

**Commissioner's Weekly Field Memo
Friday, March 21, 2014**

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Notes from Commissioner Gist

1. U.S. Department of Education releases progress reports on Race to the Top

On Wednesday, the U.S. Department of Education released the year three Race to the Top state progress reports for Rhode Island and the other 10 states that won the grants in 2010. I am very pleased that the report found that, in Rhode Island, “there is growing evidence of this investment’s impact: state and local leaders are receiving support and resources to better prepare all students for college and careers.” The report notes the improvements we have made in Rhode Island in results on our state assessments, on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, and in our graduation rates and college-enrollment

rates. The report highlights several of our accomplishments, including:

- Collaborative Learning for Outcomes, that has brought LEAs together in teams to work on curriculum development and other initiatives;
- interim assessments aligned with the Common Core State Standards;
- instructional data and resources, including our Educator Performance and Support System;
- the pilot of the Early Warning System to identify students at risk of not graduating;
- the Turnaround Leaders Program, preparing educators for leadership positions on low-performing schools;
- professional development on formative assessments and on data-driven decision-making;
- feedback to educators through the evaluation system;
- targeted supports for teachers in low-performing schools; and
- support for growth of charter public schools.

The report also recognizes the challenges we have faced in launching the Instructional Management System. As I noted to you in last week's Field Memo, we are in Phase One process of redesigning that system, now known as the Instructional Support System. We will complete Phase One of the redesign in June, and will complete the redesign process by the end of the calendar year.

From the outset, our Race to the Top initiative has been a sterling example of partnership between RIDE and LEAs. We are very proud that you and all of your colleagues across the state have

participated whole-heartedly in this initiative from the outset and that you and your colleagues have met the commitments in the Race to the Top Scopes of Work. With the no-cost extension that the U.S. Department of Education approved two weeks ago, we will meet the commitments we made in our Race to the Top application and we will expend all of the funds allocated in the Race to the Top grant. Thank you for your long-standing commitment to this work.

The complete year three report for Rhode Island is available here:

<http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/performance/rhode-island-year-3.pdf>

2. Five schools chosen to represent Rhode Island at regional conference

Five of our schools – Central Falls High School, Coventry High School, the Alan Shawn Feinstein Middle School of Coventry, Cumberland High School, and Westerly High School – will represent Rhode Island at the New England Secondary School Consortium regional conference on effective strategies for improving teaching and learning in the 21st century.

The conference, High School Redesign in Action (newenglandssc.org), will take place next Thursday and Friday, in Norwood, Massachusetts. Through such initiatives as improving school culture, implementing a “resident-expert” program for professional development, redesigning the school as an “instructional organization,” and focusing on project-based learning, all five of these schools have developed best practices that they will share with their colleagues from across New England. Congratulations to the students, teachers, and leaders at

each of these Rhode Island schools. It's great to have the opportunity to share this work among colleagues from across the region!

3. Senator Reed receives adult-literacy award

The Council for the Advancement of Adult Literacy has presented Senator Jack Reed with one of its two annual Congressional Champion Awards, honoring him for his work on behalf of adult education and workforce-skills development. Congratulations to Senator Reed on receiving this recognition!

From RIDE

Educator Evaluations:

4. RIDE posts materials used during educator-evaluation calibration sessions

The response to the in-district calibration sessions has been incredibly positive, with more than 90 percent of participants rating the quality of the sessions as high or very high. The materials used during the sessions are now available to download from our website, and district and school leaders can use these resources to facilitate ongoing calibration sessions in the coming years. All of the materials have been posted in Word or PowerPoint to allow you to customize the materials to fit your local context and needs.

To access the calibration session materials, please go to the RIDE website, at:

www.ride.ri.gov/EdEval-Best-Practices-Resources.

From the U.S. Department of Education

5. U.S. Department of Education releases 2011-12 Civil Rights Data Collection

Please see this message from Catherine E. Lhamon, assistant secretary for the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights:

Equity – the push to ensure strong educational opportunity for every student – drives everything we do at the U.S. Department of Education, and particularly in the Office for Civil Rights. From preschool enrollment to college attendance and completion, our office’s work is grounded in the belief that all students, regardless of race, gender, disability, or age, need a high-quality education to be successful.

Yet despite the gains we’ve made as a country, too many students are not receiving the education they deserve, and it is our collective duty to change that. Data is crucial to this work and helps us understand the extent of educational inequity throughout the U.S. and make informed decisions for action.

Since 1968, the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC), formerly the Elementary and Secondary School Survey, has collected data on key education and civil rights issues in our nation’s public schools. Our office uses this data to focus our equity efforts and monitor the effectiveness of our programs. Earlier today we released new data from the 2011-12 collection, and for the first time since 2000, we collected data from every public school in the nation. This newest

collection also includes data on preschool suspensions and expulsions for the first time as well.

Below are five striking new facts from the 2011-12 CRDC collection:

Access to preschool is not a reality for much of the country. About 40 percent of public school districts do not offer preschool, and where it is available, it is mostly part-day only. Of the school districts that operate public preschool programs, barely half are available to all students within the district.

Suspension of preschool children. Black students represent 18 percent of preschool enrollment but 42 percent of preschool students suspended once, and 48 percent of the preschool students suspended more than once.

