Commissioner's Weekly Field Memo
Friday, January 9, 2015

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Attachments to this Field Memo

Action Item Calendar

Today (January 9): [Talent Pool](#) nominations due
(January 16): [Student contact](#) data due
January 31: Create [PARCC test sessions](#)
March 16: Update [PARCC Personal Needs](#) profiles

Notes from Commissioner Gist

1. **Quality Counts award Rhode Island a ranking of 13th among all states, up from 31st in 2011**

Yesterday (January 8), Education Week released its annual report on educational progress and policies in all states, Quality Counts. This year we attained an overall ranking of 13th among the states. Our previous overall ranking was 17th, and in 2011 our ranking was 31st in the country, so we've made a lot of progress over the past four years. (Exact comparisons year to year aren't perfect, as Education Week has changed the ranking factors several times.)

We receive especially high marks (7th in the country) in the area of school finance, both for the adequacy of our expenditures on education and for equity. We also achieve high marks based on the performance of our students on NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress), particularly for the improvements in both mathematics and reading over the past ten years. On the other hand, we receive low marks regarding equity gaps (48th in the country on grade-8 gaps in NAEP, based on poverty) and regarding our graduation rate.

Quality Counts 2015 also includes a special section on Early Education, on which Rhode Island ranks 32nd in the country. We have this low ranking because of our relatively low enrollments in full-day preschool and full-day kindergarten and because of a gap in preschool enrollment based on income. I am confident, however, that we are poised to make dramatic improvements in early education, thanks to our Preschool Expansion Grant, our full-day kindergarten grants, and the Exceed initiative to support quality improvement in our early learning schools and programs.

2. **Strategic-plan design team to hold its first meeting tomorrow**

The 26 members of the team that will write our next strategic plan for public education in Rhode Island will come together

tomorrow (Saturday) for their first meeting. The team members will discuss the process for developing the next strategic plan, the activities they will engage in to continue gathering information and feedback throughout the process, and the steps they will take to complete their work by the end of June. The team will present its final plan to the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education and the Board of Education for approval. The team will base its initial work on the results of the statewide education [survey](); 10,150 Rhode Islanders participated in the survey, which was completed last month.

The meeting will run from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., at the United Way of Rhode Island, 50 Valley St., Providence. Like all meetings of the design team, this meeting will be open to the public.

I am very pleased that so many Rhode Islanders have participated in the process of strategic planning and that the Council has selected such a qualified, committed, and diverse group of Rhode Islanders to take on this important work. Our goal is to have in place a strategic plan that is of, by, and for Rhode Islanders and that will guide our work toward transforming education over the next five years.

From RIDE

Data Collection and Use:

3. **RIDE announces 2nd round of grants to LEAs to support development, use of data systems; applications due January 30**

RIDE is pleased to announce a second round of mini-grants to support the work being completed under our Year 5 Race to the Top no-cost extension. The Rhode Island Race to the Top no-cost extension supports continued development and use of our Rhode Island data systems (Instructional Support System, Educator Performance and Support System, and the Growth Model). All mini-grant applications must include work that will use one or more of these systems along with other data sources in order to improve teaching and to increase student learning. RIDE will provide ideas for possible projects as well as an option to create personalized grant proposals based on LEA needs. Grant awards will be based on the scope of the project and the number of educators involved, and the grants may include consultant costs and costs for substitutes or for stipend reimbursement. All funds must be obligated by June 30, 2015, and liquidated by September 1, 2015. Previous and new applicants are encouraged to apply.

The application is due to RIDE on Friday, **January 30**. The application form, instructions, and rubric are available here:

http://www.ride.ri.gov/InsideRIDE/AdditionalInformation/RacetotheTop.aspx.

You can direct questions about the grants to Kate Schulz, at kate.schulz@ride.ri.gov or 222-8489.

4. *Reminder:* **Student Contact collection due by January 16 –** *Action Item*

We collect Student Contact data to survey students with disabilities. We also use the data in order to communicate important information to students and families. You should submit Student Contact data at the beginning of the school year,

and you should keep the data up to date throughout the school year, with resubmissions in January and June. Student Contact data can be submitted through eRIDE (www.eride.ri.gov) by using the Enrollment Census application or through the Automated Data Transfer (ADT) agent; for more information regarding this data collection, please refer to the collection [documentation](#). If you have any questions or concerns about Student Contact data, please contact Greg Martin, at Gregory.martin@ride.ri.gov or 222-8495.

