

**Commissioner's Weekly Field Memo**  
**Friday, May 22, 2015**

**Notes from Commissioner Gist**

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2. Prototype 4 of [strategic plan](#) for public education released; RIDE seeks comments and feedback by **June 1**
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  10. RIDE gathers feedback from school, district leaders on [2015 PARCC assessments](#), posts survey results
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**Action Item Calendar**

- Today** (May 22): [CRP](#) due for summer activities
- May 29: 2016 PARCC administration survey due (see [below](#))
- June 1: [Asset Protection Plans](#) due
- June 2: [Student contact](#) file due
- June 5: Preliminary [CEIS data](#) due
- June 5: School [Health](#) report due
- June 5: Preliminary [Homeless](#) and Title I files due
- June 5: [Disproportionality](#) Performance Report due
- June 17: [CEIS Report](#) due
- June 30: [Dual-enrollment](#) polices completed
- June 30: [Preschool](#) Performance Report due
- July 1: [CRP](#) due
- July 10: [Educator-evaluation](#) reports due
- July 15: [Special Education](#) Performance Report due
- July 15: [Housing Aid](#) forms due

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## Notes from Commissioner Gist

### **1. PARCC Governing Board votes to reduce testing time; RIDE to survey superintendents on new testing window**

*Repeating from yesterday's Field Memo alert:* On Wednesday, the PARCC Governing Board voted to use only one testing window and to reduce total testing time by 90 minutes in the coming school year (2015-16). The Governing Board approved these changes as a result of feedback from all PARCC states during the first year of testing and after a careful review of the test design.

The redesign of the PARCC assessment will meet our goal of streamlining assessments in Rhode Island at all levels – state, district, and school. I am confident that, with a narrower testing window and with a shortened testing time, the PARCC assessments will allow more time for classroom instruction while still providing valuable and reliable information to families and educators about student progress and achievement.

As a result of the Governing Board vote, next year the PARCC consortium will:

- consolidate the two testing windows that stretched from March to June into one testing period of approximately 30 days;

- reduce the number of test units from 8 or 9, depending on grade level, to 6 or 7 test units;
- reduce the testing time for students by 90 minutes overall (30 minutes in English language arts, 60 minutes in mathematics); and
- simplify administration of the assessments while giving schools flexibility in setting their testing schedules within the testing period.

Though the testing period will be about 30 days, most schools will need only one or two weeks to complete their testing. The scheduled testing time for each test unit will be only about 60 to 90 minutes, depending on subject and grade level.

You can find additional information on changes to the design of the PARCC assessment [here](#).

This action by the Governing Board should help resolve some of the issues you and your team of test coordinators, as well as students who participated in the PARCC assessments, have raised in our follow-up survey and in many communications and informal conversations.

In light of these changes in the PARCC test design, we would like to get your input on next year's testing window. We will be sending you a survey on **Tuesday** (May 26) so that you can let us know which option is preferable within the parameters of the PARCC Consortium. Please involve your staff in the discussion so that we decide on a testing window that is based on our collective good thinking and input.

I appreciate the feedback you have provided to us, and I am very grateful to you for the successful administration of the PARCC

assessments, with more than 210,000 online assessments successfully completed in Rhode Island to date!

## **2. Prototype 4 of strategic plan for public education released; RIDE seeks comments and feedback by June 1**

We are pleased and proud to publish prototype 4 of the 2015-2020 strategic plan. I want to thank you and all of the members of your team, including your teachers, for contributing to this process so far. Some school leaders are serving on the Ambassador Design Team, others have come to feedback sessions, and many have responded to our prototype surveys. Prototype 4 is the final opportunity for statewide feedback. Please consider taking 15 minutes to participate in this important final step.

Please go to [www.ride.ri.gov/Plan-Feedback](http://www.ride.ri.gov/Plan-Feedback) to watch a short introductory video, download prototype 4, and respond to the brief (six-question) survey, which focuses on your high-level feedback regarding the quality, scope, and focus of prototype 4.

The survey will be open until 8 a.m. on **June 1**. After we close the survey, we will collect your feedback and gather the feedback into a report that we will use to inform the Ambassador Design Team final revisions. We expect to bring a final plan forward next month.

Along with other RIDE team members who have been working on this project, we are confident that this strategic plan has captured the hopes, priorities, and interests of Rhode Islanders and that the plan will set the course for our journey toward making Rhode Island the home of America's best public schools.

### **3. RIDE issues guidance on implementing the Statewide Bullying Policy**

As part of our ongoing efforts to ensure that the Statewide Bullying Policy is being implemented effectively in all of Rhode Island districts and schools, I have issued new “Guidance on the Statewide Bullying Policy” and RIDE has developed a sample “Investigation/Response Form.” This form and this guidance supplement the report form and Statewide Bullying [Policy](#) and the bullying-prevention [guidance](#) that we disseminated in 2012. This guidance also reflects the October 21, 2014, [communication](#) from the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, urging LEAs to re-evaluate policies and practices so as to ensure effective responses to disability-based harassment. If you have any questions with respect to this guidance, you may call our Legal Office, at 222-8979.

