



MINUTES OF THE MEETING
April 30, 2024

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 5:30 p.m.

Present: Mary Barden, **Amy Beretta, Colleen Callahan, Karen Davis, Patricia DiCenso, Michael Grey, Jo Eva Gaines, Robert Mitchell, *Lisa Laehey

*Ex-officio member

**Member Beretta arrived at 5:35 p.m.

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 April 30, 2024, meeting

Vote: 7 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative as follows:

YEAS: Mary Barden, Colleen Callahan, Karen Davis, Patricia DiCenso, Michael Grey, Jo Eva Gaines, Robert Mitchell

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

2. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

On a motion duly made by Karen Davis and seconded by Colleen Callahan, it was,

VOTED: That the Rhode Island Council on Elementary and Secondary Education approves the minutes of the March 26, 2024, meeting

Vote: 6 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative as follows:

YEAS: Mary Barden, Colleen Callahan, Karen Davis, Patricia DiCenso, Michael Grey, Robert Mitchell

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

RECUSAL: Jo Eva Gaines

3. COMMISSIONER'S REPORT

Commissioner Infante-Green began her report, eager to share some exciting updates from the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE). She was delighted to announce that five of the school communities in RI had been designated as 2024 Green Ribbon awardees by the U.S. Department of Education. This esteemed recognition is granted to schools for their dedication to high-quality sustainability practices within their facilities and environmental education efforts. This marks the highest number of Green Ribbon awards earned in one year in RI. She added that RI leads New England as the top state for Green Ribbon Schools, boasting a total of 23 awards. Moreover, it holds the top position nationally for Green Ribbon Schools per 1,000 schools. She congratulated Garden City Elementary School in Cranston, William D'Abate Elementary School, and Frank D. Spaziano Elementary School in Providence, Dunn's Cornes Elementary School in Westerly, and the Chariho Regional School District. She further explained that because of these efforts, public schools constructed or renovated over the past 15 years have achieved significant environmental gains. They now consume at least 30% less energy, 20% less water, and have diverted a minimum of 50% of construction waste from landfills. Notably, two of three new Providence schools launched this fall exemplify the district's initiatives under the state intervention. These efforts aim to elevate the proportion of students learning in high-quality educational environments from a mere 5% to 100% by 2030.

Next, she noted that RIDE has officially opened the RI Pre-K lottery for the 2024-2025 school year. To be considered for a free seat, applications must be submitted by June 24, 2024, at 11:59 p.m.

She added that RI Pre-K provides high-quality learning opportunities for children who will be four years old as of September 1, 2024, and reside in communities where RI Pre-K programs are available. These programs serve over 2,800 children at 72 sites across 2 communities in our state.

She continued by discussing AP courses, highlighting that earlier in the month, RIDE spotlighted the new AP African American Studies course. She noted that E-Cubed Academy in Providence was recognized among nearly 700 schools nationwide that piloted the course this school year. All local education agencies can choose to offer the course starting this fall. She added that, beyond this course, RI is leading the nation with the greatest increase in AP participation over the last 10 years. She invited everyone to join her at the State House on Tuesday, May 21, for the 2024 AP Day celebration.

She provided a brief update on FAFSA, mentioning that recently, the U.S. Department of Education held a FAFSA Week of Action to encourage completion of the form. They acknowledged that RI ranked third in the country for submissions trailing only behind Washington DC and Connecticut. She emphasized that FAFSA completion remains a top priority for the Governor.

She also reminded everyone that nine school communities will be participating in the inaugural Menu for Success Food Truck Roundup this coming weekend. These communities include Central Falls, Coventry, Davies, East Providence, Lincoln, Pawtucket, Providence, Westerly, and Woonsocket. She invited the Council to join RIDE on Saturday, May 4, at Lincoln High School, to enjoy some of the best dishes our students have to offer. The award celebration will be held at 2 p.m. to recognize the winners of the Commissioner's Belt and the Governor's Cup. She added that since this is the first major event where our students will serve food, capacity is limited, and guests must have tickets.

Lastly, Commissioner Infante-Green acknowledged the conclusion of Autism Awareness Month. As a mother of a wonder child with autism, she expressed her appreciation for the incredible nature of children with autism and the profound love and care their families provide. She emphasized that RIDE is dedicated to promoting autism acceptance, celebrating neurodiversity and individual differences, and fostering inclusivity and connectedness within communities, beyond the span of this month.

4. OPEN FORUM

No individuals addressed the Council or submitted a written statement.

5. DISCUSSION ITEMS

a. WIDA Standards

Deputy Commissioner Dr. Roldán set the stage for the discussion and then handed the presentation over to Chief Strategy Officer Brian Darrow, Director of the Office of Student Community and Academic Supports David Sienko, and Coordinator of English language learners Flavia Molea-Baker. Chief Darrow began by stating that the team will be introducing a comprehensive, holistic strategy to improve outcomes for multilingual learners. He noted that they will keep providing updates on how this strategy will benefit students, families, educators, and school systems. He shared that today's request involves endorsing the English Language Development standards. He reminded everyone that the Council has already endorsed these standards, which have been approved as part of the Council's multilingual learner regulations since 2010. He noted that today's request is a technical adjustment to align these standards consistently with all other RI academic standards.

Director Sienko continued mentioning that RI was one of the founding members of the WIDA consortium. WIDA or World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment is a consortium comprising of 42 states, territories, and federal agencies focused on ensuring high-quality instruction and supports for multilingual learners. He explained that as a member of the WIDA consortium RI has access to English Language Development Standards Framework. This framework includes standards essential for curriculum, instruction, and assessment for K-12 multilingual learners. It allows RI to utilize an English language proficiency assessment. This assessment measures students' academic English language skills and provides accountability. The English Language Proficiency (ELP) indicator measured through ACCESS, reflects the progress each student makes toward their annual growth target in academic English language skills. Additionally, he noted that WIDA standards emphasize a shared responsibility for improving outcomes for MLL's, aligning with a key principle within RI's Blueprint for MLL Success.

