

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

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Action Item Calendar

- Today** (December 5): [Textbook-reimbursement](#) forms due
December 19: Review [student-exit data](#)
January 1: Upgrade to [v2.0 of SCED](#)
January 7: Deadline for PARCC registration (see [below](#))
January 9: Talent Pool nominations due (see [below](#))

Notes from Commissioner Gist

1. RIDE prepares to release 2014 NECAP Science results

As you will recall, in September we received from our testing company, Measured Progress, the preliminary results on the 2014 NECAP science assessments and we shared these results with you for your review. At that time, several of you raised concerns about the scores some of their students received, particularly in grades 4 and 8. I shared your concerns. To ensure that the

results were accurate, we decided to undertake a review of the science assessments and of the scoring process and to hold off on release of the assessment results until we completed this review.

We have now completed this review, and I can report that the assessment itself and the scoring process met all technical requirements needed to report results accurately. We did, however, find several items on the “inquiry task” section of the science assessments for grade 4 and grade 8 that were borderline in meeting these requirements. We found that, because of the wording of some items, students may not have been clear about the question and did not provide the required response. Overall, however, the adjusted scores would change student scores for a small percentage of students by 1 point only and would very rarely raise the scoring level of any student. We are confident that the overall scores and proficiency levels that you received in September are accurate at the state level. We will, however, ask parents and the general public to use caution in interpreting results for students in grades 4 and 8 at the individual-student level and at the school level.

Next week, I will send you a separate correspondence with further details on the review process and on our conclusions following the review. We will hold a webinar on Wednesday at 9 a.m., to provide you with further information and with an opportunity to ask questions:

NECAP Science Briefing

Join us for a webinar on **Wednesday** (December 10) at 9 a.m.

To register, to go:

<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/6873819405346374914>

This webinar is for the NECAP Science Briefing and is intended for superintendents and other heads of LEAs.

After registering, you will receive a confirmation e-mail containing information about joining the webinar.

[View System Requirements](#)

We plan to post and release the 2014 NECAP science results next Friday.

2. Rhode Islanders encouraged to participate in survey on public education

In the month since our initial call for Rhode Islanders to express their views on public education in a statewide survey, nearly 7,000 people have participated, bringing us more than half-way to our goal of 10,000 completed surveys by the end of the year. The survey results will guide the process of developing a new strategic plan for Rhode Island public education, establishing a

vision for public education over the next five years. Based on surveys tabulated to date, Rhode Islanders believe that the two most important purposes of public education are preparing every student for future economic success and ensuring that students have basic academic skills. Rhode Islanders who have taken the survey to date believe the three most important skills our graduates need are communications, problem-solving, and basic academic skills. About 82 percent of those responding said the quality of elementary and secondary education is “of the highest importance” to our success as a state. At its meeting on Thursday, the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education will select from among the 200 applicants the 15 to 20 people who will constitute the design team that will develop and write the strategic plan for 2015-2020.

Thank you for your support on this on-going initiative, and I hope you will continue to encourage people on your team and in your community to participate in this survey. The survey, which is available in [six languages](#) in addition to English, is posted on our website here:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/2BSZ7L6>

3. Rhode Island Growth Model reports for individual educators available Wednesday

On **Wednesday** (December 10), all teachers who contributed to student learning in mathematics or reading in grades 3 through 7 will receive access to their Rhode Island Growth Model reports through the Educator Performance and Support System. These reports will include individual Student Growth Percentiles for the students the teacher taught in the 2011-12 and 2012-13 school years. They will also indicate the median Student Growth Percentile across these two cohorts of students.

We are not including the growth data in final effectiveness ratings this year, but we encourage your LEA to use these data for information and for professional development. Teachers can analyze the data to see if there are observable trends among their students (higher or lower growth in one subject area, for example), and administrators can look for trends across grades, subject areas, and schools. The data can help educators to identify groups of students who may need more support, or the data may indicate that a particular initiative is having a positive effect on student achievement. Together, building administrators and teachers can use this year’s data to discuss adjustments to instruction that may help increase student learning the following year.

On Wednesday, we will provide step-by-step directions for teachers and evaluators that will explain how to access the Rhode Island Growth Model reports in the Educator Performance and Support System. Educators will be able to download the directions from the RIDE website, at:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/EdEval>.

4. RIDE releases first reports on educator-preparation programs

Yesterday, we released the first set of [annual reports](#) on the educator-preparation programs in Rhode Island. These reports – Rhode Island Educator Preparation Indices – provide data on trends in employment, retention, and effectiveness of the newly prepared educators (teachers, school leaders, and other certified educators) from 9 of the Rhode Island educator-preparation programs that RIDE has approved. The reports provide information on those who completed preparation programs in each of the past three school years (2011-12, 2012-13, and 2013-14). There is a report for each of the 9 programs and another for Rhode Island as a whole. The release of these reports marks the first time that we have been able to link new educators in Rhode Island with the programs that prepared them for certification. The information that these reports provide includes data on the number of program completers to attain certification and to find employment in Rhode Island, the evaluation data on newly hired program completers, demographic data on program completers, as well as information on the academic achievement of those enrolled in preparation programs.

