



**Enclosure 2a**  
**November 16, 2021**

**Minutes of the September 1, 2021  
Meeting**

**RHODE ISLAND BOARD OF EDUCATION**

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Chair Barbara Cottam called the September 1, 2021, meeting to order at 5:33 p.m. and acknowledged that a quorum was present.

**Present:**

Michael Almeida  
Colleen Callahan  
Barbara Cottam  
Patricia DiCenso  
Dennis Duffy  
Rachelle Green  
\*Mike Grey  
Thomas Izzo  
Marta Martinez  
Lawrence Purtill  
Jeffery Williams

**Absent:**

Amy Beretta  
\*Margo Cook  
Karen Davis  
Timothy DelGiudice  
Jo Eva Gaines  
Michael Mello  
Marianne Monte  
\*Stephan Pryor  
\*Mackenzie Raimond

[\*Ex-officio, non-voting member]

Public access was provided to attendees of this Zoom webinar in compliance with the Open Meetings Act and the provisions of the Executive Order; contact information was provided for those experiencing technical difficulties.

After going over some ground rules, Chair Cottam asked for a motion for acceptance of the agenda.

**1. ACCEPTANCE OF THE AGENDA**

On a motion duly made by Colleen Callahan and seconded by Dennis Duffy, it was

**VOTED:** That, the Rhode Island Board of Education accepts the agenda for the remote meeting of September 1, 2021

Vote: 10 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative as follows:

YEAS: Michael Almeida, Colleen Callahan, Barbara Cottam, Patricia DiCenso, Dennis Duffy, Rachelle Green, Thomas Izzo, Marta Martinez, Lawrence Purtill, and Jeffery Williams

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

## 2. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

### 2a. Minutes of the May 26, 2021, Meeting

Chair Cottam asked for a motion to accept the minutes of the May 26, 2021, meeting

On a motion duly made by Lawrence Purtill and seconded by Marta Martinez, it was

**VOTED:** That the Rhode Island Board of Education approves the minutes of the May 26, 2021, meeting

Vote: 10 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative

YEAS: Michael Almeida, Colleen Callahan, Barbara Cottam, Patricia DiCenso, Dennis Duffy, Rachelle Green, Thomas Izzo, Marta Martinez, Lawrence Purtill, and Jeffery Williams

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

Chair Cottam welcomed Milly Asherov, a Senior at Classical High School, to her first meeting of the RI Board of Education. Milly is the new Chair of the RI Student Advisory Council and Rhode Island's Student Representative on the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education.

## 3. OPEN FORUM

One individual expressed her concerns with the mask wearing mandate for students. Three written comments were also received and shared with the members of the Board in advance.

## 4. REPORT OF THE COMMISSIONERS

- **Elementary and Secondary Education**

Chair Cottam introduced Ana Riley, Deputy Commissioner for Instructional Programs, to give remarks on behalf of Commissioner Infante-Green, who had a death in the family. Deputy Commissioner Riley began by expressing that the safety of students and staff is RIDE's main priority as the state works towards a successful return to full in-person learning. She noted that many school districts have started school this week with others starting next week. She expressed that RIDE is proud of the way Rhode Island led the nation in the swift transition to distance learning and then the return to in-person learning last Fall, and with the proper planning, this will be another successful school year. Deputy Commissioner Riley shared that the deadline for school districts to submit their back-to-school plans was last Friday and that RIDE has been working with the RI Department of Health (RIDOH) to review and revise them and help local school leaders prepare for their first day of school. The plans, which will be posted on the districts' websites and on RIDE's homepage, cover instructional policies in addition to the health and safety component that the districts submitted in mid-August.

Next, Deputy Commissioner Riley reported that as per the Governor's executive order, the State is requiring mask use in schools for all individuals, both vaccinated and unvaccinated. This policy aligns with RIDE's layered mitigation strategy to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and the agency will continue to work closely with RIDOH and the Governor's Office to monitor the situation around the Delta variant and will adjust the guidance as needed.

Deputy Commissioner Riley went on to report that a few weeks ago, RIDE was the recipient of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's Balance the Equation – A Grand Challenge for Algebra I grant. RIDE was one of 11 grantees out of an initial pool of 416 applicants from organizations across 26 countries, and the only government agency selected. The funding will support an innovative program in Providence middle schools to help multilingual learners get ahead.

