



MINUTES OF THE MEETING
February 9, 2021

Pursuant to Governor Raimondo's Executive Order 20-75, this was a remote meeting.

COUNCIL ON ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

Board Chair Cottam welcomed everyone to the February 9, 2021, remote meeting of the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education. She declared a quorum present and called the meeting to order at 5:32 p.m.

Remote Participation: Michael Almeida, Amy Beretta, Colleen Callahan, Barbara Cottam, Karen Davis, *Brandon Feliz, **Jo Eva Gaines, Marta Martinez, and Lawrence Purtill

Absent: Patricia DiCenso

[*Ex-officio, non-voting member]

[**Member Gaines joined the meeting at 6:15 p.m.]

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.

At this time, Chair Cottam welcomed two new Council members to their first official Council meeting - Dr. Michael Almeida and Ms. Patricia DiCenso. Dr. Almeida is currently the Founder and Chief Executive Officer of OSS Apparel and adjunct professor at Providence College and is a former Rhode Island teacher, principal, and superintendent of the Coventry School Department. Ms. Patricia DiCenso has 37 years of experience in education as a classroom teacher, school counselor, assistant principal, principal, and most recently superintendent of the Pawtucket School Department.

Chair Cottam also recognized departing Council Member, Dr. Gara Field, and personally and on behalf of the Council, expressed her sincere gratitude for her service as a Council Member and for her advocacy, tenacity and passion on behalf of Providence students.

1. ACCEPTANCE OF THE AGENDA

On a motion duly made by Colleen Callahan and seconded by Michael Almeida, it was

VOTED: That the Rhode Island Council on Elementary and Secondary Education accepts the agenda for the February 9, 2021, remote meeting

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

YEAS: Michael Almeida, Amy Beretta, Colleen Callahan,
Barbara Cottam, Karen Davis, Marta Martinez, and
Lawrence Purtill

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

[Member Gaines joined the meeting after the approval of the agenda]

2. ACCEPTANCE OF THE MINUTES

a. Minutes of the December 15, 2020, Meeting

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

VOTED: That the Rhode Island Council on Elementary and Secondary Education accepts the minutes of the December 15, 2020, remote meeting

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

YEAS: Michael Almeida, Amy Beretta, Colleen Callahan,
Barbara Cottam, Karen Davis, Marta Martinez, and
Lawrence Purtill

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

[Member Gaines joined the meeting after the approval of the agenda]

3. PRESENTATION OF AWARD CERTIFICATES

Chair Cottam welcomed and congratulated the Rhode Island finalists for the 2020 Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching, who joined the meeting remotely. Chair Cottam praised them on receiving the highest recognition that a kindergarten through 12th-grade mathematics or science teacher may receive for outstanding teaching in the United States, and thanked them for their passion, dedication and continuous commitment to improving the quality of education in Rhode Island.

The three finalists are:

- Natasha Gates – Mathematics Teacher at the Blackstone Valley Prep Elementary School 3 Charter School
- Nicolle Green – Mathematics Teacher at the Holliman Elementary School and Norwood Elementary School in Warwick
- Nicole Lemire – Science Teacher at the Samuel Slater Middle School in Pawtucket

Next, Chair Cottam introduced Dr. Nicole Alexander-Scott, Director of the RI Department of Health (RIDOH), to provide an update on the State's continued response to COVID-19. Chair Cottam thanked Dr. Alexander Scott and her team for their hard work over the last several Months, and for their collaboration and willingness to provide these updates as they lead the effort in responding to the global pandemic.

Dr. Alexander-Scott shared the overall approach that the State is taking on administering the vaccines across the age groupings as well as accelerating distribution in those communities that are being impacted at disproportionately higher rates. She indicated that the State is receiving vaccines each week through an allotment from the federal government at small amounts, requiring the State to be as strategic and as deliberate as it can to have those targeted amounts of vaccines go to those individuals who are most in need of it. The State is currently receiving 16,000 doses a week and going to 19,000 by the end of the month, based on what the feds have relayed to the RIDOH. Dr. Alexander-Scott indicated that as of now the vaccine has only been approved for those 16 years and older and that clinical trials are still going on for younger children.

