



Enclosure 2a
June 29, 2021

MINUTES OF THE MEETING
June 3, 2021

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

COUNCIL ON ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

Board Chair Cottam welcomed everyone to the June 3, 2021, hybrid meeting of the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education, as Council members attended in person, with the exception of Council Member Gaines and members of the general public, who joined remotely. She declared a quorum present and called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

In-Person: Michael Almeida, Amy Beretta, Colleen Callahan, Barbara Cottam, Patricia DiCenso, Karen Davis, Marta Martinez, and Lawrence Purtill

Remote Participation: Jo Eva Gaines

Absent: *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 Karen Davis and seconded by Colleen Callahan, it was

VOTED: That the Rhode Island Council on Elementary and Secondary Education accepts the agenda for the June 3, 2021, remote meeting

Vote: 9 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative as follows:

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

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

2. ACCEPTANCE OF THE MINUTES

a. Minutes of the May 12, 2021, Meeting

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 minutes of the May 12, 2021, remote meeting

Vote: 7 members voted in the affirmative, 2 members abstained 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: 2 (Members DiCenso and Martinez)

3. COMMISSIONER'S REPORT

Commissioner Infante-Green began by letting Council members know that the book in their meeting packets is one of three books that RIDE purchased, thanks to the generosity of a local donor, to gift to every single teacher across the State in recognition of the hard work that took place over the last year. Facemasks were also purchased and distributed to all school support staff across the State.

Next, Commissioner Infante-Green reiterated that RIDE has worked incredibly hard throughout the last couple of years to transition from an agency of compliance to an agency of support for schools, students and families. This shift has required the agency staff to keep an ear to the ground and understand how school communities are doing. To that end, every year RIDE administers SurveyWorks to seek feedback and input on what is working and what is not working in schools. She expressed that this past year has been unlike any other, as we faced a global pandemic that threatened lives, an economic crisis that threatened livelihoods, and a wave of unrest laying bare, deeply rooted, systemic racial injustice. With so much happening, it was critical for RIDE to understand how our school communities were impacted – from teaches to students and parents. Commissioner Infante-Green voiced that when she arrived, she didn't know what made Rhode Island special, but now she knows. Even in the pandemic, the numbers are higher. Rhode Island has outperformed everyone in the nation and the numbers doubled in the last year. This year, through SurveyWorks, RIDE received 112,000 responses, which included 2,500 more parent responses than last year, accounting for the most ever, at over 28,000 responses. As the work to improve outcomes for all students continues, it is important to know what families think and what they have to say.

SurveyWorks also needed to evolve to meet the current reality – so this year the topic on cultural awareness and action was added, and family survey accessibility was also improved by placing all surveys behind one link, which ensured ease of access, portability of survey links, and streamlined communication. To help assess the impact of learning online versus in school, a COVID-19 context question was also incorporated in this year’s survey, and the results show that school climate is at an all-time high and students say that teachers are more excited than ever to be teaching.

Next, Commissioner Infante-Green went over the reporting results of grades 3-5, highlighting that the school climate topic is up 8% from last year, with 72% of students reporting a positive climate, and for students in grade 6-12, 9% from last year, to 50%. The results show that in these trying times, for many, respect improved dramatically this year. For families, there is a marked change in the respect students have for each other – up 6% from last year, and on the teacher survey, student respect for each other was up 25% from last year, and more than half of teachers reported favorable perceptions about their students’ social emotional learning, which is up 9% from last year. Commissioner Infante-Green noted that she is pleased that the data show that we are building true, inclusive school communities, where students can reach their highest potential. While there is room for improvement, these are positive trends, and while we saw tensions flare and divisiveness across the nation, RI teachers and students came together to create a climate of support and respect, and worked hand-in-hand to overcome every obstacle.

Commissioner Infante-Green also shared that to address families’ needs for summer learning programs to help their children make-up ground in the wake of the pandemic, a few weeks ago, RIDE announced that pre-registration for over 350 courses was live on EnrollRI.org. The response has been incredible, as 4,043 pre-registrations, by 1,700 unique students, have been received, thus far.

Lastly, Commissioner Infante-Green announced that last week the General Assembly passed a bill to set standards for financial literacy in schools. While the bill has not yet been signed by the Governor, RIDE has already been working with the Treasurer’s Office and leading educators in the State to develop a plan to help students learn how to manage their personal finances.

