Commissioner's Weekly Field Memo
Friday, August 5, 2016

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Notes from Commissioner Wagner

1. Ideas offered on reducing student absenteeism

Every day in school counts. Working together, we can create the habits and practices in our school cultures that increase teacher, student, and family engagement and dramatically reduce chronic absenteeism. But there is no one solution to this challenge. If we approach school attendance solely from an enforcement perspective, we're not going to move the needle. Outreach, engagement, and instruction are all part of the picture as well.

This week, Brooke Haycock, a senior writer for the Education Trust, posted an excellent piece on the [Education Trust blog](), The Equity Line, that offers important insights into student absenteeism:

"Present in the Story of Student Absenteeism"

The [data on chronic student absenteeism]() released earlier this month by the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights are jaw-dropping.

In one school year alone, more than 6 million students — 13 percent of the student population — were considered chronically absent, missing 15 or more school days during the school year. Six million.

And rates are higher among students of color, English-language learners, and students with disabilities.
The numbers left dry-throated educators, policymakers, advocates, and education reporters alike stammering for a narrative to cushion the hard blow of the data and to try to explain how so many students went chronically missing from our classrooms in one school year alone. In the days following the release of those data, a cast of predictable

villains was assembled: [struggling families and communities](#), [inadequate health, housing and social services](#), and "bad parenting."

Alarmingly absent, however, was much of any mention of schools.

Having spent more than seven years now working directly with adolescents in the foster care system, I am not about to say that the struggles many students face outside of school do not contribute —sometimes mightily — to school absenteeism. Over the years, I have witnessed young people up against some of the most daunting challenges. And I have seen first-hand the systemic failures of agencies charged with protecting the welfare of young people and families and the turbulence that ensues in the lives of those young people.

But I have also witnessed, time and again, in both my work with young people and my work in schools through Ed Trust, the real power of schools to pull students in — and to push them out.

The schools I had the honor of spending time in while doing research on [school re-engagement](#) empower themselves with the narrative that they can do something about chronic absenteeism.

Springing from that narrative, their practices provide evidence of the power of schools to help turn staggering absenteeism rates around.

Here are five key lessons from these incredible schools and educators:

They don't wait for students to disappear. When students enroll, school counselors do an intake with each student, working to identify and address concerns and barriers to attendance and achievement. And throughout the year, these schools have systems in place to ensure that they catch any attendance issues early, before they escalate. Teachers and counselors reach out to students and families in real time and work as partners to ensure that students are present and learning. They make sure that students who have missed instructional days have a path to catch back up and don't fall further behind.

They target supports to the students who most need them. These are schools serving concentrations of struggling students. Still, they never throw up their hands and say, "Well, we have so many students to serve. We don't have time to monitor all of them." They tier students by need for intervention, and they organize themselves so that they can serve all students while providing extra supports to those who need it. And the supports they help provide for their students aren't limited to those the school provides. They reach out to youth- and family-serving agencies and organizations to provide wrap-around support and to ensure that they are maximizing — and not duplicating or fraying — efforts. *They listen to students and work to create caring school environments.* These schools are constantly providing touch points with students, from classrooms to counseling offices, to ensure that they stay on the pulse of school climate and student engagement. They make

sure that in all of their classrooms and hallways, as well as through their practices and policies, young people are made to feel heard, cared about, and empowered.

They reserve out-of-school suspension for only the most serious infractions. These schools know that absence, regardless of reason, means that students are missing valuable instructional time. And so their disciplinary practices and policies stress restoration over punishment and keep students in school, not push them out. Building an environment of support and respect, these practices don't just ultimately result in fewer suspensions, they result in fewer disciplinary infractions in the first place.

And they are constantly refining their practices with new learning. Leaders in these schools are constant learners, working to gain lessons from the field and from research in how to improve their practices. They consult resources like [Attendance Works](#) for research-backed strategies to ensure that their students are present and learning.

While others would be content to be written out of the narrative and call in sick for the effort to combat student absenteeism, these schools are standing and declaring themselves present — and powerful.