Lastly, Deputy Commissioner Riley shared that earlier today, RIDE released the final Blueprint for Multilingual Learners' Success. The final version of the Blueprint was developed through engagement sessions with stakeholders during the 2019-2020 school year and first released in draft form in December 2020. After publishing the Blueprint, RIDE solicited feedback from educators, families, and students, and incorporated their input into the final document. The Blueprint and the PK-12 Strategic Plan can be reviewed on RIDE's website in English, Spanish and Portuguese. While the Blueprint articulates the shared vision for MLL instruction and identifies the principles for high-quality instruction and services, the Strategic Plan outlines how RIDE will make them a reality. RIDE is deeply committed to serving more than 23,000 current and former MLL students in the State, who speak over 100 languages and comprise 16% of the total student population.

#### - **Postsecondary Education**

Commissioner Gilkey began his report by expressing that he believes that the work being done is critical at a time when the institutions are tirelessly working to reopen campuses across the State. He noted that the additional pandemic related challenges facing the institutions to deliver education, while keep students and staff as safe as possible, will continue to push the limits of the industry

across the country, and certainly in Rhode Island. Considering the large bodies of work that include delivering high-quality teaching and learning, enrollment management, campus safety protocols, and effective institutional policy in communications, it cannot be overstated that the institutions across the State are being asked to endure much more extended roles and responsibilities than ever before. Commissioner Gilkey noted that while it is not yet known the full extent of the strain these circumstances will have, it will inevitably impact student success, mental health and well-being, degree completion, career transition, additional planning, preparation, and intensive use of resources, that require unprecedented levels of leadership and commitment, from the design to the execution, which is also happening in the K-12 system. He shared that as a parent of a 4 and a 7-year-old who started school today, he would like to thank the administrators and staff for their help in ensuring a successful first day of school.

Next, Commissioner Gilkey reported that the Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner (OPC), as well as the colleges, are working in several fronts to move the State forward collectively. He believes that a robust mechanism of transfer across the public institutions holds tremendous opportunity for the higher education system to produce more equitable outcomes for Rhode Islanders, while accelerating completion rates for postsecondary credentials that are required by employers. He shared that at the October meeting of the Postsecondary Council, OPC, in collaboration with CCRI, RI College and the University of Rhode Island, will present a feasible approach to delivering transfer for Rhode Islanders across the public education system. He thanked the leadership of the three institutions for their commitment to this initiative and he is eager to present a reasonable approach, timetable, and deliverables, that makes seamless transfer possible in the State.

Furthermore, OPC continues to grow the work at the Westerly Education Center and at the Providence Nursing Education Center. This includes the expansion of the facility in Westerly to accommodate an increase in demand for programming to assist Electric Boat with the increase and demands for workforce. He shared that he had the chance to tour and meet with corporate leadership at Electric Boat to understand the projected workforce needs of that corporation over the next decade. The additional workforce that is going to be needed at Electric Boat is a great opportunity that is going to require a great innovation opportunity for higher education, particularly from staffing and instructors at the Westerly Education Center, to meet the demands of the military. He shared that construction has begun at a third Education Center in Woonsocket, with a projected early 2022 opening date. This Center will follow a similar business first, demand-driven strategy to workforce training model.

Commissioner Gilkey also reported that OPC leads several initiatives that help Rhode Islanders return to work through postsecondary training, specifically through the back-to-work program with the Department of Labor and Training (DLT). He shared that there are still thousands of Rhode Islanders out of work, yet many employers are looking for qualified talent, and OPC and DLT are seeking to extend the RI Reconnect Program to provide support services such as childcare, transportation, and technology, so that Rhode Islanders can get the training that they need in addition to the tuition and fees, to become qualified to return to work. It is important to note that the vast majority of Rhode Islanders who have been dislocated by the pandemic, were those that did not have some form of postsecondary credential, which is also an adult education challenge.

Commissioner Gilkey ended his report by sharing that his office is looking ahead at how they can coordinate a system of postsecondary education to serve the current teacher collective needs of the State and continue to align this coordinated system across K-12, RIDOH, Labor, and Commerce. He shared that he spent his first 100 days on the job meeting with all 39 local leaders, and last week OPC launched a new Advisory Committee that seeks to help guide efforts moving forward. The Committee is made up of around 40 Rhode Islanders outside of higher education to provide a set of recommendations that will guide the State's long-term postsecondary education planning efforts. The first discussion was keynoted by Dr. Anthony Carnevale, a leading national economist, focused on higher education and the economy. The Advisory Committee will seek to develop a set of recommendations over the next three months. The plan is to also engage faculty, staff and students, critical voices in these long-term planning efforts. He thanked the three public college presidents as well as President Bernardo-Sousa of Johnson and Wales University, Commissioner Infante-Green, Board Member Martinez, Chairwoman Cottam, Senator Izzo, Bishop Williams, Chair DelGiudice, and Mike Grey, for being part of the Advisory Committee.

