



MINUTES OF THE MEETING  
September 25, 2024

**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 welcomed a few individuals who will be joining the Council meetings moving forward. Chair DiCenso welcomed the Student Advisory Council Chair, Gabriella Bautista Bolvito once she arrived. Gabriella is a senior at Classical High School and has served on RIDE's Student Advisory Council for a few years. Gabriella is deeply involved in her school community in several ways. Chair DiCenso also welcomed the 2024 Rhode Island Teacher of the Year, Aimée Couto. Aimée began her career in education teaching preschool through second grade before joining the East Providence School Department. Aimée serves as a leader in many capacities within her school district. Lastly, Chair DiCenso welcomed RIDE's new Deputy Commissioner for System Transformation, Dr. Drew Echelson. Prior to joining RIDE, Dr. Echelson served as the Chief of Schools and Accountability for Boston Public Schools. He previously worked in several leadership roles in Boston including Interim Superintendent. Prior to his time with BPS, Dr. Echelson was the Faculty Director of the Doctor of Education Leadership Program at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Chair DiCenso declared a quorum present and called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

**Present:** Amy Beretta, Patti DiCenso, Michael Grey, Marta Martinez, Robert Mitchell, \*Aimée Couto, \*Gabriella Bautista Bolvito

\*Ex-Officio Member

**1. ACCEPTANCE OF THE AGENDA**

On a motion duly made by Amy Beretta and seconded by Michael Grey, it was,

**VOTED:** That the Rhode Island Council on Elementary and Secondary Education accepts the agenda for the September 25, 2024, meeting

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

YEAS: Amy Beretta, Patti DiCenso, Michael Grey, Marta Martinez, Robert Mitchell

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

## 2. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

On a motion duly made by Michael Grey and seconded by Amy Beretta, it was,

**VOTED:** That the Rhode Island Council on Elementary and Secondary Education approves the minutes of the August 29 meeting

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

YEAS: Amy Beretta, Patti DiCenso, Michael Grey, Marta Martinez, Robert Mitchell

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

RECUSAL: Marta Martinez

**\*A power outage occurred during the council meeting, prompting everyone to switch rooms and use alternate technology to continue the meeting.**

## 3. COMMISSIONER'S REPORT

Deputy Commissioner Lisa Odom-Villella opened by expressing her pleasure in attending the meeting on behalf of the Commissioner. She mentioned that students have returned to school and highlighted the great efforts being made statewide to support them. She shared that West Warwick wasted no time in launching their district-wide social-emotional learning initiatives and that at the RI National Guard STEAM Exploration Open House, students had the chance to explore exciting and engaging opportunities. From virtual reality to robotics highlighting the possibilities available to them in school, college, and future careers. She stated that, according to the U.S. Department of Education, Rhode Island is leading the nation in career pathway programs. Additionally, the #AttendanceMattersRI campaign is ongoing, and RIDE is looking forward to another year of in-depth data analysis and providing on-the-ground support for RI schools.

Deputy Commissioner Odom-Villella then spoke about the WaterFire event, where RIDE hosted the annual Salute to RI Educators. It was a wonderful evening celebrating the achievements of many talented teachers, administrators, and support professionals. She expressed her gratitude to everyone who attended and extended special thanks to the volunteers, including high school students and educators from across the state. She shared exciting news, announcing that the U.S. Department of Education named Cumberland's Garvin Memorial Elementary, Barrington's Sowams Elementary, and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Elementary in Providence as National Blue Ribbon Schools. She noted that Garvin Memorial and MLK were recognized as Exemplary Achievement Gap-Closing Schools, while

Sowams was honored as an Exemplary High-Performing School. These schools are three of only 356 schools nationwide to receive this prestigious designation this year. Notably, she shared that this is Cumberland's third Blue Ribbon School since 2017 and Providence's first Blue Ribbon designation since the same year.

Next, she announced that RIDE had received a significant federal grant to enhance literacy initiatives. The Comprehensive Literacy State Development grant (CLSD) will provide a projected \$40 million over the next four years to amplify and grow RIDE's Science of Reading and high-quality instructional materials work, which is already held up as a model among peer states. She noted that these resources will directly benefit our teachers. Additionally, RIDE also announced \$5 million in state funding for instructional coaching in math and English Language Arts (ELA). She expressed gratitude that RI's congressional delegation and the Governor have acknowledged and supported the strategic and ambitious plan to enhance literacy improvements throughout the state.

