



Enclosure 2a
December 7, 2021

MINUTES OF THE MEETING
November 16, 2021

COUNCIL ON ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

Board Chair Cottam welcomed everyone to the November 16, 2021, meeting of the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education. Virtual access was provided to the public. Chair Cottam declared a quorum present and called the meeting to order at 5:35 p.m.

Present: *Milly Asherov, Michael Almeida, Amy Beretta, Barbara Cottam, Karen Davis, Patricia DiCenso, Jo Eva Gaines, Lawrence Purtill

Absent: Colleen Callahan, Marta Martinez

[*Ex-officio, non-voting member]

Chair Cottam noted for the record that Members Callahan, Martinez and Commissioner Infante-Green, would not be joining the meeting. Victor Capellan, Special Advisor to the Commissioner, represented the Commissioner.

1. ACCEPTANCE OF THE AGENDA

On a motion duly made by Amy Beretta and seconded by Jo Eva Gaines, it was

VOTED: That the Rhode Island Council on Elementary and Secondary Education accepts the agenda for the November 16, 2021, meeting

Vote: 7 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative as follows:

YEAS: Michael Almeida, Amy Beretta, Barbara Cottam, Karen Davis, Patricia DiCenso, Jo Eva Gaines, Lawrence Purtill

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

2. COMMISSIONER'S REPORT

Mr. Capellan reported that Commissioner Infante-Green is in good spirits at home recovering from her recent medical procedure and that she remains in constant communication with her leadership team. He went on to share that last week RIDE released the results of the 2020-2021 Assessing Comprehension and Communications in English State-to-State for English Learners, also

known as the ACCESS assessment for multilingual learners. ACCESS is administered to multilingual learners to examine their English-language proficiency and the assessment looks at four language domains: listening, reading, speaking, and writing. He emphasized that much like all the other standardized assessments administered during the COVID-19 pandemic, average student proficiency dropped this year. He noted that the COVID effect is evident in these results and RIDE did not wait for this data to take action. To better support MLL students, earlier this year RIDE released the Blueprint for Multilingual Learners' Success and the Strategic Plan for MLL Success, and has already started implementing some strategies, including funding the districts of Central Falls, Providence, Westerly, and Woonsocket, with grants to explore, implement, or expand bilingual and dual-language learning programs in their schools.

Mr. Capellan went on to express that although we should be optimistic about what the future holds, we also know that COVID-19 is still present and impacting our education system. He expressed that the best tool to prevent the spread and keep students and staff safe, healthy, and in the classroom learning, is vaccinations. Since the CDC approved vaccinations for students ages 5-11, RIDE has been working closely with RIDOH and local school leaders to offer opportunities to families to get their children vaccinated. Upon clearance, RIDE reached out to districts and asked them to host at least two clinics in their communities, which started last week and are open to all children 5-11 years old – not just the children who attend the host school.

Next, Mr. Capellan reiterated what he stated at last week's meeting of the RI Board of Education, that as a product of Providence public schools, he is very familiar with the systemic challenges the district has faced for decades because he saw them firsthand. He shared that in 1983, he was an ESL student in Providence and that the Johns Hopkins Report three decades later, only reinforced the drastic changes that need to happen. The 1993 Providence Blueprint for Education, as well as the 2012 Council of Great City Schools Report, the 2017 Annie E. Casey Foundation's Race for Results Report, and most recently, the United States Justice Department Office of Civil Rights, all found the Providence school system to be failing students, especially multilingual learners. Progress has been made over the last 24 months, 21 of which were during a once-in-a-lifetime global pandemic. He expressed that although the last few months have been incredibly challenging, things have moved forward, and it is important that the State has the will to stay the course and create a better education system for the students and families of Providence. Over the last 30 years there have been many starts and stops, but we cannot afford to go back to what it used to be. The system has failed too many children and families, and some may have forgotten that fact, but we cannot forget.

3. OPEN FORUM

Chair Cottam noted that no one had signed-up to speak and that written testimony had been submitted and shared with the Council in advance of the meeting.

4. DISCUSSION ITEMS

a. ACCESS Results and Blueprint Release/Initiatives

Deputy Commissioner Roldán began by sharing that this evening's presentation is part of a series of State Assessment results released over the last couple of weeks. Deputy Roldán reminded everyone that the agency's work is grounded on the three pillars of RIDE's Strategic Plan – World-Class Talent; Excellence in Learning; and Engaged Communities – and that all three need to be the focus in addition to the LEAP Task Force work to accomplish the work that needs to be done over the next couple of years to counteract the impact and accelerate learning across the State. Deputy Roldán noted that Rhode Island continues to lead the nation in various areas, one of which is the work around our Multilingual Learner Blueprint.

Next, Lisa Foehr, Chief of RIDE's Teaching and Learning Division, went over the COVID-19 effect and the considerations specifically to ACCESS. She stated that what is unique about the ACCESS administration is that Rhode Island was able to administer the assessment in 2020, prior to the closing of schools, and again in 2021. She noted that much like the other state assessments, this assessment was administered in person, a decision made by the WIDA Consortium, which Rhode Island is a member of. Ms. Foehr went over the five main LEAP Task Force priorities and the State English Language Proficiency Assessments, administered to all English language learners, K-12, underscoring that this assessment is designed to measure students' social and academic proficiency in English associated with the content areas of ELA, mathematics, science, and social studies.

