



Enclosure 2a
February 9, 2015

MINUTES OF THE WORK SESSION
Council on Elementary and Secondary Education
January 5, 2015

COUNCIL ON ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

The Council on Elementary and Secondary Education Work Session was held on January 5, 2015, at the Rhode Island Department of Education, Room 501, 255 Westminister Street, Providence, RI.

Chair Guida welcomed everyone to the Work Session of the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education, declared a quorum present and noted for the record that members Callahan and Santos would not be attending the meeting. He then called the meeting to order at 5:06 p.m.

Present: Patrick Guida, Amy Beretta, Karin Forbes, Jo Eva Gaines, Eva-Marie Mancuso and Joyce Stevos

Absent: Colleen Callahan and Mathies Santos

[Member Purtill arrived at 5:11 p.m.]

1. ACCEPTANCE OF THE AGENDA

On a motion duly made by Karin Forbes and seconded by Joyce Stevos, it was

VOTED: That the Council Elementary and Secondary Education accepts the agenda for the work session of January 5, 2015.

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, Eva-Marie Mancuso and Joyce Stevos

NAYS: 0

[Member Purtill arrived at 5:11 p.m.]

2. REPORT OF THE CHAIR

Chair Guida began his report by congratulating Commissioner Gist and the entire RIDE staff in reaching the ambitious goal of getting 10,000 responses to the strategic planning survey. He went on to report that the Council has officially embarked on the process of developing Rhode Island's next strategic plan and has selected 26 Rhode Islanders who will be on the community-based strategic planning team to develop and write the plan. The official kick-off meeting of the Core Ambassador Design Team will be held on Saturday, January 10th.

He went on to announce that RIDE has scheduled three public hearings to gather public input on the Regulations for Dual Enrollment, which were developed with the goal of increasing access for all high school students to courses that can earn them credit toward graduation as well as college credit.

3. REPORT OF THE COMMISSIONER

Commissioner Gist began by wishing everyone a Happy New Year and sharing how excited she is about the number of initiatives that will be happening this spring. She shared how thrilled she is that the Governor-elect has emphasized the importance of education and that she looks forward to working with the Governor and her team in making Rhode Island schools America's best.

She went on to report that thanks to the \$19 million Preschool Expansion that the U.S. Department of Education awarded R.I. last month, RIDE will soon be seeking proposals to add new prekindergarten classes in our schools and community-based programs. R.I. currently has 17, state-funded preschool programs, with the ultimate goal of expanding to 60 by the end of 2019.

She also reported that after a five-year preparation period transitioning to the Common Core State Standards, R.I. will finally launch the PARCC assessments this spring. She is confident that the launch will be a success and truly believes that the PARCC assessments will improve teaching and learning in our state in several ways. She cautioned that considering that the standards that R.I. has adopted are different, and in many cases more rigorous than the standards that we have had in the past, it is expected that there will be a decline in scores during the first administration of the assessment, something very common in the first year of administration of new assessments. For that reason, very intentional decisions have been made for not using any of the assessment results from this spring's administration of the PARCC assessments for any determinations about students, teachers or schools.

Chair Mancuso asked whether teachers and families have been informed and are prepared about the potential decline in student scores. Commissioners Gist answered, that yes, RIDE has been working with districts in communicating with families.

Commissioner Gist continued her report by sharing a one-page handout out on "Community Eligibility," which is a new way that the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the federal body that funds and monitors our school nutrition programs, will be collecting information to determine a student's eligibility for free and reduced lunch. In R.I., the MET is the only school that has elected to utilize this new way of collecting information, but RIDE has been in touch will all superintendents to determine the most effective means of implementing this program in the future.

Commissioner Gist ended her report by congratulating Joseph Zurier, a senior at Classical High School, as the 2nd-place individual winner in the 2014 Siemens Competition in Mathematics, Science, and Technology, a competition considered to be the nation's premiere science research competition for high-school students. Joseph's second-place finish earns him a \$50,000 college scholarship.

4. DISCUSSION ITEMS

Encl4a - Educator Testing - Request for Public Review and Comment

Commissioner Gist introduced the topic by reminding Council Members that the Regents Regulations Governing the Certification of Educator in R.I. requires RIDE to seek Council approval when adopting new or revised certification tests and passing scores necessary for initial educator licensure. The Educational Testing Service (ETS), which provides most R.I. licensure tests, has recently revised four additional tests to ensure currency with the field, and those tests and passing scores need to be approved by the Council. She went on to share that Rhode Island educators participated in some of the validation studies that were conducted and RIDE staff and the Certification Policy Advisory Board (CPAB) reviewed the standard-setting process.

