

**Commissioner's Weekly Field Memo**  
**Friday, February 14, 2014**

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March 7: [School Health Profiles](#) due

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### **Notes from Commissioner Gist**

1. RIDE releases October 2013 NECAP results

Yesterday morning we released our complete report on the October 2013 NECAP test administration. Last month we released some of the highlights from the 2013 NECAP, including statewide and LEA-level results, as well graduation rates. Yesterday's complete report included cross-state comparisons, reports on disaggregations and achievement gaps, data on progress over time, the results of the writing assessment, and results at the school level.

Among the highlights:

- Rhode Island high-school students fared well compared with their peers in the region and improved their performance overall.
- Rhode Island students in grade 11 improved by 2 percentage points, to 81 percent proficiency, in reading, and by 2 percentage points in mathematics as well, to 36 percent proficiency.
- Rhode Island high-school scores are once again the highest among the NECAP in reading and have caught up with the other NECAP states in mathematics.
- Rhode Island results also remain strong in writing, with 60 percent of the tested students in elementary and middle school attaining proficiency – highest among the NECAP states.
- Rhode Island high-school students scored 66-percent proficient in writing, also highest among the NECAP states.

At the local level, a number of schools and LEAs have made significant improvements in both mathematics and reading over the past five years:

LEAs making significant progress in both mathematics and reading over the past five years are: Chariho Regional, Cumberland, Exeter-West Greenwich Regional, North Kingstown, North Providence, Providence, and The Learning Community (charter).

The Lincoln School District made significant one-year gains in reading, improving by 4 percentage points.

Schools making significant progress in both mathematics and reading over the past five years are: Burrillville High School, Chariho Middle School, Coventry High School, East Providence High School, Exeter-West Greenwich Regional Senior High School, Frank E. Thompson Middle School (Newport), North Kingstown Senior High School, North Providence High School, Vartan Gregorian Elementary School (Providence), Times 2 Academy Middle School (Providence charter), The Learning Community Elementary School, Pilgrim High School (Warwick), Warwick Veterans Memorial High School, and Westerly High School.

Forest Avenue Elementary School, in Middletown, made significant one-year gains in both mathematics and reading. Burrillville High School, Narragansett High School, and Westerly High School made significant one-year gains in mathematics. Lyman B. Goff Junior High School and William E. Tolman Senior High School, both in Pawtucket, made significant one-year gains in reading.

Congratulations on these achievements!

As I commented in the news release and to the media yesterday, the progress our students and teachers have made, especially at the high-school level, is powerful evidence that all students can succeed when we maintain high expectations and when we provide resources and support to advance teaching and learning. Though we know a lot of work remains ahead, as we strive to close achievement gaps and to maintain and expand proficiency levels across the state, Rhode Islanders should be proud of how far we have come over the past five years.

The report is posted on the RIDE website, at:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/InstructionAssessment/Assessment/NECAPAssessment/NECAPResults.aspx>

## **2. RIDE provides Board of Education with monthly update on Diploma System**

Last week, the Board of Education held a discussion on the Diploma System, during which we presented the Board with our February update on progress student are making toward graduation. Our February Update shows that at present 75.5 percent of the 2014 Cohort (students who took the NECAP assessments in October 2012) has met the state-assessment requirements of the Diploma System. The percent is up 2.5 points since our January report, thanks to the data you provided to us regarding students success on other approved assessments. Thank you for providing us with the data; we will continue to provide the Board of Education with monthly updates as we gather more data and information about our current high-school seniors.

The data you provided us show that, in the current senior class, there were 227 students who met the requirement through their performance on other assessments or who most likely qualify for waivers by virtue of early college admission. That leaves 1,587 students in the current senior class, statewide, who are still working to meet the state-assessment graduation requirement. They still have several opportunities to do so – either through the third NECAP administration, which begins later this month, or through success on one of the other approved assessments. Depending on your local policies, some of these students may also be eligible for waivers. Our hope, of course, is to provide all currently enrolled students with the support they need to prepare them to earn a diploma.

