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Friday, February 6, 2015**

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Notes from Commissioner Gist

1. Update on Tulsa Superintendent of Schools position

As I wrote to you on Monday, the Tulsa School Board has voted to authorize contract negotiations with me regarding the opportunity to serve as the Superintendent of Schools. I have enthusiastically agreed to begin these negotiations, and I have

spent most of the week in Tulsa meeting with students, teachers, school leaders, parents, and others members of the community.

As I noted to you on Monday, I am proud of all that we have accomplished together in Rhode Island over the past six years. I love this state and the people I've come to know, and I am excited about the opportunities that lie before us as we develop our next 5-year strategic plan. Nevertheless, inspired by the great work we've done, I welcome the opportunity to take on a role and a set of responsibilities that you know so well: leading an urban school district. It's particularly exciting for me to serve in the district in the city where I was raised and where my family resides. I know that Rhode Islanders can certainly recognize the attraction we have to our hometowns, and it would be a special honor for me to lead the district where I attended public school throughout my childhood.

I would leave Rhode Island knowing that we have a great team in place at the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) and that we have strong support for improving student learning and achievement and for transforming education. Governor Raimondo has strongly supported our work and the entire RIDE team, and I have unwavering confidence in her leadership—including specifically on education. We have also enjoyed support from our legislators, from the Board of Education, and from you – the school leaders responsible for bringing great public education to our schools, our classrooms, and our communities. I am grateful for your commitment and for your partnership on so many important issues that we have faced together over the past six years.

Current Tulsa Superintendent Ballard retires at the end of June, so I will continue serving as Commissioner for the near future and I

will work with Governor Raimondo to develop a transition plan for new leadership at RIDE.

2. Design Team seeks feedback on first strategic-plan prototype: Values Statements

We want to hear from you as we move forward in the development of Rhode Island's new strategic plan for public education!

The development of our new plan will be something we need your input on during every step of the process. The plan will be developed in pieces with frequent opportunities for public input and feedback to ensure that this plan is built through a statewide conversation. The first step was a statewide survey that received responses from almost 11,000 Rhode Islanders. The next step is your feedback on the first prototype of the plan: a draft set of values that will anchor and guide the strategic plan and, later, its implementation.

Each prototype of the new strategic plan will be developed by the Ambassador Design Team: 26 Rhode Islanders selected by the Council through a rigorous application process. The team members will listen to the Rhode Island public and craft what Rhode Islanders are saying into a plan that will be for, from, and about all Rhode Islanders.

The first prototype was developed through hours of individual and collective review of the survey results you and others submitted and through extensive exploration of the team members' individual perspectives on public education.

I am seeking your help to ensure that your voice is part of this conversation. Your feedback will provide valuable information to the Ambassador Design Team as they review and revise this first prototype and move on to developing the next prototype.

I would be very grateful if you would please review the prototype posted on this page and share this link with everyone in your networks: www.ride.ri.gov/Plan-Feedback.

A brief summary of the entire design process for the strategic plan is posted on our website at www.ride.ri.gov/Strategic-Plan.

We are working together on this rigorous and dynamic process, and, with your help and participation, I know that we can develop an aspirational and ambitious strategic plan that will improve the lives of our students and their families for years to come.

Please feel free to share this message with others on your team and in your community.

3. Options listed for rescheduling canceled school days

We have received many inquiries regarding school-cancellation policies and the state of emergency that Governor Raimondo declared for one day during the blizzard last month. Here are the basic facts regarding school cancellation and make-up days:

State law (RIGL 16-2-2) requires that you “maintain” a school calendar of at least 180 days of instruction. There is no provision in law that automatically reduces the number of required school days, even in the event of a declared “state of emergency.” If, because of cancellations, your school calendar falls below the minimum 180 school days for students (or 184 total school days,

including professional development), you must make up these days. See: Regulations Governing the School Calendar and School Day G-4-1.

One option for making up school days would be to add hours to school days in your current schedule, at the equivalent of six hours for each missed day (including at least 5 ½ hours of instructional time for each missed day). To implement this option, you would need to submit to me for approval a “detailed school day plan and a proposed calendar.” (RIGL 16-2-2[a][2]) and (G-4-11)

Another option would be to add school days to your existing calendar, which does not require my review or approval. You can add days from school-vacation days (not including official state holidays, i.e., Memorial Day), add days for scheduled professional development, add weekend days, or add days at the end of your current school calendar. I am not aware of any state law that requires completion of the school year by June 30, but I would advise against scheduling school days in July for a number of reasons, including possible complications with your labor contracts and fiscal-year budgets.

