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Friday, December 19, 2014

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- January 1: Upgrade to [v2.0 of SCED](#)
- January 7: Deadline for [PARCC](#) registration
- January 9: [Talent Pool](#) nominations due
- January 11: Student contact data due (see [below](#))

Notes from Commissioner Gist

1. Commissioner Gist: Holiday greetings, and reflections on 2014

I am so pleased to have worked with you throughout another great year of teaching and learning in Rhode Island! Together, we have achieved many accomplishments this year that will improve classroom instruction and advance achievement for all of our students that will support our teachers who work so hard every day in their classrooms, and that will provide excellent educational opportunities in communities across Rhode Island.

Among other highlights, over the past year we held our 3rd annual Innovation Powered by Technology conference, awarded more than \$1 million in Quality Improvement Grants to early-learning programs, published our first annual reports on educator-preparation programs, launched the Educator Performance and Support System, expanded prekindergarten programs,

and brought LEAs together through Collaborative Learning for Outcomes to develop and improve curriculum and instruction. Just as important, we continue to see signs of improved outcomes. Our high-school students, in particular, showed very solid gains this year – achieving the highest percent proficiency among the NECAP states in reading and writing and matching the other NECAP states in mathematics and science!

As we get ready for a new year, we have many exciting prospects before us. Thanks to the Preschool Expansion Grant that the U.S. Department of Education awarded us last week, we will soon seek proposals to add new prekindergarten classes in our schools and communities. Working with our partners in the Office of Postsecondary Education, we have developed our first statewide regulations on dual enrollment, which will increase access for all students to courses that can earn them credit toward graduation as well as college credit. We anticipate that the Board of Education will approve these regulations in the New Year. Finally, we are embarked on the process of developing the next strategic plan for public education in Rhode Island. The Council on Elementary and Secondary Education has selected a [great team](#) of 26 Rhode Islanders to develop and write the plan, and we will continue reaching out to you and to your communities for guidance and input throughout the development process.

I will not be sending out a Field Memo next Friday. The Field Memo will resume on January 2. I want to wish you, your family, your team, and your entire school community a wonderful holiday and a healthy and productive New Year!

2. RIDE develops policy, issues statement on data privacy

You may wish to share this statement with others if and when you receive inquiries from people in your community regarding the privacy of student data:

As the trustee of a great deal of data and information about the performance and achievements of students attending public schools in Rhode Island, we take seriously our responsibility to protect the personal privacy of all students. Among the data we possess are records of student performance on statewide assessments. Rhode Island is now a member of a multi-state assessment consortium called the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, or PARCC. All PARCC member states share a commitment to protecting the privacy rights of all students.

To that end, the PARCC Consortium states, together with legal counsel, developed a Data Privacy and Security Policy to ensure that the administration of PARCC assessments complies with all state and federal laws and regulations. The guiding principles of the policy are:

- States retain responsibility for and control over their data. Neither PARCC nor PARCC contractors will share student data with any outside entity, including the federal government.

- States must give permission to PARCC and PARCC contractors in order for them to access any personally identifiable information – and PARCC and contractors may access data only for the specific purposes that the PARCC states define.
- The Data Privacy and Security Policy applies not only to PARCC member states but to all PARCC contractors as well.

Federal and state laws and regulations have, over time, established comprehensive security policies and procedures to protect individual-student level data. A brief description of these policies with links to further information is outlined below.

The federal **Children’s Online Privacy Protection Rule (COPPA)** went into effect in 2000 and was amended in 2013. COPPA is particularly applicable to PARCC testing because it protects the privacy and confidentiality of online child or student information. The R.I. Department of Education (RIDE), along with schools and districts, is working with companies to provide online support to parents and students such as parent portals, web-based homework help, and diagnostic screening and assessment. As we work to develop this support, COPPA ensures that schools, districts, and the state can share only student information that is relevant to a specific educational purpose. Therefore, the companies we are working with cannot use any student information for commercial, research, or other purposes. For more information, visit: <http://www.coppa.org/>

