



MINUTES OF THE WORK SESSION
Council on Elementary and Secondary Education
August 25, 2014

COUNCIL ON ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

The Council on Elementary and Secondary Education work session was held on Monday, August 25, 2014 at the Rhode Island Department of Education, Room 501, 255 Westminster Street, Providence, RI.

Chair Guida welcomed everyone to the first work session of the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education, declared a quorum present, noted for the record that Board Chair Mancuso and Council Member Lawrence Purtill would not be joining the meeting, and called the meeting to order at 5:33 p.m.

Present: Patrick Guida, Amy Beretta, Colleen Callahan, Karin Forbes, Jo Eva Gaines, Mathies Santos, and Joyce Stevos

Absent: Eva-Marie Mancuso and Lawrence Purtill

Colleen Callahan arrived at 5:40 p.m.
Mathies Santos arrived at 7:00 p.m.

1. ACCEPTANCE OF THE AGENDA

On a motion duly made by Jo Eva Gaines and seconded by Colleen Callahan, it was

VOTED: That the Rhode Island Board of Education accepts the agenda
For the work session of August 25, 2014.

Vote: 6 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted
in the negative as follows:

YEAS: Patrick Guida, Amy Beretta, Karin Forbes, Jo Eva Gaines,
and Joyce Stevos

NAYS: 0

Before starting the evening's business, Chair Guida made some general comments on a couple of relevant matters.

Educator Autonomy Project

Last December Governor Chafee appointed a 16 member working group called the Educator Autonomy Working Group. Chair Guida had the privilege of being a member of that group, which met monthly over the last several months in public sessions to discuss the issue of how to improve and increase educator autonomy and develop some recommendations on how to get there.

The group also conducted a substantial number of interviews with education experts around the country and heard presentations from several guest speakers.

The group developed a report of recommendations that has been shared with the Governor, who wants some time to digest the information, before releasing it publicly.

Chair Guida personally looks forward to continuing working with that group and also with the Board of Education on the recommendations to see how to improve educator autonomy, to take advantage of some insight and innovation that can happen in the classroom without being so directive, and let teachers be professionals and do what everyone knows they are capable of doing.

The Board of Education will also be reviewing its own regulations to see if there is anything there that needs to be addressed in order to compliment the process as we move forward with trying to encourage and improve educator autonomy.

Assessment Project

Over the course of the past year, many of us have heard concerns expressed students, parents, and teachers about the number and the breadth of assessments.

We have also heard that assessments are a vital part of what needs to be accomplished and that they play a vital element in moving us forward to where we want to be.

But we want to be sure that we are doing it right, perhaps with the help and ideas of what is happening outside of R.I.

Commissioner Gist shares these concerns, and she has taken action in this regard. Within the next few days, Commissioner Gist and Katherine Sipala, President of the Rhode Island School Superintendents' Association, are submitting a joint letter to all school superintendents announcing the Assessment Project.

This project intends to bring together focus groups of students, parents, and educators to look at what we're doing right, what we're doing wrong, and what can be improved.

The Assessment Project is also planning to convene a working group made up of representatives from four school districts to develop plans to streamline their state and local assessments and hopefully be able to use a combination of one or more of those four districts' ideas as a model, and move forward with that.

The project may also include community forums and possibly mini-grants to school districts for professional development on this topic.

Commissioner Gist will be reporting out on a monthly basis on the progress of this project.

Board of Education and Council Bylaws

The Board of Education has its own set of Bylaws, which will need to be revised to reflect the recent legislatively-mandated changes to the Board of Education.

The Councils will also need their own bylaws and Chair Guida has asked Commissioner Gist to have her legal counsel reach out to the Postsecondary Education counsel so that they can strategize on how to best accomplish the revisions to the current Board of Education Bylaws as well as advise each Council on how to develop its own Bylaws, so that they can all be developed in a complimentary fashion.

2. DISCUSSION ITEMS

Encl2a - Summary of RIDE's FY 2014 Work

Commissioner Gist began by giving an overview and highlighting some of the major accomplishments from the past fiscal year by issue areas:

- RIDE completed professional development, preparing more than 6,000 educators for the transition to the Common Core Standards;
- RIDE expanded prekindergarten programs, now serving 17 sites in eight communities; and
- RIDE is almost a year ahead of schedule on the Wireless Classroom Initiative (technology bond), which will provide wireless Internet access to every R.I. classroom.

