

Commissioner's Weekly Field Memo
Friday, May 9, 2014

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- May 16: School [calendars](#) due
- May 22: Asset protection plans due (see [below](#))
- May 27: Classifications data clean-up due (see [below](#))
- May 30: District [Teacher of the Year](#) nominations due
- June 2: Preliminary academic or [behavioral-intervention data](#) due
- June 20: School [Health](#) Reports due
- June 20: Roster verification to be completed (see [below](#))
- June 23: Academic or [Behavioral-intervention final](#) data due
- July 14: Educator-evaluation data due (see [below](#))
- July 15: Housing aid forms due (see [below](#))
- July 18: UCOA preliminary date due (see [below](#))
- September 30: UCOA FY 2014 data due (see [below](#))

Notes from Commissioner Gist

1. U.S. Department of Education Team in Rhode Island for Race to the Top on-site review

This week we welcomed a team from the U.S. Department of Education, which came to Rhode Island for the Year 4 onsite review of our Race to the Top initiative. They reported to us at the outset of their visit that Rhode Island is one of the very few Race to the Top states whose request for a one-year extension of the grant was extremely minor. (Washington, D.C., also made a minimal extension request; Hawaii requested no extension.) The team is interested, during this on-site visit, in seeing “how was the needle supposed to move” as a result of the Race to the Top grant and whether it moved.

I reported to the team that we have had every one of our LEAs involved in the initiative from the beginning. This year, we are getting to the point of full implementation of all Race to the Top-funded initiatives. I did share with the team that we are concerned about sustainability beyond the period of the grant; even though we have sustainability plans in place, it’s going to be a challenge for us – and that’s true at the LEA level as well. Overall, I noted that many Race to the Top initiatives, which at one time seemed very controversial, have now become much more a part of the practices and the culture in place in our schools and districts.

I also observed to the team that, over the four years of the grant, our relations with you and your colleagues in the LEAs have continued growing particularly as you work with one another on various initiatives, and that these relationships will endure beyond the scope of the grant. Nevertheless, we are rethinking

the role of this agency going forward and we are concerned that we will be unable to continue with the kinds of services we have provided under Race to the Top. We are trying to determine what kind of support we can continue to provide to districts going forward.

We will measure the success of the Race to the Top initiative primarily by advances in student achievement, though I noted that it will be difficult to measure student progress in the aggregate as we transition to PARCC assessments. To measure success, we will also look at the successful implementation of many initiatives that Race to the Top has funded, such as transition to the Common Core, implementation of educator evaluations, and professional development regarding data use. We have many great stories about each of these initiatives and others. The hardest aspects to measure, however, are the cultural shifts: dramatic changes in the way we approach our work, starting with a statewide focus on great instruction.

At RIDE, we are continuously talking about how to sustain these initiatives after the period of the grant, I reported. We need to make sure that we do not lose sight of the value of the systems we have created, such as the Collaborative Learning for Outcomes, the evaluation systems, and the data systems for educators to use.

I am confident that the team will return to Washington with a profound understanding of our work and accomplishments in Rhode Island. The team visited three school during the week (Bristol Warren, Coventry, and North Providence), and I am grateful that these visits have proceeded smoothly. Thank you to all the folks from these three districts for taking the time to meet with the review team to discuss in depth our work on Race to the

Top on the local level. I appreciate the support from all of our LEAs during this week of on-site review and, especially, for your commitment to the goals of Race to the Top throughout the entire period of the grant!

2. Discussions to move forward on improving process for earning a diploma

Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to speak with you this morning at your membership meeting on a topic that is highly important to all educators and students: implementing the Rhode Island Diploma System. Based on all that we have learned during this year of implementation, I know that there are improvements we can make to the process. I look forward to further discussions with you as we consider ways to streamline, clarify, and improve the process for earning a high-school diploma.

