

**Commissioner's Weekly Field Memo**  
**Friday, April 1, 2016**

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April 22 – [Student Advisory Council](#) selections due  
June 20 – Reports on [interventions](#) due

### **Notes from Commissioner Wagner**

#### **1. State of Education Address highlights strategies for supporting students, schools**

On Wednesday evening I presented the annual State of Education Address to a joint session of the General Assembly. The address highlighted three strategies to support Rhode Island students and schools:

- providing access to advanced classes to help kids build the skills that matter for future success;
- re-imagining how we do schooling for the 21<sup>st</sup> century – with rigor, relevance, and student engagement; and
- empowering principals, teachers, and families.

Members of the General Assembly seemed very receptive to these initiatives, appreciative of the dedication and commitment from Rhode Island educators, and pleased with the progress we have made to date, particularly through such initiatives as PrepareRI, prekindergarten programs, all-day kindergarten, and the School Building Authority.

I sincerely want to thank the many educators and friends of education who joined us on Wednesday at the State House and who offered statements of support for our initiatives. I also want to thank the many Rhode Islanders who, over the past several months, have provided insight and feedback on how we can provide more options for students and families and how we can help our teachers and school leaders reimagine education.

With your support, we can ensure that our students are engaged in school so as to build the skills that matter for jobs that pay.

We have posted a news release on the State of Education Address on our website:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/InsideRIDE/AdditionalInformation/News/ViewArticle/tabid/408/ArticleId/310/State-of-Education-Strengthening-Neighborhood-Schools-Preparing-Students-for-the-Future.aspx>

We have posted the complete address on our home page, [www.ride.ri.gov](http://www.ride.ri.gov).

## **2. House hears testimony on Empowerment Act, funding formula**

Last night, the House Finance Committee heard testimony on the School and Family Empowerment Act and on proposed revisions to the funding formula. We are grateful to the educators, business leaders,

and community members who testified on behalf of these important proposals.

The proposed revisions to the Funding Formula would:

- provide new funds (\$2.5 million) for the education of English Learners;
- provide additional aid to communities that send large numbers of students to charter public schools;
- revise the formula for aid to charters, by excluding from that aid funds to cover services that are unique to districts;
- provide additional funds for high-cost special education students and lower the threshold for districts to receive these funds; and
- address concerns about the maintenance-of-effort requirement.

The School and Family Empowerment Act, would enable schools to decide, on a voluntary basis, to become “empowerment schools” run by principals and their teams of teacher-leaders. These schools – or schools within schools – could adopt and develop unique academic programs, much like the good, old-fashioned magnet schools. They could focus on the arts, dual-language instruction, STEAM subjects, technology, career preparation – the sky is the limit.

Empowerment schools could also choose to open their doors to enrollment from other districts, in particular to students attracted by the unique academic offerings and approaches of the Empowerment school or to allow students who change addresses to remain in their school.

Whether or not to become an empowerment school is completely voluntary and, if a school becomes an empowerment school, the school has complete discretion on which components of the package (regulatory flexibility, school autonomy, contract flexibility, open enrollment) the school would want to implement.

People have been asking for this kind of flexibility for decades, and we are offering it and making it voluntary with a three-year phase-in, including a planning year.

We have posted more information on Empowerment Schools here:

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

I discussed the Empowerment Act this week on Channel 12 Newsmakers, which you can view here:

<http://wpri.com/2016/03/31/newsmakers-3312016-ri-education-commissioner-ken-wagner/>

### **3. Featured Educator blog post focuses on how books expand teaching**

The latest post on the “Featured Educator” blog on our website is from Debra Turchetti-Ramm, the 2015 Johnston District Teacher of the Year. Debra writes about how reading books helped her expand her teaching. She notes: “There is always something new or renewed in the field of education, and, as busy educators, with limited opportunity for professional development, we rely upon books and conferences to make sense of the ever-changing landscape in education.”

Read her blog post on the home page of our website or at:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/TeachersAdministrators/EducatorRecognition/DistrictTeacherOfTheYear.aspx#DTOYblog> .

#### **4. CTE educators honored, R.I. students earn medals at Skills USA RI competition**

Congratulations to our career-and-technical education (CTE\_ students and educators who received recognition in the Skills USA Rhode Island competitions. Dr. Lynne Bedard, recently retired as the Woonsocket CTE Director high-school principal, received the Lifetime Recognition Award; Joseph Barroso, of the East Providence CTE Center, was named the SkillsUSA Rhode Island Advisor of the Year; and Charles Myers, of the Woonsocket CTE Center, was named SkillsUSA Teacher of the Year. Skills USA Rhode Island awarded students with a total of 254 medals, with Cranston students earning a total of 48 medals (including 20 gold medals) and Chariho students earning 40 medals. Good work, all!