As I remarked to the members of the Board, our Diploma System and our current graduation standards are only a first step. We cannot right now look at our students and be assured that every one of them is ready for success beyond high school. Nevertheless, we have taken a really important first step. The evidence demonstrates that the students who graduate this year will be better prepared than any cohort of students that has graduated in the past.

### **3. Model school-safety plan posted on RIDE website**

As I shared with you in last week's Field Memo, in partnership with Emergency Management Agency; the Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities, and Hospitals; the Department of Public Safety; the State Police; and the Division of the State Fire Marshal, we have developed a model school-safety plan for your adoption or adaptation. The templates for the

model plan are now available on the “[Emergency Preparedness](#)” page of our website, at:

<http://ride.ri.gov/StudentsFamilies/HealthSafety/EmergencyPreparedness.aspx>

#### **4. Sympathies extended to family, students, colleagues of George Nasuti**

We at RIDE extend our thoughts, prayers, and sympathies to the family of George Nasuti and to the students and educators at Woonsocket High School who are mourning his death. Mr. Nasuti, the Athletic Director at the school for the past 10 years and previously a principal in Woonsocket, died following an accidental fall while he was refereeing a basketball game. Friends, students, and colleagues are posting tributes to Mr. Nasuti [here](#).

#### **5. Discussion of Rick Hess’s *Cage-Busting Leadership* scheduled for February 21**

I want to remind you and your team that our discussion session on Rick Hess’s *Cage-Busting Leadership* is scheduled for next Friday, **February 21**, at 4:30 p.m., in Room 501 here at RIDE (80 Washington St./255 Westminister St., Providence). Rick’s visit to Rhode Island late last year sparked further conversations about what it means to be a “cage-busting leader” and how we can break through some of the barriers that seem to stand in our way as we work together to transform education. I’m looking forward to continuing these discussions next week. Please e-mail my executive assistant, Dana Wilson ([dana.wilson@ride.ri.gov](mailto:dana.wilson@ride.ri.gov)), if you are interested in joining us on February 21 – and please feel free to share this invitation with others on your team.

## From RIDE

### ***Educator Preparation:***

#### **6. RIDE, educator-preparation programs seek input regarding educator-preparation program report cards**

RIDE and Rhode Island educator-preparation programs are in the process of creating educator-preparation program report cards. The goals of the report card are to support ongoing program improvement, inform the program-approval process, and build program transparency for potential students, hiring managers, and educators seeking to advance their careers by enrolling in additional training. Report cards will include data on candidates enrolled in programs, those who completed programs, and program completers employed in Rhode Island schools. The Program Report Card survey will remain open until **March 7**, and may be found at:

[https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/Ed\\_Prep\\_Report](https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/Ed_Prep_Report).

Responses will help shape the design of a user-friendly and meaningful online tool widely accessible to the public. Questions regarding the report card and survey should be directed to Sarah Whiting, at [Sarah.Whiting@ride.ri.gov](mailto:Sarah.Whiting@ride.ri.gov).

### ***Educator Certification:***

#### **7. RIDE seeks public comment on proposed new tests, passing scores for initial educator certification**

ETS, the testing company whose tests we use in Rhode Island as part of the educator-certification process, is adding new tests and

phasing out older tests. There are currently six tests that ETS has regenerated that affect our current certification process. RIDE is seeking public comment from the education community and the general public on the certification tests and passing scores for initial educator certification in Rhode Island that RIDE has proposed and that the Board of Education has approved for public comment. To provide comments on the proposed certification tests and passing scores, please visit:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/Certification-Updates>.

If you have any questions about these tests and passing scores, please feel free to contact Hilda Potrzeba, at [hilda.potrzeba@ride.ri.gov](mailto:hilda.potrzeba@ride.ri.gov) or 222-8891.