5. Board of Education approves for public comment regulations on dual enrollment

At its meeting on Monday, the Board of Education approved for public comment proposed [regulations](#) on dual enrollment. The purpose of the regulations is to expand early college access for all Rhode Island students, particularly traditionally under-represented students; to reduce the amount of time and expense required to earn a postsecondary degree; and to promote partnerships between secondary- and postsecondary-education institutions. The regulations state that “no low-income students shall be denied access to concurrent or dual-enrollment coursework on their inability to pay course-related fees,” although mechanisms to provide financial support for these students are not currently addressed in the proposed regulations. I will let you know when we have scheduled public hearings on these regulations.

6. Rhode Island commended for progress under Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge

The U.S. Department of Education has posted [Year 2 summary reports](#) on the progress that states have made under the Race to the Top – Early Learning Challenge. The reports show that more children with high needs gained access to high-quality early learning and development opportunities in states that have received this grant. The reports also show that states are working to identify what the early childhood education workforce should know and be able to teach young children and on aligning those core competencies to professional development opportunities and postsecondary-education course offerings. Among the 14 grant-winning states, Rhode Island is one of the 11 that has incorporated all seven components of an effective quality rating and improvement system for early-childhood programs. The report specifically commends Rhode Island for “providing significant support to early learning and development programs that are committed to continuous quality improvement” through our Program Quality Improvement grants.

7. Verizon Innovate Learning awards granted to four Rhode Island schools

The Verizon Foundation has informed us that 4 Rhode Island schools have been selected as winners of the [Verizon Innovate Learning Award](#): The Learning Community, Highlander Charter School, Oldham School (East Providence), and Providence Career & Technical Academy. Each school will receive a \$20,000 grant. The Verizon Foundation is focused on improving student engagement and achievement in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and sees the use of technology – when paired with professional development for teachers – as a powerful way to accelerate learning. Congratulations to the students, teachers, and school and district leaders in each these award-winning schools!

8. Deputy Commissioner Abbott recovering at home

As I noted to you in a Field Memo Alert on Monday, Deputy Commissioner David Abbott is home and recovering from a heart attack that he suffered before the Thanksgiving holiday. His prognosis for a full recovery is good. Dave's doctors have ordered at least four weeks of complete rest, so we should not expect Dave to come back to work at RIDE until the New Year. In the interim, Chief of Staff Kimberly Bright and Dave's executive assistant, Colleen Brophy, will coordinate Dave's schedule. In case you would like to reach out to Dave personally, his address is 789 Central Pike, North Scituate, R.I. 02857.

From RIDE

Assessments:

9. Report shows PARCC field test was successful, informative

PARCC Field Test: Lessons Learned, a report released last week, shows that the spring 2014 trial run of the PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers) assessments went well, that PARCC states used feedback to make adjustments and improvements, and that the testing experience for students was largely positive – for example, students were successful with keyboarding, understood directions, and found the computer-based tests to be engaging.

The report also shows that school and district test administrators and coordinators thought the test manuals should be streamlined and that the test-delivery platform worked well but could use some adjustments to simplify some of the procedures.

To learn more about the field test experience and how its findings and recommendations are influencing the 2014-15 administration of PARCC assessments, you can access the full report, which is available online at:

<http://www.parcconline.org/sites/parcc/files/field-test-lessons-learned.pdf>

10. RIDE posts updated state assessment exemptions guidance document

The “[Special Considerations for Statewide Assessments: 2014-2015 Guidelines & Forms](#)” document has been updated and can now be accessed online, at

<https://www.eride.ri.gov/SASC/>

As a reminder, all exemption requests must be submitted through eRIDE by your office. Please refer to the guidance document, as this document explains each state-approved special consideration or exemption in detail and outlines the conditions under which a student would or would not qualify for special consideration or exemption. This document also explains when requests are due at RIDE and which forms must be completed to qualify for approval of each request. If you have any questions about exemption requests, please contact Dr. Kevon Tucker-Seeley (222-8494 or kevon.tucker-seeley@ride.ri.gov).

Legal:

11. RIDE issues decisions on career-technical education, residency

RIDE has issued the following three Commissioner’s Decisions:

Revocation of student’s provisional acceptance to regional career-technical education school is reversed on the basis of ambiguity relating to the school’s definition of “passing all eighth-grade classes.”

