

**Commissioner's Weekly Field Memo**  
**Friday, August 16, 2013**

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## Notes from Commissioner Gist

### 1. Rhode Island invests Race to the Top funds to transform education

As we prepare for the celebration of Year 3 of our Race to the Top grant, to take place on **Monday** (August 19), at 4:30 p.m., at the Rhode Island Foundation (1 Union Station, Providence), I want to let you know about some of the misstatements in a [story](#) that ran last week in [golocalprov.com](#).

The headline on this story reads: “Only half of Race to the Top funds went to school districts.” Only? In fact, this amount is exactly what the Rhode Island Race to the Top grant and Scope of Work requires: a 50/50 split between the state and local school districts. Among many examples on the RIDE website, see this two-page [overview](#) on how Rhode Island is spending the \$75 million.

All other Race to the Top states are also splitting funds between state and local. (For the record, Rhode Island has actually added about \$4 million in state funds to support districts in some Race to the Top programs, such as additional funds for we added for the induction program for new teachers in 2012 hiring, when hiring was greater than anticipated.)

The story – based on outdated financial data (from June 2012, more than a year ago) posted on the U.S. Department of Education website – says that Rhode Island has the lowest share

rate with local districts among Race to the Top states - a patent absurdity. The table comparing Rhode Island with other states (see box at end of story) shows that 8 of the states provided *no* funds to local districts. The reporter brushes this fact aside, saying these states received a much smaller Race to the Top grant – which is completely inaccurate. The fact is that, by the end of the grant term, all Race to the Top states will provide funds to districts. The June 2012 snapshot is, at best, an indication of progress states were making a year ago in implementing the grant.

The report includes a quote stating that funding to districts was “the carrot dangled on the end of the stick” to get districts to sign on to the grant. From the outset, we stated repeatedly that Rhode Island would use all Race to the Top funds to build systems that would transform education; districts would not receive unrestricted funds, but they would have to apply funds to programs defined in the grant [Scope of Work](#). This is what has taken place.

The story also includes quotes stating in various forms that Race to the Top funds have not been “impacting ... schools and ... classroom instruction.” This is also untrue. Race to the Top funds have affected classroom instruction at every level through numerous initiatives, such as transition to the Common Core, development of aligned curriculum, educator evaluations, induction programs for new teachers, an academy for new principals – to cite just a few examples. For more information, see our [Projects Overview](#) and the quarterly [implementation updates](#) that we post on our website.

It has always been clearly stated that Rhode Island would not use Race to the Top funds to buy materials and supplies, nor to hire

permanent personnel – and that Rhode Island will use Race to the Top funding to create systems that will remain in place and in action beyond the four-year term of the grant. (To be fair, the story quotes two sources – Mary-Ellen Butke and Tim Duffy – who correctly explain the terms and purpose of the grant.)

We should note, for the record, that Rhode Island has gone through two Race to the Top on-site reviews that the U.S. Department of Education conducted. In its progress report this year, the U.S. Department of Education named Rhode Island as one of three states making excellent progress in putting Race to the Top funds into action. We are proud of that recognition, and we will continue to work with you to ensure that we are investing Race to the Top funds wisely so as to transform education in Rhode Island.

## **2. Race to the Top Steering Committee meets Monday to celebrate Year 3 of grant**

On the subject of Race to the Top, I want to remind you that Colleen Jermain and Neil Steinberg, co-chairs of the Race to the Top Steering Committee, invite you to attend the next Race to the Top Steering Committee meeting. At this meeting, we will celebrate our achievements during the third year of our four-year grant and we will engage in a discussion on what lies ahead in Year 4 and beyond. The meeting will take place at the Rhode Island Foundation, 1 Union Station, Providence, in the Rhode Island Room, on **Monday** (August 19), from 4:30 - 6:30 p.m. All of you have worked incredibly hard to implement the major policy initiatives and the teaching and learning practices that our Race to the Top funds support, and we would like to recognize your contributions and commitment.

All Race to the Top Steering Committee meetings are open to the public, so members of your team and your community who would like to attend are welcome as well.