Next, David Sienko, Director of RIDE's Office of Student, Community and Academic Supports, went over grade-level trends in MLL enrollment, highlighting that there was a decline this year, specifically in grades K, grades 2-4, and in grades 6 and 9. This certainly presents some COVID exacerbated challenges for students transitioning to middle school and high school, as well as ESL development for elementary level students. As far as participation, Mr. Sienko noted that although Rhode Island saw a 15% decline in participation, the State emerged as a national leader in the 41-state comparison. He praised administrators and teachers who worked hard to get students to come in person in January and February, when many students were still learning remotely.

Next, Flavia Molea-Baker, RIDE's Coordinator of Multilingual Learners Program, presented data on year-to-year, by grade level, by years of MLL service, and by student group. She highlighted that the percentage of Rhode Island's MLL population testing at the Entering ELP Level has remained fairly stable over the past four years. However, in academic year 2020-2021, there was a statewide decline in average proficiency, with 60% of MLLs Emerging and Developing Proficiency (ELP Levels 2 and 3), compared to 54% in academic year 2019-2020, which is another reminder of the work that needs to be done for MLLs. Ms. Molea-Baker noted that language development is a lifelong process and that MLLs are expected to reach proficiency over the course of six years rather than one-year and that MLL service impacts language development, and the quality and continuity of services impact rates of language development.

Next, Ms. Foehr went over the MLL student performance in English language arts and mathematics on the RICAS assessments. She noted that students who recently exited MLL, start to perform close to other groups, which means that it is imperative that as we support MLLs in getting to the point of ACCESS proficiency, we are also helping them achieve and perform better on the RICAS ELA and mathematics assessments.

Lastly, Mr. Sienko went over some high-leverage strategies – amplify curricula, implement classroom observation protocols, enhance the use of formative assessments, provide professional learning, build leadership capacity, family engagement, and expand bilingual and dual language programs - for the release of the RI Blueprint for MLL Success. He shared that the purpose of the release this year was not only to look at the data and serve the data to the districts, but to also challenge the districts to look carefully at what the data is telling and how it is aligned to RICAS and their achievement data, what is the story that needs to be told, and what are the strategies and supports that district teams can begin to develop to address some of the gaps that exist.

b. Update on COVID-19 Response

Deputy Commissioner Ana Riley began her presentation by reminding the Council that last year RIDE had the EDOC (Education Operation Center), which included folks from RIDE, RIDOH, the Governor's Office, as well as the National Guard, providing unified support to districts. This year, a mini team made-up of RIDE, RIDOH and Governor's Office staff, has been created and meets daily to review what is happening at the local school districts and provide support. The team has been supporting districts set-up vaccination clinics and encouraging students to get vaccinated. As of last Wednesday, 56% of eligible students 12 years and older, are fully vaccinated, 4% are partially vaccinated, around 40% are still unvaccinated, and the governor announced earlier today that almost 10,000, 5-11-year-old students attending public schools, have received their initial dose of the vaccine. She also shared that about 90% of school staff is vaccinated, with seven districts requiring full vaccination of all staff or testing regularly. Deputy Commissioner Riley also shared that RIDE has been supporting the Westerly school district over the last 30 days as the state's first test-to-stay pilot district (PK-6 grade) and is working with 12 other school districts who have shown interest in the test-to-stay pilot program.

c. Providence Update

Acting Superintendent Montañez began by introducing some of his senior staff who will be presenting this evening – Zackary Scott, Deputy Superintendent of Operations; Joan Jackson, Senior Advisor to the Superintendent; and Nick Figueroa, Chief of Family and Community Engagement. He reminded the Council that the State intervention only started two years ago, while dealing with a global pandemic most of that time. While the takeover is new, the issues identified in the Johns Hopkins report existed for decades as he saw them firsthand as a teacher and as an administrator. He highlighted that district did not have a unified curriculum, which means that students were learning different things in different grades and in different schools as they moved across the district.

Ms. Jackson began by sharing that although she has recently joined the team, she has been working in urban education and turnaround for her entire 37-year education career. She went over the accomplishments in the area of Excellence in Learning and expressed that having a unified curriculum, matters, and that having a curriculum that is particularly targeted for students who are behind, to help them accelerate their growth, is even more important. She is excited that the district is implementing a unified curriculum across the district as a way to measure progress. In addition, the district has implemented high-quality instruction, student supports, community supports, adding content-specific supervisors to monitor and support curriculum instruction, as well as adding a Pre-K Literacy Specialist and Reading Specialist to the curriculum team. In addition, the district is using its data in a more regular and rigorous way to inform decisions and instruction.

