

Commissioner's Weekly Field Memo
Friday, September 6, 2013

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Wednesday (September 11): [SurveyWorks](#) site coordinators appointed

September 20: Course Coding updates dues (see [below](#))

September 23: [RITEAF forms](#) due

September 23: [NECAP testing schedules](#) due

September 27: [UCOA](#) files due

Notes from Commissioner Gist

1. Education Board begins discussion of Fiscal Year 2015 budget

The Board of Education held its first work session of the school year yesterday (September 5), and one of the topics before the Board is the preparation of the Fiscal Year 2015 Budget Request. We presented the Board with some preliminary numbers for

consideration, along with some of the budget instructions we have received from the Department of Administration. Our target for state aid to education is \$765.7 million, which will support full funding of Year 4 of the Funding Formula – an increase of about \$36 million from the education aid for the current fiscal year.

In keeping with the budget instructions, we will prepare two Fiscal Year 2015 budgets: one at current funding level, and one with a 7-percent reduction. This reduction, of about \$1.4 million, would primarily affect RIDE operations and certain aid programs that “pass through” RIDE en route to districts, schools, and programs. As I told the Board yesterday, this constrained budget would be very challenging for RIDE and for the districts as well, as we all try to maintain our core responsibilities and meet our performance targets at the same time.

The Board will discuss the budget further at its meeting on Monday (September 9) and in its October meetings, with the goal of approving a Budget Request at its meeting on October 7. I will keep you informed of any significant developments on this front.

2. RIDE presents Education Board with draft standards for approval of educator-preparation programs

As you know, the top priority in our strategic plan, *Transforming Education in Rhode Island*, is ensuring educator excellence. The very first strategy in the plan is the pledge to “review and strengthen rigorous standards and criteria for approval of education-preparation programs.” To meet this objective, over the past four months we have been working in partnership with the programs in Rhode Island and with leading national organizations to review and update our program-approval standards, which RIDE last revised about 13 years ago. We have a

good process in place, but we need to do more to continue to improve educator excellence. Our goal in developing the draft of revised program-approval standards is to align these standards with other key elements in our education system – including the Rhode Island Professional Teaching Standards and the Educator Evaluation Standards, which form the foundation for our evaluation system.

Yesterday (September 5), we presented a draft of revised standards to the Board of Education, which will vote on Monday to approve the draft standards for public comment. We believe we have developed a concise (5 standards) and succinct (3 pages) set of standards that focus on the critical issues. In addition, these standards are aligned with the draft standards that the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation, a new national accrediting body, has developed.

At present, RIDE approves 12 preparation programs, including programs at RIC, URI, nonpublic institutions of higher education in the state, and alternate programs such as Teach for America. Within each institution we may individually approve a number of programs, such as teacher preparation, principal preparation, and others. Over the next few months, we look forward to working with folks from each of our programs and institutions and with teachers and school leaders to ensure that we put into action educator-preparation programs that are of high quality and that focus on continuous growth and improvement.

3. Author Rick Hess to speak at RIDE on September 16

For those of you who have a copy of Rick Hess's book *Cage-Busting Leadership* and who have contacted us about joining in a discussion with Rick, we now have more specifics his visit to

Rhode Island: Rick will be here in the Shepard Building (255 Westminster St./80 Washington St., Providence), in the Paff Auditorium (first floor), on Monday, **September 16**, at 4:30 p.m. I'm sure Rick's visit here will advance our thinking about the role of leadership in transforming education, and I look forward to getting together with Rick and with those of you who have contacted us about participating in this event.

From RIDE

Assessments:

4. NECAP testing to begin next month, must be completed by October 23

The NECAP testing window this year is **October 1 – 23**. All testing—including accommodations and make-up testing—*must* be completed by October 23. In planning your assessment schedule you should take into consideration religious holidays and local events that may impact students' ability to participate. It is important that you allow ample time for make-up test sessions for those students who are absent for any reason (including absences for religious holidays) during regularly scheduled testing dates.

Principals and test coordinators are ultimately responsible for ensuring that all eligible students are tested. Therefore, you and your staff members must:

- ensure that parents and guardians are aware of the purpose of the assessment and that they have access to your NECAP testing schedule in advance so that they can plan accordingly;

- strongly discourage parents and guardians from planning any vacations or other activities that would prevent their children from testing with their peers during scheduled test-administration days;
- ensure that parents and guardians are aware that their children must make up any testing they missed while absent and that all make-up testing must be completed no later than October 23; and
- encourage parents and guardians to contact the principal, test coordinator, or teacher if their children will be absent during testing so that schools can arrange for make-up testing.

During the testing period, please encourage students to get plenty of rest, to eat a good breakfast on the day of testing, and to perform at their very best so that we all can take pride in the accomplishments of our students and their teachers!