3. ESEA Flexibility Request renewal application posted

On Monday, RIDE will submit to the U.S. Department of Education our request for a one year extension of the “flexibility” the U.S. Department of Education granted us two years ago regarding provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act, also known as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The flexibility we received in 2012 allowed us to create our current system of school classifications and accountability, under which we classify schools on a number of factors, including closing achievement gaps and progress toward goals, rather than solely on the percentage of students attaining proficiency. Our system also provides schools and districts subject to state intervention because of low achievement to design a school-improvement plan

that best suits their unique needs – rather than to select for a menu of predetermined intervention plans. In our renewal request, we are seeking only some minor revisions, which we need to implement because of our transition to a new set of statewide assessments. My deepest thanks to all who provided us with guidance and feedback as we developed this renewal request; your insights were extremely helpful throughout this process.

Information on the application that we will submit on Monday is posted on our website on this page (scroll down to “Rhode Island’s Request for ESEA flexibility” April 2014 update):

<http://ride.ri.gov/InformationAccountability/Accountability/SchoolClassifications.aspx>

We intend to post the completed application by the end of the day (May 9).

4. East Greenwich student named Presidential Scholar

Secretary Duncan announced on Monday that Heather C. Shen, of East Greenwich High School, has been named as a 2014 U.S. Presidential Scholar. Presidential Scholars are honored annually based on their academic success, artistic excellence, essays, school evaluations and transcripts, as well as evidence of community service, leadership, and demonstrated commitment to high ideals. Nationwide, only 141 students were selected as Presidential Scholars – out of the 3 million students expected to graduate this year! In her application, Heather named David Rubinstein as her “most influential teacher.” Congratulations to Heather, to David, and to the many other educators in East

Greenwich who helped Heather toward this magnificent achievement.

5. North Kingstown leader named Elementary School Principal of the Year

The Rhode Island Association of School Principals has named Edward Ferrario, of the Stony Lane Elementary School, in North Kingstown, as its 2014 Elementary School Principal of the Year. Under his leadership, Stony Lane has won a Blue Ribbon Award, the highest award that the U.S. Department of Education bestows on a school. He makes sure that every teacher in the school takes on some leadership role and responsibility. The association notes that Ed was unanimously nominated for this award by his faculty, which “speaks volumes regarding the highly effective, collaborative leader ... that he is.”

6. R.I. environmental educators receive EPA award

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has presented a 2014 Environmental Merit Award to the Rhode Island Environmental Education Association. The award represents “groups whose work has protected or improved the region’s environment in distinct ways.” In its citation, the agency noted that:

The Rhode Island Environmental Education Association is a terrific resource to Rhode Island students, schools, and educators. The organization works collaboratively to promote environmental education and public awareness of environmental issues throughout the Ocean State. Kristen Swanberg and her team have been working for years to provide a forum for members to discuss and make recommendations regarding the environmental education

needs of the state and to create an environmentally literate citizenry through the Rhode Island Environmental Literacy Plan.

We at RIDE have enjoyed working closely with the association on the literacy plan, on the Green Ribbon Schools initiative, and on the development of the Next Generation Science Standards. Congratulations to the environmental educators in Rhode Island on earning this recognition!

From RIDE

Assessments:

**7. *Reminder:* Deadline for requesting student exemption from
NECAP Science testing is May 23**

All requests for state-approved special consideration or exemption from NECAP Science testing must be submitted online no later than **May 23**, via eRIDE, using the following link:

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

We strongly encourage all requests for exemption to be submitted as soon as possible rather than at the end of the testing window. Early submission of these requests will allow you sufficient time to test the student if the request for exemption is denied.

As a reminder, *no* exemption request will be processed until a *signed copy* of the “Form 1: District Assurances Form” has been faxed to RIDE (222-3605).

As in previous years, when superintendents and LEA testing coordinators log into eRIDE they will see the icon “NECAP/RIAA Exemption Requests” and can use this to access the necessary online forms.