2. **New CTE, P-TECH opportunities open this fall; RIDE, Commerce encourage districts to consider launching P-TECH partnerships**

As we continue with our commitment to provide Rhode Island students with the skills that matter for jobs that pay, the coming school year will bring students many new pathways leading to

challenging careers. Overall, our career-technical education (CTE) programs focus on the growing fields in the Rhode Island economy that the CTE Board has identified as high-growth, high-wage priority sectors: advanced manufacturing, automotive technologies construction, health care, hospitality, and information technology. This fall, high-school students will have expanded opportunities to enroll in one of the 134 RIDE-approved CTE programs, including such new programs as biomedical science (at Ponaganset High School, Foster-Glocester) and Cybersecurity (at the Newport CTE Center).

Many of our CTE programs provide students with career opportunities immediately on graduation, such as the Electric Boat Partnership, which will launch shipfitting and welding CTE programs this fall in Chariho, Coventry, Providence, and Warwick. By 2020, Electric Boat expects to hire about 800 new workers each year for high-wage jobs.

Our PrepareRI initiative, which offers students the opportunity to receive both high school and college credits (at CCRI, RIC, and URI), at no cost to students or their families, will offer many career-preparation courses – such as Introduction to Electromechanical Systems and Advanced Digital Audio Production. This fall we are launching the Advanced Coursework Network, through which students in participating districts can choose from among 180 courses offered by a wide range of course providers – for example, Introduction to Civil Engineering Technology, from the New England Institute of Technology, or Nautical Science, from the Northeast Maritime Academy.

One of our big successes in career-technical education last year has been P-TECH, an innovative educational model that integrates high school, college, and career training. Through a four- to six-

year experience, P-TECH students earn both a high-school diploma and an industry-recognized associate's degree – at no cost to the student. The P-TECH model prepares students further study in a four-year postsecondary-education institution and for high-growth, high-wage careers. P-TECH graduates are first in line for job opportunities with the industry with which their school had formed a partnership.

This fall, P-TECH programs will open in Newport (a partnership with CCRI and the Southeastern New England Defense Industry Alliance, leading to an associate's degree in Cybersecurity), Providence (an Information Technology program in partnership with CCRI, leading to associate's degrees in either Network Infrastructure or Software Development), and Westerly (an advanced-manufacturing model program leading to an Associate of Science in Manufacturing Technology degree). Along with the Commerce Corporation, we are looking for more schools or communities to partner with us to continue to grow the P-TECH initiative in the 2017-18 school year and beyond. Please consider whether the P-TECH model might work for your community – alone or in collaboration with other school districts in your region. We still have some seats left in the Westerly program for the 2016-17 school year, so RIDE will work with local area superintendents to make sure all students are aware of this amazing opportunity.

The following guidelines for a P-TECH program may help you decide if P-TECH is right for your community: a willingness to host a cohort of between 50 and 100 9th graders and to add a cohort of the same size for each subsequent year; a willingness to restructure budgets to provide a sustainable future for the P-TECH program beyond some potential funding for initial planning and implementation; and a commitment to a collaborative

governance model for the P-TECH program along with postsecondary-education and industry partners.

We encourage communities interested in developing a P-TECH program to open in the fall 2017 to complete this [Indication of Interest Form](#) and to visit www.commerceri.com/ptech. At a later date, we will release a formal application for establishment of a P-TECH partnership.

3. *Reminder:* **RIDE accepting comment through September 15 on Secondary School Regulations; 4 hearings scheduled**

The current draft of Secondary School Regulations, which the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education gave preliminary approval to on May 17, are now undergoing the formal process for recording public comment. Public comment will be open through **September 15**. All interested parties are invited to participate in the public hearings and submit written comments concerning the proposed regulations from through September 15.