Responses are not required, but in order to help Steering Committee get a head count for planning, please RSVP here:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/RTTSCAUG2013>

### **3. Mike Barnes named 2014 Superintendent of the Year**

I want to extend my congratulations to Mike Barnes on his selection by his colleagues in the Rhode Island School Superintendents Association (RISSA) as the 2014 Rhode Island Superintendent of the Year. Mike has been a true advocate on behalf of students and educators and a champion of school transformation during his service as superintendent in Foster-Glocester. Under his leadership, the schools in his district have made significant progress and are both recognized as “Leading Schools.” Mike is a particularly good choice for this year’s Superintendent of the Year because of his strong background and interest in technology, as innovations powered by technology will be an increasingly important element of our work this year and going forward. I look forward to working with Mike during the coming school year, as he is also serving as the President-elect of RISSA.

### **4. Kim Bright named as interim Chief of Staff**

As you may know, on Wednesday the Board of Education granted Clark Greene the authority to discharge the duties of the Commissioner of Higher Education, so Clark is now officially on loan to the Office of Higher Education. I want to let you know that

I have name Kimberly (Kim) Bright as the interim Chief of Staff at RIDE. Kim has been an incredibly valuable and active member of the RIDE team, where she has helped lead our transition to the new website, managed our social-media activities, and handled a voluminous amount of e-mail inquiries from the education field and from the public. Kim has also been largely responsible for our public outreach, including school visits and community forums. Kim will continue to devote a lot of her energy to community outreach as she takes on this new responsibility. I am sure you will enjoy working with Kim as she steps up to this new position.

**From RIDE**

***Assessments:***

**5. RIDE recruiting educators to pilot Interim Assessments; advises LEAs to limit use of Interims until pilot testing is completed**

RIDE is seeking a small set of participants to pilot either the fixed-form assessments or locally created assessments in mathematics or English language arts (ELA) from the test-construction tool early next month. We would like to use this pilot to make sure that the reports are functioning properly, as we have had a limited ability to test them over the summer. We expect them to be fully functional, but we will need real student-assessment results to confirm our expectations. In exchange for participating in the pilot, RIDE is offering professional development for teachers on scoring the constructed-response items from the pilot in mathematics or ELA. If you are interested in participating, please contact Jessica Brown, at [jessica.brown@ride.ri.gov](mailto:jessica.brown@ride.ri.gov) or 222-8253, as soon as possible.

Given that we are still trying to ensure that the reports are functioning properly, we would like to encourage you to limit your use of administering assessments (either Fixed Form or the Test Construction Tool) until we confirm that the reports are functioning as expected, which should be by the end of next month; however, see the dates on the Interim Assessments [webpage](#) to begin planning when you may want to administer assessments. Keep in mind that tests can be created and saved for later use through the test-construction tool, so even if you don't plan to administer a test until a later date, their creation can begin earlier.

## **6. RIDE providing materials for seniors who need to retake NECAPs**

RIDE will provide Measured Progress, our testing contractor, with enrollment numbers and school contact information for the coming school year. All seniors who scored *Substantially Below Proficient* (Level 1) on either the NECAP Mathematics or Reading test last fall will automatically be added to our label file and will also receive testing materials this fall. If your schools receive labels for students who are no longer enrolled, please throw the labels away. If you do not receive labels for some students who scored Substantially Below Proficient, please contact Dr. Kevon Tucker-Seeley ([kevon.tucker-seeley@ride.ri.gov](mailto:kevon.tucker-seeley@ride.ri.gov) or 222-8494) by Friday, **September 20**, for instructions on how to order additional labels.

