



MINUTES OF THE MEETING
December 7, 2023

COUNCIL ON ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

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 3:05 p.m.

Present: Colleen Callahan, Patricia DiCenso, Jo Eva Gaines, Michael Grey, Robert Mitchell

1. ACCEPTANCE OF THE AGENDA

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

VOTED: That the Rhode Island Council on Elementary and Secondary Education accepts the agenda for the December 7, 2023, meeting

Vote: 5 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative as follows:

YEAS: Callahan, Patricia DiCenso, Jo Eva Gaines, Michael Grey, Robert Mitchell

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

2. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

On a motion duly made by Robert Mitchell and seconded by Colleen Callahan, it was,

VOTED: That the Rhode Island Council on Elementary and Secondary Education table the minutes of the October 24, 2023, meeting

Vote: 5 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative as follows:

YEAS: Callahan, Patricia DiCenso, Jo Eva Gaines, Michael Grey, Robert Mitchell

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

3. COMMISSIONER'S REPORT

Commissioner Infante-Green initiated her report by expressing gratitude to the remarkable teachers, administrators, and support staff for their dedicated efforts. Acknowledging the challenges in education over the past few years, she conveyed deep appreciation for the educators who remained committed to ensuring the success of students. Additionally, she emphasized that everyone would persist in moving in the right direction in 2024, fostering collaboration with teachers, administrators, support staff, and various professionals who support our kids. She extended warm wishes for a festive holiday season with friends and loved ones.

Highlighting an upcoming school break, she underscored a crucial message for all Rhode Islanders: attendance matters. Emphasizing the importance of being present in school, she conveyed that children cannot learn effectively if they are not in attendance. Continuing her remarks, she emphasized that the data unequivocally indicates that school attendance serves as a potent predictor of student outcomes. Citing research findings, she pointed out that chronic absenteeism is linked to various challenges, including course failure, heightened risk of dropout, and diminished academic achievement. She highlighted a significant observation pointing out a 20-percentage point achievement gap between students who were chronically absent and those who were not in the latest assessments. She mentioned that Governor McKee and she are urging both public and private stakeholders to participate in the Attendance Matters RI campaign, working together to address chronic absenteeism. She further stated that a few weeks ago, the initial meeting of the Chronic Absenteeism Working Group took place, involving stakeholders from the private sector, public entities, and the community.

Moving on to her next topic, student facility investments, she emphasized that the most effective means to encourage attendance is by guaranteeing that both students and teachers have access to modern spaces that are inviting, promote innovation, and contribute to excellence in learning. She shared that in November, voters in seven communities approved local bonds that will help provide thousands of students across the state with the 21st century learning environments they deserve.

These bonds support new elementary schools in Barrington, Cumberland, and East Greenwich, new high schools for Bristol Warren and Middletown and modern renovations in Lincoln and Coventry. She also mentioned that she will be joining Governor McKee and Mayor Smiley to cut the ribbon for one of the three new schools Providence Public Schools have opened this year alone. She added that RIDE recently received news of securing a federal grant exceeding \$875,000 under the Supporting America's School Infrastructure Grant Program. With this funding, our School Building Authority will be able to assist districts across the state with improving school building conditions and learning spaces for both students and educators.

Next, she delved into the discussion on McKinney-Vento and expressed satisfaction in announcing that they have allocated over \$410,000 in subgrants to seven districts. This achievement was made possible through the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act's Education for Homeless Children and Youth funds. Recipients include Middletown, Newport, North Kingstown, Providence, Warwick, West Warwick, and Woonsocket. Commissioner Infante - Green noted that this marks year two of activities as part of a three-year funding cycle. She informed the Council that every Local Education Agency (LEA) had to showcase a well-developed project aimed at facilitating the enrollment attendance, and success in school of homeless students. Additionally, these projects had to demonstrate how LEAs would offer temporary, special, and supplementary services to meet the unique needs of homeless students.

Commissioner Infante-Green announced that November marked Rhode Island STEAM Month. She noted that the month allows us to celebrate opportunities that Rhode Island schools offer students in STEAM areas as well as highlight the importance of learning in Science, Technology, Engineering, Art + Design, and Mathematics areas. She highlighted three exceptional educators who received the 2023 STEAM Educator Award and extended her congratulations to Kristen Noonan, Michelle Conary Brittain, and Corinne Gelinias.

Lastly, an update on virtual learning plans was provided. A total of twenty-nine LEAs have approved virtual plans while another five LEAs are under review.

