



MINUTES OF THE MEETING
September 14, 2021

COUNCIL ON ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

Board Chair Cottam welcomed everyone to the September 14, 2021, in-person meeting of the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education. Virtual access was provided to members of the general public. She declared a quorum present and called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

Present: Michael Almeida, Amy Beretta, Colleen Callahan, Barbara Cottam, Patricia DiCenso, Jo Eva Gaines, Marta Martinez, and *Paula Zhuang

Absent: Karen Davis and Lawrence Purtill

[*Ex-officio, non-voting member]

1. ACCEPTANCE OF THE AGENDA

On a motion duly made by Patricia DiCenso and seconded by Colleen Callahan, it was

VOTED: That the Rhode Island Council on Elementary and Secondary Education accepts the agenda for the September 14, 2021, 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, Patricia DiCenso, Jo Eva Gaines, and Marta Martinez

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

2. PRESENTATION OF AWARD CERTIFICATES

At this time, Chair Cottam welcomed and congratulated the Rhode Island finalists for the 2021 Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching. 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 four finalists are:

Mathematics:

- Donna McCadden – Narragansett High School
- Paul Ruhle – Lincoln High School

Science:

- Bryan Colahan – Tiverton High School
- Rachel Roberge – Scituate High School

3. COMMISSIONER'S REPORT

Commissioner Infante-Green began by sharing that at this point, all LEAs have returned to fully in-person learning. She expressed that the safety and well-being of students and staff continues to be RIDE's top priority, and that providing families and school staff clear and consistent information is key in moving Rhode Island's education system forward this school year. RIDE has asked that every LEA make their back-to-school plans accessible to their school communities by posting them on their homepages. In addition, RIDE created a master list on back2schoolri.com, to allow the public to see what policies and procedures are in place at the local level, and continues to work with RIDOH to not only aid to refine plans, but also provide resources to school leaders to help inform students, families, and staff. RIDE also distributed communications and outreach toolkits for school leaders to help plan their outreach and share vital information, including back-to-school tips, school testing, vaccination, quarantining one-pagers, and much more.

Next, Commissioner Infante-Green shared that last Thursday, she joined Governor McKee and Providence Public School District (PPSD) Acting Superintendent Montañez at the bus yard in Providence to kick-off the district's first day of school, and from what she saw firsthand, students and educators were excited to be back in school among friends, classmates, and colleagues. Commissioner Infante-Green reported that later in the agenda, Interim Superintendent Montañez will provide an update on PPSD's back-to-school efforts and the work the district is doing to engage students and families, as well as a presentation from Terrell Robinson, one of the new Community Specialists who have been on the ground reaching out to families directly.

Next, Commissioner Infante-Green shared that this evening there will be a presentation on RIDE's and PPSD's work with the City of Providence to realign the City's original Capital Plan with PPSD's Turnaround Action Plan that is being rolled out and that will put the needs of students first.

Next, Commissioner Infante-Green encouraged everyone to attend RIDE's Saturday, September 18 event to celebrate educational excellence at Waterplace Park with a special WaterFire, honoring educators for their outstanding service and dedication to the education profession and to their students. The event will also serve as the launching point for RIDE's new "Our Kids" campaign to underscore unity in education, energize families, educators, and school staff for the school year, and will highlight the work and focus of teachers and the core mission of RIDE: to serve "Our Kids."

Next, Commissioner Infante-Green announced that with support from RI's Congressional delegation and in partnership with DCYF, RIDE was awarded a \$9M Project AWARE grant to expand youth mental health services in Cranston, West Warwick, and Westerly school districts. This grant is the second SAMHSA Grant that RIDE has received since 2018 and is in addition to two recent USDOE grants – one on School Climate Transformation to serve nine schools, and a School-based Mental Health Services Grant to serve three districts. Rhode Island is the only state in the nation to receive all four of these grants.

Commissioner Infante-Green ended by proudly reporting that yesterday, RIDE presented at the National Center for Intensive Intervention (NCII) State Implementation Showcase. RI was the only New England state of the nine states in this project, which focused on progress monitoring for students requiring the most intensive (Tier III) academic and social and emotional needs. In addition, in collaboration with the General Treasurer's Office, yesterday RIDE announced the award of a \$50K grant to advance financial literacy education for RI students. The grant was provided by Next Gen Personal Finance (NGPF), a nonprofit that provides free, up to date financial literacy curriculum, and engaging professional development and advocacy resources. She expressed that she looks forward to continuing to work with the Council and all external partners to continue to move education forward.

4. OPEN FORUM

One individual addressed the Council.

Written comments submitted to the Council are on file at the RI Department of Education.