4. OPEN FORUM

Chair Cottam noted that in addition to the 11 individuals who signed-up to provide verbal testimony, the Council received 6 written comments, which were shared with Council members prior to the meeting.

Written testimony is on file at the Office of the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education.

5. DISCUSSION ITEMS

a. SurveyWorks Results

Scott Gausland, RIDE's Director of Data, Analysis and Research, introduced and commended, Peg Votta, RIDE's Research Specialist, SurveyWorks Project Manager, for her work in managing the SurveyWorks system over the last five years; engaging and understanding how the community feels about education in the State. He highlighted that RI really does stand alone with regards to its participation rates, especially by families.

Ms. Votta walked the Council through some of the survey data and highlighted that RI works with Panorama Education; survey leaders who work with many states and large school districts across the country. She explained that the survey topics are chosen by RI stakeholders and can be changed every year, to get a sense of what is actually happening in our schools. Ms. Votta highlighted Mary E. Fogarty Elementary School in Providence, for their results in addressing School Climate - Perceptions of the overall social and learning climate of the school; Central Falls High School, for their results in addressing Cultural Awareness and Action, Teacher-Student Relationships and Family Support; and Agnes V. Henessey Elementary School in East Providence, for their results in addressing Rigorous Expectations and School Leadership.

b. Curriculum Adoption - Update

Lisa Foehr, RIDE's Chief of Teaching and Learning, framed the discussion by reminding Council members that today's presentation is a follow-up to a request by the Council a few months ago, for an update on districts' timelines and what their budgets might look like.

Next, Phyllis Lynch, RIDE's Director of Instruction, Assessment and Curriculum, shared that RIDE administered a survey and received 61 responses from the districts on the planned adoption timeline for English Language Arts (ELA) and grade level in accordance with High Quality Instructional Materials (HQIM). Districts also reported on what the estimated cost of curriculum adoption for ELA and mathematics will be; funding sources (local, state, federal, or grant) and estimated costs, by subject and year, and identified funds that will be utilized to purchase and implement HQIM starting with SY2020-2021 through SY2022-2023. During RIDE's review of districts' ESSER plans, the agency will also remind and encourage districts to use ESSER funds for purchasing curriculum and provide professional development.

c. Extension to Begin Educator Preparation Programs Residency Requirements

Prior to turning the presentation over to Joy Souza, RIDE's Director of Educator Excellence and Certification Services, Ms. Foehr reminded Council members that a few months ago, RIDE came before them to ask for continued authority to make adjustments within the certification regulations, to allow individuals additional time if they were not able to take an assessment or meet a particular requirement, due to the pandemic. Today's ask is about the residency requirement, which was built into the 2018/2019 version of the *Regulations Governing the Certification of Educators in Rhode Island*.

Ms. Souza walked the Council through the original Residency Requirement implementation timeline, which is scheduled to go into effect in December 2022. The new implementation timeline is being extended by two years, however, RIDE will be requiring all educator preparation providers to pilot a scaled version of their plan, effective December 31, 2023, a year prior to full implementation. This new timeline has allowed RIDE to finalize guidance to the educator preparation providers, so that they truly understand what the expectations are for a truly successful program and also allowing them time to build partnerships with local school districts.

d. Revised Educator Certification Assessments

Ms. Foehr reminded Council members that every time there is a test change or a test is regenerated by the Educational Testing Service (ETS), the Council has to approve the recommended cut-scores. The cut-scores come out of the multi-state, standard-setting studies that assist in establishing a passing score, based on what teachers need to know and be able to do, relative to the Common Core State Standards. At its next meeting, the Council is being asked to approve the proposed Middle School Mathematics and Mathematics Content Knowledge tests and recommended cut-scores. Once approved, RIDE will notify the educator preparation providers that candidates entering as of September 1, 2021, will take the new test. RIDE will also monitor the educator pass rates over the next year and will come back to the Council if any adjustments need to be made to the cut-scores. Ms. Souza shared that 11 states were part of this study and that 9 of those states have adopted the recommended cut-scores.