COPPA was preceded by the **Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA)**, which prohibits the disclosure to a third party of a student’s “protected information.” This restriction applies regardless of whether information is conveyed by hand delivery, verbally, fax, mail, or electronic transmission. As with assessments such as PARCC, FERPA regulations require schools and school districts to use “reasonable methods” to ensure that teachers and other school officials obtain access only to those records in which they have legitimate educational interests. For more about FERPA, visit: <http://www2.ed.gov/ferpa>

The Rhode Island [Educational Bill of Rights](#) became law in 1991. This law further articulates the rights of students regarding the privacy of their educational records, including the right to have their records kept confidential and not released to any individual, agency, or organization without prior written consent of the parent, legal guardian, or eligible student, except to the extent that the release of the records is authorized by the provisions of 20 U.S.C. § 1232g or other applicable law or court process.

Similarly, the Rhode Island [Access to Public Records](#) act (Rhode Island General Laws, 38-2) specifies that certain records “shall not be deemed public,” including records “the disclosure of which would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy,” RIGL 38-2-2(4)(A)(I)(b), and records...required to be kept confidential by

federal law or regulation or state law.” RIGL 38-2-2(4)(S). See:
<http://webserver.rilin.state.ri.us/Statutes/title38/38-2/INDEX.HTM> .

Finally, we have reiterated our commitment to privacy and security by developing a [Data and Management Policy](#) to ensure that we securely maintain all student data in our possession and control, that we provide safeguards for all personally identifiable information, and that we store and use all data we receive in complete accordance with applicable state and federal laws and regulations.

In short, we are committed to collecting and retaining accurate data about education in Rhode Island, using data wisely to improve teaching and learning, and protecting the privacy rights of Rhode Island students and their families.

This policy statement, and an assurance letter from the leaders of the member states in the PARCC consortium, are posted here:

Protecting Data Privacy Link:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Protecting%20Data%20Privacy.doc>

PARCC State Chiefs Assurance Letter:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/PARCC%20State%20Chiefs%20Assurance%20Letter.pdf>

3. Governor Chafee receives report on educator autonomy

On Monday, I joined Governor Chafee, Board Chair Mancuso, and Council Chair Guida for a ceremony at which the chairs of the Educator Autonomy Working Group – Yanaiza Gallant, principal of the Orlo Avenue School (East Providence), and Pat Page, a business-education teacher from East Greenwich High School – presented Governor Chafee with a [report](#) and recommendations on autonomy.

Governor Chafee appointed and convened the [16-member group](#) a year ago (Chair Guida and I were members of the group), and, over a series of monthly meetings that were open to the public, we looked into a wide range of issues concerning educator autonomy. Our report includes three specific recommendations:

- increase the awareness of existing autonomies at the district and school level;
- provide the training, support and resources to educational leaders necessary to carry out effective and successful practices in an autonomous structure; and
- create a clear path for existing local education authorities and their schools to put autonomy into practice.

Over the course of the year, I will continue to keep this issue at the forefront and to look for opportunities to provide more autonomy to teachers and school leaders. I am committed to the principle that we should make educational decisions as close to the student level as possible, and providing teachers and school leaders with more autonomy will move us closer to that ideal.

4. RIDE releases 2014 NECAP science results

As you are aware, on Tuesday we released the 2014 NECAP science results. After a two-month review of the test design and scoring process, we are confident that the overall scores and proficiency levels are accurate at the state level but we have asked people to use caution when interpreting the scores at the school level. The wording and the scoring process on two “inquiry task” test items for grades 4 and 8 led some students to receive scores of “0” on those questions when they might have earned partial credit of 1 point.

The results of the 2014 statewide science assessments released show improvement statewide and in all tested grades since the assessments began six years ago (2008). Statewide, 32 percent of Rhode Island students attained the level of proficiency or better on the New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP) science assessments administered in May, an increase of 8 percentage points over the past six years. In the tested grades, 41 percent of 4th-grade students (up 5 points since 2008), 23 percent of 8th-grade students (up 4 points since 2008), and 30 percent of 11th-grade students (up 14 points since 2008) attained proficiency or better.

