

**Commissioner's Weekly Field Memo**  
**Friday, March 28, 2014**

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**Today** (March 28): [Textbook](#) lists due

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### Notes from Commissioner Gist

#### **1. RIDE provides monthly update on Diploma System and Class of 2014**

On Monday, I provided the Board of Education with our monthly update on the progress that students in the Class of 2014 are making toward fulfilling the state-assessment component of the Rhode Island Diploma System.

About 10,500 students in the Class of 2014 took the NECAP assessments in their junior year (October 2012), and about 60 percent met the graduation requirements at that time. In October 2013, about 3,200 high-school seniors retook the NECAP. We released the results from this assessment in January. Of the high-school seniors who retook the NECAP assessments, approximately 1,400 made growth or attained at least partial proficiency and thus met this graduation requirement. That meant that about 73 percent of the students who took the high-school assessments in 2012 had met the graduation requirement as of January.

Last month, I reported to the Board that an additional 227 students met the cut scores on any of the other assessments that RIDE has approved, bringing the level of students eligible for graduation up to 76 percent. This month, at least 200 additional students have met the graduation requirements through success on other approved assessments or by admission to competitive, non-open enrollment postsecondary schools. We are still collecting data from LEAs on the number of students who have

succeed on other approved assessments or qualified for waivers. To date, however, 78 percent of the original cohort of students are eligible for graduation, and that percentage will grow as we continue collecting local data.

In February and March, we administered approximately 1,400 NECAP retakes in mathematics and 300 in reading throughout the state. RIDE staff members managed the test administration throughout Rhode Island and reported that generally speaking students were working hard and taking the third NECAP administration seriously. We will have results of these retakes by the end of next month. I appreciate the excellent cooperation from you and your team throughout this process, including test administration and collection of data. Let's keep working together to prepare all of our graduates for success.

## **2. Bioscience report from Rhode Island Tech Collective calls for STEM investments**

Last week, the Rhode Island [Tech Collective](#), the bioscience and information-technology industry association, released its [Rhode Island Bioscience Skills Gap Study](#). The report profiles the burgeoning bioscience industry in Rhode Island and focuses on its workforce needs, including career and professional-development opportunities and elementary and secondary education pathways. The report also makes recommendations to foster workforce and industry growth.

The report includes a timeline identifying bioscience industry development, workforce training, and K-16 education achievements over the past decade. In particular, the report recommends engaging youth in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) fields, integrating STEM into the curricula for elementary and secondary education, and developing more integrated and afterschool STEM programs.

Supporting STEM, as well as STEM to STEAM (STEM plus Arts), initiatives has been an important part of our strategic plan and of our Race to the Top commitments. In particular, in my state of education address I identified

STEAM initiatives as one of key areas that we will focus on increasingly in the coming years. On Thursday, I will be attending the Rhode Island STEAM Summit, at Salve Regina University, and I hope to engage in fruitful conversations about developing more STEAM programs in elementary, secondary, and higher education across our state.

### **3. RIDE developing options for cyclical educator evaluations**

A small group of educators met last week with RIDE staff members to consider cyclical options that we could introduce next year as part of our educator-evaluation systems. All of the options we are considering would address on-going capacity concerns that you have expressed to us while also identifying ways through which educators will continue to receive annual feedback to help them strengthen their practice. The group will meet again in a couple of weeks to review and draft details regarding each option as well as to outline the opportunities for LEAs during the next school year. We look forward to sharing these options with everyone in the near future.

### **4. Three educators honored for excellence in career and technical education**

SkillsUSA Rhode Island has presented recognition awards to three Rhode Island educators, based on peer nominations, who represent excellence and professionalism in career and technical education. Dave Bannister, a construction-technology instructor at the Chariho Career and Technical Center, is the 2014 SkillsUSA RI Career and Technical Educator of the Year. Joseph Fantozzi, a graphic arts and printing instructor, and Kristin St. Pierre, the social studies department chair, both at the William M. Davies, Jr. Career and Technical High School, are the 2014 SkillsUSA RI Advisors of the Year. Congratulations, Dave, Joseph, and Kristin, on these awards, and thanks for your commitment to career and technical education in Rhode Island!