A third option is that you can seek an “emergency reduction of school year,” in the event of “any emergency which may endanger the health of children or the physical well-being of the community.” (RIGL 16-2-3) To seek an emergency reduction of the school year, your school board or school committee must request approval from the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education. As Deputy Commissioner Abbott noted to the leadership of the Rhode Island School Superintendents’ Association yesterday (Thursday), we would be willing to accept a batch submission of requests for approval of emergency

reductions of the school year. Please note that you cannot reduce compensation for employees as a result of an emergency reduction of the school year.

Finally, please note that if you make any changes to your calendar – adding school days, extending school days, or reducing the number of school days – your school board or school committee must notify me by May 1. (G-4-3)

From RIDE

Professional Development:

4. Reminder: Registration is open for showcase on how Individual Learning Plans drive college, career readiness

School teams of principals, administrators, career-and-technical center directors, school counselors, school-based coordinators, and advisors are invited to [register online](#) for the “Individual Learning Plans Drive College and Career Readiness Showcase.” The showcase will take place on Wednesday, February 25, from 3 to 5:30 p.m., at the New England Institute of Technology, 1 New England Tech Boulevard, East Greenwich. This event will be an exciting opportunity to hear from four Rhode Island school districts about their current best practices in implementing the Individual Learning Plan and in developing college- and career-readiness. Schools in these districts have created teams that engage in collaboration to implement a comprehensive Individual Learning Plan process.

Schools are encouraged to come as a team of administrators and faculty members who have responsibility for implementing their Individual Learning Plan process.

District and school representatives presenting at the showcase are:

- Principals Arthur Lisi and Michael Hobin, Career and Technical Center Director Lori Ferguson, and School Counselor Lori LeBrun, from Coventry;
- Director of Guidance and former RISCA President Bill Pepin, from North Smithfield;
- Superintendent Patti DiCenso, from Pawtucket; and
- Principal Michael Zajac , School Counselor Kristin Albertella, and School-based Coordinator Linda Silva, from Scituate

[Registration](#) through eRIDE is open through February 20. You may use an existing eRIDE user account to log in or you can create a workshop registration account by going [here](#). Once you have logged into eRIDE, search for “How ILPs Drive College and Career Readiness” to complete your registration. A confirmation will be sent to your email address as soon as the registration is complete.

Seating is limited; please be sure to register by **February 20**.

For additional information about this showcase, email Diana Crowley, at Diana.Crowley@ride.ri.gov.

From the Office of the Governor

5. Governor Raimondo announces five Board nominees

Please see this news release that Governor Raimondo issued yesterday (Thursday):

Governor Gina M. Raimondo announced Thursday (February 5) her intent to nominate five members to the Board of Education. As the Governor works to expand opportunities for Rhode Island families, these nominees will help build the foundation for success in our schools. Raimondo will submit the names for consideration to the Rhode Island State Senate for confirmation.

“We must ensure all students in Rhode Island have access to the quality education they need to succeed in the 21st century. A great education is a ladder of opportunity. Great schools and a pipeline of well-trained, well-educated workers are key tools to attracting companies to invest and create jobs here,” said Raimondo. “The individuals I’m nominating today bring a wide-range of experience to the Board. I am incredibly thankful to Eva-Marie Mancuso, who has generously dedicated so much of her time to the state and our students for the past three years, to Patrick Guida for his more than a decade of commitment to the Board, and to Antonio Barajas and Mat Santos for their public service on behalf of Rhode Island's children.”

The Governor is submitting the following names to the State Senate for confirmation:

- Barbara Cottam, of Providence (Raimondo's nominee for Board Chair)
- Jim Karam, of Tiverton
- Marta V. Martínez, of Warwick
- Betsy Shimberg, of Providence
- Rev. Dr. Jeffery Williams, of Cranston (re-nomination)

The Governor intends to designate Jim Karam and Rev. Dr. Jeffery Williams to the Post-Secondary Council and Marta V. Martínez and Betsy Shimberg to the K-12 Council.

“I welcome this opportunity to serve on behalf of our students,” said Barbara Cottam. “A strong Rhode Island economy requires an educational system that prepares students for tomorrow's jobs. I look forward to working with Governor Raimondo, the Board, parents, teachers, educators and students in ensuring every child and young adult receives a quality education and achieves his or her potential.”

Barbara Cottam

Barbara Cottam is Executive Vice President for Citizens Financial Group. She serves as a member of the Board of Trustees for Home & Hospice Care of Rhode Island, Crossroads RI, and La Salle Academy. Cottam also serves on the Providence College President's Council, having recently completed ten years as the Head of the Council. She is a founding member of RI Kids Count, the state's leading child advocacy organization, and served on the board for 10 years, the last three as Chairman. From 1991 to 1994, Cottam was Press Secretary for Governor Bruce Sundlun. Cottam is a graduate of Lincoln School and Providence College.

