

**Commissioner's Weekly Field Memo**  
**Friday, May 1, 2015**

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**Action Item Calendar**

May 8: [PARCC](#) administration survey due  
May 8: Teacher-absenteeism survey due (see [below](#))  
June 5: Preliminary [CEIS data](#) due  
June 17: [CEIS Report](#) due  
June 30: Dual-enrollment polices completed (see [below](#))

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**Notes from Commissioner Gist**

**1. Board approves dual-enrollment regulations requiring local policies by June 30; webinars scheduled – Action Item**

On Monday, the Board of Education unanimously approved a new set of regulations on dual enrollment, which will provide all qualified high-school students in Rhode Island public schools with

access to college-level coursework while they are still in high school.

One of our top priorities has been making sure that our high schools offer challenging coursework, and through dual-enrollment programs, our high-school students from all communities will now have access to credit-bearing, college-level courses. Students who earn college credits while they are still in high school are more likely to enter college, persist in college, and earn a degree – and they are also likely to carry less debt when they graduate.

The regulations that the Board approved enable students to enroll in courses in public postsecondary institutions and to simultaneously earn both college credit and course credit toward earning their high-school diploma. The regulations open the entire course catalogs for dual enrollment, including career and technical education and college-development courses, from the Community College of Rhode Island, Rhode Island College, and the University of Rhode Island.

The regulations also encompass “concurrent enrollment,” which are college-credit courses that students take at their high schools and which are taught by a teacher whom one of the postsecondary institutions has approved. Currently, Rhode Island high schools offer about 60 college-level courses through concurrent enrollment.

The regulations state that high schools may establish enrollment criteria for student participation in dual enrollment, and postsecondary institutions may establish eligibility criteria for course enrollment.

The regulations state that school districts “shall support, if financially possible” the costs of dual enrollment, although families “may be asked to contribute all or a portion of the cost.” The regulations also state, however, that “no low-income student ... shall be denied access to dual- or concurrent-enrollment coursework [because of] their inability to pay course-related tuition and fees.”

Additionally, the regulations require you to adopt local dual-enrollment policies by **June 30**. LEAs are responsible for communicating to students and their families information about the available concurrent- and dual-enrollment courses, eligibility criteria for taking dual-enrollment courses, and enrollment procedures to help students choose their courses for the upcoming school year.

To support you in meeting the requirements of these regulations, we are posting information on dual enrollment for students and families, for schools, and for districts on our website, at

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

We are also posting parent-information letters on dual enrollment for you to use as part of your outreach strategy.

To learn more about the dual-enrollment policy, please register for one of the webinars that we have scheduled to share information pertinent to district and school leaders, school counselors, teachers of concurrent-enrollment courses, and other educators who support students in accessing dual-enrollment coursework.

The webinars will also discuss Governor Raimondo’s Prepare RI

Dual Enrollment Fund, which, if the General Assembly approves this recommendation in Governor Raimondo's Fiscal Year 2016 budget, will provide funding to enable qualified students to participate in dual- and concurrent-enrollment programming.

Here is the webinar schedule:

**Wednesday** (May 6) at 2 p.m. [Register here for May 6 webinar](#)

**Thursday** (May 7) at 10 a.m. [Register here for May 7 webinar](#)

For additional information about these webinars, please call Sharon Lee, at 222-8484, or Paula Barney, at 222-8399.

The dual-enrollment regulations are posted here:

[http://media.ride.ri.gov/BOE/Boe Meeting 042715/Encl6a Regulations for Dual Enrollment.pdf](http://media.ride.ri.gov/BOE/Boe_Meeting_042715/Encl6a_Regulations_for_Dual_Enrollment.pdf).

## **2. RIDE seeking public comment on proposed revisions to accountability, classification, support system**

Over the past year, members of the RIDE team have worked closely with the members of a working group that we convened to discuss the Rhode Island system of school classifications, accountability, and support for low-achieving schools. Based on the ideas that this working group, Accountability 3.0, developed, and taking into account feedback we have received from other educators in the field, parent groups, and groups representing students with disabilities and English learners, we have developed a set of proposed revisions to our system for school accountability and support. Last month, we submitted our proposed revisions to

the U.S. Department of Education, as part of our request for continued flexibility under the provisions of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The U.S. Department of Education will review our request, but I want to let you know that we are still accepting public comment on the proposed revisions to our system of school accountability and support and we are still able to revise or amend our submitted request.

