

Commissioner's Weekly Field Memo
Friday, September 5, 2014

Notes from Commissioner Gist

1. RIDE seeks [Presidential Scholar](#) nominees by **November 12 – Action Item**
2. High-schools encouraged to participate in [United States Senate Youth Program](#)
3. Data published on attendance, [chronic absenteeism](#); workshop scheduled for September 18

From the R.I. Department of Education (RIDE)

Educator Certification:

4. LEAs asked to review, update eRIDE information on [work assignments](#) by **September 30 – Action Item**

Assessments:

5. [PARCC](#) learning modules for educators available online
6. LEAs to have access to [NECAP Science](#) results on September 15, public release scheduled for **September 23**
7. RIDE schedules sessions for [test coordinators](#), others on PARCC assessments

Technology:

8. Registration is open for 3rd annual RIDE Innovation Powered by Technology [conference](#)
9. RIDE will launch Phase II of the [Wireless Classroom Initiative](#)

Transportation:

10. Statewide transportation program will not operate on [Primary Day \(Tuesday\)](#), Election Day

Finance:

11. Fiscal Year 2013 [UCOA](#) data posted

12. **Reminder:** Final [Fiscal Year 2014](#) files due **September 30**

Awards:

13. RIDE announces 2014-[15 Green Ribbon Schools](#) award program; applications due **January 15, 2015**

From the U.S. Department of Education

From other organizations

14. Applicants sought for awards to high-achieving [urban schools](#)

15. Grants available to support [STEM](#) initiatives in high-poverty schools

Action Item Calendar

September 19: [RITEAAF](#) forms due

September 30: UCOA FY 2014 data due (see [below](#))

September 30: Updated work-assignment data due (see [below](#))

November 12: Presidential Scholar nominations due (see [below](#))

Notes from Commissioner Gist

1. RIDE seeks Presidential Scholar nominees by November 12 – Action Item

The Commission on Presidential Scholars, of the U.S. Department of Education, has asked me to nominate students from Rhode Island as 2015 U.S. Presidential Scholars. I am seeking your help in selecting the best possible nominees from Rhode Island.

The Presidential Scholars Program honors outstanding high-school seniors who are selected on the basis of either outstanding scholarship (based on SAT or ACT scores) or accomplishment in the arts or creative writing. In order to expand the nominee pool, the Commission has asked me to nominate additional candidates, "students who, while demonstrating outstanding scholarship, might not otherwise be nominated through the current SAT/ACT or arts-recognition processes."

To help me select these additional Rhode Island nominees, I ask you to nominate one male and one female high-school senior (who are citizens or legal permanent residents of the U.S.,

graduating between January and June of 2015) from each high school in your LEA. In selecting U.S. Presidential Scholars from among the nominees, the Commission will consider:

- involvement and service, in school and community;
- leadership and character;
- writing samples;
- academic achievements; and
- extraordinary achievement, heavy work load, family responsibilities, or obstacles overcome.

Each student you nominate should prepare an application that includes:

- his or her resume, including home mailing address;
- a letter of reference from you or a school official that explains how the student stands out as having outstanding scholarship; and
- a brief (approximately 500 to 750 words) essay that responds to this question: "What special challenges or hurdles have you overcome while still achieving high academic success?"

Either you or your high-school principal(s) will be our contact in this process. I would ask either you or your principals (not the nominated students) to submit your nominations to Dana Wilson (dana.wilson@ride.ri.gov) by November 12.

From nominations we receive, I will select up to ten nominees from Rhode Island (up to five male students, five female students).

The Commission will select finalists by mid-January 2015, and Scholars will be announced at the beginning of May. Scholars will receive an expense-paid trip to Washington, D.C., in June. For more information about the program, see:

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

2. High-schools encouraged to participate in United States Senate Youth Program

I am pleased to announce an exciting scholarship opportunity for your students. High-school juniors and seniors are eligible to participate in the 53rd Annual United States Senate Youth Program (USSYP). All 50 states offer this program, and Rhode Island has participated for many years. Each state selects two students to represent their state for a week of special activities in Washington, D.C., where the students interact with elected officials and people in top government positions. Each student selected will also receive a \$5,000 scholarship. The students we have selected to represent Rhode Island have always reported that they enjoyed a unique and valuable educational experience.

RIDE will use a three-phase screening process, including a test, an essay, and an interview, to select the two student representatives and two alternates. Each school that wishes to participate must name a program coordinator who will be responsible for administering the test and essay portion of this process at their high school.

We have sent information on this program to those in your high school or high schools who have coordinated this program in past years. I encourage you to make sure that your high schools participate in the United States Senate Youth Program. If you do not have a high-school coordinator for this program, I encourage you to speak with your high-school principal about participation this year.

