

**Commissioner's Weekly Field Memo
Friday, March 27, 2015**

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April 24: [Student advisory council](#) elections

Notes from Commissioner Gist

1. Senate confirms Barbara Cottam as Board Chair

Congratulations to Barbara Cottam, who received unanimous support from the Senate in the vote to confirm her as the new chair of the Board of Education. Barbara is certainly well known to many Rhode Islanders from her time in government (as press secretary to Governor Sundlun), in business (she is currently an executive vice-president and the head of corporate affairs for the Citizens Financial Group, based in Providence), and in education, particularly as a founding member of Rhode Island Kids Count. Barbara also serves on several boards of trustees, including Home & Hospice Care of Rhode Island, Crossroads Rhode Island, and La Salle Academy, as well as on the President's Council at Providence College. I know that Barbara will be fully devoted to improving our schools and to serving the needs of our students as she takes on the leadership of the Board of Education.

2. RIDE proposes revisions to accountability system; will submit proposals to U.S. Department of Education on Tuesday

Over the past year, members of the RIDE team have worked closely with the members of a working group that we convened to

discuss the Rhode Island system of school classifications, accountability, and support for low-achieving schools. Based on the ideas that this working group, Accountability 3.0, developed, and taking into account feedback we have received from other educators in the field, parent groups, and groups representing students with disabilities and English learners, we have developed a set of proposed revisions to our system for school accountability and support. We are preparing to submit our proposed revisions to the U.S. Department of Education on Tuesday, as part of our request for continued flexibility under the provisions of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

Some of the key elements in our flexibility request include these components of our system of classifications:

Proficiency: Instead of receiving points or credit for percentages of students attaining proficiency and percentages of students attaining distinction, schools would receive various amounts of credit for the percentage of students at each level of achievement, with additional credit for improving achievement levels of students facing additional learning challenges (students with disabilities, English learners, and economically disadvantaged students).

Closing Achievement Gaps: Schools would receive credit for closing the achievement gap between the lowest-achieving quartile in the school and the top 50 percent of student achievement in the school (or, if the school achievement as a whole is especially low, the top 50 percent of achievement in Rhode Island). This requested change would help alleviate the problem of many schools still not being held accountable for gap-closing for various students groups because of low “n-sizes.” It would also respond to concerns educators and

others have raised regarding “blaming” various student groups for low school achievement – rather than focusing on the achievement and growth of all students. Additionally, it would respond to concerns about schools that may have “closed” achievement gaps only because of an overall decline in student performance in the reference group.

Growth: Rather than maintain our focus on the median growth of all students and of various identified student groups, our request would allow us to focus on the growth of students a growth percentile lower than 35 (i.e., 66 percent of students or more have made greater growth over the past academic year). Students below the 35th growth percentile are those most likely to lose academic ground over time.

Along with these proposed changes, it is important to note that we will continue to use graduation rates and participation rates as key components in our system of accountability and, most important, that we will continue to calculate and publicly report annual targets and progress toward those targets for all student groups. Schools that fail to meet any annual target for three consecutive years – including the participation-rate target of 95 percent – will receive an “alert” as part of their classification and will be ineligible for either of our highest classifications, Commended and Leading.

With approval of our flexibility request, we will have clearer pictures of how schools are improving over time and we will be able to more accurately measure gains of students who are approaching but have not yet achieved proficiency on our state assessments. Most important, our continued use of sophisticated diagnostic tools will provide better information regarding what

individual schools need to focus on in the short term to improve teaching and learning. We are confident that our request is responsive to the needs of our schools, supportive of our teachers and school leaders, and in the best interest of the students of Rhode Island.

The changes would go into effect for the school classifications beginning with the 2015-16 school year, and our request for flexibility covers a span of three school years. This afternoon, we presented a PowerPoint in these proposed revisions to our accountability system. We will post the webinar on our website early next week.

From RIDE

Innovation Powered by Technology:

3. Registration is open for the Future Ready Summit on April 21 and 22

Last November, the U.S. Department of Education announced that, as part of the [“Future Ready”](#) initiative, there will be 12 Regional Summits this year on using technology and digital learning. Rhode Island will be the host state for the Northeast Regional Summit, which will take place at West Warwick High School (1 Webster Knight Dr.) on April 21, from 11 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., and April 22, from 8:15 a.m. to 4:45 p.m.

The conference will include panel discussions, breakout sessions, demonstrations of technology, sharing of successes and experiences across districts, and action planning. Speakers will include Richard Culatta, from the U.S. Department of Education Office of Educational Technology; Tom Murray, the State and

District Digital Learning Policy and Advocacy Director at the Alliance for Excellent Education; and the keynote speaker, Michael B. Horn, co-author of *Blended: Using Disruptive Innovation to Improve Schools*. So far, teams from nine Northeast states have registered to attend the conference.

All who signed the Future Ready pledge may attend the conference free of charge. Join the teams that have already registered for the Rhode Island Future Ready Summit before space is filled. Registration information is [here](#).