Encl2b - School Construction Projects

Commissioner Gist reminded the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education that one of its many responsibilities is reviewing and certifying the need for school construction

immediate health and safety projects that are reimbursed to districts through the housing aid program. These projects, which address high priority health, life safety, and code compliance issues, are reviewed by a RIDE team and registered building professionals.

There is a legislative moratorium on new school construction project approvals until May 1, 2015, with the exception of projects that are necessitated by immediate health and safety reasons.

The Council was then provided with detailed information on the five (5) pending project requests (Bristol Warren, East Providence, Narragansett, Pawtucket and Smithfield), which were shared with and approved by the General Assembly.

Council Member Beretta had a specific question about Pawtucket's request for several elementary schools with really big tickets and wondered if there is any possibility of consolidating schools within the district. Joe da Silva, RIDE's School Construction Coordinator, answered that Pawtucket is one of a few communities that has seen a growth in its population and part of that value is the result of the condition and age of the buildings. Andrea Castaneda, RIDE's Chief of Fiscal Integrity and Efficiencies, added that one of the important functions that the RIDE team serves as part of a routine review for school construction, is a review of demographic and population shifts to ensure that we are not supporting building projects that are not justified by the enrollment projections and that we are considering consolidations that might afford savings.

Council Member Forbes shared her concerns of what will happen once the legislative moratorium is eventually lifted and how the state will be able to fund all of the requests. Commissioner Gist indicated that she/RIDE are very aware of what happens anytime projects are deferred and that the RIDE team has ideas for a process for determining priorities on how the State can look at funding for schools, which the team will work with the General Assembly leadership and the Governor on. Joe da Silva added that while there may be a huge push in projects, there will probably be many consolidations, resulting in savings.

Council Member Gaines cautioned about the projections on enrollment. She used Newport as an example and how they were projected to lose population a year ago, and when they built a new school their enrollment increased and they had to rent two additional classrooms this year to accommodate the over enrollment.

Encl2c - Budget Briefing

Commissioner Gist began by stating that budget season is underway and RIDE is well into the FY 2015 budget cycle and managing that work well. RIDE is now in the process of developing the FY 2016 budget in accordance with the budget instructions provided to them by the state budget office.

She then turned the conversation over to Andrea Castaneda and Mark Dunham, Finance Director, who gave the Council a high-level orientation to the budget cycle, a summary of the enacted FY15 budget (major funding sources and expenditure categories, highlights and cost drivers, and status of funding formula aid) and preview of FY16 budget, which the Council will be asked to approve at its October 14th meeting.

On the FY 2015 Enacted Budget by Expenditure Category presentation, member Forbes asked who the vendors were, to which Mark replied that out of the \$38 million dedicated to school/student services and vendors, \$18 million are dedicated to the school transportation vendor and one million to the testing vendor. Member Callahan suggested that it would be helpful to have a list of vendors and the contract dollars associated with them.

Before wrapping up the presentation, Ms. Castaneda gave a quick preview of the FY 2016 budgets - the current service level budget and a constrained budget - which will be shared with the Council at its next two meetings. In addition, RIDE will be readying itself to deal with a couple of very important issues and start to work on the transition from RTTT into a post RTTT funding period. She ended the presentation by stating that the FY 2016 budget will be much more challenging than the current FY 2015 budget, which rings true to LEAs as well.

Chair Guida and member Callahan asked that the Council have an opportunity to review and assess some of the RTTT initiatives that worked well in order to identify those that demonstrated success.

Commissioner Gist reminded the Council that the full Board of Education needs to approve the budget prior to its transmittal, but because the next full Board quarterly meeting is not scheduled until December, RIDE is coordinating with Chair Mancuso and the chairs of both Councils in notifying the Department of Administration to ensure that they understand that the budget that they will be receiving in October has not received full Board approval.

Considering that the full Board will be asked to approve both Councils' budgets, member Forbes asked if she was correct in assuming that the Councils will not be changing each other's budgets. Commissioner Gist added that there has to be a level of trust that the Councils have for one another and that it is the responsibility of each Commissioner to keep his/her Council aware of what is developing in the other Council.