## 5. DISCUSSION ITEMS

### a. PK-12 Education Back to School Plan

Deputy Commissioner Riley began by sharing that as soon as school ended in June, RIDE began working with school districts on opening plans for the 2021-2022 school year. She shared that both an instructional template and a health and safety component outlining the critical elements needed to begin the new school year, were shared with school districts, which set the stage for districts to apply for the \$450M ESSER III funds available to them. She explained that the Back2School planning template outlines the critical components needed for districts to begin the 2021-2022 school year, and that in addition to ensuring effective planning for instruction, health and safety is also a required submission to access ESSER III funding. Deputy Commissioner Riley also went over the COVID-19 mitigation strategies for the health and safety component of the Back-to-School Plan – screening, testing, masking, cleaning, ventilation, vaccination, and spacing, which she attributed to the success and low transmission rates in schools last year. This year RIDOH is engaging each municipality to plan and execute back to school vaccination clinics and school districts were provided financial resources (\$50/student) through an ELC Reopening Grant, to enable and expand school-based screening and testing to support and maintain in-person learning.

Next, Emily Crowell, RIDE's Chief of Staff, went over the Back2School Communication Campaign goals, including key communications and outreach activities to support and promote in-person learning for families and students, leading-up to the first day of school.

Senator Izzo suggested that teachers be directly engaged as part of the outreach plan.

Members Callahan and Purtil expressed that as members of the governing boards of the RIFTHP and NEARI, they would be happy to serve as conveners to bring teachers and other union members together and get messages out.

Deputy Commissioner Riley responded that the Back2School Plans required engagement and feedback from teachers, administrators, parents, and community members.

b. Postsecondary Education Back to School Plans - Update

Dr. Meaghan Hughes, President of the Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI), began her update by expressing how thrilling it was to be back in person at the college for the first time in 18 months to welcome thousands of students back to in-person learning. President Hughes went over the current vaccine policy, vaccine clinic, testing policy, safety measures, and gave a brief overview on where the college stands with the fall enrollment and the late start semester. She shared that students must be vaccinated or have an approved medical or religious exemption in order to take in-person classes, and students who are exempted, must share a negative test that is taken within 72 hours or less, every time they come into campus. To incentivize students to get vaccinated, the college gave \$200 from the federal relief dollars to every student who uploaded their vaccine information into the health portal by the previous Friday. The college at this time is not requiring faculty and staff to be vaccinated but is encouraging them to do so and to share that information with the college. In partnership with RIDOH, CCRI held 26 vaccine clinics across all campuses for any Rhode Islander needing a vaccine and will be continuing to offer drive-by clinics on Saturdays at the Providence and Lincoln campuses. For students, vaccine clinics are being run Monday – Friday at all campuses. All students, faculty and staff are required to wear masks, except when working in a private office or eating/drinking. All non-vaccinated students, faculty and staff undergo daily screening, including temperature scans. Cleaning protocols have also been greatly enhanced, including the use of disinfectant machines for all classrooms. President encouraged Board members to spread the word that student enrollment is being extended through September 7<sup>th</sup>. President Hughes concluded her report by noting that as of this morning, there are around \$12,000 registered students compared to around 13,000 last year, a 10 percent enrollment decline. The college is once again offering a condensed 12-week semester, to try and close the enrollment gap.

Member Williams asked how CCRI's enrollment decline compares to the rest of the region.

President Hughes responded that sister schools have not released their numbers, so that data won't be available until the middle of October.