5. LEA NECAP testing schedules due by September 23 - *Action item*

During the fall NECAP testing window (October 1 - 23), RIDE staff members will once again be visiting a random selection of schools across the state to observe the administration of the NECAP tests. These visits are necessary so that we can continue to improve the NECAP testing program for test coordinators, test administrators, and students and also so that we can monitor whether proper testing procedures and guidelines are being followed in school classrooms.

We ask that all LEA testing schedules be submitted no later than Monday, **September 23**, so that RIDE staff members will be able to begin planning school visits during the scheduled times of

testing. Each LEA is responsible for creating the testing schedule for all its schools so that each of the tested grades (3-8, 11) has the same testing schedule (e.g., all 3rd graders in the LEA are taking the mathematics test on the same day at the roughly the same time).

LEAs should take into consideration religious holidays and local events that may affect students' ability to participate. Although LEAs may opt to schedule around these dates, it is important that ample time be incorporated into scheduling to allow time for make-up test sessions for those students who are absent for any reason (including absences for religious holidays) during regularly scheduled testing dates. Make-up testing may begin immediately following the scheduled administration of a test session. No student should be scheduled for a make-up session prior to the scheduled administration of that test session.

Please submit your testing schedules online via eRIDE, using the new eRIDE NECAP Schedule Tool:

www.eride.ri.gov

Please note: The tool allows schedule submission only from the LEA level. If you log in to eRIDE and do not see an icon for the NECAP Schedule Tool, please send an e-mail to NECAP@ride.ri.gov.

Finally, as in previous years the "NECAP Monitoring Visits Interview Questions" are available online. We strongly encourage all LEAs and schools to download and widely distribute these interview protocols so that everyone is aware of the types of questions that will be asked during visits. All three documents are available on the RIDE website, at:

www.ride.ri.gov/NECAP

If you have any questions about NECAP schedules or monitoring, please contact Dr. Kevon Tucker-Seeley (222-8494 or Kevon.Tucker-Seeley@ride.ri.gov). Thank you.

Professional Development:

6. RIDE, East Bay Collaborative schedule conference for teacher assistants

RIDE is sponsoring, in partnership with the East Bay Collaborative, a professional development conference for teacher assistants through the Teacher Assistant Networks. A day-long conference for teacher assistants will be held on Saturday, **September 28**, from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m., at Archie R. Cole Middle School, 100 Cedar Ave., East Greenwich. Please see [this flyer](#) for information, and please feel free to share this information with teacher assistants in your LEA. Space is limited, and pre-registration and pre-payment (or P.O.) is necessary. The conference sessions will provide teacher assistants with practical information and strategies that may be implemented within the classroom to support student achievement and success.

For information on conference topics and registration, go to:

<http://ebecri.org/>

If you have questions regarding the Teacher Assistants Conference, contact Lisa Labbitt, at lisa.labitt@ebecri.org.

7. RIDE provides professional development, resources on formative assessments

Formative Assessment Facilitator Orientation sessions were held around the state last month, and the formative-assessment online professional development is available to all educators on RIDEmap. Facilitators who were unable to make it to an orientation session can now access a recorded webinar on the formative-assessment page of the RIDE website, at:

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

This posting explains the structure and scope of the professional-development initiative, clarifies expectations of participants and facilitators, and highlights resources available for facilitators. Please contact Laura Kacewicz, at laura.kacewicz@ride.ri.gov or 222-8993, with any questions related to the formative-assessment initiative.

Instruction:

8. RIDE to form team to develop plan for Social and Emotional Learning

Last month (August 2), RIDE, in partnership with the Bradley Schools, held a conference on Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) and presented the model from the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). The core competencies of SEL focus on Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, Relationship Skills, and Responsible Decision-Making.

Developing social-emotional competence is a key to being college and career ready. Research shows that SEL has positive effects on academic performance, benefits physical health, improves citizenship, is demanded by employers, is essential for lifelong success, and reduces the risk of maladjustment, failed relationships, interpersonal violence, substance abuse, and unhappiness.

Social and emotional skills can be taught and learned, just like academic skills. According to CASEL: “Teaching social and emotional skills has been found to improve academic attitudes (motivation and commitment), behaviors (attendance, study habits, cooperative learning), and performance (grades, test scores, and subject mastery).”

A statewide team is forming to develop a plan for SEL in Rhode Island. We are trying to identify and highlight emerging or successful practices in Social and Emotional Learning. If your LEA is developing or implementing promising SEL practices within small groups, classrooms, schools, or districtwide, please contact Alice Woods, at Alice.Woods@ride.ri.gov.