In addition, the “State-Approved Special Considerations for Statewide Assessments: Guidelines & Forms” document has been updated for the current school year to outline the policies and procedures for requesting student exemptions. This document is available on the RIDE website, at:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/InstructionAssessment/Assessment/NECAPAssessment/NECAPExemptions.aspx>

It is also available on the eRIDE exemptions page, at:

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

It is very important that you review the guidance document before attempting to submit requests through eRIDE. If you have any questions about NECAP Science exemptions, please contact Dr. Kevon Tucker-Seeley (phone: 222-8494; e-mail: Kevon.Tucker-Seeley@ride.ri.gov).

Professional Development:

- 8. RIDE offers professional development on mathematics Common Core State Standards and on PARCC assessments**

We are pleased to offer two new professional development sessions focusing on the Common Core State Standards for mathematics and PARCC assessments:

- *Using PARCC Tools to Develop & Evaluate Assessments*
The design of PARCC assessments has actively involved many educators throughout the participating states. The purpose of this 2-hour professional development session is to provide Rhode Island high-school mathematics teachers with the opportunity to engage in a simulated item review that parallels the process used in vetting PARCC items. Participants will become acquainted with the different task types that will populate PARCC assessments and will review the life cycle of a PARCC mathematics item. Participants will gain greater insight into the PARCC Evidence Statements and will actively use these statements in reviewing a variety of item types. As a result of the session, educators will come away with a greater understanding of PARCC assessments and with the ability to access and use the PARCC tools to write or evaluate local assessments.
- *The Rigors of Ratio and Proportional Reasoning in the Common Core State Standards for Mathematics*
Ratios and proportional reasoning is one of the major content areas for middle-school mathematics and is an essential understanding for success in high-school mathematics. Focusing on the development of this concept, this 2-hour workshop will provide participants with strategies that will engage students and deepen their understanding of ratio and proportion as addressed in the Common Core State Standards for mathematics. Incorporation of mathematical practices as

well as the use of visual models and representations will be highlighted. (If you have questions regarding this mathematics Common Core State Standards professional development, please contact Susan Pagliaro, at susan.pagliaro@ride.ri.gov, or Patricia Carnevale, at patricia.carnevale@ride.ri.gov.)

School Finances and Statewide Efficiencies:

9. Housing Aid Forms due July 15

LEAs that complete school-housing projects for repair, renovation, or new construction may be eligible for state housing aid reimbursement, pursuant to Rhode Island General Laws 16-7-35 through 16-7-47. These laws are designed to guarantee adequate school housing for all public-school children and to prevent the cost of school housing from interfering with the effective operation of the schools. Fiscal Year 2015 housing-aid instructions and forms are now available online. For detailed information, instructions, and forms please visit:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/FundingFinance/SchoolConstructionProgram/HousingAidProgram.aspx>

Forms are due by **July 15**. Please note that the General Assembly recently changed the housing-aid payments from October 31 and April 30 to September 15 and March 15. Therefore, it is extremely important that all housing-aid submissions be submitted by the July 15 deadline. Please contact Mario Carreno, at 222-8030 or Mario.Carreno@ride.ri.gov, if you have any questions about housing aid.

10. Asset Protection Plans due May 22 – Action Item

LEAs are required to provide annual asset-protection plans pursuant to the School Construction Regulations. Beginning in 2012, the collection of Asset Protection Plans has occurred electronically to improve accuracy and to make it easier to completing the forms.

To submit your plans online, business managers or other authorized users should log in to eRIDE. Once logged in to eRIDE, you will see an Asset Protection Plan icon located at the bottom of your screen. For your convenience, a user manual has been provided at the bottom of the page.

If you do not have an eRIDE account or if you are unable to access the Asset Protection Plan link, please e-mail Joseph da Silva, at Joseph.daSilva@ride.ri.gov.

Asset Protection Plans for Fiscal Year 2014 are due by **May 22**.