Finally, Deputy Commissioner Odom-Villella shared how RI has received national recognition for many efforts, including the states attendance and data initiatives. She explained that RIDE is hoping to help states around the nation seeking to innovate and improve their enrollment processes through the newly published toolkit entitled "EnrollRI: How a Small State Generated Big Learning Opportunities." The publication details how RIDE leveraged a federal Rethink grant to build the one-of-a-kind statewide enrollment platform. She highlighted that EnrollRI.org provides access to a statewide course catalog for RIDE's All Course Network (ACN), a first-of-its-kind common application tool for public charters, and listings of CTE and adult education programs. She added that this toolkit not only shares the technical and strategic elements of the platform, but also highlights the collective effort and vision that made it possible during the pandemic. Additionally, in addition to the toolkit, RIDE has eight spotlight articles available detailing various efforts funded through the federal Rethink grant. She thanked everyone and handed the meeting back to Chair DiCenso.

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

No individuals addressed the Council, and no written statements were submitted.

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

##### **5a. Attendance Matters RI Update**

On a motion duly made by Amy Beretta and seconded by Marta Martinez, it was,

**VOTED:** That the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education approves to table Discussion Item 5a, Attendance Matters RI Update

Vote: 5 members voted in the affirmative,  
0 members voted in the negative  
YEAS: Amy Beretta, Patti DiCenso, Michael Grey, Marta Martinez, Robert Mitchell  
NAYS: 0  
ABSTAINS: 0

### **5b. Certification Regulations Update**

Deputy Commissioner Lisa Odom-Villella started the presentation by informing everyone that her team was unavailable, so she would be presenting on their behalf. She announced that she would provide a brief update on the certification regulations and referenced the July briefing by Lisa Foehr and Gina Masiello, where proposed changes were outlined prior to stakeholder engagement. Since that time, the team has conducted meetings with key stakeholders, including the Superintendents Association, the School Principals Association, NEA, AFT, the Rhode Island League of Charters, Special Education Directors, and others. She explained that the team presented three key areas, or “buckets,” to all stakeholders: expanding pathways, increasing flexibilities, and refining standards and language. Some proposed changes include introducing new certificates, adjusting grade spans, and creating additional pathways for RI educators. She noted that feedback from stakeholders was largely positive, however questions were raised about certain areas.

Deputy Commissioner Odom-Villella indicated that stakeholder engagement had been completed, and the next steps involve continuing research and refining the draft regulations. A formal proposal will be provided to the Council, along with a request to initiate the public comment period. Following the public hearings, RIDE will conduct internal revisions based on the feedback received. She noted that the Council will hold a final vote to approve the Certification Regulations. Once approved, the regulations RIDE will file with the Secretary of State, and guidance documents, along with official communications will be distributed by RIDE to LEAs.

### **5c. RIDE Table of Organization**

Krystafer Redden, Chief of Staff, began the presentation by stating that he would be presenting the proposed modifications to the RIDE table of organization, designed to align with the agency’s next phase of operations. He outlined the agency’s priorities, emphasizing the goal of establishing agency-wide focus that is collectively owned across all offices to improve student outcomes. He highlighted four key priorities: attendance, post-secondary success, high-quality teaching, and learning, and closing equity gaps. Additionally, he emphasized that agency-wide efforts should focus on achieving these outcomes by addressing key enabling conditions. Chief Redden explained that the reorganization is a strategic alignment to support the next phase of the work at both RIDE and LEAs.

He emphasized that this alignment was intentionally designed to target all workstreams. He provided an overview of each division, detailing the proposed organizational structure for each. A council member requested a comparison of the previous organizational chart with the proposed one, and staff assured that this information would be made available.

#### **5d. Multilingual Learner Regulations for Public Comment**

Brian Darrow, Chief Strategy Officer, began the presentation with a concise overview of the March council meeting, emphasizing the growth of multilingual learners (MLLs) in RI in comparison to national trends. He noted that RI recorded the highest growth in the nation for the percentage of MLL students from 2010 to 2020. Additionally, he highlighted that RI ranks fifth among all states in the percentage of MLL students and has the highest percentage in New England. He also noted that RI had two times as many MLLs enrolled in SY23 vs. SY13, and MLL enrollment has grown across RI, not just in the urban core. In his overview, he also noted that RI's 17-year-old regulations, last updated in 2007, are outdated and not in compliance with federal law. He outlined a comprehensive holistic strategy that encompasses students, families, educators, and school systems. He emphasized that RIDE aims to leverage all available policy tools to implement this strategy effectively and improve outcomes for MLL students, prioritizing the core values of quality, flexibility, and support. He stated that RIDE will provide a supportive implementation timeline for LEAs to fully comply with all regulatory requirements. He simultaneously stressed the urgency of addressing student needs and meeting federal requirements without delay. He indicated that all LEAs are expected to fully comply with regulatory requirements by SY2029-2030.