She expressed gratitude to everyone participating, encouraged them to enjoy the holiday with family and loved ones, and conveyed her appreciation for all their efforts on behalf of the children.

4. OPEN FORUM

No individuals addressed the Council.

5. DISCUSSION ITEMS

a. **Board Appointments for the Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center, the Rhode Island School for the Deaf, and the Central Falls School District**

Director of School Opportunities Andrew MacMannis provided a brief overview of the process and shared that under Rhode Island General Law § 16-45-6(e)(1) and Rhode Island General Law § 16-26-3.1(c)(1)(2) The Council on Elementary and Secondary Education shall appoint the members of the board of trustees at the Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center (MET) and the Rhode Island School for the Deaf from nominations made by the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Mr. MacMannis added that the Rhode Island Department of Education is putting forth two nominees to fill vacancies on the MET's Board of Trustees, along with one nominee to fill a vacancy on the Rhode Island School for the Deaf's Board of Trustees. All three candidates underwent interviews conducted by two members of the Rhode Island Department of Education.

He shared that the nominees for the MET are Jose Rodriguez and Soljane Martinez, and the nominee for the Rhode Island School for the Deaf is Kim Mullaney. He expressed confidence that all three nominees have the experience, skills, and commitment required to further the goals and mission of both the MET and the Rhode Island School for the Deaf.

Chief Strategy Officer Brian Darrow provided a recommendation of extending the acting Central Falls Board of Trustees Chair and Vice Chairs Leadership terms. He provided an overview and shared that Rhode Island General Law § 16-2-34 establishes a seven-member board of trustees to govern the Central Falls School District (CFSD), with the membership and leadership appointed by the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education. He shared that in Spring 2023, the Commissioner initiated a transparent, collaborative, and inclusive process to identify new CFSD Board of Trustees' members. He added that in accordance with district's current governance structure, the joint search committee was made up of representatives from the Governor's Office, Central Falls Mayor's Office, Rhode Island Department of Education and the Board of Trustees, and Central Falls families. He shared that because of this process, the Council appointed five new individuals to the CFSD Board of Trustees immediately. The Council also appointed two individuals to serve as the board's Acting Chair - Andrew Bramson and Acting Vice Chair - Hugo Figueroa, through December 31, 2023, to help ensure an effective transition for the board. As a result of the effective transition to date, the CFSD Board of Trustees voted unanimously to request an extension of the Chair and Acting Chair.

b. District Support Program Update

Director of School and District Improvement Kristen Danusis initiated the District Support Program update by sharing that the District Support Program emerged as the most significant initiative resulting from the state-level ESSER efforts in terms of funding and direct assistance to our districts with the greatest needs in the post-pandemic period. It marked the agency's shift towards considering the nature and structure of support at the district level. Acknowledging the presence of new council members, she provided some background information. She noted that the initial challenge was determining the eligibility of districts for the District Support Program. RIDE collaborated closely with partners at WestEd to create a thorough matrix that considered various criteria for this selection process. She discussed four distinct subsets of criteria that were considered during the district selection process. These subsets encompassed Health Metrics, Academic Performance, Percentages of students from historically underserved student groups, and School Climate and Student well-being. The districts that were identified were Central Falls, East Providence, Johnston, Newport, North Providence, Providence, Pawtucket, West Warwick, and Woonsocket, noting that the Providence Public School District participated in a different manner given their unique needs and context. She noted that the District Support Program has four main goals which were developed in collaboration from feedback from the Leap Task Force and working closely with a couple of Superintendents. These goals include modeling RIDE as a support-based agency, build a durable infrastructure for continuous improvement, providing select districts with targeted supports and sustainably and strategically invest resources to meet the needs of school communities impacted by the pandemic. She also discussed the priorities for planning and budgeting and the support, resources, and technical assistance that was provided. Additionally, Ms. Danusis offered an overview of the timeline for support and implementation, noting that we are in year three and addressed the Fellows who were integral members of the team providing support to the districts.

Associate Director, Andrew Milligan continued the presentation and highlighted the successes observed. He pointed out that districts enhanced their continuous improvement skills, invested in District Support Program priorities, and experienced a shift in mindset from planning for compliance to focusing on performance. Additionally, he mentioned that RIDE transitioned to a service delivery model, prioritizing district needs, fostering increased collaboration between offices to better support districts, and building capacity for district-level continuous improvement alongside districts.