***Technology:***

**8. LEAs reminded to make appointment with RIDE on Wireless Classroom Initiative once vendor is selected**

Work on the Wireless Classroom Initiative continues. This week IDE issued another \$623,300 in grants to LEAs, bringing the total grants issued to \$11.8 million out of the \$20 million in bond funds available for the project. Grants issued to date cover 60 percent of all LEAs, representing 78 percent of all participating public schools and 77 percent of all public-school students. We have also reached a new milestone, with two LEAs completing their implementation!

We remind you to e-mail the Wireless Classroom Initiative (WCI) mailbox, [WirelessInitiative@ride.ri.gov](mailto:WirelessInitiative@ride.ri.gov), for an appointment once you have made a decision regarding the vendor and solution for your LEA. If you have questions or need assistance as you go

through your evaluation, please do not hesitate to reach out to us.

If you are executing contracts with an authorized vendor, please follow the instructions sent with the grant-agreement packet in order to reduce delays in grant reimbursements and to ensure compliance with WCI standards. These instructions include notifying RIDE of all implementation schedules and change requests, should they become necessary. Please continue to send all communications to our WCI mailbox.

We look forward to our continued work with you to bring wireless connectivity to every public classroom in Rhode Island.

## **From the U.S. Department of Education**

### **9. U.S. Department of Education outlines possible use of federal funding for digital learning**

Last week on Digital Learning Day, the U.S. Department of Education released a “Dear Colleague” letter to states to provide guidance on ways that existing federal funds can be best leveraged to support schools and educators in the transition to digital learning in support of President Obama’s [ConnectED Initiative](#). Specifically, the letter outlines ways in which current federal education funding available to states can be used to provide professional development for educators, access to high quality digital content, and devices for learning.

The letter offers specific examples of the many ways that grantees including districts, states, and eligible partnerships can use their federal funds to:

- purchase devices for student and educator use;
- personalize professional development;
- access high-quality digital content and open educational resources; and
- increase educator collaboration and communication.

The letter can be found [here](#).

### **10. U.S. Department of Education seeks public comment on grants to expand high-quality preschool programs**

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

The Fiscal Year 2014 Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2014 (Public Law 113-76) makes important education investments, including \$250 million in new Race to the Top to States grants for improving early-childhood care and education.

On February 4, 2014, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan announced on a call with U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Kathleen Sebelius that the Administration plans to use the \$250 million for a major new competition to build, develop, and expand high-quality preschool programs, working with local communities and with states across the country.

The two agencies are very interested in your input. We encourage all interested parties to submit opinions, ideas, suggestions, and comments pertaining to the new competition on the [Homerroom Blog](#) up until 5 p.m. on **February 26**, at which time the input section will be closed,

and we will begin considering comments received as we develop requirements, priorities, selection criteria, and definitions.

Once the initial input from the field is collected and reviewed, we will draft an executive summary and post for comments that will, in turn, inform the final Notice Inviting Applications (NIA).

Please see the [Homeroom Blog](#) for complete information and to share your comments.

## **11. U.S. Department of Education notes Career and Technical Education Month**

Please see this message from the Office of Communications and Outreach:

This month, during [Career and Technical Education Month](#), the U.S. Department of Education announced that the name of the Office of Vocational and Adult Education has been changed to the [Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education](#) (OCTAE), acknowledging that “career and technical education” is a more accurate term to describe what and how students are studying to be career-ready. The office has a rich history of being in the forefront of career, technical, and adult education, providing critical funding and technical resources, for example, to the career-pathways movement. OCTAE continues to be the office responsible for administering federal career-technical education (CTE) programs, as well as the partner adult-education programs. Two years ago, the office issued a [blueprint](#) calling for effective, high-quality CTE programs aligned with

college- and career-ready standards. Students in such CTE programs graduate with industry certifications, licenses and postsecondary certificates, or degrees that prepare them for in-demand careers within high-growth sectors.

***RIDE will post this field memo on Tuesday, at:***

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