Encl2d - RIDE's Executive Pay Plan and Organizational Chart

Next Commissioner Gist went over enclosure 2d, which covers RIDE's Executive Pay Plan and Organizational Chart. She introduced the major changes to FY 2015 Executive Pay Plan and FY 2015 Table of Organization:

- Elimination of a couple of positions for which RIDE no longer has funding - Chief Transformation Officer and the Strategic Relations Planner and Performance Management Executive.
- A grade change for 2 positions based on changes in their duties (increase in the range of about \$5K for two staff members).
- A COLA-based adjustment in the salary scales. These are the same ones that were negotiated for the employees at the state level and are being implemented across all state employees. These employees received their last COLA adjustment three years ago (2011).
- Reorganization of two offices between Chiefs (direct reports to Commissioner).
- The expansion of RIDE's Early Childhood work at a staff level within the Office of Instruction, Assessment and Curriculum.

The combination of these changes brings RIDE's Executive Pay Plan and Chart of Organization up-to-date.

Member Beretta asked whether these pay grades are consistent with pay grades for other state departments for similar positions. Commissioner Gist answered that RIDE does not coordinate with other state departments as the positions at RIDE are very different. She then asked Deputy Commissioner Abbott to weigh in. Mr. Abbot explained that Higher Education and Elementary and Secondary Education are each unique in their own way because their personnel systems are governed outside of what is called "the merit pay system." In every other state agency it is a global management process managed by the Department of Administration through its Personnel and Budget Offices. On the Elementary and Secondary Education side that function sits with the Commissioner and with the Council on Elementary Secondary Education on the postsecondary side.

Enclosure 2e - R.I. Proficiency-Based Graduation Requirements - Recommendation Regarding Secondary School Regulations

Commissioner Gist began with an update on the Class of 2014 to clarify an inquiry about summer school raised by member Callahan at the August 4th Board meeting. At that time, there was only one student who had received a diploma as a result of the moratorium on the full graduation requirements. Since that meeting, RIDE reached out to the districts and received updates following summer school and can now report that there are nine (9) students in the state who received their diploma based on that change. These are students who would have remained in school supported by their districts with additional course work or instruction, but instead were given a diploma at the end of the summer.

Member Callahan asked if the Council could receive a breakdown of how many students demonstrated their proficiency through the testing requirement, how many met the requirement after the first attempt, the second and third attempts, and also how many students received waivers and whether districts across the board have the same policies.

Member Stevos asked if the Council could receive a breakdown of the impact demographically in terms of different subgroups.

Commissioner Gist presented the Council with a high level summary of her recommendation that the Council revise the Secondary School Regulations with implementation of the full multiple-measures system, including the state assessment, to begin with the class of 2020.

Chair Guida stated that from the Council's perspective there is a great responsibility to now make certain that it gets the date right and that it does not blink again. He wants to get a sense from the Council that they feel that 2020 is genially fair and equitable and that it can be implemented in a way so that when it gets to that point that everyone can have a sense of confidence and comfort that everything that can be done was done, and that the Council has a responsibility in the interim to make certain that those areas of preparation happened.

Member Callahan voiced that while she has reservations about the conjunctive system as opposed to the compensatory system, she is very supportive of the 2020 date. She also hopes that there are systems in place to communicate with districts and check-in with them periodically and share best practices, particularly in the area of notification. She also suggests carefully monitoring the results of the first administration of the PARCC assessments to ensure that the assessment is the right assessment.

Member Gaines shared that she is also very comfortable with the 2020 date and that if districts step up to the plate and do what they need to do to prepare students and communicate with parents, there should be no reason for waivers.

Member Beretta stated that she wants to make sure that what the Council is looking at is really extending the time and not going back and revisiting the conjunctive nature or anything like that. Now that the whole notion of "we didn't have enough time to prepare" is being taken away, she would like to look at the growth issue, the waiver issue, and whether or not the test is the test.

Commissioner Gist responded that she agrees that those are certainly things that RIDE needs to take a look at and that some of those same issues were discussed with a committee of a few superintendents who have been meeting with RIDE based on everything that was

learned this year of implementation, prior to the passing of this new legislation. Consideration also needs to be given to the other optional tests and the role that they play now that additional time has been allowed. She also addressed the topic of waivers by stating that there is work to do to make sure that the waiver process is used more consistently and is more widely understood. There also needs to be an understanding that there will always be some type of waiver process, because for some students any standardized assessment does not measure what they know and can do. However, it should be rare as described in the Board of Regents 2012 regulations.