Jim Karam

Jim Karam is the President and CEO of First Bristol Corporation, a real estate development and management company that builds shopping centers, office buildings, and hotels throughout Southern New England. For 10 years, Jim served as a Trustee of the University of Massachusetts,

including 4 years as Chairman. Karam is a graduate of the University of Massachusetts.

Marta V. Martínez

Marta V. Martínez currently serves as Executive Director of Rhode Island Latino Arts, an arts education non-profit that provides cultural programs for K-12 students. Martínez is a former elementary school Spanish teacher, and she was previously chosen by Governor Sundlun to serve as the first ever Chair of the Governor's Advisory Commission on Hispanic Affairs. Martínez is a graduate of Providence College, George Washington University and Georgetown University.

Betsy Shimberg

Betsy Shimberg is the Program Director for K-12 Education at the Howard R. Swearer Center for Public Service at Brown University. She also serves on the boards of City Year RI and Generation Citizen. Shimberg was confirmed by the Senate in 2008 to the Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education, serving in this role until 2013. She graduated from Wellesley College and earned a Master's in Public Policy and Administration from Columbia University.

Rev. Dr. Jeffery Williams

Rev. Dr. Jeffery Williams founded the King's Cathedral in 1999, which now owns five properties. Internationally, Dr. Williams oversees 43 congregations in six nations. Dr. Williams graduated from Brown University in 1981. He also has a Doctorate of Ministry degree from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and a Master's in Public Administration from the Harvard Kennedy School of Government.

From the U.S. Department of Education

6. President Obama's budget includes education investments

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

The Obama Administration released a [fiscal year 2016 budget](#) on Monday (February 2) that includes key investments to expand high-quality early learning programs, increase [equity and opportunity for all students](#), support teachers and school leaders, and improve access, affordability, and student [outcomes in college](#).

“The President’s budget reflects this Administration’s belief that every single child in this country deserves the opportunity to receive a strong education,” said U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. “As demonstrated by the record high school graduation rate and by huge gains in college-going, especially for minority students, states, districts, educators, and students across the country are making real progress. The President’s budget would continue and accelerate that progress.”

The budget request is \$70.7 billion in discretionary appropriations for the Education Department, a 5.4 percent increase over the previous year’s funding. The budget also improves new mandatory funding for early childhood education, teacher support and college opportunity.

Key education investments in the President’s budget:

Increasing equity and opportunity

An increase of \$2.7 billion for [Elementary and Secondary Education Act](#) programs, including \$1 billion for Title I, to ensure that all students – which includes poor and minority students, students with disabilities, and English learners - graduate from high school prepared for college and careers; and

An increase of \$175 million for [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Part B grants](#) to support the work that states are doing to improve results for children with disabilities and another \$115 million for programs for younger children with disabilities.

Expanding high-quality early learning programs

\$75 billion over 10 years for the [Preschool for All](#) proposal to provide universal high-quality preschool programs for all 4-year-olds from low- and moderate-income families; and

\$750 million for [Preschool Development Grants](#), an increase of \$500 million, to help states lay the foundation for universal public preschool.

Supporting teachers and leaders

\$5 billion over five years for a new, mandatory Teaching for Tomorrow program to support fundamental changes in how states and school districts recruit and prepare new teachers and strengthen professional support for teachers throughout their careers; and

\$350 million for Excellent Educators Grants to provide funds for states and school districts committed to implementing new systems that develop, support, reward, and advance teachers and principals.

Another key theme in the President's budget is investing in what works in all levels of education – preschool, K-12, and colleges - to maximize results for taxpayers and students. By investing in what works, learning more about what works, and sharing what we learn, we can help more students succeed. For instance, the budget includes \$300 million, an increase of \$180 million, for the Investing in Innovation program, to develop, validate, and scale up effective practices and strategies for improving student achievement in K-12 education.

More information on the U.S. Department of Education's budget request can be found here: [Budget Fact Sheet](#) and [Budget Summary](#).

7. Library of Congress seeks applications for summer program for K-12 educators

Please see this message from the U.S. Department of Education Office of Communications and Outreach:

The Library of Congress is accepting applications for its [week-long summer programs for K-12 educators](#) through March 24. Held at the Library of Congress, the professional development provides educators with tools and resources to effectively integrate primary sources into classroom teaching – with an emphasis on student engagement, critical thinking, and construction of knowledge.

From other federal offices

8. U.S. Attorney, State Police, local police departments prepare drug-awareness presentation for middle schools

Peter F. Neronha, United States Attorney, District of Rhode Island, has worked with the State Police and local police departments to produce a drug-awareness presentation for students in grades 7 and 8. Please see the attached letter and PowerPoint from U.S. Attorney Neronha for additional information, and please feel free to share this information with your middle-school teams. We will also send this communication to middle-school principals.

