



MINUTES OF THE MEETING  
September 19, 2023

**COUNCIL ON ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION**

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Chair DiCenso welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education. She declared a quorum present and called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

**Present:** Mary Barden, Amy Beretta, Colleen Callahan, Karen Davis, Patricia DiCenso, Jo Eva Gaines, Marta Martinez, Robert Mitchell

**1. ACCEPTANCE OF THE AGENDA**

On a motion duly made by Jo Eva Gaines and seconded by Colleen Callahan, it was,

**VOTED:** That the Rhode Island Council on Elementary and Secondary Education accepts the agenda for the September 19, 2023, meeting

Vote: 8 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative as follows:

YEAS: Mary Barden, Amy Beretta, Colleen Callahan, Karen Davis, Patricia DiCenso, Jo Eva Gaines, Marta Martinez, Robert Mitchell

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

**2. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES**

On a motion duly made by Jo Eva Gaines and seconded by Colleen Callahan, it was,

**VOTED:** That the Rhode Island Council on Elementary and Secondary Education approve the minutes of the August 22, 2023, meeting

Vote: 8 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members

voted in the negative as follows:

YEAS: Mary Barden, Amy Beretta, Colleen Callahan, Karen Davis,  
Patricia DiCenso, Jo Eva Gaines, Marta Martinez, Robert Mitchell

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

### 3. COMMISSIONER'S REPORT

Deputy Commissioner for System Transformation Dr. Kelvin Roldán presented the report on behalf of Commissioner Infante-Green. He informed the Council that all Rhode Island schools have resumed for what we anticipate will be another prosperous school year. He proceeded to mention school leaders have worked tirelessly to welcome students to new and improved learning spaces, enhanced academic and social emotional support and much more to help them succeed. He also conveyed that the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) initiated a back-to-school campaign, emphasizing the significance of attendance. He noted that Governor McKee and Commissioner Infante-Green submitted an op-ed in the Providence Journal which highlighted successes and challenges in education. He shared that children were joyfully laughing and displaying enthusiasm throughout the state, particularly those who had the opportunity to attend the three recently inaugurated schools in Providence. These investments matter because they send a clear message to students that we care about their learning experience.

Subsequently, he highlighted three communities, Clayville Elementary School in Scituate, Park Elementary School in Warwick, and Woodridge Elementary School in Cranston, which have been acknowledged as National Blue Ribbon Schools by the U.S. Department of Education. He shared that the National Blue Ribbon Award is a testament to exemplary leadership, the hard work of educators, the engagement of students, and the support of parents and the community.

Next, he proceeded to share that RIDE recently marked the second anniversary of releasing the *Blueprint for Multilingual Learner Success*. He noted that along with the *Blueprint* RIDE also released the *Strategic Plan for MLL Success* and since the release, the work around MLL's has been recognized nationally.

Afterward, Dr. Roldán discussed the annual WaterFire: A Salute to RI Educators event, stating that RIDE would host a special WaterFire on September 30 to celebrate education excellence. He extended the invitation to all to participate in the award ceremony honoring our exceptional teachers at Memorial Park in Downtown Providence.

Lastly, Dr. Roldán acknowledged that Arts in Education week had just wrapped up and thanked

the incredible art teachers who are helping students explore skills, develop their talents, and perfect their craft. He reminded everyone that the Council had approved \$5 million in funds to support local arts programming statewide through the Art Reengages Talent in all Students (ARTS) initiative. He thanked the Council for their commitment to the arts. Dr. Roldán expressed gratitude to all attendees and passed the meeting over to Chair DiCenso.

#### **4. OPEN FORUM**

No individuals addressed the Council.

#### **5. DISCUSSION ITEMS**

##### **a. Attendance - PPSD Update**

Providence Public Schools (PPSD) Superintendent Montañez offered a concise update regarding attendance for the forthcoming presentation on attendance and passed the meeting responsibilities to his team, consisting of PPSD's Chief of Community & Engagement Carina Pinto, Executive Director of Student Programming Marc Catone, and Director of Student Attendance BK Nordan. The team initiated the presentation by introducing themselves. Mr. Nordan started the discussion by addressing chronic absenteeism and its effects on the learning process. Additionally, he noted that the attendance target for the 2022-2023 school year, aiming for students to be present at 90% of the time, had been achieved. He presented supplementary data concerning the annual percentage of students experiencing chronic absenteeism and the average daily attendance. Mr. Catone assumed control of the meeting and elaborated on the attendance strategy being implemented by the district. He presented data showcasing the rise in average daily attendance across different school levels, attributing the increase to the summer outreach efforts. Ms. Pinto proceeded to talk about the recent developments in supporting students' attendance efforts. She covered topics such as new hires, professional development, and the implementation of new structures, including policies, guidebooks, and attendance dashboards. To conclude the presentation, she exhibited the attendance packet distributed to all families. The packet includes an attendance contract, a calendar, and guidelines. Additionally, copies of this packet were provided to all Council members present at the meeting. Council members asked questions and shared concerns throughout the presentation and received corresponding responses.