Please be sure to have your high-school principal(s) forward to RIDE no later than **September 14** the name and e-mail address of the coordinator for each high school. Please have your high schools send the program-coordinator information to Dana.Wilson@ride.ri.gov.

If you have any questions about this program, please contact Dana Wilson, at the above e-mail address or at 222-4690. More information and program forms are available at <http://hearstfdn.org/ussyp>.

3. Data published on attendance, chronic absenteeism; workshop scheduled for September 18

As I noted in several Field Memos last month, one of our priorities this year is to take positive steps to reduce chronic absenteeism in our schools. Rhode Island is working with five other states on an Advisory Committee to End Chronic Absence. We can anticipate media inquiries on this issue this month, as September has been designated Attendance Awareness Month.

One of our commitments is to provide schools, districts, and the public with timely data on absenteeism rates. With that in mind, we have just released attendance and chronic absenteeism data for the preceding school year, and the reports are available on [InfoWorks!](#), including data at the state, district, and school level. These reports provide valuable information that can help us promote the importance of regular attendance as we begin the school year. I invite you to share data on chronic absenteeism with your team and to communicate with parents and families about the importance of attending school every day.

I also want to let you know that the Rhode Island Mentoring Partnership and the Cranston Public Schools Attendance Counts! task force will hold a special workshop on Thursday, September 18, from 3:30 to 5 p.m., at the Cranston Public Library, 140 Sockanosset Cross Rd.

Led by Dr. Rosemary Burns, the Cranston Data Coordinator, the workshop will give a brief overview of the attendance and tardiness problem in elementary and secondary schools and will focus on the positive work being done in Cranston to improve student attendance.

All are invited to attend this workshop, which will provide opportunities to discuss strategies for improving attendance.

Registration is requested by **Wednesday** (September 10). To register, contact Sue Thomas, at stthomas@mentorri.org or 732-7700, and please feel free to share this invitation with your principals and others on your team. I will participate in the workshop, and I look forward to seeing you there.

From RIDE

Educator Certification:

4. LEAs asked to review, update eRIDE information on work assignments by September 30 – Action Item

RIDE is pleased to announce the opening of the Personnel Assignment Submission (PAS) for the reporting year 2014-15. LEAs are encouraged to review and update the work assignments for certified staff in the PAS portal, located in eRIDE, and to update them this month. Beginning next month, RIDE will review the assignment information for educators who are flagged as “Out-of Area.” Based on feedback from the PAS in the previous school year, changes have been programmed into the validation rules. The changes are summarized in the user guide that is available in the PAS module. Please submit a ticket to the RIDE helpdesk (<http://support.ride.ri.gov>) if you have any questions about the PAS.

Assessments:

5. PARCC learning modules for educators available online

The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) is developing a series of online professional learning modules to help teachers, counselors, school leaders, and school and district testing coordinators understand the new PARCC assessment system and put the new high-quality assessments to work for them and their students.

These tools will help educators learn how to read results from the assessments, make inferences about the results, and identify learning gaps in time to make relevant instructional decisions and modifications.

The first two completed online professional-training modules focus on the PARCC Common Assessments Overview and the PARCC Accessibility System. These are a great resources to orient educators to the new PARCC assessment system:

[How To Use the Modules — Watch this first!](#)

[PARCC Assessments Overview](#)

In Theory: practical theories behind PARCC assessments and related goals

In Practice: Information about how a student will be assessed throughout his or her school career and that offers an assessment walkthrough (based on the role selected — administrator, primary teacher, secondary teacher- English language arts, secondary teacher - mathematics)

In Context: Valuable, downloadable resources focused on the PARCC Model Content Frameworks for mathematics and English language arts

[PARCC Accessibility System](#)

In Theory: An overview of accessibility features with details about how they are built into the PARCC design

In Practice: Information about how teachers use accommodations in the classroom

In Context: Downloadable accessibility features and accommodation manual

The modules are posted on the RIDE website, at:

www.ride.ri.gov/PARCC

6. LEAs to have access to NECAP Science results on September 15, public release scheduled for September 23

The results of the 2014 New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP) Science tests will soon be available to schools and districts. The following information outlines the timing of the release of results and instructions for accessing and downloading student-level data files and reports from the Web.

September 15 (9 a.m.): Schools and districts will be able to access a password-protected site to download all reports, which includes School and District Results Reports, District Summary Reports, Item Analysis Reports for science, Released Items and Support Materials documents, as well as the *Guide to Using the 2014 NECAP Science Reports*. All school and district reports refer to Testing Year, which means data presented for each student are for the May 2014 administration of the test and the school at which he or she took the test. LEAs will be able to download student-level data files that contain demographics, scores, student-questionnaire results, and student performance on the released items.