Health:

4. Annual School Health Report forms to be posted Monday (March 30)

The *Rules and Regulations for School Health Programs*, Section 2.5, require all LEAs and nonpublic-school authorities to submit to the Commissioner of Education and to the Director of Health on an annual basis a report pertaining to the school or district health program. The Annual School Health Report provides a standardized template to fulfill this reporting requirement and allows RIDE and the Department of Health to monitor school and district compliance with school health-related statutes, regulations, and protocols that ensure the health and safety of students and staff at all Rhode Island schools.

To ensure compliance with school health and safety statutes and regulations and to align with the beginning of each academic school year, this Annual School Health Report will apply to the coming academic year (2015-16).

The Annual School Health Report template will be available through eRIDE on **Monday** (March 30). You will receive an e-mail notification from RIDE when the report is open for completion and submission via eRIDE.

For a preview of the Annual School Health Report and for assistance in understanding what will be required, please see the [Annual School Health Report Tutorial](#) and [Guidance/Q&A document](#).

Instruction:

5. Early Warning System now integrated into the Instructional Support System

The Rhode Island Early Warning System is now available through the Instructional Support System platform. The Early Warning System (EWS) tool includes a set of indicators that enables educators and school teams to identify and intervene with students at risk of not graduating from high school on time. The EWS screens all students from grade 6 through grade 12 using six data points to help educators meet the global needs of their school and to ensure that all students are successful in graduating from high school. The existing EWS platform on RIDEmap will be available until May 1. After May 1, educators will be able to access the EWS only through the Instructional Support System. For more information on the Early Warning System, or to schedule an EWS training, please contact Cali Cornell (cali.cornell@ride.ri.gov).

Assessments:

6. *Reminder:* Seats still available for NECAP Science test-coordinator training workshop

To help prepare district and school test coordinators for the NECAP Science test, workshops have been scheduled for the following dates and times (*Note: Both workshops cover the same material, so there is no need to attend both workshops.*):

- April 14, at the Providence Marriott Downtown, 1 Orms St. (1 – 3 p.m.)
- April 15, at the Radisson Airport Hotel, 2081 Post Rd., Warwick (9 – 11 a.m.)

Registration for workshops can be done online by going to <http://iregister.measuredprogress.org>, selecting “New England Common Assessment Program” from the drop-down menu, clicking “Enter” and selecting a workshop, and then following the online directions. On-site, in-person registration will also be available on the day of each workshop 30 minutes prior to the scheduled start time.

Workshop attendance is strongly encouraged, as the latest information on NECAP testing policies and procedures as well as information about test security will be provided.

If you have any questions about these workshops, please contact Dr. Kevon Tucker-Seeley (kevon.tucker-seeley@ride.ri.gov or 222-8494).

Data Collection:

- 7. *Reminder: RIDE opens career-technical data collection for high schools, centers, programs; informational webinars scheduled***

The Career and Technical Education (CTE) data collection is required for any district that operated approved programs during the current school year. The list of approved programs that are required to submit data can be found on the RIDE website [here](#). If a program is undergoing review for the first time this school year, it will be required to submit this data collection for the coming school year (2015-16). To determine what career and technical education courses and programs must be reported by your school, if any, please refer to the RIDE-approved [program list](#).

The data in the collection include CTE-program and student-level information that will be used for reporting requirements and for further development of outcome metrics. Some data elements that directly relate to student outcomes in the program will need the input of school leadership, the CTE or program director, or instructor in the program. The data elements required for this collection are outlined in the published data-specification document found [here](#). The collection is now open, and the data are due by the end of this school year.

Webinars to answer program-related questions will be held on **Wednesday** (April 1), from 3 to 4 p.m. (to register for April 1 [click here](#)) and Tuesday, April 7, from 3:30 to 4:30 p.m. (to register for April 7 [click here](#)).

For program-related questions regarding the CTE data collection, please contact Paula Barney, at paula.barney@ride.ri.gov or 222-8399. Data managers with any questions please enter a helpdesk ticket, at:

<https://support.ride.ri.gov>.

Teacher Quality:

8. RIDE schedules session on April 13 to review Title II, Part A and Consolidated Resource Plan applications

RIDE will offer a Title II, Part A overview session on April 13 from 9 to 11 a.m., at the Rhode Island Foundation, 1 Union Station, Providence. This session will provide an opportunity to meet with RIDE staff members to receive guidance on the appropriate uses of teacher-quality funding and to review the annual Consolidated Resource Plan application and the Title II, Part A Monitoring application.

If you have any questions regarding this session, contact Mary Keenan at mary.keenan@ride.ri.gov or 222-8497.