Compared with last year’s results, the percent of students attaining proficiency or better was unchanged since 2013 in both grades 4 and 11 and fell by 7 percentage points in grade 8, a decline essentially matched by the other NECAP states: 8th-grade results Vermont declined by 7 points as well, and results in New Hampshire declined by 6 points.

The overall six-year gains in science results have been positive, but I do have concerns about the one-year decline in percent proficient in our middle schools. We need to be aware that the science assessments have fewer questions and require a shorter testing time than our mathematics or reading assessments. As I have noted to the media, there are relatively few questions on the NECAP science assessments so NECAP science scores may vary from year to year, especially for smaller schools.

We do not use the science assessment as a promotion or graduation requirement for students, nor for school classifications, nor for educator evaluations. The primary purpose of the science assessment is to provide educators and families with information that can improve student achievement.

With that purpose in mind, I encourage you to review their science instruction and curriculum, in light of the 2014 assessment results, to see which content areas may need a sharper focus or more resources and support.

We have posted a report on the 2014 science assessments on the RIDE website, at:

www.ride.ri.gov/NECAP-results

5. Providence student takes 2nd place in national science, mathematics competition

Congratulations to Joseph Zurier, a senior at Classical High School (Providence), the 2nd-place individual winner in the 2014 Siemens Competition in Math, Science, and Technology. The competition is considered “the nation’s premiere science-research competition for high-school students.” Joseph’s second-place finish earns him a \$50,000 college scholarship!

6. Westerly High School is state finalist in Samsung Solve for Tomorrow contest

Congratulations to the students and teachers at Westerly High School, the state finalist in the Samsung Solve for Tomorrow contest, which is designed to raise student interest in STEM subjects. Westerly High has won \$20,000 in technology for the school, and moves on to the next phase of the completion, the selection of national finalists.

7. Champlin Foundations award grants to R.I. schools

The Champlin Foundations, a generous supporter of Rhode Island educational institutions and other nonprofit organizations in our state, have awarded 2014-15 grants to the following public schools, primarily to provide “hands-on” equipment and facilities: Hugh B. Bain Middle School (Cranston), Burrillville Middle School, Archie R. Cole Middle School (East Greenwich), East Bay Educational Collaborative, Exeter-West Greenwich Junior High School, The Learning Community, Nathanael Greene Middle School (Providence), Park View Middle School (Cranston), Tiverton Middle School, the Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program, and Woonsocket Middle School. Congratulations to all of the grant recipients. I am sure the funds you are receiving from the Champlin Foundations will provide your students with new opportunities for learning.

8. Rhode Island Foundation awards grants to elementary-school teachers in five school districts

Teachers in five urban school districts are getting more resources for classroom innovation thanks to \$148,000 in grants through the Rhode Island Foundation Spark Grants program. Conceived of and funded by philanthropists Letitia and John Carter, the initiative is based on a simple premise: Students learn best when given real-life opportunities to engage in academic content in meaningful, non-traditional ways. And classroom teachers know best how to provide those opportunities.

Full-time third-grade teachers in Central Falls, Newport, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket were invited to apply. Teachers of special subjects such as art, music, and physical education were also eligible. In all, 157 teachers received grants of up to \$1,000 to fund ideas that will engage students through unique experiences and creative learning methods and

stimulate their interest in academics. Eligible expenses include software licenses, field trips, equipment, and other resources that otherwise would not be available in the classroom. We are very grateful for the support generous the Carter family and the Rhode Island Foundation continue to provide to schools, teachers, and students in Rhode Island.

From RIDE

Data Collection:

9. Cohort-graduation data review closed

We have completed the cohort-graduation data review. Thank you for working with our data-and-analysis team in making this collection a success.