#### **5. Report finds R.I. ranks high on state support for school construction, low on overall construction spending**

A partnership of three organizations – the 21<sup>st</sup> Century School Fund, the National Council on School Facilities, and the Center for Green Schools – has released a report, “State of Our Schools 2016: America’s K-12 Facilities.” The report shows that Rhode Island has the highest share of state funding for school construction (78 percent) but Rhode Island ranks 2<sup>nd</sup>-lowest in “capital-construction spending compared with the standard,” according to parameters that the report sets. You can read the full report here:

[http://www.21csf.org/best-home/docuploads/pub/331\\_StateofOurSchools2016.pdf](http://www.21csf.org/best-home/docuploads/pub/331_StateofOurSchools2016.pdf)

## **6. Home Show features tree house built by R.I. career-technical students**

Our career-technical team reports that the 66<sup>th</sup> Annual Rhode Island Home Show, sponsored by the Rhode Island Builders Association, features a “not-to-be missed” treehouse constructed, wired, and landscaped by students from career-technical centers in Chariho, Coventry, East Providence, Newport, Warwick, and Woonsocket as well as the Davies, the Providence Career and Technical Academy, and Mount Hope, Narragansett, and Westerly High Schools. The Home Show will be at the Rhode Island Convention Center through the weekend.

### **From RIDE**

#### ***Educators:***

## **7. RIDE posts reports on certification, educator preparation**

RIDE has made available a number of reports on educator certification, including a Newly Certified in Rhode Island report, which includes information about pathways to certification, popular certificate areas, and the Rhode Island employment status of those individuals certified in Rhode Island. This report also includes a discussion protocol for Rhode Island LEAs, future educators, hiring managers, and educator-preparation providers to assist in their shared analysis of this information. Questions regarding the data included within the report should be directed to Shoba Annavarjula, at [shoba.annavarjula@ride.ri.gov](mailto:shoba.annavarjula@ride.ri.gov)

Additional reports now available on this new web page include the R.I. Educator Preparation Indices and the Emergency Certificates Report. All

reports can be accessed on our website at:  
<http://www.ride.ri.gov/certification-reports>

### **8. RIDE offers to schedule SLO/SOO Scoring Calibration workshop for LEAs; to hold workshop for new evaluators on April 29**

RIDE is offering to schedule a workshop on scoring calibration for student learning objectives (SLOs) and student outcome objectives (SOOs). This workshop will be conducted with evaluators as the primary audience, and the workshop will be open to all LEAs. The purpose of this workshop is to assess and increase consistency of SLO/SOO scoring. In the session, participants will use the SLO/SOO scoring maps to determine scoring, using multiple SLO/SOO examples and scenarios. This workshop will help evaluators solidify their ability to score SLOs/SOOs effectively, which can then guide the work they do with teachers and support professionals.

RIDE can work with school or district leadership to co-facilitate a workshop that involves actual SLOs/SOOs.

RIDE will also hold a one-day, voluntary workshop that will focus on end-of-year activities and procedures, as part of the yearly training and support for new evaluators who use the Rhode Island Model. During this session, participants will engage in activities such as calibrating and scoring SLOs/SOOs, calculating final effectiveness ratings, and using evaluation data or the Educator Performance and Support System to inform talent-management decisions. The workshop will take place on Friday, April 29, from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., at RIDE. Please use the following link to register:

<https://www.eride.ri.gov/workshopReg/ViewWorkshop.aspx?workshopid=1462>

If you are interested in having a RIDE staff member facilitate a calibration session for evaluators in your LEA or if you have questions about the new-evaluator training on April 29, please contact Alicia Reniere, at [alicia.reniere@ride.ri.gov](mailto:alicia.reniere@ride.ri.gov) or 222-8178.

### **9. RIDE seeking nominations for 2016-17 District Teachers of the Year**

The 2016-17 District Teacher of the Year Profile Sheet has been posted on the Educator Recognition web page. District Teacher of the Year Profile Sheets are due by Friday, **May 27**. This year 38 teachers from across Rhode Island represented their individual districts as District Teacher of the Year.

