



Enclosure 2a
June 3, 2021

MINUTES OF THE MEETING
May 12, 2021

Pursuant to Executive Order 20-75, this was a remote meeting.

COUNCIL ON ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

Board Chair Cottam welcomed everyone to the May 12, 2021, remote meeting of the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education. She declared a quorum present and called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

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

Absent: Patricia DiCenso
Marta Martinez
*Brandon Feliz

[*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.

1. ACCEPTANCE OF THE AGENDA

On a motion duly made by Colleen Callahan and seconded by Amy Beretta, it was

VOTED: That the Rhode Island Council on Elementary and Secondary Education accepts the agenda for the May 12, 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, Jo Eva Gaines, and Lawrence Purtill

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

2. ACCEPTANCE OF THE MINUTES

a. Minutes of the April 6, 2021, Meeting

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

VOTED: That the Rhode Island Council on Elementary and Secondary Education accepts the minutes of the April 6, 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, Jo Eva Gaines, and Lawrence Purtill

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

3. COMMISSIONER'S REPORT

Commissioner Infante-Green began by sharing that as a small token of appreciation to all educators who went above and beyond in making students feel safe and successful during a trying year, RIDE raised some funds and was able to gift each educator a copy of one of the following books – *Thank you, Teacher from a Very Hungry Caterpillar*; *Because I had a Teacher*; or *A Teacher is the Greatest Gift*.

Next, Commissioner Infante-Green gave an update on the RIVESP program at the Sherlock Center. She shared that at a press conference Monday, it was announced that there will be a committee to look at the work that needs to be done to make the Sherlock Center a sustainable model, and that current services will continue for the next two years.

Commissioner Infante-Green also announced that RIDE recently won two grants – CS4RI grant, to provide early elementary school students with computer science skills, and the Coding as Another Language (CAL), which RIDE will work with Tufts University to provide computer science curricula to RI students in grades K-2. Over the next two years RIDE will support the integration of a K-2 ScratchJr computer science curriculum into core content areas, by providing elementary schools with professional development, technology equipment, and a K-12 computer science curriculum. Fourteen elementary schools have been approved for sub grants from RIDE, which will impact 1,900 students in 76 K-2 classrooms. RIDE is also selected as one of 15 recipients of a planning grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to help prepare our multilingual students for algebra. RIDE's proposal involves expanding our pre-algebra "Readiness Course" to a full semester, and building on additional supports to ensure that multilingual learners in Providence succeed in the course and are prepared for Algebra courses.

Next, Commissioner Infante-Green shared that on today's agenda is the final authorization for three charter schools that receive preliminary approval last December – Excel Academy Rhode Island, Nuestro Mundo Public Charter School, and Providence Preparatory Charter School. She emphasized that first and foremost, charter schools are public schools and that RIDE's focus is on making sure that every student and family is able to access a high-quality education no matter if in a traditional or charter school. She also noted that RIDE's role in the process is procedural as applications are reviewed by a third party and the Department advises.

Lastly, Commissioner Infante-Green reported that in late April, RIDE's Learning, Equity and Accelerated Pathways (LEAP) Taskforce released its final report and recommendations, which will help guide accelerated learning opportunities to rebuild Rhode Island's educational system post pandemic. Rhode Island has received national recognition for the inclusive nature, research and student data, that it used for this work.

Member Callahan expressed that she is glad that a resolution was reached with the vision service providers at the Sherlock Center, thanks to the parents and students who advocated for the services they deserve as well as the legislators who listened to those voices around a way to move forward, as least in the interim. She asked who will be on the committee and when it may convene.

Commissioner Infante-Green replied that she wasn't sure as the committee will not involve RIDE, but thinks that it will be made up of four members of the Senate and four members of the House.

4. OPEN FORUM

Chair Cottam noted that in addition to the 19 individuals who signed-up to provide verbal testimony – 2 on the Sherlock Center vision services matter; 3 in opposition to and 14 in support of the charter final authorization to operate – the Council received 7 written comments, which were shared with Council members prior to the meeting.