10. Student Contact collection due by January 11 – *Action Item*

We collect Student Contact data to survey students with disability. We also use the data in order to communicate important information to students and families. You should submit Student Contact data at the beginning of the school year, and you should keep the data up to date throughout the school year, with resubmissions in January and June. Student Contact data can be submitted through eRIDE (www.eride.ri.gov) using the Enrollment Census application or through the Automated Data Transfer (ADT) agent; for more information regarding this data collection, please refer to the collection [documentation](#). If you have any questions or concerns about Student Contact data, please contact Greg Martin, at Gregory.martin@ride.ri.gov or 222-8495.

11. *Reminder:* LEAs asked to migrate to new version of SCED by January 1

RIDE has identified LEAs that are still using version 1.0 of the School Courses for the Exchange of Data (SCED) codes for some or all of their courses. LEA-specific crosswalk files have been loaded to District Exchange for each LEA to help facilitate the migration from version 1.0 to version 2.0 SCED codes. It is vital that you migrate these codes by **January 1**. If you have any questions about this transition, please e-mail Greg Martin, at Gregory.martin@ride.ri.gov, or input a request for assistance, at:

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

Assessments:

12. *Reminder:* Deadlines extended for PARCC student registration

The Performance-Based Assessment (PBA) student-registration (enrollment) deadline for the spring Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) testing has

been extended to **January 7**. It is recommended that LEAs complete student registration before the holiday break to ensure timeliness and completeness of the data. If you have any questions or concerns about PARCC registration, please contact Greg Martin, at Gregory.martin@ride.ri.gov or 222-8495, or input a request for assistance, at:

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

13. RIDE schedules webinar on PARCC accommodations

The PARCC Accommodations webinar is designed to briefly cover the accommodations for PARCC and to answer questions. This webinar will not cover how to upload information or populate the PNP. Please register for this webinar. Webinar login and call-in information will be sent to those who register in advance.

When: Monday, **January 12**, from 3 to 4:30 p.m.

Who: Educators who either missed the in-person training sessions or who need clarification on certain accommodations.

Registration: Through the eRIDE link, at:

<http://www.eride.ri.gov/workshopreg/ViewWorkshop.aspx?workshopid=1220>

Educator Certification:

14. Changes to certification of new special educators go into effect January 1

As you may know, significant changes were promulgated two years ago (in 2012) that affect the certification of *new* special educators. Beginning next month (January 1), the following changes will be in effect:

For *new* educators, RIDE will issue Elementary Special Education Teacher Grades 1-6, Middle Grades Special Education Teacher Grades 5-8, and Secondary Education Teacher Grades 7-12 in place of the Elementary/Middle Special Educator certification or Middle/Secondary Special Educator certification. Also for *new* educators, anyone wishing to become certified in special education will have to also hold general-educator certification.

Currently certified educators who hold a special-educator certificate will continue to be able to renew the same certificate. Educators who allow their certificate to expire will be held to the changes upon a request to reinstate the expired certificate.

15. Educators can begin certification renewal January 2; online application to open mid-January

Educators who hold initial and professional certificates that expire on August 31, 2015, may begin to renew next month (January 2). The on-line application for renewal will open in mid-January. Please share this information with your educators in your LEA.

Educator Evaluations:

16. RIDE to offer calibration sessions for evaluators

Building on the successful calibration sessions offered to leadership teams throughout the previous school year, RIDE will offer a new in-district calibration opportunity focused on the Rhode Island Model Support Professional Evaluation and Support System. Based on your response, we will offer up to 15 sessions, starting next month and completing in March. These sessions will focus on the observation process, aligning evidence for professional practice, and providing specific and actionable feedback.

In addition, we will again offer a Professional Practice Calibration Session for evaluators of teachers. To coordinate a calibration session, please contact Melissa Denton, at Melissa.denton@ride.ri.gov or 222-8955.

17. New evaluators to complete online training by June 1

New evaluators were given Teachscape FFTPS accounts at their summer training. Evaluators should have completed or be in the process of completing the online training and proficiency assessment. The assessment window will close on June 1.

