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Friday, December 13, 2013

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Notes from Commissioner Gist

1. Common Core community forums scheduled; RIDE offers to hold additional forums in local communities

As part of our commitment to adopting world-class standards, we have been moving forward with the first year of full transition to the Common Core State Standards. In Rhode Island, thanks in part to our Race to the Top grant, we have been able to work directly over the past three years with about 6,000 Rhode Island

educators to prepare for this transition to the Common Core. Rhode Island is certainly ready to align our instruction with the Common Core State Standards – and that alignment and implementation process has been proceeding smoothly across our state. Educators are observing that the Common Core enables teachers and students to use their time more seriously and effectively; that is the Common Core provides not more standards, but standards that are fewer and more clear. Parents, too, are learning about the Common Core and are eager for more information, as was evident recently in an excellent and thoughtful meeting on the Common Core in the Bristol Warren district.

The release of the 2012 PISA results last week, which showed that students across the United States perform only average or below average in comparison with their peers around the world, only serves to reinforce the need for these internationally benchmarked standards.

Because the Common Core standards are new and because many parents and community members are unfamiliar with the Common Core, we have brought together a team of “Common Core Ambassadors,” who have been leading a series of public forums on the Common Core in local community settings. The ambassadors, joined by senior RIDE staff members, held several successful forums to date, and many more are scheduled for the new year.

Please support us in planning these events and in helping to spread the word about the Common Core. We have posted information about the Common Core on our website, at:

www.ride.ri.gov/Transition-CCSS

You can also find an outreach handout on the Common Core, at:

www.ride.ri.gov/CCSS-Outreach

We are willing and eager to hold forums in any community that's interested, so if you would like us to schedule a Common Core forum in your community, please let me know.

2. Rhode Island high schools invited to participate in OECD Test for Schools; America Achieves can pay full cost for up to 20 schools

As I've noted in several recent Field Memos, America Achieves has invited Rhode Island high schools to participate in the OECD Test for Schools, a new international assessment that is modeled on the well-known PISA international assessment, the "gold standard" for critical thinking. We know that we have excellent education in schools across our state, and this assessment gives us the chance to calibrate against an international standard what we are doing well. The assessment will also provide each participating high school with information to improve from its starting point. We want to lift up the performance of all of our students and all of our schools, and the OECD Test for Schools can help us to do so.

Last year, five Rhode Island districts participated in the pilot version of the OECD Test for Schools – perhaps the highest participation rate in the country, which really demonstrated that Rhode Island educators are thinking globally. Based on last year's pilot, I was very impressed with the quality of the report that the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) prepared for participating districts. These reports, about 100

pages each, contain not only in-depth information about how each high school compares with others around the world but also includes results of a survey that every student completes. Of course we have our own longitudinal student surveys in Rhode Island (SurveyWorks), but, again, the OECD survey enables schools to compare responses on an international scale.

Last month America Achieves held an informational webinar for Rhode Island schools to answer questions and to provide information about the OECD Test for Schools. You can view a recording of the webinar [here](#).

Among the key points the folks from America Achieves emphasized during the webinar were:

- the test is data-rich but manageable – administered in about 3 ½ hours and involving no more than 85 students in larger high schools – and far fewer participating students in smaller participating high schools;
- the test is not in any way an accountability measure – it is a diagnostic tool only, and participation is voluntary;
- every participating school will receive a detailed report within about three months of the assessment ;
- the testing contractor (McGraw-Hill) will manage the selection of participating students and the test administration; and
- schools can select the date of participation – any time through the end of March.

I can also add that the vast majority of participating students (randomly selected 15-year-olds) will be in grades 9 or 10 and will

therefore not be participating in the NECAP assessments during this school year.

Of course, participation is entirely voluntary – for schools, and for students. We want people to participate because they believe this will be a valuable opportunity. The OECD Test for Schools is an assessment focused on problem-solving and critical thinking, which should have huge value in our state, as we all want to ensure that our students have these vital skills. The report that participating schools will receive will also provide an opportunity for professional development, as you can use these reports with your team to evaluate your current plans, think about what you want to do differently, and consider what new areas you may want to focus on going forward.