Lisa Foehr, Director of the Office of Educator Quality and Certification, walked Council members through enclosure 4a and explained that two of the tests before them are subtests for elementary testing and those two revisions are designed to start to align them to the new Common Core expectations. The other two tests are simply regenerated tests, which have to be updated every five years or so to ensure that they are up to date with standards and with up to date with what is going on in the field. The four cut scores are the scores that were recommended in the multi-state study, which is a study convened by a panel of individual teachers and higher education faculty from multiple states who go through a standard-setting study and the result of that study is a recommended score for states to then consider and potentially approve or adopt as their standard-setting score.

Encl4b - Secondary School Regulations - Feedback from Public Review and Comment

Commissioner Gist reminded Council Members that back on September 8th, RIDE requested the Council to review, for the purpose of public review and comment, the proposed revisions to Rhode Island's Secondary School Regulations that will postpone the implementation of standardized assessments as a part of Rhode Island's proficiency-based graduation system until 2020. At that time, she shared with Council members that the decision was not an easy one to make, but she believes that the decision was the right one. She feels very confident that school districts are committed to what RIDE is committed to, which is that between now and 2020, everyone will continue to work tirelessly, not only to ensure that the class of 2020 is prepared, but also to be sure that every class that comes before them is more prepared than the next. She emphasized the need to ensure that expectations are attainable, but high, and that they are set in a way that ensures that students will be well positioned for success when they leave high school and that diplomas are meaningful.

Steven Osborn, Chief of RIDE's Division of Accelerating School Performance, joined the discussion and walked Council Members through the feedback received during the public review and comment period and the revisions that were made as a result of the feedback. He went on to explain that RIDE received a total of 27 individual responses in terms of public feedback and that the overall feedback was positive with some general opposition around having an exit exam. RIDE made one set of changes to the regulations, which came in from a superintendent who wanted to have some clarity on the local flexibility for districts if they so choose to use standardized assessments as a graduation requirement after 2017 but before 2020. Member Beretta asked which superintendent made the request, to which Mr. Osborn replied that the request was made by Superintendent Ricci.

Board Chair Mancuso expressed that considering how much time was spent last year defending the position around the use of the NECAP assessments as a graduation requirement and the fact that the Council caved in the end, she suggested putting the regulations on hold at this point and continuing the discussion around whether or not there should be exit examinations. She would like to avoid "kicking the can down the road" to the next Board and when 2019 rolls around they are going to end up in the same position that this Council and the Board of Education was in last year when it spent the bulk of the year talking about one test.

Commissioner Gist reminded the Council that right now the regulations need to be changed because it currently states class of 2014, which is inconsistent with the statute. She further emphasized that although the statute says 2017; her recommendation is to move it to 2020, to allow districts more time to prepare for the brand new PARCC Assessment and to make the transition less complicated. She stressed that there continues to be a very strong commitment on the part of RIDE and the superintendents who continue to work tirelessly in preparing students for the next few years.

Board Chair Mancuso expressed that when she looks at the amount of money that has been spent as a system of education around a divisive issue that polarizes people, she questions whether or not the Council is setting themselves up that in five years they will be in the exact same situation and will spend another full year trying to defend the test.

Chair Guida commented that he has no doubt that in 2020 there will be another human cry not to allow PARCC to be used as a graduation requirement, however, the Council has a five-year period to assess how things are going and there is nothing to prevent the Council from readdressing the matter at any point and time between now and then. The way it is currently set-up, starting in 2017, it is possible that an individual district could decide to go out and pilot it as a graduation requirement and see how that goes. He shares the same concern as Chair Mancuso; however, he believes that it is premature to have the discussion now on whether or not it would be appropriate to have it implemented as a graduation requirement.

Commissioner Gist stated that everything that she has heard from the leadership at the General assembly, who passed the bill to put the postponement in place, is that it was a postponement and not a change of direction and that is what RIDE has been operating under. RIDE is very open to feedback from the Council around a lot of the aspects around what worked and what didn't work in the implementation, but what she has heard from everyone is that we need to have expectations and the need to raise the bar in ensuring that our students are well prepared upon graduation.

Members Beretta, Gaines, Forbes, Purtill and Stevos all concurred that the only change to the regulations should be the date and not to address whether or not standardized tests should be used as a graduation requirement.

**Encl4c - Recommendations to the R.I. School for the Deaf Board of Trustees &
Encl4d - Recommendation to the Central Falls School District Board of Trustees**

Commissioner Gist introduced the topic by reminding Council Members that one of their important responsibilities as a Council is to appoint members to the Boards of Trustees of the state-operated schools and the Central Falls School District, from nominations made by her.

The R.I. School for the Deaf is recommending two nominees (Amanda Montgomery and Nora Meah) to fill current vacancies, one of which is the Chairmanship recently vacated by Marie Lynch, and the Central Falls School District is recommending one nominee (Dr. Ronald Pitt).

Council members commended the schools and RIDE for putting forward three strong candidates.

