



**Enclosure 2a**  
**October 20, 2020**

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING**  
**October 6, 2020**

**COUNCIL ON ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION**

Board Chair Cottam welcomed everyone to the October 6, 2020, Hybrid meeting of the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education. She noted for the record that she and members Beretta, Davis, and Student Representative Feliz, were attending in person, while members Callahan, Field, Gaines, Martinez, and Purtill, were joining via the Zoom Webinar platform. She declared a quorum present, and called the meeting to order at 5:32 p.m.

**Present in Person:** Amy Beretta, Barbara Cottam, Karen Davis, \*\*Brandon Feliz,

**Via Zoom Webinar:** Colleen Callahan, Gara Field, Jo Eva Gaines, Marta Martinez, and Lawrence Purtill

**Absent:** 0

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

**1. ACCEPTANCE OF THE AGENDA**

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

**VOTED:** That the Rhode Island Council on Elementary and Secondary Education accepts the agenda for the October 6, 2020, hybrid meeting

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

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

**NAYS:** 0

**ABSTAINS:** 0

**2. ACCEPTANCE OF THE MINUTES**

**a. Minutes of the September 15, 2020, Meeting**

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

**VOTED:** That the Rhode Island Council on Elementary and Secondary Education accepts the minutes of the October 6, 2020, Hybrid Meeting

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

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

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

### 3. OPEN FORUM

Andrew Bramson, President and CEO of the College Crusade of Rhode Island, shared that on October 17, 2020, the College Crusade will be hosting Rhode Island's first ever outdoor FAFSA event, to be held at the skating rink in downtown Providence. The event is open to any high school senior in Rhode Island and is by appointment only. He thanked the city of Providence for donating the space and Blue Cross Blue Shield and Cox Communications for their financial support.

He also voiced that the College Crusade looks forward to partnering with the Council and the State around what needs to happen now for next summer and next school year around extended learning opportunities for students who will be behind academically, socially and emotionally, as well as the difficult conversation about what grade retention will look like in the 2020-21 school year.

Keith Oliveira, Executive Director of the League of Charter Schools, urged the Council on behalf of the League's members, to approve the four proposed recommendations for charter school renewals for an additional two years, due to the lack of data to fairly and appropriately evaluate those schools. He also asked that as the Council considers how to address the broader school accountability system to reflect the impact of COVID, that it revisit the charter school renewal frameworks to make sure that they account for the impact that the pandemic has had on the schools' performance metrics – financial, operational and educational.

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

Chair Cottam shared that she had just visited the Education Operations Center (EdOC) and was very impressed by the coordination between the staff from the RI Department of Education (RIDE) RI Department of Health (RIDOH, Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF), and the RI National Guard (RING), who are supporting and guiding school districts in the areas of transportation, air, health issues, etc.

#### **4. COMMISSIONER'S REPORT**

Commissioner Infante-Green began her report by expressing that RIDE continues to put public health and student/teacher safety as a top priority in all decisions being made. RIDE worked with school leaders to make sure they had great plans and were ready to put them into operation, and worked with schools and teachers to ensure that when schools restarted, students would be safely learning. She expressed that the public health situation remains real and serious, but by working with our colleagues at the RIDOH, wonderful partnership has been forged that lets them focus on health and RIDE on learning. RIDE is pushing hard to get qualified teachers into classrooms, and is helping school leaders address this most challenging area by making COVIC funds available to help fund substitutes; working with the Highlander Institute to finalize a program that will prepare more substitute teachers to fill the gaps across the State; and working with teacher prep programs to make sure their students can get the teaching hours and experiences they need to enter the classrooms on time and ready to do their jobs. RIDE also just finalized an agreement with Fuel Education, a world-class online learning provider, to address two critical learning needs in Rhode Island – it will now be available to all districts, at no charge, to provide high-quality instruction for their medically exempt students. In addition, all high school multilingual learners who elected distance learning in Providence are rapidly being moved onto this platform, which will improve the quality of instruction immensely, and ease the burden on the Providence teachers who have let RIDE know that there is a need for more teachers to deliver excellence to students. In addition, more than 100 Providence Public School seniors are taking advantage of the Accelerate Program to spend the school year taking college-level courses at the Community College of Rhode Island and at Rhode Island College. The key to success in transforming education in Rhode Island is remaining in close contact with communities, therefore, last week RIDE hosted a statewide Back-to-School Forum in English and one in Spanish, where superintendents, a representative from RIDOH, and members of the RIDE team reflected on how schools have restarted, and answered questions from the communities.