Assessments:

5. **LEAs reminded to create test sessions by January 31, complete student personal-needs profiles by March 16 –** *Action Item*

Thank you for importing data on your students for the spring assessment block, which begins on March 16. We would like you to be as prepared as possible for the beginning of the spring assessment. LEAs should be working on their student personal-needs profile import, which you can import at any time up to the beginning of the assessment period. When importing files or making any modifications within PearsonAccessNext.com, please be aware of the assessment for which you are modifying the data. You can check the assessment by verifying the assessment period in the top right of the pearsonNext.com screen. LEAs should also be conducting teacher trainings on the Pearson TestNav tool, and test coordinators should be creating test sessions within the PearsonAccessNext.com site, by **January 31**. You can find a timeline of technology events and abbreviated setup guides for Proctor caching and session creation on [District Exchange on RideMap, under District Exchange Public/PARCC Technology Toolkit](#). If you have any questions or concerns about PARCC

technology preparedness, please contact Greg Martin, at Gregory.martin@ride.ri.gov or 222-8495.

From the U.S. Department of Education

6. U.S. Departments of Education, Justice issue guidance of rights of English learners

Please see this message from the U.S. Department of Education:

On Wednesday (January 7), the U.S. Departments of Education and Justice released joint guidance reminding states, school districts and schools of their obligations under federal law to ensure that English-learner students have equal access to a high-quality education and the opportunity to achieve their full academic potential.

"Four decades ago, the U.S. Supreme Court held in *Lau v. Nichols* that all students deserve equal access to a high-quality education regardless of their language background or how well they know English," said U.S. Department of Education Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights Catherine E. Lhamon. "Today's guidance not only reminds us of the court's ruling but also provides useful information for schools as they work to ensure equity for students and families with limited English proficiency."

In addition to the guidance, the Departments also released additional tools and resources to help schools in serving English-learner students and parents with limited English proficiency:

- a fact sheet in English and in other languages about schools' obligations under federal law to ensure that

English-learner students can participate meaningfully and equally in school;

- a fact sheet in [English](#) and in [other languages](#) about schools' obligations under federal law to communicate information to limited English proficient parents in a language they can understand; and
- a [toolkit](#) to help school districts identify English-learner students, prepared by the Education Department Office of English Language Acquisition. This is the first chapter in a series of chapters to help state education agencies and school districts meet their obligations to English-learner students.

This is the first time that a single piece of guidance has addressed the array of federal laws that govern schools' obligations to English learners. The guidance recognizes the recent milestone 40th anniversaries of *Lau v. Nichols* and the Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974 (EEOA), as well as the 50th anniversary of the Civil Rights Act. The EEOA, similar to *Lau*, requires public schools to take appropriate action to help English-learner students overcome language barriers and ensure their ability to participate equally in school.

From other organizations

7. **Rhode Island Mentoring Partnership seeking more volunteer mentors**

Please see this message from the Rhode Island Mentoring Partnership:

Did you know that youth with mentors are more likely to graduate and less likely to skip school or begin using drugs? And nearly one-third of young people nationally say they've never had a mentor in their life. The Rhode Island Mentoring Partnership is looking for more volunteer mentors to help fill this gap, and students seeking mentors can also contact the Rhode Island Mentoring Partnership. Please share this opportunity with your colleagues; it would be a great show of support for mentoring and National Mentoring Month. January, designated as National Mentoring Month, is a chance to recognize and promote the role mentors play in the development of our nation's youth. As part of the celebration, the Rhode Island Mentoring Partnership will host special events, social media discussions, and recruitment drives throughout the month. For more information about mentoring and how you can get involved, visit www.mentorri.org.

8. **College for Every Student to provide Closing the Gap awards to five low-income middle schools, high schools**

Please see this message from College for Every Student:

College For Every Student (CFES) has received funding to support five low-income schools for Closing the Gap awards, a three-year program that will help underserved students become college and career ready.

We will select five schools for Closing the Gap awards as part of our commitment to help one million more low-income students attain college degrees by 2025. We invite you to circulate award information to eligible middle schools and

high schools in your network, and encourage them to apply by March 1.

College For Every Student is a nonprofit organization committed to helping underserved students get to and through college ready to enter the 21st-century workforce. CFES currently supports more than 20,000 students in 200 rural and urban K-12 schools in 27 states and Ireland by providing a framework that allows schools to customize the implementation of three core practices (mentoring, leadership through service, and pathways to college) proven to help students develop essential skills for college and career success.

RIDE will post this field memo on Tuesday, at:

http://www.ride.ri.gov/InsideRIDE/CommissionerDeborahAGist/FieldMemos.aspx