Surveys:

9. *Reminder: Principals to appoint SurveyWorks site coordinators by Wednesday (September 11)*

As part of this year’s annual SurveyWorks, all principals should have received an e-mail on Wednesday (September 4) from SurveyWorks/WestEd requesting principals to nominate site coordinators for their school by Wednesday (September 11). The SurveyWorks team will send e-mail reminders to those principals who have not yet responded. Principals must respond to the

SurveyWorks e-mail and provide the name and contact information for their site coordinator. Any principal who has not nominated a site coordinator will be expected to assume that role.

Any site coordinator serving for the first time is required to participate in one of the three required training webinars, which will be held on September 16, 20, and 24. SurveyWorks will contact nominated site coordinators on Thursday (September 12) to provide them with the necessary information for the upcoming survey administration. If you have any questions SurveyWorks, please contact SurveyWorks, at surveyworks@wested.org or 1-877-787-5725, or Carol Moran, at Carol.Moran@ride.ri.gov or 222-8953. Thank you for your continued commitment to this initiative.

Data:

10. Course Coding updates due by September 20 – Action Item

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) developed a common classification system for school courses in the United States called SCED (School Codes for the Exchange of Data). Throughout the previous (2012-13) school year, RIDE worked with each LEA to map all of your courses to a SCED. We would like to complete this phase of the process by having each LEA data manager, along with a curriculum specialist or guidance counselor, review the courses that RIDE has mapped for your LEA.

Users can access the mapped courses by using the *Course Coding* module within eRIDE (www.eride.ri.gov). If your LEA has items that are highlighted in pink, then there was a problem when

mapping the course – such as missing information or a duplicate course ID. By **September 20**, please provide updates to Jaime Viti, at Jaime.viti@ride.ri.gov, on any of the items that are highlighted so that the problems can be resolved. Any remaining courses that are highlighted and unresolved will be deleted from the database. The next phase of the course-coding process will begin late this month, allowing you the ability to manage your course mapping, which includes adding or removing courses.

Educator Evaluations:

11. RIDE provides guidance on adding evaluation forms in EPSS

In order to keep the Educator Performance and Support System (EPSS) dashboard free from unnecessary forms, only the basic evaluation forms were prepopulated for educators. For example, two Student Learning Objective (SLO) forms, one Professional Growth Plan form, and one optional Self-Assessment form were prepopulated onto every teacher's dashboard (in Rhode Island Model LEAs). Evaluators are able to add forms for educators on their caseload as needed, including additional SLO forms, Student Outcome Objective forms, and Performance Improvement Plan forms.

Step-by-step directions for adding forms in EPSS are available on the RIDE website, at:

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

12. RIDE clarifies connection between certification renewal and the differentiated evaluation process for teachers

In Rhode Island Model schools and districts, a full evaluation is required the year following a teacher's certification renewal, regardless of the teacher's Final Effectiveness Rating from the previous year. This year, any teacher whose certificate was up for renewal on August 31, 2013, should receive a full evaluation, including at least three classroom observations and three evaluation conferences. Many LEAs maintain their own certification database, but the eCert public portal can also be used to identify teacher-certification expiration dates. In the future, there will be an eCert LEA portal that will include an expiring-certificates report. Additional details about the differentiated evaluation process for teachers can be found on pages 8-9 of the Addendum to the Rhode Island Model Guidebook, and the eCert public portal can be accessed at:

<http://ecert.ride.ri.gov/public/>

13. RIDE schedules make-up evaluation workshops

To accommodate evaluators who were unable to attend one of the applicable evaluation workshops offered throughout the summer, RIDE has scheduled make-up workshops. Evaluators can register for an evaluation workshop by clicking one of the links below or by e-mailing Greg Stewart, at greg.stewart@ride.ri.gov.

Evaluation workshops:

[Academy for New Evaluators](#)- Northern Rhode Island Collaborative (September 19 from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.,

September 26, from 8:30 a.m. to noon, October 3, from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.)

[Workshop for Personnel Evaluating Teachers \(Non-RI Model\)](#)-West Bay Collaborative (September 16, from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.)

[Workshop for Personnel Evaluating Teachers \(RI Model\)](#)-West Bay Collaborative (September 16 from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., September 17 from 8:30 a.m. to noon)

[Workshop for Personnel Evaluating Teachers \(Non-RI Model\)](#)- Northern Rhode Island Collaborative (September 18, from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.)

[Workshop for Personnel Evaluating Teachers \(RI Model\)](#)-Northern Rhode Island Collaborative (September 18, from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., September 19, from 8:30 a.m. to noon)

[Workshop for Personnel Evaluating Teachers \(Non-RI Model\)](#)- Middletown Administration Building (September 23, from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.)

[Workshop for Personnel Evaluating Teachers \(RI Model\)](#)-Middletown Administration Building (September 23, from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., September 24, from 8:30 a.m. to noon)

[Workshop for Personnel Evaluating Teachers \(Non-RI Model\)](#)- Westerly Tower Street Community Center (September 30, from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.)

