



Enclosure 2a
December 15, 2020

MINUTES OF THE MEETING
December 8, 2020

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

COUNCIL ON ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

Board Chair Cottam welcomed everyone to the December 15, 2020, Hybrid meeting of the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education. She noted for the record that she and Student Representative Feliz, were attending in person, while members Beretta, Callahan, Davis, Field, Gaines, Martinez, and Purtill, were joining via the Zoom Webinar platform. She also noted that Member Field would not be joining the meeting. She declared a quorum present and called the meeting to order at 5:32 p.m.

Participating in Person: Barbara Cottam and *Brandon Feliz

Remote Participation: Amy Beretta, Colleen Callahan, Karen Davis, Gara Field, Jo Eva Gaines, Marta Martinez, and Lawrence Purtill

Absent: 0

[*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 Jo Eva Gaines, it was

VOTED: That the Rhode Island Council on Elementary and Secondary Education accepts the agenda for the December 8, 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 November 17, 2020, Meeting

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

VOTED: That the Rhode Island Council on Elementary and Secondary Education accepts the minutes of the November 17, 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

At this time, Chair Cottam addressed the Open Forum part of the meeting so that everyone was aware of the facts. She noted that under the Open Meetings Act, the Council is not required to hold a “public comment” portion of the meeting as these are not public hearings or forums, but rather meetings for the Council to get its necessary business done. In addition, the Council Bylaws state that except in unusual circumstances, no more than 20 minutes will be set aside on each Council agenda for any person, other than staff members, to address the Council during Open Forum; such persons will be asked to limit their remarks to two minutes or less. She expressed that under her tenure this Council has maintained that portion of the meeting at all of its meetings and has always allowed people to finish their comments over the two-minute limit. In the case of today’s meeting, the Council anticipated a robust public participation related to the two discussion items, and to allow the maximum number of people to comment on those two items before the Council votes on them next week, a decision was made to limit the public comment to those two items. That decision has been reversed and RIDE has notified all of the members of the public who signed-up to speak. The Council always welcomes public input and feedback as we have heard from many individuals at the biweekly meetings of the Council over the last several months. As far as the charters, there have been 14 hours of public comment with two, one-hour sessions for each proposal. In closing, Chair Cottam expressed that these are extraordinary times and everyone is doing their very best to ensure that everything we do is in the best interest of students.

3. COMMISSIONER’S REPORT

Commissioner Infante-Green began by thanking everyone for attending the meeting and recognized RIDE staff for their hard in reviewing the charter applications and compiling the public feedback.

The Commissioner reported that as Rhode Island takes a pause as the number of positive cases continues to increase, despite the additional restrictions by Governor Raimondo, the safety of our communities is front of mind. Classrooms remain places where children can learn, where they receive services and support, and a place where they are around adults who care about them. There have been so many challenges and changes presented by COVID-19 and everyone at this meeting has done an incredible job adapting and meeting the needs of our kids. RIDE has been working hard with our colleagues in state government to protect these spaces and to provide resources that our schools need right now.

Next, the Commisisoner reported that last week, RIDE launched our pilot testing program with the Department of Health and with the support of our Education Operation Center or the EdOC. In four days, the testing teams were able to efficiently and effectively test two schools with both the new BinaxNOW tests we received and the PCR tests. She thanked the team that helped and Central Falls Superintendent Downey Toledo for her support as it was because of her team in Central Falls that this model was so successful. More testing is planned this week in that community. From the results, we know that out of 256 students and staff tested as of Friday-- 3 positive cases were identified, 1 staff and 2 students, for a 1% positivity rate. This supports what we are seeing statewide. In Rhode Island, out of all of the positive cases in our school communities, the positive test rate for their close contacts is 1.3%. When you compare that to the state average of just less than 5%. We see that in our classrooms, in schools across Rhode Island, we have mitigation measures in place to minimize spread of the virus and they are working to keep spread in schools very low. We're going to be adding Providence and Lincoln to this pilot in the next week and hope that our testing teams can help schools prepare for increased mitigation plans like this during the second semester. As Rhode Island top health officials evaluate the numbers daily. We're grateful for the district and school leaders who have been able to make timely decisions that best meet the needs of their community. Before Thanksgiving, it was announced that districts had the option to increase distance learning and out of the 51 high schools and districts that responded to our survey 30 remained at their current level. RIDE continues to look to our leaders to tell us what works for their schools and how we can best support them, no matter the challenge. She shared that she and Superintendent Harrison met with Providence high school teachers earlier in the day where teachers expressed that they would like to see more 10th and 11th grade students brought back to in-person learning.