3. COMMISSIONER'S REPORT

Commissioner Infante-Green began by sharing that from the moment that the pandemic started, RIDE has been one or two steps ahead of it in terms of mitigating and putting things into place. She expressed that the past year has been incredibly hard for everyone even though there has been diligent planning and cross-collaboration on how to support school leaders, teachers and students to provide families the opportunity to either send their kids to school in person or choose remote learning. With the stimulus money, in June, RIDE put out a RFP for interim assessments as it was really important to know where students are in order to be able to better support them. She expressed that preliminary data suggests that students who are impacted the most are those who were already at-risk and those most vulnerable – the students we know who need critical support - students of color and multi language learners who were already facing incredible obstacles and may be losing another nine to eleven months. She announced that RIDE is getting ready to launch the Learning, Equity and Accelerated Pathways (LEAP) Task Force, comprised of educational experts who understand literacy and mathematics, and what it means to be a multilingual learner and a differently abled student. The Task Force also includes students, teachers, parents, community leaders, and experts in different areas of education, representative of the diversity of the State. The Task Force will kick-off this week with former Secretary of Education John King, as the keynote speaker.

5. OPEN FORUM

Chair Cottam noted that individuals interested in providing public comment were encouraged to submit written comments to the Council in advance of the meeting. The Council received one written comment, which has been shared with Council members and will be made part of the permanent record of this meeting. No one signed-up to speak.

6. DISCUSSION ITEMS

a. Update on State Standards and Curriculum Work

Ana Riley, Deputy Commissioner, Teaching and Learning, began the discussion by sharing RIDE's mission and vision. She noted that tonight's presentation will focus on RIDE's priority of Excellence in Learning, as the agency is committed to providing supports and resources that allow every LEA to adopt and implement high-quality curricular materials. She reminded Council members that in 2019, RIDE was tasked with developing statewide academic standards and curriculum frameworks for mathematics, English language arts (ELA), and science; identifying at least five examples of high-quality curriculum and materials for those core subjects; and supporting school systems in the selection and implementation of curriculum materials. She stressed that 100 percent of LEAs must adopt high-quality curriculum materials in K-12 schools that are aligned with academic standards, with curriculum frameworks, and with statewide standardized tests, where applicable. As required by legislation, this must be completed by June 2023 for ELA and mathematics, and by June 2025 for science.

Next, Lisa Foehr, RIDE's Chief of Teaching and Learning, emphasized that the legislation attempts to create a coherent system starting with the standards and moving to curriculum. She went over how high-quality curriculum matters; the process that RIDE must institute to develop curriculum frameworks, which differs from state to state; the review process that RIDE must establish for reviewing and identifying curriculum and materials; and provided a snapshot of where Rhode Island is in terms of high-quality curriculum adoption in ELA and mathematics. Ms. Foehr ended her presentation by sharing the steps that RIDE is taking in order to achieve the goals outlined in legislation to implement high-quality curricular materials with fidelity by ensuring alignment with the most up-to-date learning standards and curriculum frameworks; continuing to evolve its professional development vendor guide; incentivizing the use of high-quality curricular materials; pairing school systems with trusted partners that can provide support; collaborating with school leaders and educators to ensure smooth implementation; and engaging the public in the implementation process.

Member Beretta expressed that it makes her sad to see that so many districts are not where they should be and asked how much it would cost to get all of the districts to where they need to be, and whether districts have started planning for that.

Ms. Foehr responded that she doesn't have exact numbers, but estimates that it would cost approximately \$5M across an implementation of elementary ELA and mathematics into the middle school, which translates into an enormous amount of funding for the 60 plus districts and charter schools across the State. Up until now, districts have not received specific or dedicated funding to make these purchases, however, some have been budgeting for them as part of their typical budgeting processes and supplemented sometimes by some federal funds, but there hasn't been a dedicated funding source to support districts going through the adoption process.

Member Davis asked when we will know what the impact the budgets as they stand today will be for the next round of purchasing.

Ms. Foehr responded that there are still 15 districts walking through the process with RIDE of making selections and are planning with their school committees on their purchases, while others have expressed that things feel very unknown and it may be impossible for them to continue on the schedule to make a purchase.