5. DISCUSSION ITEMS

a. Providence Update

Dr. Javier Montañez, Acting Superintendent of Providence Public Schools (PPSD) began his presentation by expressing that as Acting Superintendent for the 2021-2022 school year, his top priority is to combat chronic absenteeism and reengage families and students. He noted that chronic absenteeism has been a challenge for PPSD for decades, and although COVID did not create this problem, it made the existing problem worst. To tackle the problem, the district is engaging students and families, recognizing good and improved attendance, monitoring attendance data and practices, providing personalized early outreach, and developing programmatic response to barriers that students and families may be facing. Next, he highlighted some of the reasons why students are chronically absent and PPSD's ongoing efforts and investments to combat the crisis, including an improved, proactive outreach system.

Next, Terrell Robinson, Community Specialist at Mt. Pleasant High School, presented on his role to increase student engagement, increase family connections, and increase community engagement to align with school outcomes that will help reduce chronic absenteeism.

Next, Victor Capellan, Senior Advisor to the Commissioner, and Mario Carreno, Director of the School Building Authority, gave an overview of PPSD's Capital Plan. Mr. Capellan explained that this body of work has been led by RIDE's Office of School Building Authority (SBA) in collaboration with PPSD and the City of Providence over the last two years. He went over the current state of PPSD's facilities, emphasizing that decades of neglect had left the majority of school buildings in a state of structural disrepair, symbolic of the low expectations that permeated the school system for decades. He explained that once the RIDE intervention began in 2019, RIDE and PPSD worked with the city to re-align the city's original Capital Plan with the district's TAP to put the needs of students first, with guiding priorities for the amended Capital Plan. He went on to explain that the old plan mainly focused on construction as just warm, safe, and dry, however, the new plan will also focus on instruction and student learning.

Next, Mr. Carreno shared that over the last 10 years, Providence spent around \$35M in their facilities, half of what the town of Lincoln spent for a district 8 times smaller. He shared that voters approved two bonds totaling \$300M, and for the first time, the district is looking at creating for the first time within the district, what is called as a revolving Capital Fund. These resources will be available in the district to do work and get state reimbursement and then use that reimbursement to do more, rather than bonding and issuing financing costs, allowing districts to take bond funds and doing bigger projects. PPSD is currently initiating the first phase of its Capital Plan, with the second phase currently in design and subject to approval in spring 2022. Mr. Carreno went over the significance of using swing space, which minimizes construction time, costs, and disruption to student learning. In addition to reimagining PPSD's Capital Plan, RIDE and PPSD have made significant efforts to improve the overall quality of the school facilities by increasing custodial expectations, streamlining collaborative oversight of school facilities between the district and the city, revitalizing Providence School Building Committee to include parent and community representation, and ensuring clean and safe facilities. The amended Capital Plan includes six major projects (Hope High School, Windmill Street, Classical, Spaziano Elementary and Annex, Pleasant View and 21 Peace Street), at approximately \$216M.

Member Beretta asked whether money will be set-aside for maintenance once the work is completed.

Mr. Carreno replied that it is one of the most critical pieces of the Capital Reserve Fund that RIDE is trying to setup for the district, so that it will be self-sustaining going forward.

Member DiCenso, former Pawtucket Superintendent, praised Mr. Carreno and the SBA team for their guidance, support and focus on student-centered buildings, when Pawtucket went through a major renovation. She shared that continuing to build a Capital Fund is something that keeps a district from chasing its tail in case an emergency arises.

Member Callahan asked that since swing space is about one year out, she is wondering how air quality issues and safety issues are being addressed.

Mr. Capellan replied that while all the future planning is happening, there are several ongoing maintenance projects taking place right now.

Member Almeida asked where the estimated costs of the proposed projects come from.

Mr. Carreno replied that it all starts from a necessity of school construction process, including independent cost estimates, schematic designs, independent bids to ensure that they are warranted, and a rigorous review where things aren't substantiated, they are trimmed down, ensuring that that numbers are legitimate.

b. District Accountability and Site-Based Management

Dr. Kelvin Roldán gave an update on where RIDE is in the implementation of the 2019 Accountability Act. He went over the legislation components – District Accountability System; the implementation of Site-Based Management; the creation of Strategic Planning System that will be utilized by every school district; deliverables and next steps; and timeline and process-to-date.

Next, Scott Gausland, RIDE's Director of Data and Technology Services, went over each of the elements and explained that in creating the District Accountability System, RIDE looked at best practices from other states around the country to see what was happening around this space. It then decided to elevate RI's Accountability System by having the exact same system with the exact same achievement metrics for both LEA leaders and school principals. He also went over where the system is and where it plans to be, highlighting that the results of the RICAS that was administered in Spring 2021, with accountability waivers from the USDOE being released in late fall 2021. District and school report cards will be released, with truncated information, in early December 2021, and district accountability star performance ratings, will be released in fall 2022.