<http://www2.ride.ri.gov/applications/RideDirectory/DOCS/2014/016-14 P. Doe v Davies 101414.pdf>

Regional career-technical education school’s decision to deny student’s promotion to tenth (10th) grade due to course failures is upheld.

<http://www2.ride.ri.gov/applications/RideDirectory/DOCS/2014/017-14 F Doe v Wm. Davies Jr. CTHS 110314.pdf>

Siblings who attend West Warwick schools but reside in Coventry must be enrolled in the Coventry school system.

<http://www2.ride.ri.gov/applications/RideDirectory/DOCS/2014/018-14 In The Matter Residency of Students W. Doe 110314.pdf> .

Data Collections:

12. Reminder: LEAs asked to review cohort-graduation data by December 19

The Cohort Exit Data Review is open and LEAs should have started the review process. The instructions are located [here on eRIDE](#). The review process will close on December 19. Signed reports are due on **December 19**. This is a critical process for high schools. If you have any questions or concerns about these reports, please contact Greg Martin, at Gregory.martin@ride.ri.gov or 222-8495, or input a request for assistance, at: <https://support.ride.ri.gov> .

13. Deadline extended to January 7 for PARCC student registration – *Action Item*

The Performance-Based Assessment (PBA) student-registration (enrollment) deadline for the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) testing has been extended to **January 7**. It is recommended that LEAs complete student registration before the holiday break to ensure timeliness and completeness of the data.

Additionally, we have received questions around the accessibility features and accommodations information that are needed in the *Student Registration File* as compared with the *PNP File* uploads. The Student Registration File includes several accessibility features and accommodations that require special or additional materials (e.g., large-print or Braille booklets) that need to be shipped before the test. The PNP File is a separate upload that does not require paper-based materials that need to be shipped (e.g., answer masking, color contrast). The PNP upload needs to be completed before the beginning of the test window.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding PARCC enrollment data, please contact Greg Martin, at Gregory.martin@ride.ri.gov or 222-8495, or input a request for assistance, at: <https://support.ride.ri.gov>.

Educator Recognition:

14. LEAs asked to submit nominations for Talent Pool Recommendation by January 9 – *Action Item*

This year we have modified the Talent Pool Recommendation application process based on feedback from superintendents and principals. By creating a condensed prescreening application, we are hopeful that more LEAs will submit Talent Pool applications. The initial prescreening application requires a letter of recommendation from the superintendent of schools or head of the LEA and completion of a one-page application. We will contact you if a nominated educator from your LEA has been selected as a Talent Pool finalist.

Please submit a prescreening application for 1 to 3 educators who represent exceptional educational talent as evidenced by effective instructional practices and student-learning results in the classroom and school within your LEA.

Please review the following link for Talent Pool criteria and application:

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

Prescreening application are due on **January 9**.

From the U.S. Department of Education

15. Guidance issued on single-sex classes, extracurricular activities

The U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (OCR) released guidance on Monday for K-12 schools that offer or want to offer single-sex classes.

In response to numerous inquiries about the legality of single-sex classes, OCR issued [guidance](#) that charts a path for schools on how they can provide boys-only or girls-only instruction while remaining in compliance with civil rights laws.

“As we receive increasing inquiries about single-sex offerings we want to be clear what federal law allows: Protect civil rights and promote achievement,” said Catherine E. Lhamon, assistant secretary for civil rights. “It is our hope that this guidance will give schools, students and parents the tools they need to ensure compliance with the Title IX regulations on single-sex classes.”

To offer single-sex classes or extracurricular activities, schools must:

- identify an important objective that they seek to achieve by offering a single-sex class (such as improving academic achievement);
- demonstrate that the single-sex nature of the class is substantially related to achieving that objective;
- ensure that enrollment in the single-sex class is completely voluntary (through an opt-in, rather than an opt-out, process);
- offer a substantially equal coed class in the same subject;
- offer single-sex classes evenhandedly to male and female students;
- conduct periodic evaluations at least every two years to ensure that the classes continue to comply with Title IX;
- avoid relying on gender stereotypes;
- provide equitable access to single-sex classes to students with disabilities and English language learners; and
- avoid discriminating against faculty members based on gender when assigning educators to single-sex classrooms.

The guidance is posted here:

<http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/faqs-title-ix-single-sex-201412.pdf>

16. U.S. Department of Education proposes regulations on educator-preparation programs

The U.S. Department of Education has announced [proposed regulations](#) to help ensure that teacher training programs are preparing educators who are ready to succeed in the classroom. The proposal builds upon the innovations and reforms already happening at the state and program level across the country and by national organizations like the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation and the Council of Chief State School Officers. The proposal shifts the focus for currently required state reporting on teacher-preparation programs from mostly inputs to outcomes – such as how graduates are performing in the classroom – while giving states flexibility to determine how they will use the new measures and how program performance is measured.

