

**Commissioner's Weekly Field Memo  
Friday, November 7, 2014**

**Notes from Commissioner Gist**

1. [Congratulations](#) offered to winning candidates
2. Improvement continues on CCRI [remediation rates](#)
3. RIDE to release 2<sup>nd</sup> annual report on [educator evaluations](#)
4. President Obama declares [Military Family Month](#)

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

5. U.S. Department of Education notes up-coming [holidays, celebrations](#)
6. U.S. Department of Education seeks [ideas about evaluations](#)

**From other state agencies**

7. HEALTH provides update on [Ebola](#) virus

**From federal offices**

8. First Lady Michelle Obama challenges high schools to increase [FAFSA](#) completion rates

**From other organizations**

9. Nominations being accepted for 2014 Toyota [Family Teacher of the Year](#)

**Action Item Calendar**

**Wednesday** (November 12): [Presidential Scholar](#) nominations due  
December 5: [Textbook-reimbursement](#) forms due

**Notes from Commissioner Gist**

## **1. Congratulations offered to winning candidates**

With the election season behind us, I want to congratulate Governor-elect Raimondo and all of the winning candidates. I look forward to working with the Raimondo administration, with Lt. Gov. McKee, and with the newly elected and the re-elected members of the General Assembly. Two key issues in many contests across the state were workforce development and public education – two issues that are closely related, of course. It has been heartening to see that virtually all candidates for office recognized the importance of having a great system of public education if we are to improve the economic prosperity of Rhode Island. In particular, many candidates talked of the need for investments in early-childhood education, which RIDE, along with our partner agencies, has championed. As we look across the broad spectrum of issues, including everything from early learning to career-technical education and our diploma system and on to postsecondary and adult education, it is obvious that we still have many important and exciting challenges ahead of us. Let's continue working together in the best interest of Rhode Island students and of our state.

## **2. Improvement continues on CCRI remediation rates**

Thanks to the hard work and commitment on the part of students, families, teachers, school leaders, and community members across the state, I was able to state with confidence over the past year that the graduating students in the Class of 2014 were better prepared for postsecondary education than students in any previous class. We have recently received some data adding to the evidence confirming that observation: President Di Pasquale's team at the Community College of Rhode Island has presented us with the latest data on the enrollment of entering students in remedial courses, and I'm very pleased to report that we are continuing on a positive trend. The percentage of recent graduates entering the Community College of Rhode Island who need remedial courses is now down to 66 percent, a 3-point improvement from the previous year and the lowest percentage over the last six-year span. Here is the information we received from CCRI:

Below you will find the percentage of each fall cohort (enrolling at CCRI the same year of high school graduation). The good news is this overall statistic reports a decreasing percentage of students receiving a developmental placement as measured by the College Board's Accuplacer Placement Test.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Percent Placed in Developmental Classes</b>
Fall 2014	66.2 percent
Fall 2013	69.4 percent
Fall 2012	75.5 percent
Fall 2011	73.7 percent
Fall 2010	72.5 percent
Fall 2009	74 percent

### **3. RIDE to release 2<sup>nd</sup> annual report on educator evaluations**

As I noted in the Field Memo two weeks ago, we have completed our second annual report on educator evaluations, "Improving Teaching and Learning: Year 2." This report is based on information from the 2013-14 school year, the second year of full implementation of educator evaluations in Rhode Island. Technical difficulties with our website have delayed our posting of this report, but we plan to post it and issue a news release on Wednesday. I will notify you by e-mail when we post the report and issue the news release. The report includes information on summative ratings for teachers (percent ineffective, developing, effective, highly effective) at the district level, though not at the school level.

### **4. President Obama declares Military Family Month**

Because of the strong and long-standing relationship between Rhode Island communities and the military forces, particularly the U.S. Navy, many of our schools have significant enrollments of children from military families. I therefore wanted to let you know that President Obama has declared this as Military Family Month. In issuing his declaration, President Obama wrote:

For more than two centuries, members of our Armed Forces have defended our country with unyielding courage. In our Nation's times of need, these brave patriots step forward to answer America's call, leaving behind everything they know and love. And as they help secure our freedom and democracy, their families sacrifice alongside them. During Military Family Month, we recognize every spouse, parent, sibling, child, and loved one who stands with our service members, and we reaffirm our solemn vow to serve these families as well as they serve us.

Every day, our military families at home and abroad inspire us and remind us of our obligation to take care of those who do so much for our country. As a grateful Nation, we pay tribute to the women and men who have made our military the finest fighting force the world has ever known, and we honor the enduring strength and dedication of their families.

I hope you will take some time this month to honor the military families in your community, and I know all of us are dedicated to ensuring that children of military families are welcomed and supported in our schools.

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

### **5. U.S. Department of Education notes up-coming holidays, celebrations**

The U.S. Department of Education has Office of Communications and Outreach notes several holidays and celebrations for the coming weeks:

[Veterans Day](#) (**Tuesday**, November 11) celebrates the service of all U.S. military veterans. Schools are encouraged to invite veterans into their classrooms. Veterans can share their experiences and teach students lessons about the history and significance of Veterans Day, helping students reflect upon the importance of the ideals of liberty, freedom, and democracy. (Note: A [teacher resource guide](#) is available online.)