## **7. PARCC releases sample test items**

Rhode Island is a member of the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) consortium, which is a develop a set of assessments aligned with the Common Core State

Standards, to be ready for use in classrooms in the Spring of 2015. Yesterday (August 15), Laura McGiffert Slover, Senior Vice President at PARCC, distributed this message regarding the release of PARCC sample test items:

I am pleased to share a set of sample PARCC test items in Mathematics and ELA/literacy. The release today is a “soft release” to PARCC leaders like you, Educator Leader Cadre members, and friends and advocates for PARCC. The public release will be **Monday** (August 19). At that time, we will issue a press release and all of the items will be posted on the PARCC website. We encourage you to share the following [Dropbox link](#) with your in-state supporters so they can get a preview before the 19<sup>th</sup>. For the moment, these sample items are being released in PDF form, so they aren’t going to be interactive – yet. PARCC plans to publicly release revised versions of these items on the actual technology platform in late 2013.

This release of sample items is a key milestone in the development of the PARCC assessments, and the items are an important tool for teachers who are implementing the Common Core State Standards in their classrooms.

The new sample test items show that, unlike many current state tests, the PARCC test will assess for critical thinking and writing and will measure students’ abilities to solve real-world problems—all of which are key skills needed for success in postsecondary career training and college. These sample items have gone through PARCC’s development and review process, including a check to make sure they are fair and free of bias.

PARCC plans to release another set of sample items this October. In all, these will cover mathematics and ELA/Literacy in every grade. Next spring, more items will be released as a practice test, available to everyone—students, teachers, parents—via [PARCCOnline.org](http://PARCCOnline.org).

***Technology:***

**8. RITEAF forms due September 23; LEAs asked to update technology plans – *Action Item***

The Rhode Island Telecommunications Educational Access Fund (RITEAF) forms have been updated based on feedback from throughout the year. RIDE needs these forms to apply for ERate funding on behalf of the consortium of schools and libraries in Rhode Island receiving RITEAF telecommunications lines. These forms must be returned no later than **September 23** in order for RIDE to file the appropriate ERate paperwork on your behalf and for your schools to receive line allocations for the 2014-15 school year.

The updated forms are located at:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/FundingFinance/SchoolDistrictFinancialData/RITEAFE-RateProgram.aspx>

Please be sure to mail your original *signed* documents. Please do not use outdated forms. Look for the correct school year: 2014-15!

Frequently asked questions can be found on the RIDE website as well as on the forms and accompanying paperwork. Technology directors and those responsible for ERate paperwork should be

made aware of the updates and due dates. Questions about the RITEAF forms can be directed to Karen Cooper, at [karen.cooper@ride.ri.gov](mailto:karen.cooper@ride.ri.gov)<<mailto:karen.cooper@ride.ri.gov>>.

Also, please log onto eRIDE and update the URL that points to your district's technology plan. Technology plans are used by many RIDE staff and must be kept current.

RIDE will cross-check technology plans with bandwidth upgrade requests. If a bandwidth request is made, justification must be included for the request.

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

#### **9. New online modules focus on Building Administrator SLOs and Special Educators and SLOs/SOOs**

Two new online modules are now available: *Building Administrator SLOs* and *Special Educators and SLOs/SOOs* (Student Learning Objectives/Student Outcome Objectives). A total of nine distinct online modules are now available on the RIDE website, ranging in length from 8 to 20 minutes long. The initial feedback on the online modules has been overwhelmingly positive, and we encourage all schools and districts to share these new resources with educators. The full suite of evaluation related online modules and the Assessment Toolkit can be found on the RIDE website, at:

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

#### **10. Updated Rhode Island Model evaluation materials to be delivered to all participating LEAs**

Hard copies of the Rhode Island Model Addendum to the Teacher Evaluation Guidebook, the Addendum to the Building Administrator Evaluation Guidebook, and the new Support Professional's Guidebook are being delivered to all participating LEAs beginning next week. The West Bay Collaborative is coordinating the deliveries and has contacted every LEA to confirm the correct number of materials and the delivery location. Electronic copies of all of the Guidebooks and Addenda, including an updated Measures of Student Learning Guidebook for non-Rhode Island Model districts, are also available on the RIDE website, at:

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

### **From Governor Chafee's Office**

#### **11. Governor Chafee, Cox Communications to announce broadband access program for students, families**

In partnership with Governor Chafee's Office, Cox Communications issued this news advisory on Thursday (August 15):

Governor Lincoln Chafee, Local Mayors,  
Educators, Students, and Families

Join Cox Communications to Launch Connect2Compete in RI:  
Increasing Broadband Access to Students to Help Them Build a  
Better Future

Statewide opportunity to be announced

Wednesday, August 21, in Central Falls

**What:** Cox Communications, along with its partner Connect2Compete, is bringing students and their families online by providing affordable high-speed Internet, low-cost computers and free digital literacy training.