Also, all evaluators with Teachscape FFTPS accounts can now log in to view two new videos to calibrate their observation of practice. Individual evaluators or groups of evaluators can use these videos, which can serve as excellent opportunities for practice and discussion, especially in a cyclical year for many educators. The winter window is open until March 1. For additional information the use of these videos, contact edeval@ride.ri.gov

Regulations:

18. Public hearings scheduled on dual-enrollment regulations

Earlier this month (December 1), the Board of Education approved draft Dual Enrollment Regulations to go out for public hearing. These regulations stem from Rhode Island General law §16-100, the “Dual Enrollment Equal Opportunity Act.” In accordance with §16-100-3(b), a workgroup was convened to consider and advise the Board of Education on a dual-enrollment policy. The findings and recommendations of the workgroup were incorporated into the draft regulations. The intent of the Dual Enrollment Regulations is to expand access for all students to participate in dual-enrollment courses in any of the three public postsecondary-education institutions. The regulations provide for a common course offering, common eligibility criteria, and assignment of credit for both high-school graduation requirements and postsecondary

credit. Importantly, the regulations also promote a partnership between postsecondary education and elementary and secondary education.

There are three public hearings scheduled on these regulations:

Thursday, January 15 @ 5 p.m.
Woonsocket High School Auditorium
777 Cass Avenue

Tuesday, January 20 @ 5 p.m.
Newport Public Library
Program Room, Lower Level
300 Spring Street

Tuesday, January 27 @ 5 p.m.
University of Rhode Island - Providence Campus
Room 260
80 Washington Street/255 Westminster St.

The draft regulations can be found [at this link](#). Written comment on the regulations may also be submitted to Lauren McCarthy (lauren.mccarthy@ride.ri.gov) from now through **January 18**.

From the U.S. Department of Education

19. Information, resources available on seasonal flu, Ebola virus

Please see this message from Education Secretary Arne Duncan:

Now that we are in the season of influenza, and mindful of other infectious diseases, the U.S. Department of Education would like to refer you to information and resources for district leaders, schools, and educators on steps that can be taken to guard against the spread of disease. We continue to appreciate the work you do to foster a healthy environment in America's schools and hope that these materials will support your efforts.

Seasonal "flu" occurs between October and May and typically peaks in January and February. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) predicts that this will be a particularly heavy flu season. Recently, CDC issued a health advisory saying that the vaccine developed for 2014-15 is less effective than usual; however, CDC encourages everyone, especially school personnel, to get vaccinated because children are among the most vulnerable to the disease.

Complete information about the flu and how to contain and manage it is given at www.flu.gov and at www.cdc.gov/flu/. The [Readiness Emergency Management for](#)

[Schools \(REMS\) Technical Assistance \(TA\) Center](#) also has useful resources and information for addressing infectious diseases as part of a comprehensive emergency operations plan (EOP), including coping with a widespread outbreak at rems.ed.gov/KeepSchoolsSafeFromDiseases.aspx. We encourage you to convey this information to your district and school leaders and remind teachers, students, and others to:

- wash hands often with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer;
- avoid touching eyes, nose, or mouth;
- avoid close contact with those who are already sick;
- get plenty of sleep;
- eat healthy food and drink plenty of fluids;
- cover your nose and mouth when coughing or sneezing with a tissue or the crook of your arm; and
- stay home if ill for at least 24 hours after fever is gone.

Districts and schools may want to review their EOPs with public health authorities, as well as plan for continuity of teaching and learning during a school dismissal, in preparation for the height of the flu season or other infectious disease outbreak. As with all health-related instances, districts and schools should maintain the privacy and identity of individual students and teachers in conformity with applicable privacy laws.

The Ebola virus outbreak in West Africa remains in the news, and CDC, the U.S. Department of Justice, and the U.S. Department of Education have prepared resources for school districts on this topic. These resources make clear that, in the United States, Ebola remains a very rare disease that has affected only a handful of people. To date, no cases of Ebola in U.S. schools have been identified and no community transmission has occurred in schools. The most likely situations regarding Ebola exposure that educators will face will pertain to perceived rather than any actual risk. Nevertheless, the following resources have been developed for public information and are available at www.ed.gov/ebola-response:

- K-12 Schools Guidance;
- Office for Civil Rights Guidance;
- Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services Guidance; and
- Continuity of Teaching and Learning Guidance.