Some of the key elements in our flexibility request include these components of our system of classifications:

**Proficiency:** Instead of receiving points or credit for percentages of students attaining proficiency and percentages of students attaining distinction, schools would receive various amounts of credit for the percentage of students at each level of achievement, with additional credit for improving achievement levels of students facing additional learning challenges (students with disabilities, English learners, and economically disadvantaged students).

**Closing Achievement Gaps:** Schools would receive credit for closing the achievement gap between the lowest-achieving quartile in the school and the top 50 percent of student achievement in the school (or, if the school achievement as a whole is especially low, the top 50 percent of achievement in Rhode Island). This requested change would help alleviate the problem of many schools still not being held accountable for gap-closing for various students groups because of low “n-sizes.” It would also respond to concerns educators and others have raised regarding “blaming” various student groups for low school achievement – rather than focusing on the achievement and growth of all students. Additionally, it would respond to concerns about schools that may have

“closed” achievement gaps only because of an overall decline in student performance in the reference group.

**Growth:** Rather than maintain our focus on the median growth of all students and of various identified student groups, our request would allow us to focus on the growth of students a growth percentile lower than 35 (i.e., 66 percent of students or more have made greater growth over the past academic year). Students below the 35<sup>th</sup> growth percentile are those most likely to lose academic ground over time.

Along with these proposed changes, it is important to note that we will continue to use graduation rates and participation rates as key components in our system of accountability and, most important, that we will continue to calculate and publicly report annual targets and progress toward those targets for all student groups. Schools that fail to meet their participation-rate targets of 95 percent cannot be classified as Commended Schools. Schools that fail to meet any annual target for three consecutive years – including the participation-rate target – will receive an “alert” as part of their classification and will be ineligible for either of our highest classifications, Commended and Leading.

With approval of our flexibility request, we will have clearer pictures of how schools are improving over time and we will be able to more accurately measure gains of students who are approaching but have not yet achieved proficiency on our state assessments. Most important, our continued use of sophisticated diagnostic tools will provide better information regarding what individual schools need to focus on in the short term to improve teaching and learning. We are confident that our request is responsive to the needs of our schools, supportive of our teachers

and school leaders, and in the best interest of the students of Rhode Island.

The changes would go into effect for the school classifications beginning with the 2015-16 school year, and our request for flexibility covers a span of three school years.

We have posted on our website a PowerPoint on these proposed revisions to our accountability system:

<http://ride.ri.gov/InformationAccountability/Accountability.aspx> (see under “New: RI Accountability Revisions”)

We have posted our complete flexibility-renewal request here:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Information-and-Accountability-User-Friendly-Data/Accountability/ESEA %20Flexibility Renewal Red-Lined Final 03312015.pdf>

Comments and feedback from you and from your team are welcome; please use this email address: [ESEA.flex@ride.ri.gov](mailto:ESEA.flex@ride.ri.gov).

### **3. RIDE helps launch Summer Meals campaign; LEAs asked to designate Summer Meals liaison to work with RIDE coordinator**

As educators, we know how important it is to keep children healthy, well rested, and well nourished – not just during the school year but throughout the year. During the school year, more than 76,000 Rhode Island students receive meals through the National School Breakfast and Lunch Programs, but far too often children eligible for free and reduced-price food services during

the school year have fewer options – or none – in the summer. We cannot let these children go hungry.

Last year we served more than 200,000 meals during the summer. This meal might be the only one a child receives in any given day during the summer. Our goal is to connect healthy free meals to the children in your community – good nutrition is crucial for children’s development and also for their readiness when the new school year starts in the fall. Many cities and towns in Rhode Island have opened sites where children through age 18 can receive summer meals at no cost to them. There are no eligibility criteria; families don’t have to fill out any paperwork to receive these free meals.