### **5. Barnes & Nobel announces winners of “My Favorite Teacher” contest**

Barnes & Noble, in Warwick, has announced that Marc Brocato, an English teacher at East Greenwich High School, has been named the local winner of the Barnes & Noble My Favorite Teacher Contest. Andrew Miner, a senior at East Greenwich High School, nominated Marc Brocato for this award. Students were invited to nominate their favorite teacher by writing essays, poems, or thank-you letters that explain how their teacher has influenced their life and reveal why they appreciate and admire him or her. Both Marc Brocato and Andrew Minor will be recognized at a special event at Barnes & Nobel on April 29, at 6:30 p.m. Barnes & Nobel will also recognize the 2<sup>nd</sup>-place winner, Mary Hoyt, of The Prout School, and 3<sup>rd</sup>-place winner Helen King, of Exeter-West Greenwich Regional High School. Abigail Borges nominated Ms. King. Congratulations to the winning teachers and their students!

#### **6. New England Secondary School Consortium honors Dr. Michael Barnes**

The New England Secondary School Consortium has named Dr. Michael Barnes as the recipient of its 2014 Rhode Island State Champion award, one of seven state and regional awards honoring educators “for their extraordinary commitment to ensuring that public-school students across New England have a chance to succeed in school, live a fulfilled and meaningful life, and make a positive contribution to the world.” Michael, the Foster-Glocester Regional superintendent, is also serving as our 2014 Rhode Island Superintendent of the Year. Congratulations, Michael, on this well-deserved recognition!

**From RIDE**

***Assessments:***

#### **7. Seats still available for NECAP Science test-coordinator training workshop**

To help prepare district and school test coordinators for the NECAP Science assessment, RIDE has scheduled workshops for the following dates and times:

- April 15, at the Providence Marriott Downtown, 1 Orms St., (1 – 3:30 p.m.)
- April 16, at the Radisson Hotel, 2081 Post Rd., Warwick (9 – 11:30 a.m.)

*(Note: Both workshops cover the same material, so there is no need to attend both workshops.)*

Registration for these 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](mailto:kevon.tucker-seeley@ride.ri.gov), or 222-8494).

## **8. RIDE invites educators to participate developing NECAP science assessment items**

RIDE is offering an opportunity for classroom teachers and other educators to participate in the development process of the NECAP science assessments for grades 4, 8, and 11. The NECAP teacher committees are essential to the work of creating a valid and reliable assessment system. Many of your teachers have participated in these committees and have learned a lot – not only from the process, but also from the teachers representing New Hampshire and Vermont.

Please encourage teachers to apply to represent our students as a member of the Bias & Sensitivity Review Committee. Applications can be found on the RIDE website, at:

[www.ride.ri.gov/NECAP-Science-IRC-Bias](http://www.ride.ri.gov/NECAP-Science-IRC-Bias)

The Bias & Sensitivity Review Committee will convene for one day, **August 7**.

To prepare assessment items for field-testing, all NECAP assessment items are reviewed to ensure that they are free from language or content that may negatively affect the performance of a specific group of students. This work is done by a team made up of four educators from each state (Rhode Island, New Hampshire, and Vermont) for a total of 12 educators being selected to serve on the Bias & Sensitivity Review Committee. These educators either represent specific groups (e.g., racial, ethnic, or religious groups; rural or urban interests; individuals with disabilities; recent immigrants; English language learners) or they have direct experience working with students from these groups.

To qualify, educators should meet the following criteria:

- have current and direct experience teaching or working with students;
- offer a unique perspective on one or more specific student groups;
- be willing to work intensively with a team of educators for two consecutive days; and
- have experience with the science GSEs for their grade span.

The Item Review Committee will convene on two days, **August 7 and 8**.

Each year, as part of preparing assessment items for field-testing, NECAP science items and the inquiry tasks are reviewed for alignment to the appropriate science assessment target, depth-of knowledge level, student accessibility, and instructional relevance. This work is done by three content-area teams of 12 educators, with four teachers each from Rhode

Island, New Hampshire, and Vermont on each team. The Item Review Committees meet once a year.

To qualify, educators should meet the following criteria:

- have advanced knowledge and experience with the Grade Span Expectations,
- have experience teaching at the relevant grade cluster; and
- be willing to work intensively on a team for two or more consecutive days.