“It has long been clear that, as a nation, we could do a far better job of preparing teachers for the classroom. It’s not just something that studies show. I hear it in my conversation with teachers, principals, and parents,” Education Secretary Arne Duncan stressed. “New teachers want to do a great job for their kids, but, too often, they struggle at the beginning of their careers and have to figure out too much for themselves. This proposal, along with our other key initiatives in supporting flexibility, equity, and leadership, will help get us closer to President Obama’s goal of putting a great teacher in every classroom, especially within our high-need schools.”

Specifically, the proposed regulations would encourage states to:

- develop meaningful systems to identify high- and low-performing teacher preparation programs across all kinds of programs, not just those based at colleges and universities;
- reward only those programs determined to be effective by states with eligibility for TEACH grants, which are available to students who are planning to become teachers in a high-need field and in a low-income school, to make sure that these limited federal funds support high-quality teacher preparation; and
- offer transparency into the performance of teacher preparation programs, creating a feedback loop among programs and prospective teachers, employers, and the public and empowering programs with information to facilitate continuous improvement.

The proposal is undergoing a 60-day comment period, during which the public can submit suggestions.

Want to learn more? The U.S. Department of Education teacher-preparation [web page](#) links to a [press release](#), [press call](#), [blog post](#), [fact sheet](#), and [PowerPoint presentation](#).

17. Municipalities invited to apply for grants to develop strategies for educational improvement

Please see this notice from the U.S. Department of Education Office of Communications and Outreach:

States, municipalities, and tribes can now apply to become a [Performance Partnership Pilot](#) (P3), to test innovative, outcome-focused strategies for achieving significant improvements in educational, employment, and other key results for disconnected youth. This initiative enables up to 10 pilots to blend together funds that they already receive from different discretionary programs administered by the U.S. Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, and Labor, the Corporation for National and Community Service, and the Institute for Museum and Library Services. Moreover, pilots will receive start-up grants of up to \$700,000. The [Notice Inviting Applications](#) is posted online. Be sure to check out the [blog post](#) and archived [national webinar](#).

From other state agencies

18. Health, CDC provided updated information on Ebola virus

Michael Fine, MD, Director of the R.I. Department of Health, and Thomas R. Frieden, MD, MPH, Director of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), have written a letter to Rhode Island Educators, which we have attached to this Field Memo (Ebola_Educator_Letter_Fine and Frieden). Drs. Fine and Frieden recommend “that you not exclude for your schools the household or family members of asymptomatic travelers from Ebola-affected countries or any asymptomatic teachers, staff, or students who have recently traveled to Ebola-affected countries.” They also recommend “that you not require household members or asymptomatic travelers to obtain ‘clearance letters’ from a physician or health authority before allowing them to attend classes or come to work.”

The R.I. Department of Health (HEALTH) has provided this additional update on the Ebola virus:

- The CDC is notifying HEALTH of travelers arriving from Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Mali. HEALTH is monitoring these travelers daily for symptoms of Ebola. Monitoring will continue for 21 days from date of departure from Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Mali.
- To date, no one has become infected with Ebola in Rhode Island.
- In Rhode Island, only people who have been in Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone, or Mali in the past three weeks are at risk of developing Ebola. Even if someone has relatives in Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone, or Mali, they are *not* at risk for developing Ebola if they have not traveled to one of these countries in the past three weeks.
- The Ebola outbreaks in Senegal and Nigeria are now considered over.
- There is [specific guidance](#) available for people coming here from Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Mali about monitoring their temperatures.
- People are not contagious until they show symptoms.

From other federal agencies and offices

19. White House announces second Student Film Festival

Please see this message from The White House, and please share this message with your school leaders:

We are happy to announce that from now through January 20 submissions are open for the second White House Student Film Festival. The theme of this year's festival is "The Impact of Giving Back," and it's open to U.S. students, grades K-12. So tell a story about paying it forward, about community service, or what making a difference looks like in your eyes and through your lens. It can be a fictional story or a short documentary, so break out the lights, write a script, get the camera ready, and show us your passion for service and giving back. We can't wait to see what you will make this year! For inspiration, [take a look at the official selections from last year's White House Student Film Festival](#), when the theme was the power of technology in education.

Films can be short – in fact, they must be 3 minutes tops. The official selections will be featured on the White House website and shared across the world on White House sites and official social media accounts. If selected, you may have a chance to attend the film fest yourself at the White House.

Submission Guidelines:

- All films must be shorter than 3 minutes.
- All films must be made by students in grades K-12.
- No film may use copyrighted material, including music, TV shows, or movies.
- All films must be uploaded to YouTube
- All film submissions must be received by 11:59 p.m. on **January 20**.

For more information, go to:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/filmfestival>

RIDE will post this field memo on Tuesday, at:

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