Continuing, Ms. Danusis delved into the district interventions, emphasizing the importance of helping districts identify their most significant priorities and developing tailored interventions accordingly to tackle their greatest area of need. She further

mentioned that the office is starting to observe positive outcome data from pilots. She added that while it's too early for any conclusive assessment results, she wanted to highlight a few districts and share the encouraging developments that they are witnessing. Council members posed questions throughout the presentation, and the team responded accordingly, addressing inquiries, and providing relevant information.

c. Charter School Preview

State Strategy & Student Opportunity Officer Stephen Osborn and Director of School Opportunity Andrew MacMannis provided a Fall 2023 Charter School Overview. Mr. Osborn conveyed that the objective of the presentation is to offer a status update on important matters concerning charter schools in Rhode Island. He further mentioned that the update will encompass a review of proposals for new or expanding charter schools, an overview of charter renewal decisions, and information about charter schools with conditions on prior renewal terms.

He informed the Council that the applications currently undergoing evaluation include RISE Prep Mayoral Academy, Trinity Academy for the Performing Arts, and the Medical Preparatory Academy of Rhode Island. He also discussed the renewal of the four charters scheduled for the 2023-2024 school year. These include, Blackstone Valley Prep Mayoral Academy, Hope Academy, The Learning Community, and Segue Institute for Learning. Furthermore, detailed information was provided in response to the Council's request for yearly updates on charter schools. The team provided an update on the Apprenticeship Exploration School, Charette, Highlander, Sheila C." Skip" Nowell Leadership Academy, Times2 STEM Academy, and the Village Green Virtual School. He added that in 2021 RIDE began to issue earned five-year renewals to recognize the academic impact of learning loss resulting from the pandemic. Schools that earn three stars in the Star Rating system will receive a full five-year term. Schools that do not will be reviewed after three years. He noted that there are currently five charters with earned five-year renewals. These charters are Blackstone Academy, Southside Elementary, Beacon, Paul Cuffee, and Trinity Academy for the Performing Arts. He added that the Compass School received a full five-year term after the release of the 2022 Star Ratings.

Council members posed questions, and appropriate responses were provided accordingly.

6. ACTION ITEMS:

a. Approval of recommendation of nominee Jose Rodriguez to the Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center Board of Trustees

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

VOTED: That the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education approves the recommendation of Jose Rodriguez to the Metropolitan Regional Career & Technical Center Board of Trustees as presented

Vote: 5 members voted in the affirmative,

0 members voted in the negative and 0 members abstained, as follows:

YEAS: Colleen Callahan, Patricia DiCenso, Jo Eva Gaines, Michael Grey, Robert Mitchell

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

b. Approval of recommendation of nominee Soljane Martinez to the Metropolitan Regional Career & Technical Center Board of Trustees

On a motion duly made by Michael Grey and seconded by Colleen Callahan, it was,

VOTED: That the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education approves the Recommendation of Soljane Martinez to the Metropolitan Regional Career & Technical Education Center Board of Trustees, as presented

Vote: 5 members voted in the affirmative, 0 members voted in the negative and 0 members abstained, as follows:

YEAS: Colleen Callahan, Patricia DiCenso, Jo Eva Gaines, Michael Grey, Robert Mitchell

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

c. Approval of recommendation of nominee Kim Mullaney to the Rhode Island School for the Deaf Board of Trustees

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

VOTED: That the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education approves the Recommendation of Kim Mullaney to the Rhode Island School for the Deaf Board of Trustees, as presented

Vote: 5 members voted in the affirmative, 0 members voted in the negative and 0 members abstained, as follows:

YEAS: Colleen Callahan, Patricia DiCenso, Jo Eva Gaines, Michael Grey, Robert Mitchell

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

d. Approval of recommendation of extending the acting Central Falls Board of Trustees Chair and Vice Chairs Leadership Terms

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

VOTED: That the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education approves the Recommendation to extend the leadership term of Central Falls School District Board of Trustees' Acting Chair, Andrew Bramson, and the Acting Vice Chair, Hugo Figueroa, from December 31, 2023 to June 30, 2024 as presented

Vote: 5 members voted in the affirmative, 0 members voted in the negative and 0 members abstained, as follows:

YEAS: Colleen Callahan, Patricia DiCenso, Jo Eva Gaines, Michael Grey,

Robert Mitchell

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

7. ADJOURNMENT:

On a motion duly made by Michael Grey and seconded by Colleen Callahan it was,

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

Vote: 5 members voted in the affirmative, 0 members voted in the negative, and 0 members abstained as follows:

YEAS: Colleen Callahan, Patricia DiCenso, Jo Eva Gaines, Michael Grey, Robert Mitchell

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

Meeting adjourned at 4:36 p.m.