5. DISCUSSION ITEMS

a. Update on the Learning, Equity and Accelerated Pathways (LEAP) Task Force

Dr. Kelvin Roldán, Deputy Commissioner for Systems Transformation, began by noting that the LEAP is connected to RIDE's mission and vision, the work of RIDE's strategic plan and to three (equity, excellence in learning and engaged communities) of the five RIDE priorities. Deputy Roldán went over the cognitive map of the process that RIDE utilized to establish the work, which included working with a Taskforce composed of 36 individuals (superintendents, principals, educators, teachers, parents, and community members) to establish systemic enabling conditions, creating some absolute priorities, delivering on the recommendations, creating a framework for delivery, and issuing the fiscal guidance to the field. Deputy Roldán also went over the five LEAP absolute priorities that will accelerate student learning and move the PK-12 system forward.

Next, Ana Riley, Deputy Commissioner for Teaching and Learning, went over the ESSER II/III funding overview, highlighting that directly to the schools will be just under \$540M, to begin funding key areas that must be addressed in the plan - learning loss; summer enrichment; afterschool programs; and other state activities, with underserved students being the guiding force behind the work and will be prioritized through this funding; and \$60M (10%) will be set-aside for RIDE. She noted that RIDE must complete a ARP ESSER State Plan, to be completed by June 7, to be able to access the remaining one-third of RIDE's ARP ESSER fund (\$13.8M out of \$41.5M), which also counts as a six-month progress report for ESSER II funds.

Member Callahan asked what guidance has been provided to districts, what the timetable is for districts to submit their plans to RIDE, and whether district plans, once approved, will be publicly posted on RIDE's website.

Deputy Riley responded that RIDE provided districts with a good framework on March 30 and funds were released to RIDE today by the State Department of Administration. RIDE is expecting to receive district applications as soon as tomorrow morning and will be reviewing them on a rolling basis. She shared that ESSER III plans have to be made public, however, ESSER II plans don't require a public plan. RIDE's plan will also be made public, once approved.

b. Necessity of School Construction Projects

Victor Capellan, Senior Advisor to the Commissioner, framed the discussion by sharing that today RIDE is recommending to the Council school construction projects to be reimbursed through the School Housing Program and the School Building Authority Capital Fund for three LEAs- Coventry School Department; Paul Cuffee Public Charter School; and South Kingstown School Department.

Next, Dr. Joseph da Silva, RIDE's School Construction Coordinator, explained that as the Council considers these requests, there are two traditional public schools and one public charter school. The projects are repairs of warm, safe and dry, some major renovations and some property purchases, impacting 16 schools, have positive outcomes for 18,000 students, totaling around \$110M. The state commitment to these projects would be \$45M.

c. Public Charter Schools - Authorization to Operate - Final Approval

Steve Osborn, RIDE's State Strategy and Student Opportunity Officer, framed the discussion by sharing that this evening's conversation is about the final approval for the charter schools that were brought forward to the Council last December - Excel Academy Rhode Island; Nuestro Mundo Public Charter School; and Providence Preparatory Charter School. He explained that this is a procedural step and is triggered when the schools have met the requirements that are outlined in the Charter School Regulations. He stressed that the goal is to extend excellence and strong, high-quality school options and opportunities, for children and families in Providence

and Central Falls. He further stressed that charter schools are public schools as stated in state law and that there is not a direct correlation between and increase in charter seats and a decrease in district seats, as evidenced by the increase in enrollment in the Central Falls School District. Mr. Osborne also noted that the performance in charter schools is dramatically outpacing the schools in which these students would otherwise be attending. Over the last 20 years, 15,500 students from Providence and Central Falls have dropped-out of high school, not counting those who have graduated unprepared, costing the taxpayers of Rhode Island \$4.5M, according to projections by Northeastern University. RIDE remains confident that the three schools before the Council tonight will perform at three stars or higher, with Classical being the only school in both Providence and Central Falls to meet that designation. Mr. Osborn went over the preopening requirements that each of the three schools must meet for final approval. All three schools met all of the requirements, including securing a school building.

To clarify a comment that was made during public comment regarding the east side of the St. Joseph building and the chapel that was donated to the city by Paolino Properties for a dual language, K-8 school, Commissioner Infante-Green explained that the part that Excel Academy of Rhode Island is leasing, is a floor on the west building. Commissioner Infante-Green also stated that RI's multilingual learners are at single digits in the ELA RICAS assessment, compared to students in MA who are at 52%, and Excel at 55%, exceeding the state average. In mathematics, RI is at 24% compared to MA at 46% and Excel at 60%. She noted that last year alone, 600 students dropped-out in Central Falls and Providence, with statistics showing that four out of five students will end up incarcerated, with 35% ending up unemployed. RIDE's responsibility is to provide a quality education to all families. Latino students in Providence are performing at 15% in ELA compared to those in charters at 33% and at 10% in mathematics compared to 25% in the charters. Providence's black students are at 17% in ELA and 9% in mathematics, compared to 36% and 29%, respectively, in the charters. Commissioner Infante-Green stressed that if you are a kid of color, you just don't have choices.