##### **b. Bipartisan Safer Communities Act Grant**

Stephanie Enos, the Federal Program Coordinator at RIDE, initiated her presentation on the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act (BSCA) Stronger Connections Grants. She gave an overview of the act, which allocates \$1 billion in funding to support State Educational Agencies (SEAs), Local

Educational Agencies (LEAs), and schools in creating safe, healthy, and supportive learning environments through the program. Additionally, she noted that RIDE had acquired \$4.8 million in funding to be distributed to high-need LEAs through a competitive grant process. RIDE has already awarded funds to 12 LEAs to support initiatives up to the end of the 2025-2026 school year. She reviewed the eligibility criteria and explained that the determination of high-need LEAs was based on two metrics, which are Poverty/Title I schools and SurveyWorks Student data. The BSCA Stronger Connection funds align with state priorities and aim to enhance students' sense of belonging.

She presented the list of grant awardees and concluded by outlining a timeline for the three-year grant project. The council members expressed satisfaction and interest in delving deeper into the developments within the district.

### **ci. Readiness Based Graduation Requirements Update**

Stephen Osborn, RIDE's State Strategy and Student Opportunity Officer, was present this evening to offer an update on the support being extended to our schools. He emphasized how this year is being utilized as a planning phase to effectively implement the readiness-based graduation requirements in collaboration with our schools and districts. He highlighted that, hearing the council's call for ride to assist schools and districts in transitioning to Readiness-Based Graduation requirements, one of the objectives outlined in the 5-year action plan is fostering partnership and collaboration. To provide support, RIDE initiated the "Let's Get Ready" community of practice. Its aim is to collaborate with high schools across the state, ensuring they comprehend the upcoming changes and feel adequately supported during the implementation process. He stated that RIDE organized sessions in August, during which they received favorable feedback from the education community. Candace Caluori, Toll Gate High School's principal, was present to discuss the support and collaboration her school has received from RIDE. Mr. Osborn emphasized another objective, which is to redefine the learning experience. RIDE initiated the XQ+RI ELA Learning Redesign sessions, aimed at assisting high school ELA teachers in enhancing real-world, pertinent learning while integrating high-quality instructional materials. He highlighted that RIDE believes promoting student engagement is 100% compatible with teaching high-quality instructional materials. He talked about the sessions' experience and offered a summary of what took place during those days. He concluded by expressing gratitude to everyone for their time, thoughtful contributions, engaging conversation, and collaborative partnership. Members posed questions, and responses were provided accordingly.

### **cii. Regulations Required Pursuant to 16-7.1-5.1**

Anthony Cottone, RIDE's Chief Legal Counsel initiated the discussion with a concise introduction to the legal mandate for promulgating regulations. He explained that RIGL § 16-7.1-5.1(d) requires the Council to promulgate statewide regulations providing for when a district under RIDE's control exits turnaround status and returns to local control. Brian Darrow, RIDE's Chief Strategy Officer proceeded with the presentation, addressing the foundational principles that would guide

the development of the regulations. These principles encompass the application of state-level regulations pertaining to the Council's responsibilities for any district under the Crowley Act, drawing inspiration from Massachusetts' existing regulations as a template, and collaborating with local and national experts in school governance for the development process. It was also noted that these regulations are slated for implementation in PPSD in the spring of 2024 following the promulgation. He also presented a comprehensive breakdown of the timeline for promulgation and implementation and included in-depth information about the expert feedback that was received to shape the regulations and the essential components of these regulations.

He indicated that RIDE will carry out a transparent, statewide public comment procedure to review proposed regulatory language in accordance with state regulatory standards. These sessions are expected to take place between November and December and will be conducted in every Rhode Island County, mirroring the approach taken for secondary regulations. RIDE will consolidate the main insights gathered from public comments and engage in a review process with the Council in January 2024.

## 6. ADJOURNMENT:

On a motion duly made by Colleen Callahan and seconded by Amy Beretta, it was,

**VOTED:** That the meeting of the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education adjourns

**Vote:** 8 members voted in the affirmative, 0 members voted in the negative, and 0 members abstained as follows:

**YEAS:** Mary Barden, Amy Beretta, Colleen Callahan, Karen Davis, Patricia DiCenso, Jo Eva Gaines, Marta Martinez, Robert Mitchell

**NAYS:** 0

**ABSTAINS:** 0

Meeting adjourned at 7:17 p.m.