11. LEAs asked to complete form on Wireless Classroom Initiative implementation - *Action Item*

The Wireless Classroom Initiative (WCI) team is pleased to report that 40 LEAs have received grant awards for a total of \$12.9 committed to date. Several LEAs have completed installations, and others are in the final testing phase. In addition, implementation is underway in many LEAs. We are waiting for recommendations from 15 LEAs, and 3 other LEAs awaiting proposals. Reimbursement requests and change orders are now being received, and the processing of these requests is underway.

Last week, the WCI team hosted a web conference to update you on the progress of the project. Topics covered included the approach and procedures for grant administration, implementation and vendor management, and roles and responsibilities in partnership with RIDE. For those who were unable to participate, the web conference will be available on the RIDE website next week. You can access the session from the WCI page using the following link:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/FundingFinance/SchoolDistrictFinancialData/WirelessClassroomInitiative.aspx>

Yesterday the WCI Team deployed an LEA Status Self-Reporting Form. This will assist our project office with tracking the progress of LEA implementations and it will provide the information necessary for us to manage workflow and cash flow forecasts. We ask LEAs to complete and return the form as soon as possible.

12. Uniform Chart of Accounts preliminary data for current Fiscal Year due July 18 – *Action Item*

The completion of the Fiscal Year 2013 Uniform Chart of Accounts data is near. This was a particularly challenging year for some regarding completing data in a timely manner. We have changed our protocols so as to test data earlier in the year in order to provide you with sufficient time to make necessary corrections. It is critical, however, that the cycle for completion of annual data be closed by October of each year to ensure that we are able to provide you with comparative data for budgeting purposes. We expect to post Fiscal Year 2013 data within the next three weeks.

As to Fiscal Year 2014, you are required to submit UCOA data on a quarterly basis. Although submissions have improved,

approximately 50 percent of LEAs have not yet submitted a file for the current fiscal year. At this point we should have received three-quarters of data. Those LEAs that have submitted Fiscal Year 2014 files have already received their quality-assurance review reports, allowing them to make any necessary corrections before the impact of end of the fiscal year is upon them. If you have not yet submitted a file, please do so at this time. The preliminary June 30 file will be due by **July 18**. The final file of the year is due **September 30**.

School Classifications and Accountability:

13. LEAs to have access to 2014 classifications, accountability on Monday; data clean-up information due May 27

The 2014 school classifications and accountability data for each LEA, which is strictly embargoed, will be uploaded to the District Folder located in the RIDEmap District Exchange by the end of the day on **Monday** (May 12) Included in the folder will be 24 general files comprising all documentation and data used to develop the school classifications and the district and school report cards; also included will be the student-level files for both teaching and testing years. Over the next two weeks, you may share this material with your administrative team for verification and review. You must direct any questions and communicate any information for data clean-up to Michael Ferry, our Director of Data, Analysis, and Research (Michael.Ferry@ride.ri.gov) by **May 27**. At that time, we will begin preparing final data files and report cards, which we will release on **June 9**.

All information on school classifications is embargoed until that date; please do not share publicly any of your accountability results until the statewide release on June 9.

Note: The file upload to the RIDEmap District Exchange replaces the CD that we have sent to you with this data in previous years.

Educator Evaluations:

**14. Educator-evaluation data reporting due on July 14 –
*Action Item***

For schools and districts not fully implementing the Educator Performance and Support System (EPSS), a reporting spreadsheet along with instructions is now available on the RIDE website. The spreadsheet allows LEAs to document the required evaluation data for all teachers and building administrators in a simple format that can then be uploaded to the EPSS. The evaluation-data upload tool will be accessible under the “Config Admin” tab in the EPSS, beginning on May 16, to the individuals who have been designated by the LEA as the EPSS District Configuration Administrator. The deadline for reporting educator-evaluation data to RIDE is **July 14**. Please contact Sandra.Forand@ride.ri.gov with any questions or concerns about reporting educator-evaluation data.