Each District Teacher of the Year (DTOY) will have the opportunity to take part in WaterFire: A Salute to Rhode Island Educators, participate in leadership professional development, collaborate with DTOYs from across the state, and apply to represent all Rhode Island Educators as the 2017 State Teacher of the Year.

Please visit our Educator Recognition web page or click on the following link to download the 2016-17 District Teacher of the Year Profile Sheet: [www.ride.ri.gov/DTOY\\_2016-17\\_Application](http://www.ride.ri.gov/DTOY_2016-17_Application)

If you have any questions regarding the District Teacher of the Year program, please contact Mary Keenan, at [mary.keenan@ride.ri.gov](mailto:mary.keenan@ride.ri.gov) or 401-222-8497.

### ***Students with Disabilities:***

### **10. Advisory committee on special education seeking new members; application deadline, April 15**

The Rhode Island Special Education Advisory Committee (RISEAC) advises the Commissioner, RIDE, and the Board Education on matters

concerning the unmet needs within the state in the education of children with disabilities, comments publicly on any rules or regulations proposed by the state regarding the education of children with disabilities, advises RIDE in developing evaluations and reporting on data, advises RIDE in developing corrective-action plans to address findings identified in federal monitoring reports under Part B of the IDEA, and advises the RIDE in developing and implementing policies relating to the coordination of services for children with disabilities.

RISEAC is currently seeking new members.

Membership applications can be accessed at the following link:

<http://ride.ri.gov/StudentsFamilies/SpecialEducation/AdvisoryCommittees.aspx#1260640-special-education-advisory-committee-riseac>

The deadline for all submissions has been extended to Friday, **April 15**. Any inquiries and/or questions may be directed to Kerri Sorensen, at [Kerri.Sorensen@ride.ri.gov](mailto:Kerri.Sorensen@ride.ri.gov).

***Instruction:***

**11. Computer-science information session on for educators to be held Wednesday**

Educators and school leaders are encouraged to attend the next CS4RI Teacher Information Session, to be held on **Wednesday** (April 6), from 4 to 5:30 p.m., at the Galanti Lounge, Carothers Library, University of Rhode Island. There will be a brief presentation from the CS4RI program partners followed by Q&A and a reception with light refreshments. Teachers will be able to meet the CS4RI program partners, get details and dates for summer professional-development

opportunities, check out curriculum offerings, and find out how they can bring computer-science opportunities into their schools and classrooms.

Register for the CS4RI Teacher Information Session at <http://goo.gl/EpBFdw>.

You can find more information about computer science at <http://CS4RI.org>.

## From the U.S. Department of Education

### 12. USED releases resources on improving school climate

Yesterday the [U.S. Department of Education](#) released new school-climate surveys and a quick guide on making school-climate improvements to help foster and sustain safe and supportive environments that are conducive to learning for all students.

The [ED School Climate Surveys \(surveys\)](#) and the [Quick Guide on Making School Climate Improvements](#) will enable states, local school districts, and individual schools to collect and act on reliable, nationally validated school-climate data in real-time. These new free and adaptable resources will enable educators, administrators, and school-system leaders to understand and create environments where every child can be successful.

These new resources build on two Administration initiatives: President Obama's [Now is the Time Plan](#), and his [My Brother's Keeper Taskforce](#), which [recommended](#) that the U.S. Department of Education work on the issue of school climates.

The new school-climate surveys, which are on a web-based platform, are designed for middle and high school students, instructional staff,

non-instructional staff, and parents and guardians. Moreover, the platform can process real-time data and provide user-friendly reports. Education agencies and schools administering the survey can store school climate survey data on their state, local, or school-based data systems. The federal government is planning to conduct a sample-based study using the surveys for benchmarking but will *not* collect or store data generated by the schools using the surveys for any other purposes.

In addition to the Quick Guide, a series of tools will be released later this this spring and summer as part of the [School Climate Improvement Resource Package](#), a web-based suite of action-oriented, research and evidence-based resources to help create and support positive school climates.

### **13. USED begins rulemaking process on ESSA and assessments; to begin regulatory process on accountability, reporting**

Responding to calls from stakeholders across the education system to provide clarification in key areas of the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) – particularly those essential to the equity and excellence goals of ESSA and to protecting the civil rights of students – the U.S. Department Education (USED) began the process of negotiated rulemaking last month in two areas of Title I, Part A: student assessments and supplement not supplant requirements. And, it will begin shortly the regulatory process on state accountability systems and reporting, submission of state plans, and Title I, Part B innovative assessment demonstration authority. While the USED will continue to seek input on where guidance and technical assistance would be helpful, it does not plan to propose regulations on any other areas of the new law this year.