Applications are available on our website, at:

[www.ride.ri.gov/NECAP-Science-IRC-Bias](http://www.ride.ri.gov/NECAP-Science-IRC-Bias)

If you have questions about these teacher committees, please contact the following RIDE personnel:

- Peter McLaren, at [peter.mclaren@ride.ri.gov](mailto:peter.mclaren@ride.ri.gov); or
- Jennifer Sołek, at [Jennifer.solek@ride.ri.gov](mailto:Jennifer.solek@ride.ri.gov)

## **9. PARCC Field Test off to a great start!**

This week, the PARCC Field Test officially started and participating schools across the state began administering the Performance-Based Assessments. We would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone for a successful first week and for all of your excellent feedback! We are grateful that schools and districts have shared concerns and suggestions as well as positive implementation experiences. Please continue to document any concerns, suggestions, and positive experiences. Also, be sure to encourage folks to respond to the Test Coordinator, Test Administrator, and Student surveys as this important feedback will be used to make improvements prior to next year's operational administration of the PARCC assessments.

So far, things are running smoothly in Rhode Island, with no reported paper-based testing incidents and only a few isolated technology-related incidents reported so far for computer-based testing. These incidents generally involved one or two (out of a dozen or more) student computers “freezing up” during testing or students having difficulty entering responses in the spaces provided. We have feedback from some middle school students that they liked all of the tools, specifically the calculator, eliminate answer choice, and the flag/review tool. There was also general consensus that they appreciated having longer, but fewer questions. The students biggest complaints were regarding glitches with technology when using some of the tools.

RIDE encourages schools to continue to contact PARCC Support at 888-493-9888 or [PARCC@support.pearson.com](mailto:PARCC@support.pearson.com) if any incidents arise or if there are any questions relating to navigating PearsonAccess or TestNav or relating to testing materials or accessing other PARCC resources, etc. As a reminder, please be sure that your school and district test coordinator’s information is correct in the eRIDE School Directory and also on PearsonAccess to ensure timely receipt of communications and materials.

A few things that have come up during conversations with other PARCC states that RI schools should be aware of include the following:

1. Test Administrators/Teachers need to be aware of a **Field Test Administration Alert** released on 3/27 that provides guidance on important changes to scripts in the Test Administration Manual. Please refer to the complete Alert that was sent out via the PARCC listservs on 3/27. In short, the Alert provides “replacement paragraphs” for Test Administrators/Teachers to read in place of text currently found in the Test Administration Manual regarding constructed responses. The new text encourages students to ensure their responses to constructed response items are well developed and thorough and remind students to use evidence from the passages to develop and support their ideas.
2. Test Administrators/Teachers—especially those administering online assessments—must read and follow the scripts exactly as they are written in the Test Administrator Manual for each session.

3. Test Administrators/Teachers should only provide one seal code at a time to students taking online assessments.
4. Some students taking online assessments are prematurely hitting the “Submit Final Answers” button before they have completed the final test session within the Performance-Based Assessment (PBA). Note that students should ONLY do this when they have reached the final test session/task within the PBA. If this happens, then these students will not be able to log into the second test session (e.g., Session 2 for Math PBA or Research Simulation for ELA PBA) and they will get an error message that says: “Msg 9025: This test has been completed and may not be taken again.” As a general rule, students should not “submit final answers” until after they’ve completed the student survey. If you get a report from a school on this issue, instruct them to call the PARCC Support Center at 888-493-9888 and ask them to “unsubmit” the student’s test so the he/she may continue testing.

As always, if there are any questions or concerns, schools can contact RIDE’s “PARCC Team” via email at [PARCC@RIDE.RI.Gov](mailto:PARCC@RIDE.RI.Gov) or by calling Dr. Kevon Tucker-Seeley (222-8494), Kamlyn Keith (222-8465), or Lee Rabbitt (222-8495).

## **10. PARCC releases practice tests**

This week PARCC released ELA/Literacy Practice Tests for grades 3-11. This release is one of two major releases of the Practice Tests: A spring 2014 release and a fall 2014 release.