Council Member Beretta thanked the RIDE staff for making the presentation data-driven, student-focused and about what is necessary to make these families help their children improve, not just educationally, but overall.

Member Callahan voiced that she also agrees that the children should be kept at the center of conversations. She then asked why Excel Academy Rhode Island is missing the Auditor General's report, and if there is a report showing what the negative impact will be on programs and services, and the resources necessary going forward to ensure that those students who remain in the traditional public school receive the services that they deserve.

Mr. Osborn responded that the statute related to Mayoral Academies does not have the same level of oversight from the Auditor General, so what RIDE did instead was conduct an internal review of the charter's financial plan and the budget by the Department's Finance Office, to ensure there was a reasonable budget submitted and that it may all of the qualifications.

On the report, Commissioner Infante-Green shared that there is a plan that Providence presented to their School Board. She then asked what has been done for Providence prior to this moment, as what she found was \$1M in efficiencies; schools that were staffed to the number of the building as opposed to the number of students in the school; and many other financial problems. She also noted that folks should not be worried about losing programs that are producing single digit numbers.

Member Purtill expressed that he would also like to see the superintendent's plan as it has always been his concern that there isn't a plan to address program cuts for those students left behind, who are mainly students of color and come from poverty.

- d. Recommendation of Nominees to the Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center (MET) Board of Trustees

Commissioner Infante-Green presented the two new nominees, Cedric Huntley and Mia Lombardi, to fill two current vacancies on the MET Board of Trustees and attested that the candidates possess the leadership, strength and commitment to advance the school's goals and mission, and urged the Council to consider RIDE's recommendation of their appointments.

6. ACTION ITEMS

6a. Approval of Necessity of School Construction Projects

a1. Coventry School Department

On a motion duly made by Jo Eva Gaines and seconded by Michael Almeida, it was

VOTED: That the Rhode Island Council on Elementary and Secondary Education approve the necessity of school construction projects totaling \$89,384,022 pursuant to R.I.G.L. 16-7-41.1, as presented

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

6a2. Paul Cuffee Public Charter School

On a motion duly made by Jo Eva Gaines and seconded by Michael Almeida, it was

VOTED: That the Rhode Island Council on Elementary and Secondary Education approve the necessity of school construction projects totaling \$12,746,540 pursuant to R.I.G.L. 16-7-41.1, as presented

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

6a3. South Kingstown School Department

On a motion duly made by Lawrence Purtill and seconded by Jo Eva Gaines, it was

VOTED: That the Rhode Island Council on Elementary and Secondary Education approve the necessity of school construction projects totaling \$7,633,985 pursuant to R.I.G.L. 16-7-41.1, as presented

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

b. Public Charter Schools – Authorization to Operate – Final Approval

At this time, Member Purtill moved to postpone the pending motion until the next regular meeting. Member Callahan seconded the motion.

Member Almeida asked Commissioner Infante-Green if she is confident that the plan for Providence Public Schools, specifically the Superintendent’s plan and RIDE’s plan will be able to be carried out financially based on monies possibly being diverted to the charter schools.

Commissioner Infante-Green responded, absolutely and that the district is in a good place.

Member Davis expressed that this is difficult as it is a divisive matter, even within the Council as we are trying to make-up for past sins and pave a path forward. There has to be trust in the plan and the takeover plan because the very people who are responsible for that takeover plan are the ones who are supporting this plan – the charter school expansion. The mayors are supporting it, the parents are asking the Council to give their kids options, and we owe it to them now, knowing that our system hasn’t been serving the most vulnerable children, as it should. That is why she is supporting these charters and although not easy, she wishes that everyone could get to the same page. She believes that everyone is make decisions based on what is in the best interest of the kids.

- VOTE: That the Rhode Island Council on Elementary and Secondary Education move to postpone the pending motion until the next Regular meeting
- Vote: 2 members voted in the affirmative and 5 members voted in the negative as follows:
- YEAS: Colleen Callahan and Lawrence Purtill
- NAYS: Michael Almeida, Amy Beretta, Barbara Cottam, Karen Davis, and Jo Eva Gaines

Motion to postpone the pending motion until the next regular meeting, failed.

