



Enclosure 2a
October 6, 2020

MINUTES OF THE MEETING
September 15, 2020

COUNCIL ON ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

Board Chair Cottam welcomed everyone to the September 15, 2020, Hybrid meeting of the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education. She noted for the record that she and members Beretta, Callahan, Davis, and Purtill, were attending in person, while student representative Brandon Feliz and members Field, Gaines, and Martinez, were joining via the Zoom Webinar platform. She declared a quorum present, and called the meeting to order at 5:33 p.m.

Present in Person: Amy Beretta, Colleen Callahan, Barbara Cottam, Karen Davis, and Lawrence Purtill

Via Zoom Webinar: **Brandon Feliz, Gara Field, Jo Eva Gaines, and Marta Martinez

Absent: 0

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

Chair Cottam noted for the record that she was Chairing the meeting as Daniel McConaghy, Chair of the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education, recently resigned as he has accepted a position with the State Department of Administration. On behalf of the RI Board of Education, Chair Cottam thanked him for his leadership and service over the last five years and wished him well in his new position.

1. ACCEPTANCE OF THE AGENDA

On a motion duly made by Jo Eva Gaines and seconded by Colleen Callahan, it was

VOTED: That the Rhode Island Council on Elementary and Secondary Education accepts the agenda for the September 15, 2020, hybrid meeting

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

YEAS: Amy Beretta, Colleen Callahan, Barbara Cottam, Karen Davis, Jo Eva Gaines, Marta Martinez, and Lawrence Purtill

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

[Member Field joined the meeting after the acceptance of the agenda]

2. ACCEPTANCE OF THE MINUTES

a. Minutes of the August 18, 2020, Meeting

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

VOTED: That the Rhode Island Council on Elementary and Secondary Education accepts the minutes of the August 18, 2020, Meeting

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

YEAS: Amy Beretta, Colleen Callahan, Barbara Cottam, Karen Davis, Jo Eva Gaines, Marta Martinez, and Lawrence Purtill

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

[Member Field joined the meeting after the approval of the minutes]

3. OPEN FORUM

Nine individuals who signed-up in advance to address the Council, shared their continued concerns with the reopening of schools, especially the Virtual Learning Academy in the Providence School System.

Written testimony addressed to Council members in advance of the meeting is available at the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

4. COMMISSIONER'S REPORT

Commissioner Infante-Green began her report by thanking Council members for their leadership, support and guidance over the last few months. She expressed that thanks to their efforts and after months of hard work, students headed back to school yesterday, some via distance learning and most in their classrooms. She shared that, unfortunately, an employee at one of the Providence schools went to work with Covid-like systems, but thankfully, that person had minimal contact with students and other staff. She stressed the need to follow the Health Department's guidance and if folks are not feeling well, they should not go to work. She reiterated that the testing centers are going to expedite testing for teachers and students, where in some cases, results will be available within a couple of hours. As expected, there have been some challenges with the Providence Virtual Learning Academy, particularly at the elementary level, which comes as no surprise, as every new school year is hit with some challenges in the beginning. Commissioner

Infante-Green went on to share that when visiting schools over the last couple of days, she was very pleased to see very creative ways of delivering instruction and teachers and children very excited to be back in school. She stressed that thanks to the hard work of everyone involved, we are putting quality curriculum and world-class instruction front and center once again, both in our real and our virtual classrooms. At the end of the day everyone has to work together to get through the challenges and what will get us through are the same things we have leaned on over the last several months – flexibility, patience and kindness.

Commissioner Infante-Green ended her report by introducing Tom McCarthy, RIDE's Chief of Staff, who has been working very closely with the RI Education Operations Center (EdOC) who gave a brief overview of the "walkthroughs" that the State organized to ensure that schools were ready to reopen. He shared that EdOC staff visited 301 of the 302 Rhode Island schools and were able to follow-up with districts who needed the support to address issues that were identified during the visits, which were critical for a successful reopening.

Member Callahan requested an update on the issues that were found to be problematic in Providence, how that information is being communicated to people, and the progress that is being made to address them.

Commissioner Infante-Green replied that schools would not have been allowed to be open if those issues had not been mitigated, but that RIDE can provide a summary of the issues.

Member Beretta shared that she visited an elementary school in Providence and was happy to witness how enthusiastic teachers and students were to be back in the classroom, and how impressed she was by how clean and cheery the building was.