Next, Jennifer Carney, RIDE's Director of School District Planning and Improvement, spoke on what RIDE has done to support Site-Based Management and the shifts in governance responsibilities in the Education Accountability Act, prior to 2019 and in 2019. She then gave a status update – This past spring, RIDE released school improvement team guidance vetted by districts; designed school improvement team modules (school leadership and stakeholders), released in June 2021; and this summer, launched professional learning sessions, in partnership with the RI School Principals Association (RIASP).

Next, Ms. Carney shared that over the last year, RIDE, the Long-term Education Planning (LEAP) Committee, and other key partners, collaborated with school communities across the state to develop RIDE's Strategic Plan, to unify and create a vertical alignment between RIDE's Strategic Plan, LEAs Strategic Plans, and coordinating annual plans and school plans required by the law, to ensure that everyone is working towards the same vision.

Mr. Gausland ended the presentation by sharing RIDE's structure of its Strategic Plan that forms the foundation of the entire Strategic Planning system, which districts will eventually use to model their plans after. He also went over deliverables and next steps moving forward.

c. Curriculum Frameworks and Standards – Update

Lisa Foehr, RIDE’s Chief of Teaching and Learning, and Dr. Phyllis Lynch, RIDE’s Director of Instruction, Assessment and Curriculum, gave an update on the development and feedback process for standards and the establishment of curriculum frameworks for English Language Arts, mathematics, science, and social studies, that has been underway for several months. Ms. Foehr shared that this is the first time that the state has made a statewide attempt at developing curriculum frameworks across the board. Ms. Foehr went over the importance of standards and high-quality curriculum, instruction, and assessment, and why standards matter; defining what a curriculum framework is and what it means to have high-quality frameworks; who will use the curriculum frameworks; and what high-quality instruction and learning looks like.

Next, Dr. Lynch went over RIDE’s year-long cross-agency process in the development of the curriculum framework, with feedback gathered from content advisory educator groups as well as families and educators, with emphasis on integration and coherence. She also went over the five guiding principles of RI’s frameworks, emphasizing that standards are the bedrock of the High-Quality curriculum, instruction, and assessment system; high-quality instructional practices; content-specific examples; and themes from key stakeholder feedback sessions, and sample revisions to the document.

Next, Ms. Foehr gave an update on the social studies standards, which she noted have not been revised since 2008. She explained that over the last several months, RIDE, with the assistance of different individuals, has been pairing the social studies standards work with the curriculum framework, by doing a complete revision of the work. She shared that unlike the other content area standards, there isn’t one commonly agreed upon clear set of national standards around social studies that states can build upon. Therefore, RIDE is relying on the feedback from over 900 individuals, giving RIDE some direction on how to approach social studies standards, which has driven some of the early work. Ms. Foehr ended the presentation by going over the structure and process, and timeline.

d. Recommendation of Members to the RI Vision Education and Services Program (RIVESP) Advisory Board

Deputy Commissioner Roldán shared that this summer he spent a considerable amount of time with the leadership of RIVESP discussing the process, work, and the partnership. He and the Commissioner have also met with each of the recommended members to discuss the future of the work and outline the Board’s priorities. The Commissioner’s recommendation includes eight of the required eleven members to the Board, with the additional three members to come at a future date.

6. ACTION ITEMS:

a. Approval of Recommended Members to the RI Vision Education and Services Program (RIVESP) Advisory Board

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

VOTED: That the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education approves the Appointment of the Advisory Board for the RI Vision Education Services Program (RIVESP), 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, Patricia DiCenso, Jo Eva Gaines, and Marta Martinez

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

b1. Approval of the Appeals Committee Recommendation on the matter of Student F. Doe v. Pawtucket School Department

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

VOTED: That in the matter of Student F. Doe v. Pawtucket School Department, the Commissioner's decision is upheld, as presented

Vote: 6 members voted in the affirmative, 0 members voted in the negative, and 1 member abstained as follows:

YEAS: Michael Almeida, Amy Beretta, Colleen Callahan, Barbara Cottam, Jo Eva Gaines, and Marta Martinez

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: Patricia DiCenso

b2. Approval of the Appeals Committee Recommendation on the matter of DCYF v. Providence Public School District

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

VOTED: That in the matter of DCYF v. Providence Public School District, the Commissioner's decision is upheld, 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,
Patricia DiCenso, Jo Eva Gaines, and Marta Martinez

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,
Patricia DiCenso, Jo Eva Gaines, and Marta Martinez

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

Meeting adjourned at 6:55 p.m.