The evaluation reporting spreadsheet along with the instructions can be found on the RIDE website at:

www.ride.ri.gov/EPSS.

Data and Reports:

15. Roster verification begins Wednesday; process to be completed by June 20 – Action Item

Roster verification is the process by which educators verify that the Teacher Course Student data pertaining to them is accurate. This year, roster verification will take place from Wednesday (May 14) through June 20. Below are some important facts about roster verification. Additional information can be found in the [Roster Verification User Guide for Principals](#) and the [Roster Verification User Guide for Teachers](#).

Stage 1 - From Wednesday (May 14) through May 21, principals will begin the roster-verification process by logging into the Roster Verification Tool and checking the Teacher-Course-Section (TCS) data to ensure that the information from the LEA Student Information System was submitted correctly to RIDE. You will identify if there are any missing teachers or course sections for your school – or if there are any teachers or courses that should not be listed – and get corrections made in the Student Information System so that the correct data can be submitted back to RIDE in time for teachers to begin their portion of the roster-verification process.

Stage 2 - Between May 28 and June 6, all teachers who are contributing educators in English language arts or mathematics for grades 3 through 7 must complete their segment of the roster-verification process. Principals should monitor the progress of teachers during this phase.

Stage 3 - Between June 9 and June 20, principals will review and sign off on the rosters that their teachers have verified in the

previous period. You must complete this segment of Roster Verification no later than June 20.

Questions about roster verification? Please enter a help-desk ticket, at:

<https://support.ride.ri.gov>.

From the U.S. Department of Education

16. U.S. Education, Justice Departments issue guidance on providing equal access to school enrollment

Please see this message from the U.S. Department of Education:

Secretary Arne Duncan and Attorney General Eric Holder announced yesterday (May 8) updated guidance to assist public elementary and secondary schools to ensure enrollment processes are consistent with the law and fulfill their obligation to provide all children—no matter their background—equal access to an education.

In 2011, the U.S. Departments of Justice and Education issued guidance to help schools understand their responsibilities under the Supreme Court’s decision in Plyler v. Doe and federal civil rights laws to provide all children with equal access to an education regardless of their or their parents’ immigration status. Yesterday, the departments issued important updates to that guidance, including examples of permissible enrollment practices, as well as examples of the types of information that may not be used as a basis for denying a student entrance to school.

The updated guidance documents—including a guidance letter to states and school districts and a fact sheet and Q-and-A document—emphasize the need for flexibility in accepting documents from parents to prove a child’s age and to show that a child resides within a school’s attendance area. They also provide specific examples of the types of documents that many schools have accepted. And the guidance documents remind schools that they may not require certain documents—such as a parent’s state-issued driver’s license—where such a requirement would prevent a student from enrolling because of his or her parent's immigration status.

The important changes announced yesterday will provide districts with the additional tools and practical guidance needed to make sure the schoolhouse door is open to all students and that undocumented children and children from immigrant families no longer face barriers to enrollment in school and starting down the path to a better future.

The English-language guidance documents are posted at:

<http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201405.pdf>

<http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/qa-201405.pdf>

<http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/dcl-factsheet-201405.pdf>

The Spanish-language guidance documents are posted at:

<http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201405-sp.pdf>

<http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/ga-201405-sp.pdf>

<http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/dcl-factsheet-201405-sp.pdf>

From other federal agencies

17. U.S. Department of Justice seeks participants for research on school safety

Please see this message from the U.S. Department of Education:

[Solicitations related to research in the area of school safety](#) were recently announced by the U.S. Justice Department's National Institute of Justice. The "Investigator-Initiated Research" solicitation is wide open, and the institute will consider any topic that can add to the knowledge base on school safety. The "Developing Knowledge About What Works to Make Schools Safe" solicitation is open to states, districts, and public charter schools and supports a unique opportunity to engage in research that closely examines the effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability of various school safety strategies.

RIDE will post this field memo on Tuesday, at:

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