Member Field expressed that she is concerned by what she has been hearing from parents and students on the high volume of students in the Virtual Learning Academy, as well as the district's inability to utilize outdoor spaces while the weather is still nice.

Member Gaines echoed Member Field's concerns with the Virtual Learning Academy. She also asked if during the tours, folks selected where they wanted to visit or were they guided by the school administration as to where they might visit.

Mr. McCarthy replied that in the initial set of "walkthroughs," it started off with an interview with the facility managers to get a sense of what the schools had done to date – from full blown inspections to evaluations of HVAC systems. He stressed that the visits were not meant to be inspections, but rather an opportunity to walk the grounds and get a sense if there were issues, and should they be digging a bit deeper and provide the feedback. Teams continue to be out at the schools on a regular basis to support, assist, coach, mentor, preserve the relationships, and be there to support and help, rather than inspect, as schools are more likely to share potential issues before they actually become problems. There will be spot checks and education reinforcement throughout the year.

Chair Cottam shared her experience when visiting schools in East Providence, Johnston, and Providence earlier in the day. She witnessed tremendous engagement and excitement by teachers and students, clean buildings, and social distancing measures being executed successfully. She also recognized that some schools are experiencing difficulties that need to be addressed, such as the Virtual Learning Academy in Providence.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

a. Reopening of Schools - Update

At this time, Ana Riley, Deputy Commissioner for Instructional Programs, gave an update on the reopening of schools and began by sharing that RIDE, through many state and national partners, offered several no-cost professional learning opportunities to school and district employees across the state. RIDE staff also provided 16 webinars, with additional synchronous and asynchronous offerings available until the end of October. Prior to the start of the new school year, RIDE made a point of contacting every superintendent to find out how the agency could support them. RIDE also introduced the districts to the Education Operations Center (EdOC), staffed by RIDE, RIDOH, and the RI National Guard (RING). The EdOC, will provide schools with ongoing technical assistance on operations and logistics. RIDE also just received final approval to work with the Highlander Institute to train up to 200 substitute teachers.

b. School Accountability System - Update

Stephen Osborn, RIDE's Chief of Innovation, began by stating that the purpose of this evening's presentation and the FAQ document that will be released to the field later in the week, is to provide guidance and clarity on how RIDE will be approaching school accountability for the 2020-2021 school year. He explained that School Accountability is required by the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), with the goal of raising academic standards for all students and measuring student achievement to hold schools accountable for educational progress. For the 2019-20 school year, the United States Department of Education (USDOE) gave states the ability to request a waiver to cancel state assessments, and in turn school accountability for the year, however, RIDE will be reporting and sharing publicly, in-house data on teacher and student attendance.

Next, Scott Gausland, RIDE's Director of Data, Analysis, and Research, walked the Council through the process of the data measures that RIDE is looking at to report school accountability going forward, considering that there will most likely be only two years, of the required three years of data, as state assessments were not administered in the school year 2019-20. RIDE is

requesting permission from the USDOE not to use the 2020-21 school year student or teacher absenteeism data for accountability purposes, however, that data will still be measured and reported outside of the accountability system, including to analyze the impact of COVID-19. By removing measures from school accountability, it also means that RIDE will need to adjust the “Star Chart,” which is used to determine a school’s star rating.

Commissioner Infante Green shared that although statewide assessment data will not be used for accountability purposes, it will be made available to the districts for instructional planning purposes.

c. RIDE’s Priorities for the Upcoming School Year – Update

Deputy Riley shared that in addition to the COVID-19 related work, RIDE continues to support the Commissioner’s priorities around World-Class Talent, Excellence in Learning, and Engaged Communities. RIDE continues to work on shifting the agency from compliance to support; long-term strategic planning across the agency; improving outcomes in Providence; and placing equity front and center in all policy decision-making.

Council Member Davis asked if a formal statewide parent group exists where parents can receive training to become advocates.

Commissioner Infante-Green replied that there is a statewide parent group as well as a Providence specific parent group. The statewide parent group, in partnership with advocacy groups across the State, is working on a parent Bill of Rights.

6. ADJOURNMENT:

On a motion duly made by Colleen Callahan and seconded by Karen Davis, it was

VOTED: That the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education adjourns

Vote: 8 members voted in the affirmative, 0 members voted in the negative, and 0 members abstained as follows:

YEAS: Amy Beretta, Colleen Callahan, Barbara Cottam, Karen Davis, Gara Field, Jo Eva Gaines, Marta Martinez, and Lawrence Purtill

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

Meeting adjourned at 7:08 p.m.