Here is our Guidance on Bullying:

As you may recall, in 2011 the General Assembly directed the Department of Education to prescribe by regulation a statewide bullying policy to ensure a consistent and unified statewide approach to the prohibition of bullying at school. This law is known as the “Safe Schools Act” and can be found at R.I.G.L. 16-21-33 and 34. The Statewide Bullying Policy was promulgated by RIDE effective June 30, 2012. Since then, the state’s public and private schools have been utilizing this Policy to address and prevent the bullying of students.

Local oversight of schools’ implementation of the Statewide Bullying Policy is placed with school committees and school governing boards. The Policy requires that a summary report

of incidents, responses, and other bullying-related issues be provided by the school principal, director, or head of school to the governing body at least twice annually.

Pursuant to my obligation under R.I.G.L. 16-60-6(9)(vii) to require the observance of all education laws, I am charged with ensuring that the Safe Schools Act and the Statewide Bullying Policy are effectively implemented. In this capacity, as well as in my capacity to hear and decide disputes arising in our public schools or involving students with disabilities, I have dealt with bullying issues. Members of my staff have also worked with local school staff to resolve complaints from parents and advocates. In some instances, it has been shown that procedures required by the Statewide Bullying Policy have not been followed and that protections set forth in the Policy have not been provided. Also, on October 21, 2014, the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights issued additional guidance with regard to disability-based harassment and encouraged SEAs and LEAs “to reevaluate their policies and practices in light of this letter, as well as OCR’s and OSERS’s prior guidance.”

In light of the above, I would like to take this opportunity to offer the following clarifications of the Statewide Bullying Policy.

First, in its October 26, 2010, “Dear Colleague Letter: Harassment and Bullying,” the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, stated:

When responding to a bullying allegation, “a school must take immediate and appropriate action to investigate or otherwise determine what occurred. The specific steps in

a school's investigation will vary depending on the nature of the allegations, the source of the complaint, the age of the student or students involved, the size and administrative structure of the school, and other factors. *In all cases, however, the inquiry should be prompt, thorough, and impartial.* [Emphasis added]

In order to demonstrate that a school's investigation has met these requirements, it is imperative that the steps taken to investigate an allegation, the determination of whether or not bullying occurred, and the response or intervention measures taken by the school are documented. RIDE has received complaints from parents and advocates that allegations of bullying have been ignored or not adequately addressed at the school level. Creating documentation that describes the steps taken in the investigation, the finding made with regard to the credibility of the allegation of bullying, and the response or intervention by the school will enable the school to establish compliance with the Statewide Bullying Policy. The Guidance document, which includes an attached Investigation/Response [Form](#), is posted on our website. This guidance and form can serve as a blueprint for compliance that will better ensure that an allegation of bullying was addressed promptly, thoroughly, and impartially. The form also complements the Report Form that accompanies the Statewide Bullying Policy.

Second, it is permissible for the principal, director, or head of school to designate another member of the school staff to investigate an allegation of bullying and to recommend an appropriate response or intervention when found to be needed. This designation is consistent with the Safe Schools Act and consistent with current practice in the field. We

have learned that, given the practical constraints on a school leader's time, it is not necessarily the school principal, director, or head of school who follows up on every allegation of bullying. It is often more efficient to designate an assistant principal or director, school social worker, or other member of the school staff to address an allegation.

In addition to these clarifications, I also would like to offer my appreciation and gratitude for the hard work that I know has been expended in implementing the Safe Schools Act and the Statewide Bullying Policy. It is my hope that, with this guidance, the implementation of these measures will be more efficient and effective.

U.S. Department of Education Dear Colleague Letters:

<http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201010.html>

<http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-bullying-201410.pdf>

We have posted this guidance and the Investigation/Response Form here:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Inside-RIDE/Legal/Bullying%20Guidance%202015.pdf>

#### **4. RIASP honors Principals of the Year**

Congratulations to three of our finest educators, whom the Rhode Island Association of School Principals (RIASP) has selected as principals of the year:

- Kenneth Hopkins, of the Vincent J. Gallagher Middle School in Smithfield, Assistant Principal of the Year;
- Michaela Keegan, of the Juanita Sanchez Educational Complex, in Providence, First Year Principal of the Year; and
- Louise Seitsinger, of the Tiogue Elementary School, in Coventry, Elementary School Principal of the Year.

(Previously announced award-winners were Jaime Crowley, of the Thompson Middle School, in Newport, and Alan Tenreiro, of Cumberland High School.)

All of us at RIDE recognize that teachers do their best work when they have the support and resources they need – especially, the support of a great school leader. We are blessed to have so many excellent school leaders in Rhode Island, and the five principals of the year, whom RIASP honored in an awards ceremony on Wednesday, represent school leadership at its best.

### **From RIDE**

#### ***Educator Certification:***

#### **5. RIDE posts guide, rubric used for reviewing educator-preparation programs**

[PREP-RI](#) provides a structure for reviewing in-state educator preparation programs. PREP-RI is designed to meet three goals: assessing the performance of individual preparation programs, assessing the aggregate quality of educator-preparation providers, and providing meaningful feedback to programs and providers. Each year, in-state preparation programs prepare about 800 educators for certification in Rhode Island.