[American Education Week](#) (November 16-22) celebrates teachers and school staff. The week's tagline, "Great Public Schools: A Basic Right and Our Responsibility," is a call for all Americans to do their part in making public schools great for every child. During the week, education support professionals will be honored on Wednesday, while substitute educators will be honored on Friday.

[International Education Week](#) (November 17-21) celebrates the benefits of international education and exchange worldwide. This year marks the 15th anniversary of International Education Week (IEW). In his IEW 2014 [video message](#), Education Secretary Duncan encourages everyone to promote the global mission of ensuring that every child receives a world-class education.

## **6. U.S. Department of Education seeks ideas about evaluations**

Please see this message from the U.S. Department of Education Office of Communications and Outreach:

The U.S. Department of Education is soliciting ideas on which high-priority, high-leverage evaluations it should fund in order to help drive major improvements in P-12 education. In particular, the agency is interested in hearing about which evaluation questions, if answered, would provide information that students, parents, educators, policymakers, and other stakeholders could use to improve strategies, programs, and services for students. Interested parties can read about and respond to this opportunity [here](#), with ideas and recommendations due by December 1.

### **From other state agencies**

## **7. HEALTH provides update on Ebola virus**

Please see this message from the Department of HEALTH:

Since October 17, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has notified HEALTH of travelers arriving from Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea where Ebola outbreaks are active in West Africa. Since that time, HEALTH has conducted active daily monitoring for Ebola symptoms for these travelers. Monitoring will continue for 21 days from date of departure from Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea.

To date, no one has become infected with Ebola in Rhode Island. In Rhode Island, only people who have been in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone in the past three weeks are at risk of developing Ebola. Even if someone has relatives in Guinea, Liberia, or Sierra Leone, they are *not* at risk for developing Ebola if they have not traveled to one of these countries in the past three weeks.

The Ebola outbreaks in Senegal and Nigeria are now considered over. There is [specific guidance](#) available for people coming here from Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone about monitoring their temperatures. People are not contagious until they show symptoms.

You *cannot* get Ebola through:

- casual contact with someone who has no symptoms of the disease;
- air;
- water; or
- food in the U.S.

The Ebola outbreak is an evolving process. Healthcare workers, the CDC, and others are learning how best to respond. We are expanding our response to meet the needs. There will be changes and adjustments as we go.

HEALTH is coordinating a series of conference calls and presentations to provide specific Ebola guidance to community partners who work in particular fields. These community partners include school nurse teachers, school administrators, members of law enforcement, and the leadership of cities and towns. These calls and presentations are in addition to HEALTH's on-going coordination with healthcare facilities and healthcare providers throughout Rhode Island.

#### *Additional Rhode Island Resources*

Calendar of other [community events](#) related to Ebola [Information](#) about Ebola

#### *Children and Ebola*

Children have unique physical, developmental, and social needs. CDC created [Resources for Parents, Schools and Pediatric Healthcare Professionals](#).

### **From federal offices**

#### **8. First Lady Michelle Obama challenges high schools to increase FAFSA completion rates**

Please see this message from The White House and feel free to share this message with your high-school leaders:

First Lady Michelle Obama has announced a commencement challenge via video as part of her [Reach Higher](#) initiative. Schools choosing to participate in the challenge will create video submissions to capture their efforts to make attending and completing college a reality for all students. Finalists could have the opportunity to hear from the First Lady at their commencement ceremonies in the spring of 2015.

The Reach Higher initiative is the First Lady's effort to inspire all students in America to take charge of their future by completing their education past high school, whether at a professional training program, a community college, or a four-year college or university. In today's economy, a high-school diploma just isn't enough. Students have to "reach higher," which is why the First Lady is working to rally the country around the President's "North Star" goal — that, by 2020, America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world.

### [The FAFSA Completion Challenge](#)

The First Lady's "FAFSA Completion Challenge" video urges high schools to increase Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completion rates among their seniors.

As the First Lady says in her [video](#):

*Through FAFSA, the Department of Education provides more than \$150 billion each year in loans, grants, and work-study programs that can help you and your family pay for college. That's why I'm calling on every high-school senior in America to complete their FAFSA form starting on January 1st. And I want students, teachers, school counselors, and administrators to show me how your school is taking action to get more students to fill out their forms this year. So fill out your FAFSA, make a video, and share it online.*

### **From other organizations**

#### **9. Nominations being accepted for 2014 Toyota Family Teacher of the Year**

Please see this message from the National Center for Families Learning:

The [National Center for Families Learning](#) (NCFL) is accepting nominations for the [2015 Toyota Family Teacher of the Year Award](#), which will award a \$20,000 to an exemplary teacher engaging families in education. Educators working with families through schools, libraries, and many other community-based organizations will be considered, and nominations are due **December 31**.

The selected educator's school or program will receive the \$20,000 prize to further efforts to engage families in learning together and join an elite group of educators across the country that have been recognized as such for nearly two decades. NCFL will

award the second-prize winner a \$2,500 prize. Both winners will be announced in March at the [2015 Families Learning Summit](#), which will be held this year in Houston. The grand prize winner will deliver a speech to summit attendees alongside keynote speaker Leland Melvin, former astronaut, NASA deputy director, and NFL player who currently co-chairs the White House STEM Council.

Educators can be nominated via the brief online application, and learn more about winning criteria and Toyota Family Teacher of the Year benefits, [here](#). For inspiration, [read](#) about last year's winner, Liz Attack (Nashville Public Library).

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

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