Two hard copies of the Student Reports will be shipped to schools on September 23.

*Please note that all summative results are embargoed from public release until **September 23** at 3 p.m.*

September 23 (3 p.m.): Schools and districts will no longer be required to provide a password to have access to the non-confidential results. The general public will have access to all non-confidential NECAP science results via a link on the RIDE website:

www.ride.ri.gov/NECAP-results.

Non-confidential results are those that do not contain any student-level information. Those reports include the School, District, and State Results Reports and Summary Reports. The public will also have access to the Released Items and Support Materials documents, and the *Guide to Using the 2014 NECAP Science Reports*.

Instructions for accessing the password-protected NECAP Science results online:

1. Go to <http://iservices.measuredprogress.org>
2. Select New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP) from the drop-down menu and click "Enter."
3. On the left-hand side of the screen, click on "NECAP Reporting."
4. On the next screen, click on the map of Rhode Island.
5. Enter your user name and password in the appropriate boxes and click on the "Log In" button.
6. A successful log-in will direct you to the Rhode Island Analysis & Reporting System home page.
7. Use the tabs at the top of the screen to navigate through the reports. Follow the detailed instructions provided on each screen.

If you need any assistance accessing your reports any time after 9 a.m. on September 15, please call the NECAP Service Center at (877) 632-7774. Please note that the password and user-name information is being sent to districts and schools by Measured Progress in a separate memo that will arrive next week. Contact the NECAP Service Center if you have not received your password by September 12.

Finally, Measured Progress will be recording and posting a NECAP Science Reporting webinar to demonstrate the Rhode Island Analysis and Reporting System and to explain the types of reports that are produced for NECAP Science. A link to the recorded webinar will be posted on the RIDE website, at www.ride.ri.gov/NECAP-results, during the week of September 15.

7. RIDE schedules sessions for test coordinators, others on PARCC assessments

RIDE will offer full-day sessions this fall to prepare our schools and districts for PARCC assessments that will be administered during this school year. These sessions are intended to help district and school test coordinators, district technology directors, and special education administrators prepare for technology preparation and test coordination and setup. The sessions will also provide updates on accessibility features and accommodations as well as updates on policies and practices that have been put in place since the field test last spring.

The locations and dates for the sessions are listed below; each session will cover the same material and is limited to 50 participants. More information, a topical agenda, and eRIDE registration links and guidance will be sent next week.

University of Rhode Island (Kingston Campus):

October 14
October 29

East Bay Educational Collaborative:

October 21
November 13

Community College of Rhode Island (Knight Campus):

October 22
November 5

Northern Rhode Island Collaborative:

October 24
November 7
November 20

New England Institute of Technology (East Greenwich Campus):

November 17
November 18

If you have any questions about these sessions, please contact PARCC@ride.ri.gov.

Technology:

8. Registration is open for 3rd annual RIDE Innovation Powered by Technology conference

Administrators, teachers, students, and interested community members are invited to register [online](#) for the 3rd annual RIDE Innovation Powered by Technology conference, to be held on October 25, at the Rhode Island Convention Center, 1 Sabin St., Providence, from 8 am. to 4 p.m. This is an exciting opportunity to engage in systemic planning around the effective use of technology and digital learning. The conference will include a number of sessions designed and presented by leaders in digital learning, including many Rhode Island educators. Speakers include:

- Lisa Duty, The Learning Accelerator;
- Julie Freeland, The Christensen Institute;
- Erin Klein, award-winning educator;

- Rich Kiker, Google-certified trainer and eLearning architect;
- David Moscarelli, 2015 Rhode Island Teacher of the Year; and
- Tom Murray, The Alliance for Excellence in Education.

9. RIDE will launch Phase II of the Wireless Classroom Initiative

We are pleased to announce that, as a result of the successful partnership among LEAs, vendors, equipment manufacturers, and RIDE, we are projecting that additional funds will be available under the Wireless Classroom Initiative (WCI) after covering the initial scope of “core” classrooms. This opportunity will allow us to address the concerns expressed during our proposal reviews with some LEAs that other spaces in addition to core classrooms are used for instructional purposes, group study, and testing. Examples of such spaces include cafeterias, gymnasiums, auditoriums, and other auxiliary rooms for speech, reading, and therapy that are routinely used by schools for instruction and testing. Your diligence in managing costs will allow us to launch WCI Phase II to expand wireless coverage in all public schools beyond core classrooms into other spaces used for instruction and instructional support. We agree that having wireless network access in these areas provides instructional benefits. Phase II will also incorporate schools that have opened since the program began, in 2013. Additional information will be distributed shortly regarding Phase II of the WCI program.