Next, Commissioner Infante-Green reported that last week, the U.S. Department of Education named three Rhode Island schools – Charlestown Elementary School, Kingston Hill Academy Charter School, and Narragansett Elementary School – as National Blue Ribbon Schools for 2020, based on their overall academic excellence or their progress in closing achievement gaps. She praised teachers, school staff, students, and families for working hard every day to create environments in which children can learn and thrive.

Lastly, Commissioner Infante-Green reported that last March, the unexpected closure of schools led to the cancellation of the April administration of the in-school SAT with Essay test for the class of 2021 (grade 11 students during the 2019-20 school year). RIDE expects that schools will administer the SAT with Essay to all eligible 12 grade students on October 4, 2020, free of charge. The October SAT cannot be administered from home; it is strictly on on-site assessment, even for those students who have opted for distance learning. She noted that scores will not be used for the achievement or exceeds expectations measures, however, scores will count for the Commissioner's Seal measure for any student who meets the college and career readiness benchmark. She also noted that October 19 is a statewide professional development day for teachers and a distance learning day for students.

Member Callahan asked if Commissioner Infante-Green could direct her to the right person who might be able to help her better understand what the guidelines might be around when a district makes a decision to move from full-in-person or partial-in-person to distance learning, because it seems as if decisions are being made differently from district to district.

Commissioner Infante-Green replied that her understanding is that no school has been asked to go distance learning and that RIDOH has not said that a school needs to quarantine or close, as there hasn't been an outbreak either in school or outside of school. Those decisions have been made at the local level by school leaders, either out of an abundance of caution, or the lack of staff to be able to carry on the work.

Member Beretta asked for an update on Providence's Virtual Learning Academy (VLA).

Commissioner Infante-Green replied that she personally met with VLA teachers, and other than a lack of school supply materials, their main concern was with the amount of students (52) that they are being expected to teach. RIDE and PPSD are still working on addressing that issue as there is a lack of teachers, however, teachers are receiving additional training and coaches have been assigned to them.

Member Field asked that on the VLA what are the odds are of getting the teacher/student ratios down by having the autonomy to go out of district and she would like to have a better understanding of the metrics that RIDOH is using for Rhode Island and how are they aligned to what Massachusetts is doing.

Commissioner Infante-Green replied that the statewide platform option has always been on the table. As far as the metrics, she proposed inviting someone from RIDOH to the next meeting of the Council to answer any health related questions.

Member Davis asked if the spike in the number of college students who are testing positive is negatively impacting the Providence numbers.

Commissioner Infante-Green replied that they are part of the overall numbers, which is a challenge.

Member Callahan asked if some thought has been given to hiring retired teachers across the State who are already certified, to increase the substitute pool to staff the VLA.

Commissioner Infante-Green replied that there has been many recruitment efforts, including reaching out to retired teachers. The Governor also stands ready to execute an Executive Order to temporarily lift current restrictions on the number of days that retirees are able to work.

## **DISCUSSION ITEMS**

### **a. Capital Budget – Fiscal Years 2022-2026**

Mark Dunham, RIDE Director of Finance, explained that annually, the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education is required to approve the Capital Budget request, a five-year plan that covers repairs, renovations, and improvements typically at State-owned properties. This year's request includes projects for the Davies Career and Technical Center, the Metropolitan Career and Technical Center, the Rhode Island School for the Deaf, and a selected statewide initiative. The Capital Budget is the first step in the FY 2022 budget process.