e. Providence - Update

Commissioner Infante-Green began by sharing that she has received many telephone calls from Latino parents about the disrespect that she has been shown personally by people in leadership. She noted that "you have been at this table with me the entire year, and meeting after meeting, we have surpassed every benchmark, but personal attacks on my name, my accent, it's not okay, it's not okay. I look like the kids that we are failing. It is not okay. I have kept my mouth closed, lies, after lies, after lies, and guess what, they are lies. We are going to go through it and I am going to ask you for your patience, so that you can hear all of the work that has been done. I heard families yesterday, mobilizing because they are so upset. Teachers have come to me apologizing. Some of you witnessed at the forums that we had parents who got up and asked if I was going to talk about the elephant in the room. They said, they are going to come after you and it is going to be personal, and they also said, I am afraid to speak-up because of retaliation. I could not understand that. In those sessions we talked about that. Parents feeling retaliated against, by adults. There has been a public display of what that is. Very public. I have to tell you, what happened with Harrison doesn't hurt anyone any more than it hurts me. We had a superintendent in there that could do the job. He made a mistake. He made a mistake and jeopardized me. It doesn't pain anyone more than me. If I could go back, we would do all of this differently, but the personal attacks, never in my life. And these are the same people that teach

our kids. That is what is wrong with the broken system. And yes, my name is Angélica. It has an accent on the e. It is extremely disrespectful. I tried to build trust with the community. And just to be clear to everyone, I met with community leaders, I met with parents, I met with students, and I met with teachers. You saw the SurveyWorks data. Those are teachers input in there. It can't be that everything is wrong. It can't be that we can't acknowledge progress. You are going to see three principals today, and the only reason I invited them, is because I went to a principals' meeting yesterday and they said, Commissioner, can you please talk about the progress that we have made. I said no, you talk about the progress we have made. You talk about what has happened. Our State has risen above the national average for the first time. You don't have to like me, but I am here to do a job and I am here to do it collaboratively. And if we want to speak truths, we are in the middle of a union negotiation that historically, because I went back, takes two years. Name calling, not okay, guys. Not okay. I am the first Commissioner of color. Don't think that doesn't escape everyone, because it doesn't. I want you to give me the respect and the time to go over what actually has happened. Just because you say it on Twitter, doesn't make it true. And let me tell you, I cried many a nights with this situation with Harrison, so no one here can tell me that they are more devastated than I am, because I made a promise and I intend to keep it for the families and the community."

Next, Commissioner Infante-Green walked the Council through a presentation on the state of the Providence School District over the last three decades, highlighting that the 2019 Johns Hopkins Report – *Providence Public School District" A Review*, mirrored the 1993 Report, *Imagine... Providence Blue Print for Education*. Commissioner Infant-Green stressed that this is not about one person, but rather about a system that is broken and dysfunctional, and from what has been seen online, that is very clear. She went over the steps that were taken by the State to intervene in Providence, which the Council deemed necessary, to address the decades of neglect and lost generations of children. She also went over the Turnaround Action Plan that was created by the community, and a commitment by the State to the community, the allocation of \$4M to purchase and implement a K-8 gold-standard core curricula (that comes in Spanish), throughout the district, which is important in a district where the student population is 70% Latino. Commissioner Infante-Green also shared progress to date and upcoming priorities for Excellence in Learning; Engaged Communities; World-class Talent; and Efficient District Systems. – TAP Planning and Progress Monitoring, and PPSD's Capital Plan in Action.

Next, Commissioner Infante-Green introduced three of PPSD's amazing principals – Cynthia Torres, Principal of the Reservoir Avenue Elementary School; Wobberson Torchon, Principal of the Providence Career and Technical Academy; and Tim Milisaukas, Principal of the Esek Hopkins Middle School, to share the great work that has been happening in their respective schools.

Principal Torres began by sharing that she is a first-year principal in Providence and has been a part of the Providence community for 20 years, where she started as a teacher's assistant. She shared the great things that are happening at her school, which she attributes to the resilience, tenacity, resourcefulness, and growth mindset of the students, teachers and the community.

Next, Principal Torchon, shared that he has been employed by PPSD for 26 years, starting out as a mathematics teacher. Over that time period, he has been amazed at the creativity, ingenuity and resilience of students. He believes that effort creates ability, therefore, if students are that smart and performance is showing that they need to improve, we must speak about the system that has the inability to provide adequate resources and instruction. He voiced that he is proud to be under the leadership of Commissioner Infante-Green. He also believes that you can only accelerate student learning by having above average teachers and administrators, and laser-focused instructional teaching and learning - quality teaching, results in quality learning. Individual coaching has been instrumental this past year, and although he has been a principal for 16 years, he believes that he has benefited from having a coach, who provides him with feedback, so that he reflects on what it is that he wants to accomplish.