Transportation:

10. Statewide transportation program will not operate on Primary Day (Tuesday), Election Day

In accordance with RI General Laws 17-1-2(2) and 17-15-1, Rhode Island public schools cannot be in session on the day of each general election and each statewide primary. Accordingly, the statewide transportation program will not be in operation on these dates. E-mail notification was sent to all of the schools to whom we transport students with a request that they notify parents.

Finance:

11. Fiscal Year 2013 UCOA data posted

Fiscal Year 2013 UCOA data reports have now been posted. These links will take you to the UCOA data:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/FundingFinance/SchoolDistrictFinancialData/UniformChartofAccounts.aspx>
<http://www.ride.ri.gov/FundingFinance/SchoolDistrictFinancialData/UniformChartofAccounts.aspx>

Final per-pupil and revenue reports are being compiled and will be posted shortly.

12. *Reminder: Final Fiscal Year 2014 files due September 30*

We issue a sincere thank you to the School Business Administrators who have worked diligently to submit data files through the 4th quarter of the current year. A reminder that final, zero-error Fiscal Year 2014 files are due at RIDE no later than **September 30**. Please note that these are not audited files but rather files that match the general ledger of the district after accruals and corrections are made. Since audits and agreed-upon procedures (AUP) are not generally completed by September 30, LEAs with adjustments required as a result of the audit or AUP review must correct and submit a revised file at that time.

Awards:

13. RIDE announces 2014-15 Green Ribbon Schools award program; applications due January 15, 2015

We are pleased to announce that Rhode Island will once again participate in the Green Ribbon Schools program. RIDE is looking to identify schools that have the least impact on the environment, the most positive impact on the health of students and staff, and the most effective preparation of students for careers and citizenship in the 21st century. From the pool of applicants, RIDE will submit up to four nominations to the U.S. Department of Education for national award consideration.

Modeled after the Blue Ribbon Schools program, the Green Ribbon Schools award recognized exemplary achievement in environmental impact, health, and environmental education. Rhode Island is the only New England state to participate in all three years of the program, which produced six national Green Ribbon Schools award recipients in our state: Classical High School, Nathan Bishop Middle School, Providence Career and Technical Academy (all in Providence); the Claiborne Pell Elementary School, in Newport; and two charter public schools: The Compass School and The Green School.

All elementary and secondary public and nonpublic schools are eligible to apply. Schools that would like to be nominated for this award must complete and e-mail the application to Joseph.daSilva@ride.ri.gov by **January 15, 2015**.

If you have questions about the Green Ribbon Schools program, you may call Joseph da Silva, our School Construction Coordinator, at 222-4294, or e-mail him at Joseph.daSilva@ride.ri.gov.

For more information and to obtain the 2014-15 Rhode Island Green Ribbon Schools application please visit:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/FundingFinance/SchoolConstructionProgram/SchoolFacilities.aspx>.

From other organizations

14. Applicants sought for awards to high-achieving urban schools

Please see this message from the National Center for Urban School Transformation:

Each year the National Excellence in Urban Education Award Program identifies and celebrates some of the nation's best urban schools. These urban public and public charter schools serve low-income communities, do not use selective admission criteria, and boast achievement results that exceed state averages for all students. The award criteria and award applications are available at <http://www.ncust.org>. The application deadline is **November 14**. The Center is particularly seeking applications from the highest-achieving urban schools in metropolitan areas with a population greater than 50,000 residents, including Blue Ribbon Schools, Title I Distinguished Schools, urban alternative schools, and other schools that have earned academic distinctions.

15. Grants available to support STEM initiatives in high-poverty schools

Please see this notice from The Verizon Foundation:

The Verizon Foundation is looking to partner with K-12 public schools to improve student engagement and achievement in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM). Through the Verizon Innovate Learning Grant program, schools will be eligible for \$20,000 grants to:

- engage students in STEM in new, innovative ways;
- help teachers more effectively use technology; and
- create more personalized learning environments to help students succeed.

Public elementary, middle or high schools where 70 percent of the students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch are eligible to apply for a chance to win a Verizon Innovate Learning Grant. This grant helps schools in significantly underserved areas to expand or build new STEM initiatives that leverage technology for their students.

We encourage schools in Rhode Island to submit an original idea to bring new learning to students in their community. The deadline for applications is **October 6**. For more information on the Verizon Innovate Learning Grant and to apply, go to:

www.verizon.com/innovateaward.

RIDE will post this field memo on Tuesday, at:

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