9. RIDE works to maintain induction program; LEAs asked to complete survey on induction by April 10 – *Action Item*

RIDE, in partnership with the Northern Rhode Island Collaborative, is working to ensure that the Rhode Island Beginning Teacher Induction Program continues as a support for all teachers entering the profession. We are excited about continuing the Rhode Island Beginning Teacher Induction Model during the coming school year. As you may be aware, this model assists in accelerating beginning-teacher growth and development through classroom observations and through focused conversations among beginning teachers, coaches, and administrators. During the current school year, six school districts opted in to provide this benefit to their beginning teachers. The collaborative model replicates the Rhode Island Beginning Teacher Induction Model of delivery which was implemented during our Race to the Top funding period. We are asking that you

complete a short survey regarding induction for your beginning teachers.

To complete the survey, please go to the following link:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/Q7GNZ33>

The survey will close on Friday, **April 10**.

By completing the survey questions indicating how you plan to move forward with supporting beginning teachers hired by your district, you will provide us with the important information to properly plan for beginning-teacher induction support during the coming school year. We realize that this is critically important work but also that induction is a costly investment. We continue to look for funding sources to help offset the cost of this model.

If you have any questions about induction or if you need more details, please contact Joseph Nasif, at jnasif@nric-ri.org, or Hilda Potrzeba, at hilda.potrzeba@ride.ri.gov.

From the U.S. Department of Education

10. Principals encouraged to nominate students for President's Education Awards Program

Please see this message from the U.S. Department of Education Office of Communications and Outreach, and please feel free to share this information with your principals:

Founded in 1983, the President's Education Awards Program honors graduating elementary-, middle-, and high-school students for their achievement and hard work. The program

has provided individual recognition from the President and the U.S. Secretary of Education to those students whose outstanding efforts have enabled them to meet challenging standards of excellence. Each year, thousands of elementary, middle, and high schools participate by recognizing deserving students. For information about applying for these awards, see:

<http://www2.ed.gov/programs/presedaward/index.html>

From other organizations

11. Principals' leadership institute to be held in New York City in July

Please see this notice from the National Principals Leadership Institute, and please feel free to share this notice with your leadership team:

Designing Schools for The Future will be the theme at the 18th Annual National Principals Leadership Institute. Imagine that it is 2040. How will our daily lives be different? Will technology lead to utopia or dystopia? What will it take to educate the next generation?

We selected inventors and innovators in diverse fields to describe their creative process. We will hear from artists, economists, entrepreneurs, futurists, medical researchers, technology wizards, and urban planners.

Using the insights offered by our speakers, on-stage interviews, and panels, institute participants will design a school for 2040, a school that will be radically different.

A number of presenters have already been confirmed, including: Google's Research Director Alfred Spector, IBM's Watson Program Leader Satya Nitta, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Innovation Director Tom Stritikus, futurists John Mahaffie and Lisa Bodell, innovators Farah Assir (New York Times), Caleb Harper (MIT CityFarm), Garthen Leslie (Quirky inventor), Chris Bruce (Sproutling), author Monica Martinez (Deeper Learning), SREB Executive Director Gene Bottoms, AASA Executive Director Dan Domenech (AASA), CUNY Vice Chancellor Frank Sanchez, and Jake Barton, designer of the 9/11 Memorial Museum.

The Institute will be held at the Walter Reade Theater, 165 W. 65th St., New York, N.Y., starting Saturday, **July 11**, at 8 a.m. and running through July 17.

Registration is available online at www.npli.org, and group scholarships are available.

12. League of Women Voters seeks nominations for civic-education awards

Please see this message from the Rhode Island League of Women Voters of South Kingstown/Narragansett:

To honor Rhode Island's innovative teachers and their exceptional work in civic education, The Susan B. Wilson Civic Education Merit Awards Committee is accepting nominations. Applying is fast and easy. Get details and apply online at <http://www.lwvri.org/wilson-award.htm>

A Grand Prize of \$1,000, a Jury Prize of \$500, and an Honorable Mention Prize of \$250 will be awarded to three individual teachers or teams of teachers for work that has already been accomplished and whose impact has already been assessed.

The deadline for applications is **April 30**.

Nominate a worthy teacher currently teaching in a Rhode Island school (prekindergarten through grade 12) or forward this message to colleagues and friends.

13. Professional development at sea offered to educators

Please see this message from Oliver Hazard Perry RI:

Oliver Hazard Perry RI, in partnership with Salve Regina University, are pleased to once again offer at-sea professional development training for educators. During the week of August 16 through 22 participants will step aboard the brand new Tall Ship *Oliver Hazard Perry* and join the ship's crew in operating this huge, historically rigged ship. Through handling sail high in the rigging down to maintenance of the interior ship's systems, the communal effort for a successful voyage fosters qualities of teamwork, reliability, and risk-assessment in each participant, along with the thrill of an adventure at sea. Learn what it takes to be a good shipmate, which is no more or less than a good citizen of a greater community. Taking place within the ship's 24-hour watch rotation, the course promises to enhance communication skills through Process Communication Quality Relations Seminars©, to introduce teachers to effectively make films for use in the classroom,

and to extend the lessons of traditional seamanship to the contemporary workplace. Information is available at www.ohpri.org/Salve_regina.

RIDE will post this field memo on Tuesday, at:

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