### ***A. SPRING 2014 RELEASE***

The spring 2014 release includes the “Performance-Based Assessment” Practice Tests in English Language Arts/Literacy and the “End-of-Year” Practice Tests in mathematics. The following are available now or will be available in the next 2 weeks:

- Grades 3–11 Performance-Based Assessment tests for ELA (these are all available now at <http://practice.parcc.testnav.com/#>)

- Grades 3–8 End-of-Year tests for mathematics (these will be available the week of April 7<sup>th</sup>)
- Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II End-of-Year tests for mathematics (these will be available the week of April 7<sup>th</sup>)

*Notes about scoring:*

- The spring 2014 releases will **not** have scoring capability built into the tool. PARCC will provide answer keys and rubrics.
- The PARCC English Language Arts/Literacy summative assessments will include one prose constructed response item for each of the tasks that appears on the Performance-Based Assessment component. Teachers can score the three prose constructed responses by looking at the draft. [Learn more about rubrics.](#)

***B. FALL 2014 RELEASE***

What will be available:

- Grades 3–11 “End-of-Year” tests for ELA
- Grades 3–8 “Performance-Based Assessment” tests for mathematics
- Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II “Performance-Based Assessment” tests for mathematics

If you have any questions about the PARCC Field Test, please contact RIDE’s “PARCC Team” via email at [PARCC@RIDE.RI.Gov](mailto:PARCC@RIDE.RI.Gov) or by calling Dr. Kevon Tucker-Seeley (222-8494), Kamlyn Keith (222-8465), or Lee Rabbitt (222-8495).

***Educator Certification:***

**11. Online certification renewal for full certificates available through My eCert**

We are pleased to announce the launch of Online Certification Renewal through My eCert, our educator-certification portal. Online renewal is now available for My eCert users who have full certificates (Initial or

Professional) expiring on August 31, 2014. Educators can make renewal payments by credit card (Visa, MasterCard, or Discover).

At this time, however, educators must renew all preliminary certificates (One-Year Professional and Temporary Initial) as well as permits (Substitute) through a paper application.

Please note that, as of last year, RIDE discontinued mailing paper copies of certificates to educators. We send all certificates e-mail only. We encourage all educators to maintain a current e-mail address in their My eCert profile.

For more information about online application in My eCert and answers to frequently asked questions (FAQ), go to:  
<http://ride.ri.gov/Certification-Updates>.

### ***Data and Reports:***

#### **12. High School NECAP Retake Data Update**

RIDE will be collecting updated information for 12<sup>th</sup> grade students in danger of not graduating in June 2014. RIDE has updated the spreadsheets used for NECAP testing in early March with information gathered during the NECAP retest. The spreadsheets will be available to high schools and districts in RIDEMap District Exchange on March 31, 2014. Instructions for completing the spreadsheet will also be included in RIDEMap District Exchange. These spreadsheets need to be updated and uploaded in RIDEMap District Exchange by Friday, April 4, 2014. If you have any questions, please submit a helpdesk ticket at <https://support.ride.ri.gov>.

### ***Race to the Top:***

#### **13. Race to the Top Webinar on No-Cost Extension Funding Options for Districts**

Our Race to the Top team is holding a [Webinar](#) on Tuesday, April 8th at 8:30 AM to discuss options for districts under our RTT no-cost extension. The webinar will review the relevant timelines and processes for districts interested in amending or applying to extend their RTT funding for Year 5. During this time, we will also provide districts with examples of activities that would be considered relevant uses of funding under the no-cost extension application approved by USED. As a reminder, under the Year 4 timelines, funds must be obligated by September 23, 2014 and liquidated by December 23, 2014.

***Legal:***

**14. Commissioner's decisions issued regarding residency, summer-school fees, Commissioner's authority**

RIDE has recently released these Commissioner's decisions:

Student, being a resident of Coventry, must disenroll from West Warwick and enroll in Coventry at end of current school year.

[http://www2.ride.ri.gov/applications/RideDirectory/DOCS/2014/001-14 Residency of M DOE 031714.pdf](http://www2.ride.ri.gov/applications/RideDirectory/DOCS/2014/001-14%20Residency%20of%20M%20DOE%20031714.pdf)

Cumberland is authorized to charge a fee for summer school program.

[http://www2.ride.ri.gov/applications/RideDirectory/DOCS/2014/002-12 Student G. DOE Vs. Cumberland SC on remand 031814.pdf](http://www2.ride.ri.gov/applications/RideDirectory/DOCS/2014/002-12%20Student%20G.%20DOE%20Vs.%20Cumberland%20SC%20on%20remand%20031814.pdf)

Woonsocket residence of parent determines responsibility for providing FAPE to student admitted as long-term patient at Tavares Pediatric Center in Providence.