Ms. Molea-Baker provided an overview of the WIDA ELD Standards Statements, and components of the WIDA ELD Standards Framework. She emphasized that multilingual learners develop content and language simultaneously, with academic content serving as the context for language learning and language acting as a medium for learning academic content.

Chief Darrow underscored the significance of the ELD Standards, explaining that they provide a unified and systematic framework that outlines proficiency levels as students' advance through English Language development for all of RI's MLL students. Finally, he offered a glimpse into the future and outlined a broad roadmap.

b. Financial Literacy

Deputy Commissioner Odom-Villella opened the discussion and introduced State Strategy and Opportunity Officer Stephen Osborn, Director of College, and Career Readiness Michael Hobin, and Education Specialist Brittany Brown to give the presentation. Ms. Brown began by outlining the presentation objectives, which included providing an update on the financial literacy proficiency requirement as outlined in the secondary regulations, detailing recent accomplishments in supporting financial literacy, and previewing the next steps to further promote financial literacy in our schools. She reminded the Council that they had passed these regulations in June 2021. This initiative, approved before the regulations were finalized for the class of 2028, ensured that RIDE could include financial literacy and that all kids will demonstrate proficiency in financial literacy to graduate from high school. Director Hobin added that business leaders, employers, communities, students, and families have all emphasized the need for and importance of financial literacy. Ms. Brown discussed key priorities such as preparing graduates to shape their own futures, increasing engagement through real-world relevant learning experiences, and changing how children and families are supported. She shared that currently, students are not receiving experiences that connect learning to their passion and goals. The financial literacy requirement empowers students and families to make informed decisions that will impact their career and postsecondary choices. She added that RIDE received feedback from students, and their response was to include more courses relevant to the workforce. Director Hobin added that the teachers also noted that financial literacy serves as a foundation from youth to adulthood, highlighting it as one of the most crucial skills we can ensure students possess before they graduate.

Ms. Brown, Director Hobin, and Chief Osborn presented an overview of RIDE's activities since the approvals in 2021. They also addressed the legislative mandates outlined in RIGL § 16-22-13 and outlined the available options for LEAs to facilitate student proficiency demonstration. Director Hobin highlighted successful programs in certain schools that fulfill these requirements. Ms. Brown emphasized partnerships and collaborations with entities such as the Office of the General Treasurer, Fidelity Investments, the Providence After School Alliance, and the FLY Initiative. Additionally, RIDE remains committed to collaborating with NextGen Personal Finance to provide middle and high school teachers with high-quality financial literacy professional development opportunities.

In conclusion, the team conveyed that RIDE has developed a sustainable system to aid schools with free, open-source curriculum resources. Ms. Brown further noted that the upcoming year will prioritize additional professional learning opportunities, the promotion of best practices, active engagement with educators, and celebrating the achievements of the Class of 2024. The Council actively participated by asking questions, providing comments, and engaging in a fruitful discussion with the team.

c. The Status of Municipal Maintenance of Effort Requirements

Commissioner Infante-Green organized the discussion by offering a brief overview of the presentation before introducing Chief Financial Officer Mark Dunham to present the information. He began the presentation, introducing a set of interactive dashboards created by RIDE. These tools are designed to support LEAs and Municipalities in conducting financial reviews effectively. RIDE also extends its outreach to districts, delivering presentations to school administrators to assist them in making informed decisions. Additionally, another requirement is for the RIDE Finance office to evaluate the fiscal risk of all LEAs, charters, and community-based organizations that receive funding. RIDE sends out surveys and compiles the data into an assessment graph, prioritizing outreach to those deemed most at risk to provide assistance.

He proceeded to offer a summary of the state law concerning maintenance of effort. RIGL§ 16-7-23 delineates maintenance of effort requirements for cities and towns which are monitored by RIDE. He shared that a few districts were not meeting that requirement. He added that pursuant to RIGL § 16-2-21.4, if a school committee lacks the ability to adequately run the schools for an upcoming school year with a balanced budget based on current local contributions, the school committee may seek additional appropriations by initiating action with the RI Superior Court. Chief Dunham offered a summary of the school budget process between the school department and the municipality. He also presented a cumulative percentage change in local versus state funding. Over the specified period, LEA revenue from state sources increased at a faster pace compared to revenue from local taxes. Specifically, between FY 2017 and FY 2022, state revenues surged by 20.8% over the five-year period, surpassing the increase in local tax revenue (9.4%) by approximately 11 percentage points.

6. ACTION ITEMS:

a. Endorsement of the WIDA Standards

On a motion duly made by Jo Eva Gaines and seconded by Amy Beretta, it was,

VOTED: That the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education endorses the WIDA English Language Development Standards as Rhode Island’s English language development standards.

Vote: 8 members voted in the affirmative,

0 member voted in the negative

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

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

b. Approval of the CTE Appeals Process

On a motion to deny duly made by Amy Beretta and seconded by Jo Eva Gaines, it was,

VOTED: That the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education Delegate the task of hearing and deciding appeals from findings of the Rhode Island Board of Trustees on Career and Technical Education relating to the substantial similarity of career preparation programs to the Commissioner, and that such appeals to be heard as a dispute arising under a law relating to schools or education under R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-39-1, and be appealable to the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education pursuant to R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-39-3.

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, Michael Grey, Robert Mitchell

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

7. ADJOURNMENT:

On a motion duly made by Amy Beretta and seconded by Jo Eva Gaines 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, Michael Grey, Robert Mitchell

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

The meeting was adjourned at 7:33 p.m.