Educators and LEAs are encouraged to review the rubric and guide to better understand the expectations for programs, providers, and candidates. The [process guide](#), [rubric](#), and [data regarding program completers](#) are available on the [RIDE website](#). Additionally, this fall we will begin recruitment of review-team members. Questions regarding PREP-RI should be directed to either Cameron Berube, at [Cameron.Berube@ride.ri.gov](mailto:Cameron.Berube@ride.ri.gov), or to Sarah Whiting, at [Sarah.Whiting@ride.ri.gov](mailto:Sarah.Whiting@ride.ri.gov).

### ***Multiple Pathways:***

#### **6. RIDE posts materials on dual, concurrent enrollment**

Many school leaders have recently participated in webinars and engaged in great discussions about the recently enacted [Dual Enrollment regulations](#). RIDE has developed a [webpage](#) ([www.ride.ri.gov/dualenrollment](http://www.ride.ri.gov/dualenrollment)) with support materials to help enable you to:

- communicate about dual-enrollment opportunities with your students and families (flyers in [English](#) and [Spanish](#) and sample letters in [English](#) and [Spanish](#));
- communicate with your staff members about school- and district-specific information ([one page summary for staff](#));
- answer questions about the implications for your LEA through [FAQs](#);
- review available [concurrent courses for 2015-16](#), instructor and student eligibility criteria, and contact information for each of our three public postsecondary-education institutions;
- listen to the [webinar](#), in case you were unable to attend; and

- provide information about 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.

Rhode Island law requires you to adopt a dual-enrollment policy 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 coming school year.

If you have any questions about dual enrollment, please contact Stephen Osborn, Chief of the Division of Accelerating School Performance, at [stephen.osborn@ride.ri.gov](mailto:stephen.osborn@ride.ri.gov) or 222-8485.

### ***Webinars:***

#### **7. RIDE schedules webinars on grade-8 technology assessment results**

Two webinars have been scheduled, for Tuesday, June 2, and Wednesday, June 3, to share state-level 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills Assessment results. These webinars are designed to help proctors retrieve the appropriate level of student, class, school, or district reports on these grade-8 technology assessments; to read and interpret the 21st Century Skills Assessment data contained in the reports; and to apply the results to instructional or programmatic decision-making. State-level results and plans will also be discussed. The content of each webinar will be the

same; assessment proctors and district coordinators should register for only one webinar. To register, go to:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/InstructionAssessment/Assessment/TechnologyAssessment.aspx#1768855-training-opportunities>

For more information on the technology assessment, contact Holly Walsh, at [Holly.Walsh@ride.ri.gov](mailto:Holly.Walsh@ride.ri.gov).

### ***Educator Evaluations:***

#### **8. RIDE seeks principals to partner on improving evaluation implementation**

For the second year, RIDE is seeking principals interested in forming a partnership with members of the Educator Quality Team to support the implementation of educator evaluations in their school. Educator-quality specialists from RIDE will partner with principals to conduct a needs assessment and to set clear goals to focus their work together. They will provide ongoing support throughout the coming school year with the long-term goal of sharing with the field best practices and lessons learned.

Possible goals for the partnership include increasing the strategic use of data to plan differentiated professional learning opportunities, increasing the consistency of the quality and rigor of Student Learning/Outcome Objectives, calibrating the scoring of Professional Practice and Professional Responsibilities scores, improving the efficiency of the evaluation process, and implementing with quality the full support-professional evaluation process. To learn more about this opportunity, please visit our website, at:

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

To express interest in the program or for additional information, please contact our Educator Quality Team by **June 19**, at:

[ed.eval@ride.ri.gov](mailto:ed.eval@ride.ri.gov).

***Assessments:***

**9. RIDE to survey LEAs on 2016 PARCC administration plans; responses due May 29**

In preparation for the 2016 administration of the PARCC assessments, RIDE is requesting that all LEAs complete a short survey designed to determine whether you will be participating in block scheduling administration and in paper- or computer-based testing. You can access the survey here:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/V2D9SMH>.

Please complete the survey by Friday, **May 29**. If you have any questions about this request, please contact Phyllis Lynch, at 222-4693 or [PARCC@ride.ri.gov](mailto:PARCC@ride.ri.gov).

**10. RIDE gathers feedback from school, district leaders on 2015 PARCC assessments, posts survey results**

The spring administration of the PARCC assessments in Rhode Island is continuing to progress successfully. Not only will this administration provide valuable information on student achievement to parents, teachers, and schools, but the

assessments have already provided Rhode Island and the other states in the PARCC consortium with significant insight into how these assessments can best support student success in school and beyond.

The overall administration of the assessments has been very smooth, but there have been some issues as districts and schools engage with this assessment for the first time. Through in-person feedback sessions and through a survey, we gathered feedback from school and district leaders after the Performance Based Assessment administration of PARCC. You can find a summary of that feedback [here](#).

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

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