[Workshop for Personnel Evaluating Teachers \(RI Model\)](#)-
Westerly Tower Street Community Center (September 30
from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., October 1, from 8:30 a.m. to
noon)

Induction:

**14. Induction Program for beginning teachers under way,
LEAs can allocate unused funds for coaching for second-
year teachers**

We would like to introduce Melissa Denton as our new Race to the Top Induction Fellow supporting the induction work at RIDE. Melissa comes to us from Westerly. She was also an Induction Coach on loan to RIDE from her district during the past school year.

Thank you for your diligence in recruiting, hiring, and communicating the beginning-teacher data for the current school year. If your LEA has hired new HR personnel, please notify Hilda.potrzeba@ride.ri.gov so she can keep our listserv up to date, as our listserv is our main source of contact with HR personnel. It is important that all beginning teachers are entered into the database as soon as they are appointed. Please continue to provide beginning-teacher data to RIDE throughout the year.

This year, we will be able to serve up to 195 beginning teachers, which is more teachers served than we had initially anticipated. We currently have 12 coaches, and we hope to add a thirteenth within days. To date, LEAs have identified 168 beginning teachers.

If your LEA would like to allocate funds (uncommitted or unused Race to the Top funds, for example) to have second-year teachers

receive the services of an Induction Coach this year, it is important that you notify David.alves@ride.ri.gov and Hilda.potrzeba@ride.ri.gov so your second-year teachers can be assigned a coach.

As Induction Coaches start their work with beginning teachers in your schools, it would be wonderful if the building principals would designate a small area for them to work. At times schedules change, and coaches can use this extra time to do the data entry work required by RIDE. It would also be very helpful if the coaches could have Internet access, as they are each provided with a laptop to help them complete their responsibilities.

Our Summer 2013 Induction Newsletter is posted on the RIDE website on the Induction page, at:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/EducatorQuality/mentoring.aspx> .

Thank you for your continued support for the Induction Program. We look forward to serving your LEAs again this year.

If you have any questions or feedback about induction, do not hesitate to contact Hilda or Melissa:

Hilda Potrzeba, at hilda.potrzeba@ride.ri.gov or 222-8891
Melissa Denton, at Melissa.denton@ride.ri.gov or 222-8982

From other state offices and agencies

- 15. School volunteers may have criminal-background checks done at local police departments**

Please see this message from Deputy Attorney General Gerald J. Coyne, which notes that school volunteers may go to their local police department or to the Attorney General's Office for the required criminal-background check:

I am writing to bring to your attention a recently enacted amendment to Rhode Island law concerning criminal history background checks for school volunteers.

During the last legislative session, state law requiring background checks for "mentors" was amended to require state criminal records checks for all school volunteers who may have direct and unmonitored contact with children or students on school premises. The newly enacted law can be found at Chapters 34 and 45 of the Public Laws of 2013, which are identical bills.

This law was enacted on May 24, 2013. As you will see in the law, the newly enacted Section 16-2-18.4 discusses "Criminal Records review for volunteers." Paragraph (b) of this law states: "The applicant shall apply to the bureau of criminal identification (BCI), department of attorney general, state police, or local police department where he or she resides, for a state criminal records check."

In view of this amendment and the start of a new school year, which will likely result in a large number of requests by potential volunteers, I want to ensure that all are aware of this amendment and of the specific authorization provided to the State Police and municipal police to conduct these checks.

From other federal agencies

16. Excess furniture to be available to schools next month

Please see this message from the Federal Aviation Administration New England Regional Office:

I wish to alert you of an opportunity to procure government excess furniture items, free of charge, during the course of a major renovation project taking place now at the Federal Aviation Administration Regional Office in Burlington, Massachusetts. Some may recall a similar effort to reach out earlier this year with the “first round” of excessing property. The only stipulations are: school superintendents must request the item(s) on an official letterhead, and the item(s) will have to be removed by a designated representative of the school department.

At this time, a list of those excess items is unavailable, but should be available within the coming weeks. It is likely that the items will need to be removed sometime in the last three weeks of October. The recommended action that you may consider now would be an assessment of what furniture items you believe are needed, such as desks, chairs, conference tables, bookcases, filing cabinets, etc., for your publicly funded schools.

If this is something that interests the school districts throughout your state, please contact us at the FAA at your earliest convenience and we can guide you through a rather simple process.

Thank you.

Alan Reed (Alan.Reed@faa.gov)
Building Services Specialist
FAA, New England Region
12 New England Executive Park
Burlington, Mass. 01803

Hours: Weekdays, 6 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.
Phone: (781) 238-7652
Fax: (781) 238-7674

RIDE will post this field memo on Tuesday, at:

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