You can find draft Secondary School Regulations and other supporting documents can be found at:

http://sos.ri.gov/documents/archives/regdocs/holding/DESE/Board%20of%20Education%20Secondary%20Regulations%20-%20Public%20Notice.pdf

We have schedule public hearings on the proposed regulations:

*   Monday, August 22, at 5:30 p.m., at the Cumberland Public Library, Rooms 1 & 2, Hayden Center, 1464 Diamond Hill Road

- Monday, August 29, at 5:30 p.m., at the Newport Public Library, Program Room, Lower Level, 300 Spring Street
- Tuesday, September 6, at 5:30 p.m., at the Warwick Public Library, Room 101, Large Meeting Room, 600 Sandy Lane
- Monday, September 12, at 5:30 p.m., at the University of Rhode Island, Providence Campus, Room 501;, 80 Washington Street/255 Westminster Street

The hearing locations are accessible to those with disabilities, and interpreter services for those with hearing impairment will be provided if requested 48 hours before the hearing. Requests for this service can be made in writing or by calling Sonya Barbosa, at 222- 8463 or RI Relay (800) 745-5555.

Written comments may be submitted to Sonya Barbosa, at the R.I. Department of Education, 255 Westminster Street, Providence, R.I. 02903 or at Secondary@ride.ri.gov or by fax, to 222-6178.

From RIDE

Data Collection:

4. **LEAs asked to submit personnel assignment information by September 30 – *Action Item***

We would like remind your that the Personnel Assignment Submission (PAS) portal for reporting educator work assignments for the reporting year 2016-17 opened on August 2. LEAs should review and update the work assignments for all staff (certified and non-certified) in the PAS portal located in eRIDE, by **September 30** so that initial federal reporting is as accurate as possible. RIDE personnel will begin contacting LEAs to review PAS

regarding Out of Area, Certified Educators Greater Than 1.0 FTE, and Errors beginning on September 19. We appreciate your attention to reporting quality and timeliness. If you have any questions regarding the PAS, please submit a ticket to the RIDE helpdesk, at:

http://support.ride.ri.gov.

5. **LEAs urged to properly identify and code the exit status for students**

Please properly identify and code the exit status for students. The majority of LEAs currently have last year's students as still enrolled. As RIDE and all LEAs roll over to the new school year, these students, especially graduating seniors, will be coded with a generic "unknown" status because we will have no information on these students' progress. This lack of information will create extra work and data-quality issues for you in the beginning of the new school year, so it is important that you properly code the exits for your students.

If you have any questions about the exiting students, please submit a help-desk ticket, at https://support.ride.ri.gov .

6. *Reminder:* **PARCC results to be available in the Instructional Support System late this month**

The results of the 2015-16 PARCC assessments are expected to be loaded into the Instructional Support System late this month. The Instructional Support system is accessible through RIDEmap, and the PARCC results will be located on the teachers' main dashboard.

The student results will be accessible for the 2016-17 rosters. For teachers and administrators to view the PARCC results, district Teacher-Course-Student (TCS) data need to be loaded by the middle of August.

If you have any questions about the Instructional Support System or PARCC data, please submit a help-desk ticket, at https://support.ride.ri.gov.

7. *Reminder:* **LEAs urged to resolve duplicate, errant enrollment data**

Please make sure you have resolved all duplicates and demographic differences in your enrollment data. When reviewing your reports, you may find it helpful to export the student listing for the Absence Excused and Absence Unexcused reports. Once you have downloaded the file, open the file, and filter the "Not Enrolled" column, i.e., Column Y. This step will show you where you have student records that do not correspond with enrollment records for the selected schools or dates. Often these student records are errant records that need to be removed.

If you have any questions about the duplicate demographic data, please submit a help desk ticket, at https://support.ride.ri.gov .

8. *Reminder:* **Enrollment Census updated to account for students attending state-funded pre-kindergarten**

We have added an additional enrollment type to the enrollment census: You should use the "E" value for students in a state-funded preschool classroom. You should use this code should only

for those students enrolled in a state-funded pre-kindergarten classroom that was funded by a Preschool Expansion grant.