[http://www2.ride.ri.gov/applications/RideDirectory/DOCS/2014/003-14 IN RE VSS DOE 032114.pdf](http://www2.ride.ri.gov/applications/RideDirectory/DOCS/2014/003-14%20IN%20RE%20VSS%20DOE%20032114.pdf)

Commissioner lacks authority over issues relating to curriculum and instruction and teacher discipline.

[http://www2.ride.ri.gov/applications/RideDirectory/DOCS/2014/004-14%20 Janice Black Vs Barrington SD 032114.pdf](http://www2.ride.ri.gov/applications/RideDirectory/DOCS/2014/004-14%20Janice%20Black%20Vs%20Barrington%20SD%20032114.pdf)

**Events:**

**15. 2014 RI Social Studies Summer Institute –Save the Date and Call for Proposals**

RIDE and the RI State Panel on Civic Education (SPCE) will host the 2014 RI Social Studies Summer Institute on May 31, 2014. Members of the State Panel include: the RI Social Studies Association, the RI Historical Society, and K-12 and higher education educators. The theme of this FREE conference is the impact of civic action and civic education on Rhode Island's history and future. This conference will include workshops on integrating social studies content with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), instruction and assessment strategies and resources, the RI Social Studies GSEs (SS GSEs), and topics in Rhode Island History and civic education.

The conference aims to provide teachers with opportunities to hear first-hand from their peers about successful strategies and resources for teaching the SS GSEs and integrating the CCSS, to learn more about resources supporting instruction in Rhode Island history and civic education, and to create partnerships between K-12 institutions and higher education to further student engagement. Students have been invited to present their civics and history projects during a special session in the afternoon.

We are soliciting proposals from educators for workshop sessions until **April 28, 2014**. RIDE and members of the SPCE's Institute Planning Committee will review the proposals and will notify successful proposals by May 2. There are up to 12 workshop session slots available.

The application and directions for submission can be found in this document:

[www.ride.ri.gov/Social-Studies-Institute-Presentation-Proposal](http://www.ride.ri.gov/Social-Studies-Institute-Presentation-Proposal)

An Institute location, agenda, and overview will be posted soon at [www.ride.ri.gov/Social-Studies](http://www.ride.ri.gov/Social-Studies).

Questions about the Institute may be directed to Kamlyn Keith ([kamlyn.keith@ride.ri.gov](mailto:kamlyn.keith@ride.ri.gov)).

Thank you for sharing this great opportunity with your teachers and administrators! We look forward to receiving their proposals and seeing them at the conference.

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

#### **16. U.S. Department of Education, White House issue report on Race to the Top**

On Tuesday, the U.S. Department of Education and the White House jointly issued a report on the Race to the Top initiative: Setting the Pace: Expanding opportunity for America's students under Race to the Top. The report encompasses five areas: challenging courses, support for educators, STEM opportunities, transition to new standards, and turning around the lowest-performing schools. The report highlights Rhode Island regarding our induction program for beginning teachers. A news release on the report is available [here](#), and the full report is available [here](#).

### **From other organizations**

#### **17. Workshop offered on water quality, wetland exploration**

Please see this message from the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association:

*What:* Project Wet Workshop

*When:* May 3, 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

*Where:* Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association campus, 203 Arcadia Road, Hope Valley

*About:* Teachers: Get your feet wet and learn to conduct water-quality and wetland-exploration field trips as we search for aquatic creatures in the Wood River. Create better lessons around water with this 6-hour workshop based on the Project Wet (Water Education for Teachers) and WOW!: The Wonders of Wetlands environmental-education curriculum guides. Curricula align with Next Generation Science Standards and Common Core State Standards. All teachers, pre-service teachers, home-school, and non-formal educators from all grade levels are welcome. The fee is \$15 per person. Professional-development credits are available. Guides are provided free, courtesy of Department of Environmental Management Division of Fish & Wildlife.

*Info:* Sponsored by the Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association. For more information contact Denise Poyer, at 539-9017 or [denisep@wpwa.org](mailto:denisep@wpwa.org). Register on-line, at [www.wpwa.org/events](http://www.wpwa.org/events).

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

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