Lastly, Principal Torchon also thanked Commissioner Infante-Green for providing him with all of the resources to be successful, which he attributes to the hard work and dedication of the teachers and students, and the support of the Commissioner. He highlighted three things that have made the work successful - high-quality curriculum and having school wide fidelity to it; knowing that the teachers have a resource that they can rely and believe on and that is going to drive student learning; teachers trusting the school leaders to give them the feedback around their impact using data, not just their guide, collecting data together off of this high-quality program, and lastly, coaching with accountability to that coaching.

Member Callahan shared that she and along with other Council members were able to visit two schools (Juanita Sanchez and Leviton) a couple of weeks ago that had similarly dynamic principals and very engaged teachers and students. What they witnessed was amazing and it is wonderful to hear all of the things going on. Member Callahan suggested that going forward, it would be great to have updates from both central office and school level folks (administrators as well as teachers), periodically. She conveyed that she wishes this type of presentation was done on a regular basis, and that there were more focused agendas so that the Council can feel more comfortable about the data on what they are seeing and hearing from everyone. She expressed that it really is unfortunate and painful to hear what the Commissioner had to say earlier in the meeting, but thinks that, unfortunately, there are other people who are feeling pain at the same time. This is a very difficult time, whether it is with what is going on in schools or in the pandemic, and when the Commissioner talks about all of these great things, everyone bears some responsibility here. She expressed that when the Council agreed unanimously about the energy that they hoped to bring to the takeover and the hope that they had about the takeover, the Council also invested in the Commissioner the authority to oversee and operationalize, for the good, the bad and the ugly. She thanked the Commissioner for all of the progress that has been made, but thinks that it is important that the Council doesn't abrogate its responsibility either. She expressed that the Commissioner cannot be superwoman and needs this team, so the questions that are being asked should not just lend on the Commissioner. There are people

asking what the responsibility of the Council is and where were they; who made the decisions about the actions that needed to be taken around the \$170,000 payout; and who was consulted, because the Council was never consulted. She asked whether the Council vested that responsibility in just once person, and if so, where is the Council's responsibility in collaborating with the Commissioner and deliberating around a pretty important decision. Those are some of the questions that need to be answered. Critical decisions that need to be taken and critical decisions about future employment and big decisions around significant expenditure of funds, are very often recommended by the Commissioner and brought to the Council for affirmation and decision-making. She expressed that she didn't think that when she voted yes to vest the Commissioner with operational authority, that the Council was going to wait a year to get this kind of information and to help the Commissioner make decisions. Member Callahan noted that this is not personal for her, but rather, the Council's collective responsibility to ask those questions and then saying that going forward what does the Council do.

Commissioner Infante-Green noted that this is not the first time that the Council is hearing this information as there have been four previous presentations with the same material; just in a different format. As far as the payout, that judgement was made by the attorneys and being that it is a delicate matter, it could have cost the district two or three times as much. She also shared that she should have been part of the hiring, but that she trusted the Superintendent, who runs the day-to-day operation of a district, which is part of what the work is. Moving forward, she will be part of all of the hiring.

Council Member Beretta expressed that previously, the big issue in Providence was that the School Board was interfering with the administration's ability to make decisions, and now the Council should not be taking over that role, which does not make sense. She expressed that in fairness, the Commissioner has tried to shoulder too much of this on her own, and while she respects and admires it, it has created an opportunity for certain people to use it to formulate their own narrative. She expressed that she agrees with Member Callahan that targeted meetings in Providence schools, at least quarterly, where the community gets to come and speak, and where the Council bears some of the burden of decisions of the work that needs to be done. She stressed that, most importantly, communication needs to be had with legislators and other interested people that the Council talks to, giving the Council the ability to clarify what may not be accurately portrayed in the community.

Member Purtil expressed that the \$170,000 that were paid to the outgoing Superintendent, should have come before the Council for approval and the hiring of the next Superintendent should come before the Council, since that authority no longer falls under the purview of the Providence School Board. No one person should own that decision and this Council should be actively involved in the decision-making at the upper level, protecting the Commissioner and keeping the Council involved.

Member Gaines voiced that there are things that the Council has to be very careful of, which is that Council members are not day-to-day caretakers. The Commissioner's job is to hire and the Council's job to hire the Commissioner. That is her authority in law. Let's not go too far in our quest to be informed as to take over the duties of the Commissioner.

