. Department of Education](#) today took the first steps toward implementing the [Every Student Succeeds Act \(ESSA\)](#), which President Obama signed into law last week to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and replace key requirements of the outdated No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

The U.S. Department of Education launched the rulemaking process by publishing in the *Federal Register* a [Request for Information](#) seeking advice and recommendations for Title I regulations under ESSA.

The U.S. Department of Education also issued a [Dear Colleague Letter](#) to states to clarify some initial steps as states, districts, and schools transition to the new law and signal its commitment to facilitating a smooth transition to the new law—with minimal disruption to students, families, teachers, and schools—while ensuring compliance with all ESSA transition provisions.

10. Civil Rights Office provides guidance on Title IX and single-sex programs

The U.S. Department of Education [Office for Civil Rights](#) this week released guidance in the form of a [Dear Colleague Letter](#) detailing schools' responsibilities under Title IX when partnering with certain outside organizations that provide single-sex programs to a school district's students. The letter explains the circumstances under which a school district may work lawfully with “voluntary youth-service organizations” under Title IX.

The new guidance reminds schools that Title IX prohibits school districts from providing significant assistance—such as financial support, staff, equipment, and facilities—to any outside organization that discriminates on the basis of sex, unless Title IX excepts the organization from its reach. The letter explains that Title IX does not apply to the membership practices of voluntary youth-service organizations even when they receive significant assistance from a school district. In order for an organization to qualify for this exemption, its membership must be voluntary, traditionally limited to members of one sex, and principally

limited to persons under age 19. The organization also must facilitate public-service opportunities for its members.

Finally, the letter clarifies that, even though Title IX allows a school to provide significant assistance to a voluntary youth-service organization, the district still has a Title IX obligation to ensure that girls and boys have comparable educational opportunities overall.

From other state agencies and offices

11. Students invited to participate in National Center for Missing & Exploited Children poster contest

The State Police invite grade-5 students to participate in the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) poster contest.

Contest rules:

- Applicants must be in the fifth grade.
- Artwork should reflect the theme “Bring Our Missing Children Home.” This phrase must appear somewhere on the poster. The theme may be depicted in the students’ artwork through one illustration or a combination of illustrations (e.g., signs and symbols, people, abstract, industry, wildlife, etc.).
- The theme must be depicted visually and can be created using media such as acrylics, watercolor, pencils, charcoal, magic markers, spray paint, crayons, and pastels. Digitally produced images, collages, cut-outs, and stamping will not be eligible for consideration.
- The finished poster must measure 8½ x 14 inches.

- The poster must be submitted with a completed application, which includes a description of the poster and a brief biography of the artist, either written legibly or typed.

We suggest that schools have their own contest to select an entry to submit for the statewide selection. The statewide winner will be eligible for a national-level award.

All state entries must be received or postmarked **by February 17**.
Mail entries to:

Rhode Island State Police
Attn: Detective Jonathan Elliott
311 Danielson Pike
North Scituate, R.I. 02857

NCMEC has provided additional information regarding their 2016 National Missing Children's Day poster contest; all materials and information are available for download at:

<http://mecptraining.org/educate/national-missing-childrens-day/poster-contest-resources/> .

From other organizations

12. RISSA schedules training session on school safety, risk assessment

The Rhode Island School Superintendents' Association (RISSA) invites representatives from all school districts to participate in a School Safety Risk Assessment Training Session.

What is the session?:

Training for mandated school safety and risk assessments (RIGL – 16-21-23)

Who is the trainer?:

Lieutenant Derek Borek, Rhode Island State Police

Where and when is the session?:

January 26, from 9 to 11:30 a.m., at Cranston High School West.

Who should attend?:

One or two School Safety Representatives from each district, who will be able to bring the information back to the district administration to facilitate further training.

What is the cost?

None. Training is free.

RSVP:

- Please reply using the Google Sheets Reservation Form or to Larry Filippelli (RISSA liaison to School Safety Committee) at 647-4100 no later than **January 19**.
- Please [CLICK HERE](#) for the Google Sheets Reservation Form for the January 26 session at Cranston High School West.

13. Educators invited to attend Rhode Island Middle Level Educators conference on strategic plan, Secondary School Regulations

All educators are invited to attend Connecting the Middle Level, the 13th annual Rhode Island Middle Level Educators winter conference. Dr. Ken Wagner will be the keynote speaker, and

workshops will focus on issues prioritized in the Rhode Island Strategic Plan for Public Education and in the Secondary School Regulations. Some examples include personalization, blended learning, and proficiency-based teaching and learning.

The conference will take place on **January 30**, from 8 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., at the Archie R. Cole Middle School, 100 Cedar Ave., East Greenwich. For more information, contact:

ringlecommunications@gmail.com.

14. **Registration opens for New England Secondary School Consortium conference on high-school redesign**

High School Redesign in Action is the New England Secondary School Consortium's seventh annual conference for educators to share success stories, exchange best practices, and continue to build momentum for innovations that will prepare all students for success in the colleges, careers, and communities of the 21st century.

When: Thursday and Friday, **March 17 and 18**

Where: Four Points by Sheraton, in Norwood, Massachusetts

Who: Educators, students, policy-makers, and teams from middle schools and high schools, along with career-and-technical education centers and postsecondary education from across the country engaged in school improvement.

Rhode Island schools schedule to lead sessions at the conference include the Alan Shawn Feinstein Middle School (Coventry), Blackstone Academy, and Woonsocket High School with Riverzedge Arts.

To register, go to:

<https://fs19.formsite.com/GSP1/2016/index.html>

For a draft of the program, go to:

<http://newenglandssc.org/conferences/2016-conference/>

RIDE will post this field memo on Tuesday, at:

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