The deadline for requesting participation is the **end of January**. Whether you were on the webinar or not, please let me know if you plan to participate so that we can coordinate participation requests across the state. (America Achieves can pay the *full* participation costs for up to 20 Rhode Island high schools.)

More information is also available at www.americaachieves.org/oecd. If you would like to speak directly with someone from the team on America Achieves, let me know and I can provide you with contact information.

3. Families receiving solicitation letters regarding college admissions, financial aid

We have received word from our partners at the R.I. Higher Education Assistance Authority (RIHEAA) that families of students in at least one community are receiving letters from a Nevada-based company called C3. The letters, which include student

names, begin by stating: “You and your student, [first name], are scheduled to participate in an education group presentation followed by a personal interview to help determine college admission and financial aid eligibility.” Parents are then asked to register online and to call and confirm this “appointment.”

Families in your community should be notified that this message does not come from RIDE, RIHEAA, or your school department. As Gail Mance-Rios, the Acting Director of RIHEAA, notes: “These ‘free’ services typically have an aggressive sales pitch at the end for the family to sign up for their ‘paid’ services.”

From RIDE

Assessments:

4. RIDE encourages use of Test Construction Tool to create local assessments, requests assistance in benchmarking

The Test Construction Tool (part of the Interim Assessment System) is available to create local tests, quizzes, and formative and interim assessments. Currently, we have a small pool of test items available for English language arts (ELA), mathematics, science, and social studies. There will be additional items added to all content areas throughout the school year, with the next set of items to be added in February and March. This year, reports will be available only through the Instructional Management System for math and ELA tests; however, educators can still either use the science and social studies items and create their own reports for them or use these test items informally without the need for formal reports.

The items in the tool are new and do not yet contain accompanying benchmark papers for constructed-response items, which will aid in the scoring process. We plan to create benchmark papers, but we need your help! As educators score the constructed-response items, we encourage them to send us electronic copies of the student responses. For information on how to do so, please visit the Interim Assessment [webpage](#). There, you will also find step-by-step guides on how to use the Test Construction Tool, and the scoring, test-management, and scanning applications.

5. High schools asked to submit information for AP fee waivers by December 20 – *Action Item*

Under the U.S. Department of Education Advanced Placement Test Fee Waiver Program, RIDE receives federal funding to provide College Board Advanced Placement tests to low-income students at a reduced rate. The purpose of the Advanced Placement Test Fee Reimbursement Program is to alleviate some of the financial burdens that prevent many economically disadvantaged students from taking the College Board Advanced Placement (AP).

Currently, there is no funding available from the U.S. Department of Education; however, in the anticipation of available funding, all AP test coordinators are asked to complete a survey identifying the number of students qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch who intend to take AP exams. This survey is required so that we can gather the information necessary to apply for the Advanced Placement Test Fee Waiver Program when if and when funds become available. It is important that every high school complete a survey so that we have an accurate count of students when

applying for funds. Please provide AP test coordinators with the following link:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/APTestWaiver>

The surveys are to be completed by **December 20**.

If you have any questions about the AP process, please contact Jennifer Solek, at 222-8406 or jennifer.solek@ride.ri.gov.

Educator Evaluations:

6. *Reminder:* RIDE seeking current examples of SLOs, SOOs

RIDE is issuing an “All Call” for teacher, building administrator, and support professional Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) and Student Outcome Objectives (SOOs) from the current school year. We will use these objectives to produce additional samples to illustrate possible approaches and best practices. Samples from all content areas and grade levels are welcomed, and they need not be perfect or represent the best samples in a school or district. Furthermore, we will redact all identifying information such as names of schools, teachers, and students. You can submit samples, by **December 31**, through e-mail as Word or PDF files, to SLOsamples@ride.ri.gov. We know that we will all benefit from sharing our thinking and by learning from one another.