Member Almeida expressed that this work is phenomenal and long overdue. As a former district and school leader, he struggled picking curriculum and always looked for guidance and didn't have it. He is, however, concerned with relying on local districts to fund these types of initiatives, but is hopeful that the legislation and the requirement to do so, give superintendents the legs and authority to keep these curriculum budgetary items front and center, which often get cut and eliminated from the budget. He expressed that the Council and RIDE have to do whatever they can to support local districts to ensure that the message gets out that this needs to be a priority, and that the legislation is there to assist them in moving this agenda forward. He voiced that local school committees love to cut items that they consider non-essential and most of the time curriculum is not seen as a core aspect of what districts do. If districts don't have a high-quality curriculum than we don't really know where we are heading and the direction we are going. RIDE should be holding workshops and educating school committees through the School Committees' Association.

Member Callahan echoed Mr. Almeida's concerns and recommendations and further suggested ensuring that this campaign also targets the General Assembly as there will be a fiscal impact due to the pandemic. She expressed that some really good work has already started and suggested that as meetings are held with the General Assembly, this needs to be pushed as a top priority as it is going to take a combination of state and local incentives to do this work. She also stressed that in addition to purchasing the materials, there needs to be professional development, which takes a significance amount of time, expertise and resources.

Chair Cottam expressed that she argued with the legislature when they were devising the legislation that she finds 2023 and 2025 totally unacceptable as it is a child's elementary career, done, over. Chair Cottam suggested that RIDE prepare a report by community of their time schedule, funding needed and funding they already have, to see where we are, so that we can go with data and facts to the legislature, the State, the public, and the school committees, to show what it takes and where they are in this process. She stressed that without a high-quality curriculum, we are never going to improve the knowledge of our future citizens by failing another generation of students.

b. Student Learning Losses as a Result of COVID-19

Deputy Commissioner Riley framed the discussion by emphasizing that the Learning, Equity and Accelerated Pathways (LEAP) Task Force highlights three (Equity, Excellence in Learning, and Engaged Communities) of RIDE's five priorities, that will help to provide support and resources permitting every LEA to meet the needs of all students with input from stakeholders. She also went over the Learning Recovery Strategic Timeline, which began in June 2020.

Next, Dr. Kelvin Róldan, Deputy Commissioner, System Transformation, explained that the work that RIDE has been doing in partnership with many across the State, is to have a participatory process that is evidence-based and data-driven. It includes a variety of stakeholders across the State who will develop short and long-term recommendations and align resources, accordingly. He stressed that this is not going to be an issue that is going to be addressed in a single cycle, but rather a long-term commitment for the foreseeable future. RIDE needs to analyze existing academic and non-academic data as well as identify focus areas based on those root causes and create a collective strategy. Existing and future resources need to be examined in order to provide guidance to the field. Deputy Róldan shared the LEAP Task Force membership, which is inclusive of a variety of stakeholders across the State, as well as the Task Force's cadence over the next 30 days.

Chair Cottam turned the discussion over to Members Callahan and Purtill, to present the report titled *Reserving Pandemic-Caused Student Learning Losses – January 27, 2021*, that they submitted and that was shared with Council members in advance of the meeting.

Member Callahan explained that she and member Purtill were invited to be part of a group that included Neil Steinberg, RI Foundation, Gary Sass, Hassenfeld Institute for Public Leadership, the RI School Superintendents Association (RISSA), the RI Association of School Committees (RIASC), Bob Walsh from NEARI, and Frank Flynn from RIFTHP, as well as Senator Pearson and Representative Amore, to discuss pandemic-caused student learning losses. She expressed that there is a lot of commonality with the report and with what RIDE presented and while the term "learning loss" is used, you also see in the descriptor that we are talking about acceleration and

both initiatives should be seen as informative and collaborative. She noted that this is not just a summer program or a quick fix, but rather the kind of plan that will focus long-term. Although curriculum is key, social emotional learning, as well as issues related to culture and all of the other supports that students need in order to accelerate their learning, need to be addressed, so that students can thrive in all areas. She stressed the need to engage all partners to work together on this comprehensive long-term plan, and expressed that the report was just a message that says we are all working collaboratively and thinking in the same way, and all feel the same sense of urgency.

Next, Member Purtill stated that this will not be a quick summer fix, but rather a multi-year movement to accelerate learning. He emphasized that although math and reading have to be the main focus going forward, equity and cultural issues, as well as the arts and sports, need to be addressed as well, because none of it will work if we don't address the social emotional and mental health, and get these students back in line. He also stressed the importance of including local educators and schools districts in delivering this initiative.

Member Davis asked if this initiative is being led by the RI Foundation.