If you have any questions about this new enrollment type, please submit a help-desk ticket, at https://support.ride.ri.gov.

9. *Reminder:* **Several data collections are open, due this month**

The following are upcoming data-collection deadlines:

- August 16: 2016-2017 Enrollment Opens.
- August 19: Enrollment Census Grade Configuration - Sign Off

Information about upcoming data collections can be found on the data collection calendar. Weekly collection webinars provide details regarding upcoming collections, along with a question-and-answer feature.

Early Learning:

10.   **R.I. improves access to high-quality early-learning programs**

The U.S. Department of Education released a report on Tuesday on the progress states have made under the Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge initiative. The report notes that, in Rhode Island, the number of early-learning programs participating in the Tiered Quality Rating and Improvement System (in Rhode Island, that's BrightStars) increased almost eight-fold (795 percent) from 2011 to 2015. The number of children with high needs served by state-funded preschool programs increased more than three-fold

(318 percent). You can read our news release on this report [here](#), and you can read the full report [here](#).

Surveys:

11.   Educators asked to complete survey on educational issues; deadline, August 19

Please see this message from Alan Tenreiro, principal of Cumberland High School:

> I'm writing to ask for your feedback on the most pressing educational issues (as you see them) and how the U.S. Department of Education's Comprehensive Centers can provide assistance to address those issues. I am currently serving on the Regional Advisory Committee for the Northeast and Islands region. I'm asking for your feedback so that I, and the other committee members, can make recommendations to the U.S. Department of Education.

> Please complete the online survey https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/PML2GPN at your earliest convenience but before **August 19**.

> Here is some context for why I'm asking for your feedback and how it will be used:

> The Comprehensive Centers (Centers) program is authorized by Title II of the Educational Technical Assistance Act of 2002 (ETAA), Education Sciences Reform Act (ESRA) of 2002. The U.S. Department of Education (USED) funds these Centers to provide technical assistance to state education agencies (SEAs) that builds SEA capacity

to: support local educational agencies (LEAs or districts) and schools, especially low-performing districts and schools; improve educational outcomes for all students; close achievement gaps; and improve the quality of instruction.

Before a competition for the Centers program is held, the ETAA requires the establishment of ten Regional Advisory Committees (RACs). The purpose of these committees is to collect information on the educational needs of each of the ten regions. To the extent the Secretary deems appropriate, the USED will use the information submitted by the RACs, along with other relevant regional surveys of needs, to establish priorities for the next cohort of Centers.

Thanks for taking the time to read this message, and complete the survey!

Network Services:

12.   **OSHEAN sends notice that LISTSERV.RI.NET listservs will shut down at the end of the year**

OSHEAN – the organization that has managed the LISTSERV.RI.NET group of listservs many of you use – will take down its listserv server as of December 31 and will not replace it. This announcement means that you will no longer be able to access or use any of the listservs that OSHEAN manages after the end of this year.

On Wednesday, OSHEAN sent the following notice to all its listserv owners.

You are receiving this message because your email address is listed as an owner or editor of a list maintained at listserv.ri.net.

Since 1996, OSHEAN has operated LISTSERV, allowing members to maintain discussion and distribution lists to facilitate communication.

As of **December 31** OSHEAN will decommission the legacy RINET Listserv server. This means that if you're using the Listserv server for bulk emails you may wish to begin developing a plan to move subscribers to other services. If you currently use Google or Office 365, the creation of distribution groups can provide the ability to send bulk emails to targeted groups. In addition to distribution groups, email services can also be used based on member needs; MailChimp, Constant Contact, and SendGrid are a few examples. Users are encouraged to migrate their lists to an alternative service as soon as possible.

In light of this announcement, we will transfer our own listservs from the OSHEAN server to an alternate service before the end of the year, and we will send a notice through the existing listservs when we have done so.

If you have any questions about the OSHEAN listservs, we suggest that your call OSHEAN Network Support, at (877) 390-4563.