Member Purtill noted that he doesn't want to get involved in the day-to-day operations, but under the law, the Council has oversight. It protects the Commissioner and others if the Council has more oversight and involvement.

Member Beretta suggested getting a legal opinion as far as what authority the Council has.

Member DiCenso commented on the negotiations that were made with the outgoing superintendent and expressed that personnel matters cannot include everyone or be shared publicly, as the person who is leaving has some rights. She is comfortable with the decision to have the matter handled by legal counsel, but also understands where teachers are coming from about not trusting the system, when it has been broken for so long. She stressed that going forward, there needs to be a feeling of balance, as it is hard to change, but what has been done so far has to give them some faith that things are going in the right direction. She expressed that she was taken aback by how the Commissioner was treated on talk radio and that it was very painful not to hear the undertone of race. It is very disappointing when the State has made so many strides bringing bilingual education into schools and teachers that look like the communities they serve. She suggested taking a breath and stepping back from this, looking at all the good that has been happening and start building some trust again.

Member Callahan expressed that going forward, the Council clearly needs a legal opinion so that Council members know what the law says about how the individuals on this committee are charged by the General Assembly with certain things. She does not want to micromanage, as everyone has enough on their plates, but also thinks that the Council has some responsibility around the Providence oversight. For multiple reasons that were stated this evening, she would like an investigation on what the Council's role is and what things have to come before the Council, so that there are processes in place and everyone feels comfortable doing what they have been charged with doing, and chart a path forward.

Member Almeida voiced that part of the question is whether this Council had the legal authority to delegate that responsibility to the Commissioner, or was it done incorrectly.

Chair Cottam noted that when the Council voted giving the Commissioner authority on the day-to-day and decision-making, the Council's accountability rested in the Commissioner, however, action could be taken, if the Council didn't like the decisions being made.

Member Davis suggested that rather than a motion she would rather trust, and with the trust, get the information that the Council asked for and that the Council move forward from tonight, in trust.

Member Almeida expressed that he has been inspired by the work that has been done and being new to the Council, he was educated tonight on things that filled some gaps for him in regards to what really has been going on in Providence. It is about systems, it is about processes, it is about vision and collaboration, and he heard a lot about that tonight. He is really interested in the Council building that trust and that collaboration and supporting the Commissioner moving forward carrying out the systems, working to identify the new leadership, putting the right leadership in place, and continuing to work with the district to grow on the incredible amount of work that has been done over the last 18 months, which is impressive. He thanked the Commissioner for the incredible amount of work that was accomplished in a short period of time and expressed that she has his upmost support at this time and that he looks forward to working with her.

Chair Cottam noted that from the comments that she has heard this evening, it is apparent that it is about the students and that those are not just words, they have to sit at the center of every decision. Respect, trust and collaboration were themes that came through many comments this evening, and really nothing else can be tolerated. This is about the education of our children, it is about their future, individually, it is about our State, and it is about our State's economy. We need to educate people to be citizens in our State, in our world, and they are going to serve as the backbone, selfishly, of our Rhode Island economy. Chair Cottam expressed that it sickens her that there are single digit and low double digit numbers, but thinks that the State is on a path. The State needs to do much better than it has done over the last 30 years, and she doesn't think anyone is going to sit here and be part of a continuation of over 30 years of inattention to our students and to our educational system. That means staying focused, it means measuring, and it means deciding on a course and keep going forward. Our children can succeed, they can achieve and she believes in them and in our teachers. We will continue the deep-dive on Providence and will focus on different aspects of the district and visit schools and invite the community, including families and elected officials, to meetings, to speak and engage in the conversations and to keep them at the center. Chair Cottam stated that moving forward, the agendas will be more focused and reminded the Council that they are responsible for education statewide. Although the focus has been on Providence, there needs to be topics that touch everyone, not just Providence. It also begins with the Commissioner being very intentional about, and a commitment to, increasing communication with the Council, particularly for this time period, and particularly on Providence.

Member Callahan reiterated that a legal opinion needs to be sought about the Council's role moving forward.

Council members thanked the Commissioner and staff for all of the work that has been accomplished and expressed their sorrow for everything the Commissioner has gone through over the last few weeks.

7. ADJOURNMENT:

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

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

Vote: 9 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, Patricia DiCenso, Karen Davis, Jo Eva Gaines, Marta Martinez, and Lawrence Purtill

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

Meeting adjourned at 8:33 p.m.