Member Callahan responded that she isn't certain where it started, but Gary Sass and Neil Steinberg were catalyst in getting the group together. She noted that she does not see this as a separate, parallel, additional group, and that her understanding is that this was an effort to inform the work that is currently underway at RIDE, figure out the resources, and offer it as a "thought piece."

Student Representative Feliz asked if there has been any effort to reach out to youth, especially on the mental health aspect, to ensure that students are being served and are being asked what is necessary instead of assuming.

Commissioner Infante-Green replied that students and teachers will be involved in the process as they are the ones who will be carrying out the work.

Deputy Commissioner Róldan added that RIDE has built-in several intentional feedback loops into the process, which include the Commissioner's Student Advisory Council, Educators of Color, as well as the RISSA membership, to ensure that there is that end-user, important feedback and support, and direct input into the process.

6c – Proposed Revisions to the School Health Regulations, for the Purpose of Public Review and Comment

Ms. Foehr explained that RIDOH is the lead agency in promulgating these set of regulations, but that RIDE and the Council also must go through the public process and promulgate jointly with RIDOH. She reminded the Council that last March, they approved the proposed revisions so that

RIDOH could begin the public comment process. During that phase, RIDOH worked with the Office of Regulatory Reform (ORR) to get every other step in place to actually conduct public review and comment, and in the process of doing so, ORR did flag a few areas of concern with what was being proposed, including conflict with other State regulations. RIDOH had to make some modifications before the regulation could go out for public review and comment, so what the Council is being asked to approve this evening are the sections of the regulations that were revised as a result of the feedback received by ORR. Ms. Foehr shared that yesterday RIDE received a letter from the ACLU of Rhode Island, outlining some concerns that they thought they had are flagged, but still didn't seem to have been addressed. RIDE has shared the letter with RIDOH and they have agreed to address those concerns during the public review and comment process, once the Council re-approves the proposed revisions this evening, for the purpose of public review and comment.

Member Purtill asked how we address those students who are having vision problems and parents don't want them to get tested.

Ms. Foehr replied that RIDE certainly encourages schools to have a conversation with parents who decide to opt out, in order to help them understand how something might be of help, without infringing on their individual rights.

6d. Request for Continuation of Authority to Commissioner to Temporarily Waive Certain Requirements of Educator Certification Regulations

Ms. Foehr began by reminding Council members that last June they granted some flexibility for RIDE to make allowances for the issuance and renewal of educator certificates, due to COVID-19. Those flexibilities consisted of RIDE being able to provide additional time to educators to take assessments that were not available to them due to testing centers being closed. That flexibility also allowed RIDE to provide additional time to individuals who might need to complete Professional Learning Units (PLUs). Although not too many educators took advantage of this flexibility and many testing centers have started to reopen, RIDE still anticipates running into some issues where educators who were completely unable to sign-up for, and take the test, may need additional time to complete their PLUs. RIDE is requesting the Council to expand this flexibility through this season's renewal cycle, ending on September 15, 2021.

7. ACTION ITEMS

7a. Approval of the Proposed Revisions to the School Health Regulations, for the purpose of public review and comment

On a motion duly made by Lawrence Purtill and seconded by Michael Almeida, it was

VOTED: That the Rhode Island Council on Elementary and Secondary Education approves the proposed revisions to the Title 216 – Department of Health, Chapter 20 Community Health, Subchapter 10 Screening, Medical Services, and Reporting, Part 4 School Health Programs (216-RICR-20-10-4), for the purpose of public review and comment

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

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

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

[Member Martinez departed the meeting prior to the Action Items]

7b. Approval of Continuation of Authority to Commissioner to Temporarily Waive Certain Requirements for Educator Certification Regulations

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 delegate to the Commissioner of Education, as of this date, the authority to temporarily waive any certification requirements in the Regulations Governing the Certification of Educators in Rhode Island relating to professional learning units and testing as she deems necessary to address the impact of COVID-19, and to take appropriate interim measures to implement any such temporary waivers. This delegation of authority shall remain in effect until September 15, 2021.

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

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

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

8. ADJOURNMENT:

On a motion duly made by Michael Almeida and seconded by Amy Beretta, 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, Colleen Callahan, Barbara Cottam, Karen Davis, Jo Eva Gaines, and Lawrence Purtill

NAYS: 0s

ABSTAINS: 0

Meeting adjourned at 6:40 p.m.