Next, Commissioner Infante-Green shared that she is very disappointed with the ACCESS 2.0 results for the school year 2019-2020, where the scores are lower in Rhode Island than in any other state. This is a population of students that we know in-person learning has been critical for. We've been doing this ACCESS assessment for a long time and it still shows us that less than 4% of MLL students are achieving English language proficiency. The equity gaps persist and they underscore a need to better serve ALL students. Out of over 15,000 tested, 13,000 of our students were economically disadvantaged, 11,500 were Hispanic or Latino, and half of the students were from Providence. The gaps increase for our differently-abled students and our long-term multilingual learners. These students deserve more and these families deserve educational opportunities that respond to the emerging needs of our multilingual learners. At next week's

Council meeting RIDE plans to walk the Council through these results and will provide a presentation on the MLL Blueprint and Strategic Plan that we have been working on with the community. The Blueprint and the associated Strategic Plan will provide us with a clear course to best provide the necessary supports for MLL students. RIDE has already begun work on one of the actions outlined in the strategic plan-- the expansion of dual language programs in Rhode Island. With support from West Ed, the Rhode Island Foundation, and RIDE's awesome team, we have already released a pre-application for expansion of these critical programs and six LEAs have applied. Research and evidence in our own State clearly demonstrate that bilingual dual language programs provide the best long term results for our multilingual learners, yet we have very few of these programs in Rhode Island. RIDE has been engaging in sessions with interested districts by providing updates on research-based best practices. This will lead LEAs to be equipped to complete the final grant application, which will be reviewed based on high-quality criteria for bilingual and dual language programs in our State.

In closing, the Commissioner shared that this is part of RIDE's shift as a Department to provide support unique to our LEAs and our students' needs, rather than a system solely focused on compliance. She looks forward to sharing that work with everyone and hopes that these test results are taken seriously as a consistent signal to our kids that we are prepared to do more and are serious about changes in Rhode Island. Whether that be through new learning models, new curriculum, or new programs, we need to try new things because our students can't wait any longer.

Council member Callahan expressed that she is very pleased about the pilot testing and although the results sound promising, she would like to see the data that she has been asking for over the last couple of meetings on the number of teachers and other school staff who have to be quarantined due to being identified as a close contact. She is concerned with the impact the positive testing and quarantining are having on teachers and what that means for class coverage and delivery of quality instruction.

Commissioner Infante-Green responded that she is also concerned about many things, including the type of instruction students are receiving as witnessed by the data on the multilingual learners that she just finished sharing, and that in person learning is extremely important.

4. 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. Those written comments have been shared with Council members, are available at the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, and will be made part of the permanent record of this meeting. She reminded folks to keep their comments to two minutes or less, especially considering the number of speakers who signed up to speak this evening.

- 33 individuals expressed the need for schools to go on a pause and move to distance learning and/or their opposition to the charter school proposals
- 8 individuals spoke in support of the Excel Academy proposal
- 12 individuals spoke in support of the Achievement First Charter Proposal
- 3 individuals spoke in support of the Nuestro Mundo Charter Proposal
- 3 individuals spoke in support of the Segue Institute for Learning Charter Proposal
- 6 individuals spoke in support of the Wangari Maathai Charter Proposal

5. DISCUSSION ITEMS

a. Charter Public Schools

Stephen Osborn, RIDE's Chief of Innovation, began by going over the new seat recommendations. He noted that as defined by Rhode Island general law, charter schools are public schools, including district charter schools, independent charter schools, and mayoral academies. All students and prospective students of a charter school shall be deemed to be public school students, having all the same rights under federal and Rhode Island laws as students in traditional public schools. In addition, no school can be managed or operated by a for-profit entity, and unlike other states who have charter school boards, in Rhode Island, the PK-12 Council is the entity that approves the establishment and continuation of charter schools. He also went over charter school admissions' process; funding and facilities; charter authorizing over time; RIDE's high-expectations for new charter schools; how expectations are leading to increased parent demand; charter school demand by community; enrollment profiles for Providence and Central Falls; student enrollment in charter schools; outcomes; and data showing how very few children are completing grade level work and even fewer multilingual learners in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics, in Providence and Central Falls.

Next, Mr. Osborn went over RIDE's recommendations for the Council's preliminary approval of this year's charter proposals, with final approvals earmarked for spring 2021.

- Achievement First Rhode Island – the highest performing district in the State on the spring 2019 ELA and mathematics assessments for districts with more than 50 tested multilingual learners.
- Rhode Island Nurses Institute (RINI) – preparing students for college and career success and the leader in the State on the postsecondary success index in 2019 school accountability.
- Segue Institute for Learning – supports high levels of growth in ELA – in the last assessment the school has 41% of its students proficient in English, which is higher than the State average.
- Excel Academy - has been consistently outperforming the State of Massachusetts on the MCAS.