Next, Deputy Superintendent Scott went over the progress that has been made in the area of World-Class Talent – recruitment and pipeline development, hiring and retention. He shared that thanks to a USDOE grant, the district has launched a new leader residency program and hired seven leader residents to learn from expert principals across the district how to build a sustainable “bench.” The district also partnered with the Rhode Island Laborers Union that represents the Teacher Assistants, to support those assistants who are looking to become teachers. With support by the RI Foundation, the district hired a specialist to focus specifically on strengthening pipelines for teachers of color and offering loan forgiveness to newly hired teachers of color for up to \$25K for the first three years of employment, broken-up into installments. Over the last few years, the district has also expanded the tuition support and loan reimbursement for teachers to get their ESL certification and is working closely with RIDE to develop and launch the first in-house ESL certification program as well as investing in Praxis testing support for early career teachers.

Council Members expressed the need to come up with ways not only to recruit teachers, but just as important, support and retain them.

Deputy Superintendent Scott shared that the district will be having its first hiring fair on December 1st as opposed to next May, as it has been done historically.

Deputy Superintendent Scott also went over the Efficient District Systems area – PTU Agreement, funding and budgeting, and facilities. He highlighted that in August, the district reached an agreement with the PTU, which allows the district to advance some objectives, one of which is to accelerate the hiring process, resulting in fewer lost opportunities with respect to best candidates. Another objective is to reform the teacher evaluation process and recognize the challenges of the past year by giving all teachers a one-time bonus upon ratification. In the area of funding and budgeting, the district has increased school-based discretionary funding by \$440K, and in the area of facilities, the district has created the Capital Revolving Fund to support long-term school capital improvements and began design and prepared for construction of key Stage I projects, including Classical, Pleasant View, and Hope High School.

Next, Nick Figueroa, PPSD's Chief of Family and Community Engagement, went over the Engaged Communities area – family and community support and student engagement. He highlighted that one of the things that the district is trying to improve on, is the way that it communicates with families and vice-versa. He shared that last year, the district selected a vendor called K-12 Insight, an online rapid response tool that teachers, students, and families can use to engage with the district. The district also launched a family resource portal/clearinghouse, a one-stop information and referral system; hosted an orientation for new families coming into the district; began a district-wide parent ambassador program by recruiting family members to serve as liaisons at each school, to volunteer 5 to 10 hours per week; is establishing a partnership with CCRI for the Parent University's credit-bearing courses for parent advocacy, and workforce development certificates; and in October, launched a parent/teacher conference preparation training to give parents the necessary tools to collaborate with teachers. In terms of student engagement, the district hosted Student Advisory Council meetings, and in partnership with Breakthrough Providence, provided leadership training to the group; and selected a vendor to complete the student record digitization project – a project focused on digitizing decades of student records.

The Acting Superintendent also highlighted upcoming PPSD initiatives to improve student outcomes – finalize the district's ESSER III plan to accelerate student learning; expand the number of mental health support providers in every school to support student and SEL outcomes; deliver over 10,000 hours of MLL focused coaching and support to over 500 teachers; enhance professional development days to support teachers and staff improve their practice; develop a dynamic data-dashboard that will provide real-time data to school leaders and teachers to help drive and improve instruction; provide principals with coaching and supports to become instruction leaders in their schools; and continue to realign the district's capital plan with the TAP so new construction is focused on improving instruction.

Deputy Superintendent Scott concluded the presentation by sharing upcoming district initiatives to improve educator recruitment and retention – offer early contracts as soon as December 2021 to high-qualified candidates in hardest to fill positions; move up the timeline from the end of April to March 1; ensure a strong pipeline of teacher ambassadors at each school to support onboarding and retention; provide incentives to retain teachers in the district; support teacher assistants and substitute teachers pursuing teaching positions; and add dedicated staff to support recruitment and pipeline development.

5. ACTION ITEMS:

- Appeals Committee Recommendations
 - a. Highlander Charter School v. Cranston School Department and East Providence School Department

On a motion duly made by Jo Eva Gaines and seconded by Amy Beretta, it was

VOTED: That in the matter of Highlander Charter School v. Cranston School Department and East Providence School Department, the Commissioner’s decision is affirmed, as presented.

Vote: 7 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative as follows:

YEAS: Michael Almeida, Amy Beretta, Barbara Cottam, Karen Davis, Patricia DiCenso, Jo Eva Gaines, Lawrence Purtill

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

b. Sheila “Skip” Nowell Leadership Academy v. RIDE

On a motion duly made by Amy Beretta and seconded by Jo Eva Gaines, it was

VOTED: That in the matter of Sheila “Skip” Nowell Leadership Academy v. RIDE, the Commissioner’s decision is affirmed, as presented

Vote: 7 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative as follows:

YEAS: Michael Almeida, Amy Beretta, Barbara Cottam, Karen Davis, Patricia DiCenso, Jo Eva Gaines, Lawrence Purtill

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

6. ADJOURNMENT:

On a motion duly made by Amy Beretta and seconded by Karen Davis, it was

VOTED: That the meeting of the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education Adjourns

Vote: 7 members voted in the affirmative, 0 members voted in the negative, and 0 members abstained as follows:

YEAS: Michael Almeida, Amy Beretta, Barbara Cottam, Karen Davis,
Patricia DiCenso, Jo Eva Gaines, Lawrence Purtil

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

Meeting adjourned at 7:05 p.m.