(Please contact Commissioner's Office for copies of letter or PowerPoint)

From other state offices

9. Attorney General Kilmartin promotes awareness of teen dating violence

Please see this message from the Office of the Attorney General, and please feel free to share this information with your high-school community:

With February being National Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month – and Valentine's Day around the corner – Attorney General Peter F. Kilmartin is reminding teens that everyone deserves a safe and healthy relationship.

“Statistics show that one in three teens and young adults will experience some form of domestic or dating abuse.

Further data shows that girls and young women are disproportionately affected, experiencing nearly triple the national average rate of intimate partner violence. These startling figures reinforce this year's theme for National Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month – The Time to Talk is Now," said Attorney General Peter F. Kilmartin. "My hope is that by raising awareness and encouraging parents and teens to talk about what is and is not a healthy relationship; we can stop the cycle of violence before it begins."

According to statistics reported by the Love Is Respect campaign, nearly 1.5 million high-school students nationwide experience physical abuse from a dating partner in a single year. One in three adolescents in the U.S. is a victim of physical, sexual, emotional, or verbal abuse from a dating partner, a figure that far exceeds rates of other types of youth violence. One in 10 high-school students has been purposefully hit, slapped, or physically hurt by a boyfriend or girlfriend. One-quarter of high-school girls have been victims of physical or sexual abuse.

Throughout the month, Attorney General Kilmartin will be using Twitter (@AGKilmartin) to start discussions on the issue of teen dating violence, to offer resources for additional information, and to hopefully spark conversations between parents and teens on what is a healthy relationship.

While abuse affects people of all ages, genders, and demographics, studies show that young women are disproportionately affected by dating violence and sexual abuse. In fact, girls and young women between the ages of

16 and 24 experience the highest rate of intimate partner violence – almost triple the national average.

“One of the most compelling commercials during the Super Bowl was the NO MORE commercial depicting the fear a victim of domestic violence faces every day. Now, imagine if your teenage son or daughter that was trapped in that abusive relationship,” said Attorney General Kilmartin. “Use this time to talk to your children about dating abuse, let them know they are not alone and you are there to protect them.”

Attorney General Kilmartin has created a web page with local and national resources for victims, tips on abuse prevention, and public service announcements to raise awareness on the prevalence of teen dating abuse. Please visit www.riag.ri.gov for more information.

From other organizations

10. RISSA to present Paul W. Crowley Award to Dr. Tom DiPaola

Please see this news release from the Rhode Island School Superintendents’ Association:

The Rhode Island School Superintendents’ Association eighth annual Paul W. Crowley Award is awarded to Tom DiPaola, Ph.D., Director of the Education Leadership Doctoral Program at Johnson & Wales University. The presentation will take place in the State Room of the Rhode Island State House at 3 p.m. on March 4.

The Paul Crowley Award is given each year by the Rhode Island School Superintendents' Association to a Rhode Island citizen who, in his or her professional and personal capacity, has demonstrated a long-standing commitment to improving the quality of education for the children of Rhode Island as did Representative Paul Crowley throughout his career as a state representative from Newport. A \$1,000 scholarship will be awarded to a deserving senior planning a career in education and graduating from a Rhode Island public high school to be selected by Dr. DiPaola.

Dr. DiPaola has a long history of being a passionate advocate for public education. He has been a leader in special education, education reform, and best practices through his work at the R.I. Department of Education, the Westerly Public Schools, and Johnson & Wales University.

Tom served as the Director of Special Education in Central Falls (1977-84), Pawtucket (1984-91), and Providence (1991-92). He was the Director of the Rhode Island Technical Assistance Project from 1991 to 2000 and assisted the late Representatives Sherlock and Crowley, which resulted in reforming the special education process by focusing on early reading difficulties, common among many of the children who were entering the "system."

Dr. DiPaola has served as an active member of the Rhode Island School Superintendents' Association, Superintendent of the Westerly Public Schools, and Director of Special Populations at the Rhode Island Department of Education, and he remains one of the most respected leaders of public schools in our state. He is married to Nadine Champlin DiPaola. He is also the parent of two children – son Chris,

who is the owner and operator of WBLQ radio, in Westerly, and daughter Jaime who is a military-veteran specialist in student academic services at JWU.

Scheduled speakers at the presentation are Governor Raimondo, House and Senate legislative leaders, and Rhode Island Department of Education Deputy Commissioner David V. Abbott. The award will be presented by the Rhode Island School Superintendents' Association President Kathleen Sipala, Superintendent of the Narragansett Schools.

RIDE will post this field memo on Tuesday, at:

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