The Department's total request through FY 2026 is eight (8) projects for a total cost of \$520M, which includes \$106M already spent or encumbered as of June 30, 2020. There is one new project for security upgrades and enhancements at the Rhode Island School for the Deaf at a projected cost of \$200,000. There is also a request to reallocate \$5M in funding for the Davies Career and Technical School from a new building feasibility study to replace the Healthcare Program modular classrooms. There is a continued \$4M request by the Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center for roof replacement and repairs to 5 buildings at the Providence Campus. Additionally, there is an increase of \$250M to the statewide projects to renovate local school facilities.

The other projects in this budget request are continuations of projects that have been previously approved by the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education, the Governor, and the General Assembly. Included in the existing projects are \$1M in requested increases for asset protection funds for the three State schools.

Member Beretta asked if all the projects went through a bidding process and whether the Davies project will be multifunctional - for example partnering with CCRI in Lincoln and sharing the facility.

Director Dunham replied that these are just preliminary estimates and that all projects will undergo a formal bidding process when the time comes. As far as partnering with CCRI, he doesn't believe that there are any plans at this time. Stephen Osborn, RIDE's Chief of Innovation, voiced that Davies has partnered with CCRI in the past as well as with other workforce partners, i.e. CVS, for training purposes.

b. Fiscal Year 2021 Revised Budget and Fiscal Year 2022 Current Service Level (CSL) Budget

Ana Riley, Deputy Commissioner for Instructional Programs, framed the discussion by pointing out that the distinction for this year is that the Fiscal Year 2021 budget still hasn't been enacted and RIDE is operating under a revised request for 2021 and CSL budget for 2022. Both budgets include all the initiatives in the Governor's 2021 recommended budget, which due to COVID-19 emergency, was never acted upon by the General Assembly. RIDE was successful in receiving the Rethink Grant and a couple of other grants, which may create some changes in RIDE's salary and staffing budget and may need to be updated before final approval by the Board of Education. She highlighted some of the asks in the Governor's 2021 budget – implementing high-quality curriculum materials (2 FTEs); supporting school systems in closing statewide achievement gaps (3 FTEs) ; creating a strong instructional school culture (1 FTE); and social emotional learning.

Next, Director Dunham went over the State Aid to Education; Funding Formula Distribution; State Aid to Education, Categorical Aid; Fiscal Year 2022 All RIDE Departments - all funding sources; ACES Operating Budget by Funding Source; and RIDE Budget by Funding Source. He noted that this has been a very complicated budget process and since there is no 2021 budget in place, RIDE is working off the 2020 enacted budget. RIDE is also working on a constrained budget that is required by the State Budget Office.

c. Charter School Renewals

Stephen Osborn, RIDE's Chief of Innovation, shared that the annual charter renewal process is an essential part of the Council's oversight of public charter schools, as required by regulation and state statute. He shared that RIDE tried its best with balancing a strong authorizing process, while also setting-up a process that makes sense for schools given how challenging things have been due to COVID.

Next, Jermaine Curtis, Charter School Specialist, went over the charter school renewal timeline, highlighting that in a typical year, RIDE meets with the schools to discuss data, walks them through the renewal process, and schedules a site visit (typically held in the spring). Once an observation report is drafted, RIDE meets with the school in the summer to finalize the report, reviews school accountability, and determines RIDE's recommendation to the Council in the fall. Considering that the pandemic has challenged the high-quality authorization renewal process, the recommendation is to grant two additional years to the schools that have a charter contract that is scheduled to expire on June 30, 2021 - Beacon, Highlander and Sheila "Skip" Nowell, who were granted three-year renewals in the fall 2017. The fourth is the Rhode Island Nurses Institute Middle College, which is coming off a five-year renewal. This approach will give the schools the ability to focus on teaching and learning, health and safety, as well as provide two additional years of data that will better support RIDE and the Council in holding school accountable for academic results.

## 6. ADJOURNMENT:

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

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

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

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

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

[Member Martinez departed the meeting at 7:00 p.m. and Member Callahan departed at 7:12 p.m.]

Meeting adjourned at 7:17 p.m.