Enc4e - Warwick Career and Technical Center Transfer

Commissioner began by pointing out that in the past there were several state-owned and locally-operated career and technical centers and over a period of years RIDE has been going through a process of transitioning those buildings back to the ownership of the districts that run the centers themselves. RIDE has already executed similar transfer agreements for Cranston, East Providence and Newport and after the Warwick transfer, the only remaining district will be Woonsocket. The transfer agreement allows the city to take ownership of the facility and address the repairs that remain.

Chair Guida asked if in addition to the \$3.1 million grant involved with the transfer if any additional costs will come to the state as a result of the transfer process. Andrea Castaneda, Chief of RIDE's Division of Fiscal Integrity and Efficiencies, joined the discussion and answered that the grant actually covers some important facility improvements that are part of the transfer agreement.

Enc4f - Charter School Amendments

Commissioner Gist began by reporting how pleased she is to report that each of the four charter public schools (The Green School, Trinity Academy for the Performing Arts, New England Laborer's Construction Career Academy, and Academy for Career Exploration) which were approved last September have all submitted evidence of their progress by the December 15th deadline, and that she is confident that at the February Council meeting, she will be announcing that all requisite conditions have been met.

Next, she went over the requests from five charter public schools (Beacon Charter School for the Arts, Highlander Charter School, International Charter School, Kingston Hill Academy, and Times2 Academy) to amend their charters. Three of the schools are requesting amendments to increase authorized enrollment within the grades they serve, one school is requesting an amendment to expand from a high school and offer its program at the middle school grades, and one school is requesting to utilize its approved enrollment within its existing elementary school. She emphasized that RIDE does not bring forth every amendment request, but rather those of schools that have a track record of driving student achievement, show sufficient demand for the program from its enrolling communities, and have developed a sound operational plan to support its amendment request.

Steven Osborne, Chief of RIDE's Division of Accelerating School Performance, joined the conversation and gave an overview of the amendment request from the Beacon Charter School permitting the school to expand to serve grades six through eight, and enroll an additional 174 students across grades six through twelve.

Member Gaines asked how the school is planning the expansion. Mr. Osborne replied that they will start at grade 6 in year one and add additional grades in subsequent years.

Member Forbes asked if they have room in the existing building, and Mr. Osborne replied that they have room for the first year but need to look for a different facility to serve the additional student population.

Member Beretta commended the school for their performance in ELA NECAP results, but expressed concern with the school's current mathematics proficiency of 25% on the NECAP assessments and requested to see data for previous years.

Member Gaines also expressed concern with the school's low enrollment of English language learners considering that Woonsocket has a high percentage of students whose language is other than English.

Commissioner Gist reminded Council members that Beacon has a statewide catchment area with 25% coming from Woonsocket. The school has traditionally served a higher percentage of students with IEP's and that it just hasn't had the same percentage of English language learners apply to the school.

Next, Mr. Osborn gave an overview of the Highlander Charter School amendment request, permitting the school to enroll an additional 133 students in grade 7-12 and in prekindergarten.

Member Forbes asked whether the current building would be able to accommodate the additional student and Mr. Osborn answered that Highlander has recently moved to a larger facility that can house more students.

Next, Mr. Osborn gave an overview of the International Charter School amendment request, permitting the school to enroll an additional 306 students in kindergarten through grade eight.

Member Gaines asked why the International Charter School is not serving the authorized students to date. Mr. Osborn answered that the reason being that the current facility cannot accommodate that many students and that the school will be looking into securing a new facility that will accommodate more students.

Next, Mr. Osborn gave an overview of the Kingston Hill Academy amendment request, permitting the school to enroll its authorized quantity of students (260), in Kindergarten through grade five.

Member Purtill asked if the issue around special education that arose during an earlier discussion had been clarified and Mr. Osborn responded that RIDE had assigned a "Special Visitor" to investigate the matter and that he found no evidence of any discriminatory practice and that no claims were filed.

Next, Mr. Osborn gave an overview of the Times 2 STEM Academy amendment request, permitting the school to enroll an additional 80 students in Kindergarten through grade twelve.

Member Beretta requested that RIDE provide the Council with Times 2 STEM Academy's graduation rate data.

Encl4g - Update on Strategic Planning

Commissioner Gist shared with the Council a high-level summary of the preliminary analysis on the Strategic Plan, which provides initial insight into Rhode Islanders' thoughts about the purpose and future of public education.

Andrea Castaneda, who is coordinating the strategic planning process, joined the conversation and gave a presentation on the work to date, which included a list of "The Players in the Process."

Chair Mancuso requested that the Board of Education also be added to the list of players involved in the process as the Board is ultimately the governing body responsible for adopting the Strategic Plan on the Council's recommendation.

6. ADJOURNMENT

On a motion duly made by Karin Forbes and seconded by Amy Beretta, 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, Karin Forbes, Jo Eva Gaines, Eva-Marie Mancuso, Lawrence Purtill, and Joyce Stevos

NAYS: 0

The meeting adjourned at 6:46 p.m.