At this time, Member Callahan expressed that she agrees almost completely with what was expressed by Member Davis, as she does believe that they have the same intent and are at a moment where they are forced to address some issues that have been long in the making. The problem that she has is the very real problem of what it will take to address those issues. She

does not think that we can address those issues or be successful with the Turnaround Plan, or another plan to ensure that students get the resources, resources and programs that they need when we have not yet been assured that there will not really be the loss of programs that are so necessary to ensure that we do go forward, that we don't stay where we are, and that we don't repeat the mistakes of the past. Whether you are looking at a household budget, an organizational budget, or a school bus budget, the loss of tens of millions of dollars means something has to go, and while we may have found \$11M, we are talking about many more dollars. She does not feel assured that we can go forward without any programmatic impact with that kind of loss and was hoping that we would get that plan and possibly feel assured. That is part of the rationale to possibly delaying the vote, because without that, she does not think in all good conscious that we can vote to support the Excel Charter. A plan absolutely has to be in place that addresses the loss of that revenue and the numbers of students that will still be left behind and possibly be adversely affected by the loss of programs and services.

Member Gaines expressed that she too agrees with everything that Member Davis had to say and that this is a very hard decision. But on one hand, it is a very easy decision as we know that we have not served kids as they should have been served in the past. That we can say without any division, if we are being honest. We must go forward, we know what the status quo has done in the past. We have to move forward with these charter schools that are giving our kids opportunities and we must move forward with a plan to keep things going to improve for those kids who are left behind and don't luck out and get into a charter school. We need to do it all and we cannot do it if we keep putting things off. We have to move forward.

6b1. Excel Academy Rhode Island

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

VOTED: That the Rhode Island Council on Elementary and Secondary Education move to issue a final charter to Excel Academy Rhode Island and authorize its operation for a maximum term of five (5) years beginning in the 2022-2023 school year and ending in the 2027-2028 school year

Vote: 5 members voted in the affirmative and 2 members voted in the negative as follows:

YEAS: Michael Almeida, Amy Beretta, Barbara Cottam, Karen Davis, and Jo Eva Gaines

NAYS: Colleen Callahan and Lawrence Purtill

ABSTAINS: 0

6b2. Nuestro Mundo Public Charter School

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

VOTED: That the Rhode Island Council on Elementary and Secondary Education move to issue a final charter to Nuestro Mundo Public Charter School and authorize its operation for a maximum term of five (5) years beginning in the 2021-2022 school year and ending in the 2026-2027 school year

Vote: 5 members voted in the affirmative and 2 members voted in the negative as follows:

YEAS: Michael Almeida, Amy Beretta, Barbara Cottam, Karen Davis, and Jo Eva Gaines

NAYS: Colleen Callahan and Lawrence Purtill

ABSTAINS: 0

6b3. Providence Preparatory Charter School

On a motion duly made by Michael Almeida and seconded by Jo Eva Gaines, it was

VOTED: That the Rhode Island Council on Elementary and Secondary Education move to issue a final charter to Providence Preparatory Charter School and authorize its operation for a maximum term of five (5) years beginning in the 2021-2022 school year and ending in the 2026-2027 school year

Vote: 5 members voted in the affirmative and 2 members voted in the negative as follows:

YEAS: Michael Almeida, Amy Beretta, Barbara Cottam, Karen Davis, and Jo Eva Gaines

NAYS: Colleen Callahan and Lawrence Purtill

ABSTAINS: 0

6c. Approval of Nominees to the Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center (MET) Board of Trustees

On a motion duly made by Jo Eva Gaines and seconded by Michael Almeida, it was

VOTED: That the Rhode Island Council on Elementary and Secondary Education approves the recommendation of Cedric Huntley and Mia Lombardi to the MET School Board of Trustees, as presented

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

6d. Approval of the Appeals Committee Recommendation on the matter of DCYF v. South Kingstown School Committee

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

VOTED: That in the matter of DCYF v. South Kingstown School Committee, the Commissioner's decision is affirmed, as presented

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: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

7. ADJOURNMENT:

On a motion duly made by Jo Eva Gaines 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: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

Meeting adjourned at 7:33 p.m.