Access to courses necessary for college is inequitably distributed. 81 percent of Asian-American high-school students and 71 percent of white high-school students attend high schools where the full range of math and science courses are offered (Algebra I, geometry, Algebra II, calculus, biology, chemistry, physics). However, fewer than half of American Indian and Native-Alaskan high-school students have access to the full range of math and science courses in their high schools. Black students (57 percent), Latino students (67 percent), students with disabilities (63 percent), and English learner students (65 percent) also have diminished access to the full range of courses.

Access to college counselors is uneven. Nationwide, one in five high schools lacks a school counselor.

Disparities in high school retention. 12 percent of black students are retained in grade nine – about double the rate that all students are retained (6 percent). Additionally, students with disabilities served by IDEA and English learners make up 12 percent and 5 percent of high-school enrollment, respectively, but 19 percent and 11 percent of students held back or retained a year, respectively.

[Learn more about the CRDC at ocrdata.ed.gov.](https://ocrdata.ed.gov)

From other federal agencies

6. Funding opportunities announced

Please see this list of funding opportunities, courtesy of the Corporation for National and Community Service:

Support for Arts Education and Reading Programs

Target Store Education Grants

Target Store Education Grants support nonprofit organizations in the communities where the company's stores are located. [Arts, Culture, and Design in Schools](#) grants support programs that enhance students' classroom curriculum by bringing the arts and cultural experiences to schools, such as in-school performances, artist in residency programs, and workshops in schools. [Early Childhood Reading](#) grants support programs that foster a love of reading and encourage young children, preschool through third grade, to read together with their families. Grants of \$2,000 are provided in both categories. Online applications

will be accepted through April 30. Funding guidelines are available on the company's website.

School-Based Running Programs Supported

ING Run For Something Better School Awards Program

The ING Run For Something Better School Awards Program, in partnership with the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance (AAHPERD), seeks to increase physical activity in students and help fight childhood obesity nationwide through the creation of school-based running programs. The awards program will provide at least sixty grants of \$3,500 to elementary or middle schools that want to establish a school-based running program or expand an existing program. Funded programs must have a commitment of at least 25 students in order to apply and be offered for at least eight weeks. The application deadline is May 15. Visit the AAHPERD website to review the grant guidelines and submit an online application.

K-12 Service-Learning Initiatives

State Farm Youth Advisory Board National Grant Program

The State Farm Youth Advisory Board is composed of young adults who demonstrate exemplary work in service-learning, volunteering, and philanthropy in their communities. The Youth Advisory Board National Grant Program funds student-led service-learning projects throughout the United States. Grant requests must fall under one of the following issue areas: community safety and natural disaster preparedness, environmental responsibility, accessing higher education or closing the achievement gap, social health and wellness issues, financial literacy and economic inclusion, or arts and culture. Public K-12, charter, and

higher education institutions are eligible to apply. Nonprofit organizations are also eligible if they are able to demonstrate how they plan to interact with students in public K-12 schools. Grants range from \$25,000 to \$100,000. Applications must be submitted online by May 2. Visit the Youth Advisory Board website for application guidelines.

K-12 Educators Nationwide Recognized

ING Unsung Heroes Awards Program

The ING Unsung Heroes Awards Program provides educators with awards to help fund their innovative class projects. Full-time educators, teachers, principals, paraprofessionals, or classified staff with effective projects that improve student learning are eligible to apply. Applicants must work at an accredited K-12 public or private school located in the United States. The 100 finalists each receive an award of \$2,000. At least one award will be granted in each of the 50 United States, provided one or more qualified applications are received from each state. Of the 100 finalists, three will be selected for additional financial awards of \$5,000, \$10,000, and \$25,000. All awards must be used to further the projects within the school or school system. Applications must be submitted online by April 30. Visit the ING Unsung Heroes Awards Program website to access the application and learn more about the program at www.unsungheroes.com.

Support for K-12 Math and Science Education in Company Communities

Dominion Educational Partnership

The Dominion Educational Partnership provides elementary and secondary educators with the tools they need to revitalize math and science programs. Support is provided in

specific geographic areas of the states of Connecticut, Maryland, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island, and throughout the states of Virginia and West Virginia. The Partnership provides grants of up to \$10,000 to encourage the development of new programs to strengthen math and science education through the study of energy or the environment. Public and private elementary and secondary schools, institutions of higher education, and nonprofit organizations are invited to apply. The application deadline is May 1. Visit the company's website to submit an online application.

Obesity Prevention Efforts Supported

Department of Agriculture

The Agriculture and Food Research Initiative's Childhood Obesity Prevention program supports efforts to reduce the prevalence of overweight and obesity among children and adolescents, ages 2 through 19. Letters of intent are due April 17. The application deadline is June 19, 2014.

From other organizations

7. Awards announced for National History Day teachers

Sorry for the late notice, but please see this message that I received today from National History Day in Rhode Island:

The Patricia Behring Teacher of the Year Award recognizes outstanding National History Day teachers. Two state winners, one at both the junior level and senior level, will be selected from each of the 50 states. The winners of the national awards will be selected from among the state awardees. Each state winner will be awarded \$500 and the

national winners will receive \$10,000. Please consider applying or nominate a colleague. Send your nomination to rihistoryday@cox.net by **Monday** (March 24).

RIDE will post this field memo on Tuesday, at:

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