To make sure that children have access to these healthy meals year-round, we are working with community partners to launch a state-wide campaign that will invite families to take advantage of the free summer meals. Our campaign has a few objectives:

- removal of the stigma that associates the poor and needy with the Summer Meals Program; and
- sending the message that all of us need to work together to build and maintain healthy communities.

I hope that you can be a champion for healthy schools in your community by supporting our Summer Meals Program. We want you and your team to help us provide people in your community access to information about our Summer Meals Program. You can help us by:

- posting our campaign Summer Meals banner outside of your school buildings or your administrative office;
- sending news releases about this program to local media;

- participating in a kickoff event to launch the Summer Meals program; and
- using your call-back system to send a message, which we can provide, about Summer Meals.

Our hope is that you can:

- designate someone on your team to serve as your liaison to the Summer Meals Program; and
- have your Summer Meals liaison contact our outreach coordinator here at RIDE, Azade Sarah-Perin, at [Azade.Perin@ride.ri.gov](mailto:Azade.Perin@ride.ri.gov), to discuss this initiative.

Azade may also contact your office to follow up with further information about the Summer Meals program.

Please be one of our “Healthy Ambassadors” and help us build “Healthy kids, Healthy Communities, for a Healthy Rhode Island.”

#### **4. RIMLE honors five middle-level educators**

The Rhode Island Middle Level Educators (RIMLE) have selected Emily Lowry, a mathematics teacher at the West Broadway Middle School, in Providence, as the 2015 Distinguished Middle Level Educator. The organization notes: “Her passion for teaching and learning, both as a seeker of knowledge and a source of leadership for others, enhances her teaching skills. Emily reflects this passion for teaching and learning by opening her classroom to colleagues for sharing and feedback.”

RIMLE has also honored four educators at the Alan Shawn Feinstein Middle School of Coventry. Team Nautilus (Tao Albrecht, Elizabeth Collie, Julie Lamarre, and Jennifer Lawrence) received

the 2015 Middle Level Team That Makes a Difference award. The members of Team Nautilus “believe their primary purpose is to engage students in learning by making greater use of authentic problem-solving, project-based learning, cooperative learning, and technology.” In addition, RIMLE honored Ms. Lamarre, a third-year English teacher, as the 2015 Middle Level Promising Practitioner of the Year, noting: “Students and parents remark that Julie has ‘a gift’ and inspires learning. Her group projects get students interacting with each other, and that cultivates a team spirit and stretches their own learning. Julie treats every student with great respect, and that’s exactly what she got back from her students.”

Congratulations to these excellent middle-level educators!

### **5. White House posts video of Teacher of the Year ceremony**

The White House has posted a short video of President Obama’s remarks on Wednesday at the Teacher of the Ceremony. Congratulations to Rhode Island Teacher of the Year David Moscarelli, of Ponaganset High School, who represented Rhode Island teachers at this ceremony. You can see the video here:

<http://www.snappytv.com/tc/573322>

### **6. Report on digital-learning policies ranks R.I. 20<sup>th</sup> in the country, 2<sup>nd</sup> in New England**

A new report from the Foundation for Excellence in Education, the Digital Learning Now 2014 Report Card, ranks Rhode Island 20<sup>th</sup> in the country (with a grade of C and score of 74) on our digital-learning policies. Rhode Island ranks second among the

New England states, with a score one point below that of Maine. Among the highlights for Rhode Island, the report notes that:

- Rhode Island Virtual Learning Regulations (2012) require all learners in Rhode Island to have access to online courses;
- while Rhode Island does not require online courses to graduate, student individualized learning plans should reflect engagement in virtual learning opportunities;
- the Virtual Learning Regulations also require that local graduation policies not limit access or prohibit online coursework from fulfilling graduation requirements and the regulations do not regulate the number of providers with which a student can enroll.