Next, Dr. Frank Sanchez, President of Rhode Island College, expressed that the college is also excited to welcome students back to campus after a very long year of remote instruction. The college went through a very robust planning process to start the academic year. The college assembled five committees with student, faculty and staff representation around academics, community health, human resources, student experience as well as facilities, to make the necessary adjustments. RIC frequently consulted with RIDOH, which contributed to the very strong reopening plan. He thanked the Postsecondary Council for approving the student vaccination mandate, which is the cornerstone to the mitigation plan, and the Governor for instituting a masking policy. RIC is also supplementing RIDOH's contact tracing with its own contact tracing unit on campus to find cases early and quarantine and isolate as soon as possible. Distance rules are also being enforced in the classrooms and 72-hour negative tests are required for all students arriving on campus, as well as daily

screening for the entire campus. President Sanchez recognized faculty and staff for working hard around the clock to ensure that the campus is safe. He shared that much like other comprehensive colleges around the nation, RIC's student enrollment continues to be challenged as many lower-income, first generation families, still face substantial economic uncertainty because of the pandemic. He noted that as of this week, student enrollment is down by around 12 percent compared to last academic year, from being down 20 percent about a month ago. He also emphasized that of this evening, 86.7 percent of enrolled students are vaccinated, and he feels confident that rate will continue to rise.

c. Secondary School Regulations – Policy Principles

Stephen Osborn, RIDE's State Strategy and Student Opportunity Officer, gave an update on the Secondary School Regulations, which are being revised. He explained that the goal of today's conversation is to have a discussion with Board Members and receive their feedback on what they see as opportunities and challenges with the high school experience, and who needs to be engaged to make this work a success. He explained that this work began about two years ago, when RIDE launched the XQ+RI Design Challenge, which authentically engaged educators, students, families, and community members, to reimagine high school in Rhode Island. Twenty high schools were awarded funding to look at their data and come up with plans to improve themselves. When going through the process, RIDE learned a lot about what needs to be done to reimagine the high school experience, including data on how most students want to attend college, but many are not taking the necessary courses and even fewer are passing these courses. Other data points are that the graduation requirements are not aligned to college admission requirements; the high school experience is not engaging enough students; students struggle to access relevant learning experiences that connect learning to their passions and goals; high school has changed and changes on how to support students and families need to occur; and the need to do more to give every student a fair shot at reaching their potential. Mr. Osborn stressed that the demands of high school have changed, the world has changed, so changes need to be made to support students and families in high school. He also shared that RIDE had a series of conversations throughout the summer with key stakeholders, and featured national and local experts, to receive feedback on the recommended concepts. Mr. Osborne also shared that later this month, RIDE will launch the XQ+RI Art and Activism Challenge, to emphasize the role that the arts play in inspiring change in society. Next steps in the process are for the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education to approve the proposed revisions to the secondary regulations, for the purpose of public review and comment, and to develop an action plan to support effective implementation of efforts to reimagine high school and the secondary regulations.

Board Member Williams expressed that he wants to go on the record by saying that it seems like these conversations have occurred for decades with more reports, more focus groups, and more conversations, and he has yet to feel a real sense of urgency where there is a commitment that we are going to do the things that we know can be done. He would like to see true progress, true reimagining, and the commitment to do whatever needs to be done. He stressed that the current bar is too low and that should be concerning to everyone as students are not progressing. He also did not see or hear the necessity of alignment from the educational process in the earlier grades, through

high school, through career choices, and through jobs that are going to make a difference in terms of economics for families. He also emphasized that we are really doing a disservice to families if we are not putting a red-hot sense of urgency on what needs to be done to help them.

Mr. Osborn responded that it is a tough conversation for Rhode Island, but there have been a lot of efforts on the high school diploma and the high school experience has yet to yield the desired expectations. We are now trying to create the path that opens doors to students and really start the conversation on what needs to be done to support students who have responsibilities outside of school, without stigmatizing them.

Board Member Callahan expressed that she concurs with Board Member Williams in that there should be a sense of urgency and that an action plan is absolutely critical to move the work forward. She shared that 25 years ago, she was part of initial conversations around what needed to be done around student engagement, performance, capstone projects, differentiated schedules, and many other things that need to be addressed again. Because of what was going nationally at the time, RIDE took the foot off the pedal and changed directions, but it feels that we are going right back to where we were all those years ago. She stressed that going forward she hopes that a lot of emphasis is placed action planning and include all stakeholders, so that it is not just aspirational, ask the question what it will take to do it and follow through.