Legal:

7. Commissioner issues decisions on residency, compulsory attendance

Commissioner Gist has issued the following decisions:

In an interim order, the Woonsocket School District is required to provide FAPE to a student who is a residential patient of a pediatric nursing facility in Providence:

http://www2.ride.ri.gov/applications/RideDirectory/DOCS/2013/024-13_IN_RE_V.S.S._DOE_093013.pdf

In the matter of residency of Student K. Doe, a student who has resided in Warwick since the start of the school year must be immediately dis-enrolled from North Kingstown:

http://www2.ride.ri.gov/applications/RideDirectory/DOCS/2013/025-13_Residency_of_Student_K._DOE_120313.pdf

There is no violation of the compulsory-attendance law when a student is dismissed one hour before the end of the school day for purposes of receiving ABA therapy:

http://www2.ride.ri.gov/applications/RideDirectory/DOCS/2013/026-13_Student_G._Doe_Vs._Cumberland_S.C._120413.pdf

Training and workshops:

8. RIDE posts further information about scheduled training workshops on the PARCC Field Test

In response to questions from the field about the January 7 training workshop on the PARCC Field Test, we have posted some further information about the training here:

www.ride.ri.gov/PARCC-Field-Test-Training-FAQs

We have also posted the tentative agendas for the training sessions, at:

www.ride.ri.gov/PARCC-Field-Test

If you have any questions about the training, please contact Kamlyn Keith, at PARCC@ride.ri.gov or 222-8465.

Diploma System:

9. RIDE sets NECAP 2014 NECAP retest dates; RIDE will call LEAs to discuss NECAP retests logistics

RIDE is providing a NECAP retest in early spring 2014 as an option for high-school students to meet the assessment requirement for earning a diploma. Eligible students include those who did not show progress or earn partial proficiency on either the 2012 or 2013 tests in math or reading and who are *not* submitting their score(s) from another RIDE-approved test.

In response to concerns about testing locations, RIDE will support test administration in every LEA between February 25 and March 7, with additional dates for snow days. Each LEA will be assigned two test dates, one for math and one for reading, as needed.

Next week, December 16 through December 20, RIDE will call each LEA testing coordinator to share information regarding the NECAP retest, including test dates, test-administration logistics, test-administration training dates, and other LEA and RIDE roles and responsibilities. This call will be followed up with more

specific information, as we get closer to the test-administration dates.

During this phone call, we will need to collect:

- the approximate number of students who will be take the NECAP assessment in the spring of 2014;
- information on students who will need test accommodations;
- the names of LEA test administrators; and
- testing locations within the LEA.

If you have questions about the NECAP retest at this time, please e-mail Cali Cornell (cali.cornell@ride.ri.gov), in our Office of Multiple Pathways, or Kate Schulz (kate.schulz@ride.ri.gov), in our Office of Instruction, Assessment, and Curriculum.

10. Students must complete form before Accuplacer testing; form to be posted on RIDE, CCRI websites

For high-school seniors who chose to take the Accuplacer assessment as a RIDE-approved test option to meet the state-assessment graduation requirement, The Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI) and the New England Institute of Technology are available testing centers for high-school students. A common form has been developed that must accompany students when they arrive at these locations to take the assessment. If the student is under age 18, a parent signature is *required* for release of Accuplacer scores to the student's school. CCRI will post the form on its website early next week. The CCRI form will be available on the RIDE website next week as well. Due to the need for CCRI to test more than 5,000 late registrants, CCRI will not be available for Accuplacer testing during the month of January. For

more information about Accuplacer testing, contact Cali Cornell (cali.cornell@ride.ri.gov).