Innovation:

13.   *Reminder:* **Early-bird registration open for 5th Annual Innovation Powered by Technology Conference**

Register today and save for the [5th annual Innovation Powered by Technology Conference](#), scheduled for September 17, at the Rhode Island Convention Center. The early-bird special ends **August 26**. Don't miss out!

Connect with fellow educators and school leaders on the effective use of technology, digital learning, and blended learning. Collaborate with and be inspired by educators and students from across Rhode Island. Immerse yourself in ideas, strategies, and resources. Meet face to face with well-respected professionals in the education field. Be part of the 5th annual statewide conference and connect, communicate, and collaborate about strong and meaningful pathways leading to student success. Learn how Rhode Island educators are systematically creating the conditions for success for a true personalized learning experience to occur.

There will be something for everyone, including student demonstrations, hands-on experiences, strategies and solutions, panel discussions, networking conversations, digital-champion celebrations, and immediate opportunities to get involved in the movement. Learn from the Rhode Island Mayoral Academies about the 12 Summit Basecamp schools in Rhode Island. Jump on the bus tour on Friday, September 16, to visit three of the Summit Basecamp schools in Rhode Island. Extend summer learning through the URI Summer Institute on Digital Learning, the Rhode Island Society of Technology Educators Google Apps for Education Summit, and the Highlander Institute Fuse RI Programs. Gain access to free platforms, tools, and apps. Connect with sponsors providing just-in-time solutions that can accelerate personalization in your schools.

For more information about the conference, visit http://ride.ri.gov/conference or email Holly Walsh, at holly.walsh@ride.ri.gov.

From the U.S. Department of Education (USED)

14.   Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services issues guidance on support for students with disabilities

The U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) has issued guidance in the form of a Dear Colleague Letter (DCL) that emphasizes the requirement that schools provide positive behavioral supports to students with disabilities who need them. It also clarifies that the repeated use of disciplinary actions may suggest that children with disabilities may not be receiving appropriate behavioral interventions and supports. When schools fail to consider and provide for needed behavioral supports through the Individualized Education Program (IEP), it is likely to result in children not receiving the free appropriate public education to which they are entitled under federal law.

Current law allows educators to remove students with disabilities from their classrooms if the student violates a code of conduct. Data indicate students with disabilities are disciplined at far higher rates than their non-disabled peers. The DCL includes two resource documents to assist teachers and school leaders. The USED is providing supports to assist teachers with classroom management strategies and assist schools in implementing school wide behavioral efforts to create safe and effective environments where all students are given an opportunity to positively engage in their education.

To better address school discipline and to shine a spotlight on inequities, the USED has updated its school discipline webpage, [#Rethink Discipline](). This online tool contains data, graphics, and other information on the prevalence, impact, and legal implications of suspensions and expulsions; resources on effective alternatives; and ways to effectively create positive school climates. The webpage also highlights the disproportionate rate at which black students, particularly black males, receive out-of-school suspensions, and data on suspended preschoolers, by race and gender.

See [this page]() for more guidance from USED on school climate and discipline.

(Regarding schoolwide behavior strategies to reduce the use of discipline for all students, you may also want to see the Alternatives to Out of School Suspension [strategies]() on the RIDE website.)

From other state agencies

15. **EMA offers hurricane-awareness course on two dates, September 7, 8**

The National Disaster Preparedness Training Center (NDPTC), in partnership with the Rhode Island Office of Emergency Management, would like to invite you to attend the NDPTC's Hurricane Awareness course, in Providence.

This four-hour awareness-level course provides emergency managers, first responders, and community members from all sectors with a basic understanding of the latest knowledge in hurricane science, forecasting, warning, and preparedness. This

course enhances the ability of state and local decision-makers to identify and describe the hazards associated with hurricanes and to better prepare for and mitigate the impacts of high winds, heavy rain, and storm surge.

We are offering two deliveries (of the same course), September 7 and September 8, from 8 a.m. to noon, at the Providence Office of Emergency Management, 591 Charles Street.