Member Stevos supports the 2020 date; however, she has a concern with the PARCC being taken in a computer and stressed the need to ensure that all students are exposed to the technology prior to taking the test and not waiting until test-taking day.

Member Forbes also supports the 2020 date, but emphasized the point that she likes the idea that the Diploma System is being looked at not just for high schools, but rather to prepare students from the time they enter school.

Member Callahan also stressed the importance of continuing this discussion with the full Board to avoid missing the opportunity to engage the institutions of higher education and their expectations in assisting getting students ready for postsecondary education.

Member Gaines shared her concern that there are no full Board work sessions scheduled prior to the quarterly meetings of the full Board of Education and that there needs to be a time when the full Board can get together to discuss and prepare for matters requiring a vote by the full Board.

[Board member Santos arrives]

Enclosure 2f - Recommendation to the Davies Career and Technical High School Board of Trustees

Commissioner Gist began by reminding Council members that one of their many responsibilities is to appoint the members of the Board of Trustees to the state-operated schools and the Central Falls School District from nominations made by her.

At this meeting her recommendation is for George Nee, who will fill a current vacancy on the William M. Davies Career and Technical High School Board of Trustees.

As demonstrated by his resume, Mr. Nee possesses the leadership, strength and commitment to advance the school's goals and mission, and she recommended that the Council consider her recommendation at its September 8th meeting.

Enclosure 2g – Charter School Renewals

Commissioner Gist went over the visual chart that Council members had in their meeting packets, and described the review process for charter public schools and the role that the Council plays as an authorizer of charter public schools.

RIDE works with three major areas within the Charter Public School sector, including new school approvals, existing school renewals, and expanding the role and impact of the charter public school community.

Over the last four years, RIDE has made tremendous improvements in the systems used to inform authorizing decisions. RIDE staff has listened to charter school leadership in the state and have also aligned themselves with best practices nationally for charter school authorizers.

Charter school renewals are up to five years, but it does not mean that those five years are guaranteed. Every year a school's performance gets reviewed and if the school is renewed with conditions, RIDE works closely with the school to ensure that those conditions are met and removed.

Two of the four charter schools recommended for renewal for a term of up to five years are district charter schools (Academy for Career Exploration [ACE] and New England Laborers-Cranston Public Schools Construction and Career and Academy [NELS]) and two are independent charter schools (The Greene School and Trinity Academy for Performing Arts [TAPA]).

ACE, the state's first charter public school, serves Providence high school students, and is being recommended for renewal with conditions.

NELS, serves high school students statewide, and is being recommended for renewal with conditions.

The Greene School, serves high school students statewide, practices expeditionary learning design process, and is being recommended for renewal with a condition.

TAPA, serves Providence students in grades 7-12, uses a fully integrated arts curriculum, and is being recommended for renewal with conditions.

Member Forbes asked whether the schools have been notified of what the conditions are, to which Commissioner Gist responded in the affirmative.

Member Beretta asked whether the Council receives a report of how the schools are addressing the conditions that are being imposed on them and if there is also an annual performance report on each of the charters to see how they are doing in comparison to the

criteria for renewal, so that the Council knows if there is an issue along the way. Commissioner Gist answered that both the school and the Council will know the results and expectation for each school and their performance for each year.

Member Gaines asked how many times a charter school can be below performance and continue to be renewed. Commissioner Gist answered that there isn't a specific number of years, but rather RIDE takes a more holistic review at their performance over the term of the charter renewal, and works with the school on steps that it needs to take to address the issues. Member Gaines also asked if the Council could receive a report on the collaboration and practice-sharing between charters and districts to identify best practices.

Prior to adjourning, Chair Guida introduced Kathy Bendheim, a parent volunteer on the Educator Autonomy Working Group, and commended and thanked her for the many hours that she dedicated to the project.

3. ADJOURNMENT

On a motion duly made by Patrick Guida and seconded by Jo Eva Gaines, it was

VOTED: That the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education adjourns.

Vote: 7 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative as follows:

YEAS: Patrick Guida, Amy Beretta, Colleen Callahan, Karin Forbes, Jo Eva Gaines, Mathies Santos, and Joyce Stevos

NAYS: 0

The meeting adjourned at 7:19 p.m.