Conferences:

11. New England Secondary School Consortium schedules regional conference on high-school redesign

The New England Secondary School Consortium, of which RIDE is a member, will hold its fifth annual conference, “High School Redesign in Action,” on March 20-21, at the Four Points by Sheridan, in Norwood, Massachusetts. The purpose of the conference is for educators to share success stories, exchange best practices, and continue to build momentum for innovations that will prepare all students for success in the colleges, careers, and communities of the 21st century. Educators, students, policy-makers, and teams from middle and secondary schools, along with career and technical education centers and higher education across New England engaged in school improvement are invited to attend.

For the full conference program is online, at:

http://newenglandssc.org/conference/2014_program.

Registration opened last week, and there are already close to a 100 registrations, so please be sure to register soon.

Data and reporting:

12. LEAs asked to review information submitted to RIDE on work assignments – *Action Item*

RIDE is pleased to announce the opening of the Personnel Assignment Submission (PAS) for the current reporting year (2013-14). LEAs are encouraged to review the work assignments for certified staff in the PAS portal located in eRIDE and to update information by the end of the end of the month. Starting next month, RIDE will review the assignment information for educators who are flagged as “Out-of Area.” Changes to the PAS 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.

SurveyWorks:

13. Deadline for participating in SurveyWorks extended to December 20

The SurveyWorks team is extending the deadline for all participants to take the survey to next Friday, **December 20**. Statewide, many parents, teachers, students, and administrators have already taken the survey; however, the extension will enable any participants who have not had ample time for completion or who had limited computer access to complete the survey. The extension will also serve as an opportunity for schools to increase response rates in an effort to improve Rhode Island schools. If any parent, teacher, student, or administrator does not have an access code, site coordinators can call the SurveyWorks help desk, at (877) 787-5725, to obtain a code. If you have additional questions about SurveyWorks, please e-mail Carol Moran, at Carol.Moran@ride.ri.gov .

We appreciate your participation in this survey, which will provide us valuable information in an effort to improve Rhode Island

schools. Thank you for your cooperation as we complete this process.

From the Office of the Governor

14. Connect2Compete to provide low-cost digital access to economically disadvantaged students, families

Please see this message from the Office of the Governor, and please share this message with your principals:

You may have recently read the local paper, seen a news segment, or overheard your colleagues talking about an exciting program called Connect2Compete.

Connect2Compete, is a national nonprofit organization “to improve the lives of all Americans – regardless of age, race, geography, income, or education level – through the use of technology.”

Connect2Compete, in partnership with Cox Communications, will bring the families of students who are eligible for free or reduced-price school lunch online by providing low-cost, high-speed Internet; low-cost computers; and free digital-literacy training.

Students and their families can apply to the program either by phone (855-222-3252) or online, by visiting:

www.Connect2Compete.org/Cox.

Building awareness to families who might like to take advantage of this opportunity is important.

Outreach materials including flyers, voicemail messages, and newsletter copy are available, at www.connect2compete.org/cox-schools. This web page also contains FAQs, a checklist of what's needed to apply, and talking points.

If you have any questions about the Connect2Compete program, please contact Rosie Fernandez at Cox Communications, by e-mail Rosie.Fernandez@cox.com or by phone, at 615-1175.

From other organizations

15. COSEBOC announces award for elementary schools “educating boys and young men of color”

The Coalition of Schools Educating Boys of Color (COSEBOC) is pleased to announce our third annual [COSEBOC School Awards](#) designed to celebrate schools demonstrating success in educating boys and young men of color. This year the COSEBOC School Awards will be focused on schools educating Pre-K through grade-6 students. COSEBOC Award-winning schools will receive a \$10,000 unrestricted grant, and their promising practices will be featured at our Gathering of Leaders, April 24-26, in Jackson, Mississippi.

In addition to focusing on Pre-K-6th-grade schools, this year's process has been streamlined to facilitate applicants. The [application, guidelines and forms](#) are available on our website. Interested schools should review the guidelines and complete the application process by **January 20**.

Do you know of a Pre-K-6 school whose male students of color have academic outcomes and personal characteristics that rival statewide averages of all students? If the answer is yes, please encourage them to apply. And help us spread the word!

RIDE will post this field memo on Tuesday, at:

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