Member Izzo expressed that he admires the work that is being done and that it is challenging, but one of his initial reactions is that it is sort of based on a whole series of negatives that the high school experience is everything that it is not doing. One of the pieces that he thinks is really interesting after having spent over 32 years in the classroom and dealing with kids and figuring out a pathway to college, everything has become much more complex, but one of the things that continues to be missing is working on health care, juvenile justice, DCYF, foster care, youth access to tobacco, lead paint legislation, and other major initiatives that so impact families, and as much as you restructure, and as much as you want to respond in a positive way and level that playing field, if you don't have the pieces in place that truly support families, youth and community, it is going to be a continual vicious circle and we have got to better engage. In addition to what RIDE is trying to accomplish, how do we truly engage policymakers in the State, particularly at the municipal, and more importantly, at the legislative level. Kids issues are not on the front burner, and it takes immense amount of hard work to get it there and keep it there and we have to be realistic about that. It feels like we are blaming the schools and he doesn't like that feeling having spent all that time teaching. The school can be well structured and do the right things, but if the folks coming in are not prepared, if there isn't good nutrition, good housing, and healthcare, it is going to be a real challenge to make it a level playing field. He asked if these conversations ever get on the agenda of the State's Children's Cabinet.

Member Purtill expressed that Member Izzo's points are so valid that when everyone leaves tonight's meeting, they must think about what they can do with the people they work with, because the truth is until every key stakeholder gets involved and understands what this means, things are not going to change and success in schools is not going to happen.

Commissioner Gilkey expressed that when he looks at the college readiness slide, what scares him

about that percentage is that Tony Carnavalle, leading economist in education, declared last week that for 2008, over 99 percent of jobs created required a postsecondary credential, yet we are barely seeking half of the students in Rhode Island that are ready to go earn that postsecondary credential. We are setting ourselves up not only for equity problems that we morally care about and should be pushing for, but also economic challenges as a State. We also know that it is not just academic knowledge, it is also technical skills that makes you successful in the economy. What scares him is the job production versus our talent pipeline and the time is now to do something holistically in the right trajectory.

Members Duffy expressed that this was a great report with lots of fascinating and stunning data. One question that he has always had is why is it that right across the border, Massachusetts high schools do so much better in performance than Rhode Island high schools, which is true for a low-performing high schools, middle and high performing high schools. Across the board, Rhode Island schools tend to not be remotely competitive with comparable community high schools in the Massachusetts and asked if among other things, if it is because we no longer have a graduation requirement comparable to Massachusetts, which we had, but was revoked before it became effective. He also noted that there is a lot of data about students who are struggling, but he would be interested to also know how many students, high school to high school, are excelling.

Mr. Osborn voiced that historically in Rhode Island there has been no benchmark or target on what success means to be able to shoot for, so folks don't know what that bar is. It is a difficult place to be, but that is part of the problem.

Student Representative, Milly Asherov, voiced that she completely agrees that all stakeholders, including students, need to own a piece of this long-term plan that they can call their own and take ownership.

Member Green expressed that she also agrees with everything that was stated this evening and asked what is in the first piece of the regulations.

Mr. Osborn responded that one of the first things will be to align the high school graduation requirements to the college admissions criteria. If that is done, there will be discussions around whether to require it for everybody, and what will those supports to students who need schedule flexibility look like.

Board Member Grey expressed that it is critical to be clear on the definition of what equity and engagement look like and what it means as people have different interpretations of what those words mean when they hear them in different settings.

Member Izzo voiced that another important piece of the equation needs to be labor relations as you can have all the structures you want in a school, but unless it is implemented and is carried through, it is going to be really challenging.

In closing, Chair Cottam reminded folks to be bold, act swiftly, and exhibit courage on what needs to be done for students. Students need to be at the center of all decisions and the scores are not acceptable for any path, any student to take, and that should be the impetus to act, because if it is not, then we are not serving our students, families, and the economy of our State. She emphasized that the top schools in Rhode Island are in the bottom third of Massachusetts schools and we cannot forget that. She agrees that there isn't one program for all, but our job is to provide a foundation to all people, all students, so that they can be participating members of our citizenry. She asked Board members that as we move forward in the work, to remember that we have got to raise the bar for everyone to achieve for benefit of our State, the economy, etc.

## 6. UPCOMING MEETINGS

Chairman Cottam stated that the next meeting of the RI Board of Education is scheduled for Wednesday, November 10, 2021, at 5:30 p.m.

## 7. ADJOURNMENT:

Chair Cottam called for a motion to adjourn tonight's meeting.

On a motion duly made by Jeffery Williams and seconded by Rachelle Green, it was

**VOTED:** That, the Rhode Island Board of Education adjourns.

Vote: 10 members voted in the affirmative, 0 members voted in the negative, as follows:

YEAS Michael Almeida, Colleen Callahan, Barbara Cottam, Patricia DiCenso, Dennis Duffy, Rachelle Green, Thomas Izzo, Marta Martinez, Lawrence Purtill, and Jeffery Williams

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

The meeting adjourned at 7:21 p.m.