Additionally, RIDE is redefining how LEAs are categorized by MLL incidence to better reflect the growth in MLL student population across the state and updated federal guidance. He also conveyed that RIDE will strategically and intentionally incorporate MLL family engagement efforts within the existing strategic planning and school improvement initiatives of LEAs, while also codifying federal translation requirements. He presented an overview of a proposed new program model hierarchy for students, stating that in alignment with research-based practices and federal guidance, RIDE will update the MLL instructional requirements. This update will include clearly - defined dedicated time for English language development instruction, while also integrating ESOL supports within the core content curriculum. He introduced a proposed expanded MLL readiness continuum designed to enhance educators' ability to support MLL students effectively. This continuum includes awareness-level readiness, MLL endorsement proficiency-level readiness, integrated content MLL certification extension, ESOL and BDL certification, as well as MLL administrator certification. He concluded by presenting a forward-looking high-level roadmap for the MLL strategy. He noted that the state is currently seeking approval to initiate statewide public comment, which will be followed by updating the regulations based on feedback from public comments and stakeholder input. This process will include final review and promulgation of the regulations, along with the release of initial guidance. Beyond 2025, RIDE will continue to support LEAs and educators in implementation, engaging and leveraging key partners for a coherent and cohesive statewide implementation. Council members asked questions, provided comments, and staff responded appropriately.

### 5e. ESSA State Plan Updates

On a motion duly made by Michael Grey and seconded by Marta Martinez, it was,

**VOTED:** That the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education approves to table Discussion Item 5e, ESSA State Plan Updates

Vote: 5 members voted in the affirmative,

0 members voted in the negative

YEAS: Amy Beretta, Patti DiCenso, Michael Grey, Marta Martinez, Robert Mitchell

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

### 6. ACTION ITEMS

#### 6a. RIDE Table of Organization

On a motion duly made by Michael Grey and seconded by Amy Beretta, it was,

**VOTED:** That the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education approves the RI Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's Table of Organization, as presented.

Vote: 5 members voted in the affirmative,

0 member voted in the negative

YEAS: Amy Beretta, Patti DiCenso, Michael Grey, Marta Martinez, Robert Mitchell

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

### **6b. Multilingual Learner Regulations for Public Comment**

On a motion duly made by Michael Grey and seconded by Amy Beretta, it was,

**VOTED:** That the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education approves the proposed revisions to the regulations governing the education of multilingual learners, for the purpose of public review and comment and scheduling of public hearings.  
\*A discussion took place\*

Vote: 5 members voted in the affirmative,  
0 members voted in the negative

YEAS: Amy Beretta, Patti DiCenso, Michael Grey, Marta Martinez, Robert Mitchell

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

## **7. EXECUTIVE SESSION**

### **7a. Discussion of personnel contract pursuant to R.I. Gen. Laws §42-46-5(a)(1) - Review of the Proposed evaluation of RIDE's Commissioner**

### **7b. Session pertaining to litigation pursuant to 42-26-5(a)(2)-PC-2023-03940**

On a motion duly made by Michael Grey and seconded by Amy Beretta, it was,

**VOTED:** That the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education approves to go into executive session.

Vote: 5 members voted in the affirmative,  
0 members voted in the negative

YEAS: Amy Beretta, Patti DiCenso, Michael Grey, Marta Martinez, Robert Mitchell

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

On a motion duly made by Amy Beretta and seconded by Michael Grey, it was,

**VOTED:** That the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education approves to go back into Open Session.

Vote: 5 members voted in the affirmative,  
0 members voted in the negative

YEAS: Amy Beretta, Patti DiCenso, Michael Grey, Marta Martinez, Robert Mitchell

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

On a motion duly made by Marta Martinez and seconded by Michael Grey, it was,

**VOTED:** That the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education approves to seal the minutes from Executive Session.

Vote: 5 members voted in the affirmative,  
0 members voted in the negative

YEAS: Amy Beretta, Patti DiCenso, Michael Grey, Marta Martinez, Robert Mitchell

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

## 8. ADDITIONAL ACTION ITEMS

On a motion duly made by Michael Grey and seconded by Amy Beretta, it was,

**VOTED:** That the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education approves reappointment of Commissioner Angélica Infante-Green for an additional three-year term as RIDE's Commissioner and to authorize the Council Chair to negotiate and finalize the execution of the Commissioner's new employment agreement subject to the advice and consent of the full Board of Education.



Vote: 5 members voted in the affirmative,  
0 members voted in the negative

YEAS: Amy Beretta, Patti DiCenso, Michael Grey, Marta Martinez, Robert Mitchell

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

**9. ADJOURNMENT:**

On a motion duly made by Amy Beretta and seconded by Michael Grey 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

YEAS: Amy Beretta, Patti DiCenso, Michael Grey, Marta Martinez, Robert Mitchell

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

The meeting was adjourned at 8:02 p.m.