**When:** **Wednesday** (August 21) at 1:15 p.m.

**Where:** Central Falls High School, 24 Summer Street

**Why:** The national Connect2Compete program is aimed at bridging the digital divide. This program provides students and their families with access to the Internet at a significantly discounted price. This access will provide students the tools they need to complete homework assignments, communicate with teachers and explore learning opportunities online.

**Who:** Governor Lincoln D. Chafee; John Wolfe, SVP & General Manager, Cox Communications Northeast region; Mayor James Diossa of Central Falls; Mayor Donald R. Grebien of Pawtucket; Mayor Allan Fung of Cranston; Senator Elizabeth Crowley; Dr. Fran Gallo, Superintendent Central Falls School District; Students and Families.

Cox Communications has posted materials for schools and districts to use regarding the Connect2Compete, including FAQs, a PowerPoint slideshow, sample letters from principals to families, flyers in English and Spanish, and other materials, at:

<http://www.connect2compete.org/cox/school-materials.php>

### **From the U.S. Department of Education**

#### **12. U.S. Department of Education seeks public comment on peer review of state assessments**

As required by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the U.S. Department of Education reviews and approves certain state assessments through panels of peer reviews. This process has been instrumental in helping states improve the reliability of their assessment systems and the accessibility of these assessments for all students, including English Learners and students with disabilities. However, the agency suspended the process in December 2012 in order to update it to align with the new and more robust demands of what high-quality assessments should be. Now, as a step in that direction, the U.S. Department of Education is asking the public - and, particularly, experts in assessments - to respond to [questions related to the peer review of state assessments](#). All responses should be directed to [ESEA.Assessment@ed.gov](mailto:ESEA.Assessment@ed.gov) (subject: "Title I Peer Review") by **September 30**.

### **From Other State Offices**

#### **13. Attorney General's Office to offer national background check services to school employees at locations across state**

To assist teachers and other school employees to obtain the national criminal background checks required by Rhode Island

General Law, Attorney General Peter F. Kilmartin will provide the service at several police departments across the state.

Under RIGL 16-2-18.1, any person seeking employment with a private school or public school department who has not previously been employed by that public or private school department in Rhode Island during the past 12 months shall undergo a national and state criminal background check. Employees hired prior to August 1, 2001, and who have been continuously employed by a public school department in Rhode Island during the past 12 months shall be exempted.

In addition to the regular hours of operation for the Bureau of Criminal Identification at the Office of Attorney General in Providence (Monday – Friday, 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.), the Office will provide national criminal background check services at the locations, dates and times below:

Date	Police Department	Address	Time
August 20	Smithfield Police Dept.	215 Pleasant Avenue	2:00 pm – 5:00 pm
August 22	Cranston	5 Garfield Avenue	3:00 pm – 6:00 pm
August 27	Charlestown	4901 Old Post Road	3:00 pm – 6:00 pm
August 29	N. Kingston	8166 Post Road	3:00 pm – 6:00 pm
September 3	Pawtucket	121 Roosevelt Avenue	3:00 pm – 6:00 pm
September	Bristol	395 Metacom	3:00 pm – 6:00

5		Avenue	pm
September 10	Middletown	123 Valley Road	3:00 pm – 6:00 pm

Individuals must bring positive proof of ID, such as a valid driver's license, state-issued ID, or passport, as well as a letter of conditional employment. Payment must be a check or money order only. Checks should be made out to "BCI." The cost for a national criminal background check is \$35, and the cost for a state-only criminal background check is \$5. The background check will be mailed to the individual. If you have any questions, please call the Office of Attorney General at (401) 274-4400 and ask for a fingerprint technician.

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

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