To register, please contact:

Michelle Russo
Michelle.Russo@ema.ri.gov
462-7122

The courses are offered at no direct cost to participants, and we hope to see you there!

From other organizations

16.   Workshop for educators on economics scheduled for August 18

The Rhode Island Jump$tart Coalition and the Rhode Island Council for Economic Education invite you to attend the free Common Sense Economics workshop that will be held at Rhode Island College on Thursday, **August 18**, from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. All workshop attendees will receive a complimentary copy of the latest edition of the Common Sense Economics book and access to free online resources. A $50 stipend and a letter certifying attendance will be issued to every participant who attends this day-long professional development event. Continental breakfast and lunch are included.

This interactive workshop will provide a valuable opportunity for high-school and upper-middle-school educators to access new teaching materials, share teaching ideas, and network with colleagues from across the state and region. See this story about last year's Common Sense Economics workshop that was held at Rhode Island College on March 20, 2015:

http://rijumpstart.org/news/common-sense-economics-workshop/

New participants, as well as educators who attended last year's workshop, are welcome to attend this year's workshop. The upcoming program will focus on updates to the recently published 3rd edition of Common Sense Economics, with an emphasis on personal finance materials and lessons.

We encourage you to register now on Eventbrite to reserve your place at the August 18 workshop:

https://common-sense-economics-ri-2016.eventbrite.com or click here.

Please share this invitation with interested educators you may know. Thank you for your ongoing support of students' financial literacy.

17.   **Registration open for Rhode Island Foreign Language Association fall conference to be held October 1**

Registration for the RIFLA 2016 Fall Conference, which will be held on Saturday, **October 1**, from 7:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m., at Cumberland High School, is now open. The conference features

sessions for world-language teachers and teacher educators, as well as community members, parents, policymakers, school administrators, and others committed to developing the linguistic and cultural strengths of our community. This year's theme, *Engagement = Lifelong Language Learning*, encourages participants to think beyond the language-education classroom to include engagement in the community for social, political, and economic purposes, and it provides a space for networking and dialogue toward Recruiting the Next Generation of Language Educators (Have ideas? Join us!). We will begin this dialogue with our [Opening Session Plenary Panelists](#): Juana Horton, President and CEO of Horton Interpreting Services, Inc. and President of the International Medical Interpreters Association; Fabrice Jaumont, Program Officer for the FACE Foundation in New York and Education Attaché for the Embassy of France to the United States; Erin Pyne, East Greenwich High School Alumna and Environmental Scientist; Raymond Two Hawks Watson, Recipient of the Rhode Island Foundation 2016 Innovation Fellowship for the Providence Cultural Equity Initiative; and Facilitator Doris De Los Santos, Executive Director of Partnership, Development, and Community Engagement, Providence Public Schools.

Session topics include:

- Implementing the Seal of Biliteracy
- The Bilingual Revolution: Empowering Parents and Creating more Dual Language Programs in Public Schools, with Fabrice Jaumont
- Implementing a Project-Based Language Learning Model in a Proficiency-Based Language Program
- Social and Emotional Learning: Developing a Cross Cultural Language

- Linking National, State, and Local Advocacy, with Bill Rivers, Ph.D., Executive Director, Joint National Committee for Languages

Whether you are looking to strengthen an existing world-language or dual-language program or to start a new program, we hope you will join us!

Visit rifla.org for more information and to register.
Register by September 16 at a reduced rate.

18.   Superintendents asked to complete survey on CPR training

32 states now require CPR training prior to high-school graduation. Researchers at the University of Louisville are seeking to better understand the methods by which students are being trained.

Would you (or appropriate staff member) please consider filling out this brief online survey (5 minutes) regarding CPR training in your school?

https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/HSCPRSurvey

This study has been approved by the University of Louisville Institutional Review Board, and all answers are anonymous.

Thank you for your support of this important research. Contact the investigator, Dr. Lorrel Brown, at Lorrel.brown@louisville.edu, with any questions or concerns about this survey.

RIDE will post this field memo on Tuesday, at:

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