The report is posted here:

<http://digitallearningnow.com/report-card/>

## **7. Data Hub posts story on aligning the workforce with jobs**

The Rhode Island Data Hub has posted a new “data story” on the Rhode Island College to Career Landscape: Aligning the workforce with jobs. The data story looks at how the fields of study of recent graduates of the Community College of Rhode Island, Rhode Island College, and the University of Rhode Island relate to their place in the Rhode Island “employment landscape.” You can access this report here:

<http://ridatahub.org/datastories/ris-college-to-career-landscape/1/>

The Data Hub is a partnership among RIDE; the Departments of Health, Labor and Training, and Children, Youth, and Families; and The Providence Plan.

### **From RIDE**

#### ***Professional Development:***

#### **8. RIDE offers professional development on middle-school mathematics and the Common Core**

RIDE is pleased to offer *The Rigors of Ratio and Proportional Reasoning in the Common Core State Standards*, a professional development module for middle-schools teachers. The module explores the power of the tape diagram and the double number line as strategies for developing conceptual understanding and problem-solving in this domain. Additionally, activities focusing on the relationships between ratio tables and graphs reveal the essential link between ratio and proportion and future work with functions and algebra. Included in the training materials is a PowerPoint with facilitator notes and embedded instructional videos, as well as a variety of hands-on activities. These activities are both participant- and student-friendly. To access the module, please follow this link:

[ride.ri.gov /CCSS-Math-Educators](http://ride.ri.gov /CCSS-Math-Educators).

#### **9. Other Health Impaired module regarding eligibility for special education services available on RIDE website**

RIDE is pleased to announce a new on-line module available to provide assistance to special education evaluation teams regarding student eligibility in the category of Other Health

Impaired. This module is available on the RIDE website under Special Education Regulations (Be Informed) and Special Education Resources (Other Health Impaired), or at this link:

[http://media.ride.ri.gov/OSCAS/OHI\\_Module-FINAL\\_4-10-2015/story.html](http://media.ride.ri.gov/OSCAS/OHI_Module-FINAL_4-10-2015/story.html).

Please share this valuable information with your special education evaluation teams, principals, parents, and school staff. If you have questions about this module, please contact Alice Woods, at 222-8983 or [Alice.Woods@ride.ri.gov](mailto:Alice.Woods@ride.ri.gov).

***Educators:***

**10. Superintendents, heads of school asked to complete survey on teacher absenteeism by May 8 – *Action Item***

RIDE is currently exploring the topic of teacher absenteeism. In order to gain a better understanding of how LEAs capture and define absences, we are asking you to please complete a short survey.

The survey may be found at:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/C2573QS>

The deadline to complete the survey is Friday, **May 8**.

If you have any questions about this survey, please contact Mike Ferry, at [michael.ferry@ride.ri.gov](mailto:michael.ferry@ride.ri.gov) or 222-8258.

***Assessments:***

## **11. NCSC seeks educators to participate in standard-setting process for alternate assessments; applications due May 8**

RIDE is recruiting special educators, general educators, and administrators to serve on the National Center and State Collaborative (NCSC) Alternate Assessment Standard Setting Committee for ELA/writing and Mathematics. NCSC will report the results of its assessments by performance levels 1 through 4. Standard-setting is the process for determining the threshold scores students must earn on the assessments in order to reach each performance level. Participation in the standard-setting process will allow educators to play a large role in defining how student performance on NCSC assessments translates to each performance level. The application for those who would like to participate is posted here:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/InstructionAssessment/Assessment/AlternateAssessments.aspx#183317-ncsc>

*Who:* Special educators, general educators, and administrators

*What:* Participation in the NCSC Alternate Assessment standard-setting

*Where:* Indianapolis

*When:* August 9 through 13:

August 9: Travel day

August 10 and 11: Grade-level standard-setting meetings

August 13: Reconciliation day for a small group of educators.

This group will ensure that the cut points for the test scores make sense across all grade levels. Only eight people will be selected for this committee.

*Application due:* No later than Friday, **May 8**. Only *complete applications* will be considered. Not all who apply will be selected. If you are selected, detailed travel arrangements will be sent to you directly.

*Stipend/Substitute Reimbursements:* There will be no stipend or substitute reimbursements for participation on this committee.

***RIDE will post this field memo on Tuesday, at:***

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