We hope that you will familiarize yourself with these resources and that you will share them through all of your available networks and communication vehicles to help ensure they reach the appropriate audiences.

Thanks for all you do every day to support the health, safety, and education of our students.

20. U.S. Department of Education seeks applicants for Teaching, Principal Ambassador Fellows

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

Applications for the U.S. Department of Education's 2015-2016 cohort of [Teaching](#) and [Principal Ambassador Fellows](#) opened yesterday (December 18) and are scheduled to close on **January 20**, at 11:59 p.m. For more information about the application process, visit our [Teaching](#) and [Principal Ambassador Fellows](#) program pages or go directly to the applications for the [Teaching](#) and [Principal](#) Fellowships on [USAJobs.gov](#).

Since 2008, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) has employed [87 outstanding teachers](#) on a full- or part-time basis through the Teaching Ambassador Fellowship program. Last year, ED piloted a Principal Ambassador Fellowship that brought [three highly-talented principals](#) to work for the Department on a full- and part-time basis.

Teaching and Principal Ambassador Fellows are outstanding educators, with a record of leadership in the school community, strong communication skills, and insights on education policy based in their school and classroom expertise. They come with networks of support from their professional communities and have participated in a variety of activities that have prepared them to write and speak frequently about instruction, school culture and climate, educational leadership and policy.

Both of the highly selective programs reflect the belief that teachers and principals should have meaningful opportunities to learn about and shape the policies that impact students and school communities nationwide. As teachers and principals are often the most trusted sources of information about education policy for parents, community members, colleagues, and students themselves, it is imperative to create more ways to link the Department's programs, policies, and resources directly to the field.

The Ambassador Fellows have directly contributed to hundreds of activities at the Department and captured the voices of thousands of teachers and principals from every state. They were particularly instrumental in the [RESPECT project](#) and in inspiring and executing the Department's current [Teach to Lead](#) initiative. They were also critical partners in offering flexibility around [tying teacher evaluations to new assessments](#) and addressing a [culture of over-testing](#).

There are two different options for candidates. The Washington Fellowship is a full-time appointment, based at the U.S. Department of Education headquarters in Washington. The Classroom Fellowship, on the other hand, enables teachers and principals to participate on a part-time basis, while still allowing them to fulfill their regular school responsibilities.

All Teaching Ambassador Fellows spend one year learning about key federal programs and policies, sharing their expertise with federal staff members, and providing background on federal initiatives to other educators. This helps teachers better understand and implement these efforts at the federal, state and local levels. For the Fellows, the program provides greater knowledge of federal educational policy, strengthens their leadership skills, and gives them the firsthand opportunity to address some of the challenging issues facing education today.

Great teachers and principals—please consider applying and sharing this information with your colleagues! Sign up for updates on the [Teaching](#) and [Principal](#) application processes, call (800) USA-Learn, or email us at TeacherFellowship@ed.gov or PrincipalFellowship@ed.gov with questions.

From other organizations

21. The Accelerate Institute accepting nominations for Ryan Award for principals

Please see this message from The Accelerate Institute:

The Accelerate Institute recognizes the important and challenging work of school leaders across America who are giving students a chance by believing in them and holding student success as the only barometer to their own professional success.

Nominations for The Ryan Award are being accepted through **January 30** at midnight. Ryan Awardees will each receive the following benefits:

- an honorarium of \$25,000;
- the opportunity to lecture at the Accelerate Summer Institute at Northwestern's Kellogg School of Management next summer (2015);
- connection to a growing body of Ryan Fellows -- principals leading the transformation of this nation's urban public schools; and
- wide recognition through television, print, and social media.

Awardees are principals of schools who have demonstrated accelerated results in underserved schools over a *minimum of four years* and serve a sizeable percentage of low-income, students of color. To nominate principals, click [here](#).

RIDE will post this field memo on Tuesday, at:

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