There will be numerous opportunities for stakeholders to engage in the regulatory process. Along with the regulations currently under development through negotiated rulemaking (in fact, reflecting conversations from the first negotiating session, new materials – including draft regulations – will be posted soon on the [ESSA web site](#) for the negotiating committee to review and discuss), the public will be invited to comment on the USED draft regulations on accountability and reporting, state plans, and innovative assessments later this year. The USED will also provide guidance and make additional technical assistance resources available beginning this summer.

We greatly appreciate the thoughtful feedback and suggestions thus far from individuals and groups and look forward to a continuing conversation on how we can work together to help ensure every student is ready to graduate from high school and thrive in college and careers. Please continue to direct questions about the ESSA to [ESSA.questions@ed.gov](mailto:ESSA.questions@ed.gov).

**14. USED seeks comments on using SIG grants to promote diversity**

The U.S. Department of Education is interested in exploring how the federal School Improvement Grants (SIG) program can be used to promote voluntary, community-supported efforts to expand socioeconomic diversity in schools and improve student outcomes ([blog post](#)). Evidence shows exposure to students from a wide array of backgrounds can boost empathy, reduce bias, and increase group problem-solving. Comments are welcome through **April 12**.

**15. Recommendations sought for teachers to honor during Teacher Appreciation Week**

During this year's Teacher Appreciation Week (May 2-6), the U.S. Department of Education wants to extend a personal thank you to some great teachers. Help us by [recommending](#) a colleague, a friend, your child's teacher, or the teacher who inspired you. While we cannot guarantee reaching every teacher during the week, we may use submitted information for other highlighting purposes throughout the year.

#### **16. President Obama to host White House Science Fair**

Six years ago, President Obama made history by hosting the first-ever [White House Science Fair](#). He will host the final science fair of his Administration on **April 13**. While only a limited number of students can participate at the White House, all students are encouraged to share their story of discovery and invention using the hashtag #WHScienceFair ([blog post](#)).

#### **17. Applications from teachers sought for Fulbright Teaching Program**

Through the [Fulbright Distinguished Awards in Teaching Program](#), K-12 educators can apply for grants to engage in 2-8 week collaborative projects abroad. Teachers may travel to Botswana, India, Mexico, or Vietnam, and grants cover travel costs, lodging, meals, local transportation, and related costs. The deadline for applications is **April 18** for summer 2016 programs and **May 9** for fall 2016 programs.

#### **From other organizations**

#### **18. Johnson & Wales to offer MAT program at Providence campus**

Johnson & Wales University will offer a [Master of Arts in Teaching \(M.A.T.\)](#) at its Providence Campus as part of its Teacher Education program this fall.

The program offers unique dual certification concentrations in elementary education and elementary special education, and business education and secondary special education, as well as a certification concentration in culinary arts education. Johnson & Wales is the only postsecondary-education institution in Rhode Island to offer the business and culinary certification programs. Those interested in the program should contact graduate admissions, at 598-1838.

### **19. Group seeks high-school teachers who will volunteer to be part of Deeper Learning Academy**

The [Student Experience Lab](#) is working with the [Hewlett Foundation](#) to explore barriers and enablers to [Deeper Learning](#) practices in public high schools. Later this month, they will interview or observe leaders, administrators, and high-school teachers at public schools in Rhode Island. In return, participants will receive an honorarium and a chance to be part of a Deeper Learning Academy.

They are looking for a diverse group from public high schools throughout Rhode Island — school leaders, administrators, and high-school teachers with a range of experiences and interests in deeper learning practices and traditional approaches. Never heard of deeper learning? Great! They especially want to hear from you!

They'd need two hours of participants time to conduct individual interviews and activities or observations on site. Have a busy schedule? They can work with your availability and will come to you!

They will turn their observations into insights and use the findings to inform and develop a Deeper Learning Academy. Based on interest and availability, participants will have the opportunity to join the Deeper Learning Academy to design solutions and better facilitate deeper learning practices in traditional environments.

If you are interested, please take a moment to fill out a brief questionnaire based on your role:

- I'm a [High School Leader](#)
- I'm an [High School Administrator](#)
- I'm a [High School Teacher](#)

[Check out and share this opportunity to change education in public high schools!](#)

If you know someone who may be interested, please forward this along and share this link: <http://deeperlearning.launchrock.com/>.

Any questions? Contact [jessica@bif.is](mailto:jessica@bif.is).

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

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