- Nuestro Mundo – is responding to the needs of the community and will feature a K-8 school with a dual-language immersion program. The curriculum emphasizes interactive, hands-on, and project-based learning across disciplines.
- Providence Preparatory – will extend the school year to accelerate learning, proposing a 220-day school year, as well as provide Providence families a more intimate middle school option.

Next, Paula Barney, RIDE’s Charter School Coordinator, gave an overview of the 2020 charter timeline; the application process; and new seat priorities, which are focused on students and communities with identified schools and educationally disadvantaged students – multilingual learners, differently-abled and economically disadvantaged.

Next, Mr. Osborn went over the requirements in State statute that the Council has to consider when reviewing public charter school proposals.

Council Member Gaines asked if there is anything in law stipulating that the Achievement First Rhode Island request for expansion needs support from all of the Mayors of the sending districts.

Mr. Osborn replied that the proposal needs support of the Mayors, however, the recommendation before the Council is for approval of the expansion only for the sending districts of Providence and North Providence, and not for additional students from Cranston or Warwick, as the Mayors of those two cities do not support the expansion.

Council Member Callahan asked what that means for the reapportionment of students and if the proposal was being adjusted as she is very concerned about the number of students being drawn from Providence and the funds that will follow those students. She also expressed her concerns with approving any of the charters given the current health crisis.

Mr. Osborn replied that the number of seats will remain the same and after receiving the lack of support from Warwick, RIDE did an impact analysis that focused entirely on the students from Providence and North Providence.

Next, the Charter School Team went over RIDE’s recommendations to the Council on the seven charter proposals, highlighting the key drivers.

Council Member Callahan requested that the Council be provided with the mathematics proficiency rates for the Segue Institute for Learning, both overall and for subgroups.

Ms. Barney answered that the breakdown of the data is listed by grade as well as by subgroups in the local impact analysis that is part of the recommendation packet.

Council Member Callahan asked about the community support for the Excel Academy.

Ms. Barney replied that there is a section in the RFP that asks why a school is applying to serve the community that they are proposing, as well as demonstrate areas of need and areas of support. The proposal had support letters from the Mayors of the proposed sending communities and part of the capacity interview also hits on the community need and support section. These are things that are evaluated by SchoolWorks as well as RIDE's analysis of the public comment.

Council Member Davis inquired about the eligibility question for new charter schools that was raised by the RI Association of School Committees.

Mr. Osborn responded that the concern that was flagged was about having an entity that has been in existence for more than two years that has a sole purpose other than operating a school. It has been a long-standing practice in Rhode Island that with new independent proposals, there is a sponsoring non-profit organization, which in the case of Providence Preparatory Charter School is the Center for Dynamic Learning, a community based non-profit, and that for Nuestro Mundo, is Providence College.

b. Necessity of School Construction Projects

Christine Lopes-Metcalf, Chief Executive Officer, School Building Authority, and Joseph da Silva, Ph.D., AIA, School Construction Coordinator, Architectural Design Reviewer, went over the Necessity of School Construction applications for Central Falls, Exeter-West Greenwich and Narragansett, including the fiscal impact that the projects will have on housing-aid.

Ms. Lopes-Metcalf shared that school construction continues to be a priority of voters and taxpayers, and that all of the five bond initiatives that were on the ballot in November, passed with overwhelming support. She then turned the presentation over to Dr. da Silva.

Dr. da Silva began by sharing that the projects before the Council this evening underwent rigorous review, including demographics, facility conditions, proposed cost, and educational programs. The projects represent immediate health and safety – safe, warm and dry – for the most part, however, two of the communities do have an educational component. Only one of the projects is bonded, which means that it will go to the General Assembly for enabling legislation and to the voters. The other two, once approved by the Council, will go to the school district and they will fund it out of their capital reserve. The projects comply with a rigorous standard that the Council has established since 2007. He explained that these approvals don't typically impact the State in year-one, very rarely in year- two, a small portion in year-three, but really kick in in years four and five, due to the State's reimbursement model.

6. ACTION ITEMS

- a. Approval of the *Together Through Opportunity: Pathways to Student Success* – The Rhode Island 202-2025 Strategic Plan for PK-12 Education

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

VOTED: That the Rhode Island Council on Elementary and Secondary Education approves the *Together Through Opportunity: Pathways to Student Success* – The Rhode Island 2021-2025 Strategic Plan for PK-12 Education

Council Member Callahan asked how stakeholder feedback that will be collected during the rollout will be used to revise/change the Strategic Plan.

Commissioner Infante-Green replied that the Strategic Plan has to be developed at the local level and that the goal was to provide districts with the framework. The Strategic Plan is a living document and RIDE is happy to take any feedback that will help strengthen it.

Vote: 7 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, and Lawrence Purtill

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

[Member Martinez had departed the meeting due to a loss in internet connection]

7. ADJOURNMENT:

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

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

Meeting adjourned at 10:05 p.m.