



Minutes of May 15, 2024

RHODE ISLAND BOARD OF EDUCATION

The Rhode Island Board of Education met on Wednesday, May 15, 2024, at the Community College of Rhode Island, Warwick. Chair Grey welcomed everyone to the quarterly meeting of the R.I. Board of Education and called the meeting to order at 5:33 p.m. He turned the meeting to Christine Kechejian to conduct a roll call.

Present: Colleen Callahan, David Caprio, Karen Davis, Patricia DiCenso, Dennis Duffy, Rachelle Green, Michal Grey, Thomas Izzo, *Lisa Leaheey, Robert Mitchell, Lawrence Purtill, Marcy Reyes, *Ana Duarte Spencer

Absent: Mary Barden, Amy Beretta, *Margo Cook, Jo Eva Gaines, *Lisa Leaheey, Marta Martinez, Michael Mello, *Christian Ramos, Jeffrey Williams

*Ex-officio, non-voting member

1. ACCEPTANCE OF THE AGENDA

Chair Grey asked for a motion to accept the agenda of the May 15, 2024, meeting.

On a motion duly made by Colleen Callahan and seconded by Rachelle Green, it was

VOTED: That, the Rhode Island Board of Education accepts the agenda for the meeting of May 15, 2024

Vote: 11 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative as follows:

YEAS: Colleen Callahan, David Caprio, Karen Davis, Patricia DiCenso, Dennis Duffy, Rachelle Green, Michael Grey, Thomas Izzo, Robert Mitchell, Lawrence Purtill, Marcy Reyes

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

**2. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES
Minutes of December 7, 2023, Meeting**

Chair Grey asked for a motion to accept the minutes of the December 7 meeting and noted that Members, Beretta, Davis, Martinez, Mello, Purtill, and Reyes must recuse themselves.

On a motion duly made by Colleen Callahan and seconded by Rachelle Green, it was

- VOTED:** That, the Rhode Island Board of Education approves the minutes of the May 24, 2023, meeting
- Vote:** 11 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative
- YEAS:** Colleen Callahan, David Caprio, Karen Davis, Patricia DiCenso, Dennis Duffy, Rachelle Green, Michael Grey, Thomas Izzo, Robert Mitchell, Lawrence Purtill, Marcy Reyes
- NAYS:** 0
- RECUSE:**

3. REPORT OF THE COMMISSIONERS

- Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education

Deputy Commissioner Roldán began by expressing his pleasure at having the opportunity to share exciting updates from RIDE. He mentioned that Commissioner Infante-Green was unable to join today, as she attended the “Everyday Counts Summit: Addressing Chronic Absenteeism and Increasing Student Engagement.” Earlier with Governor McKee. He noted that the event featured senior officials from the Biden-Harris Administration including Secretary of Education Dr. Miguel Cardona. Thanks to collective efforts, approximately 93 percent of schools are currently reporting a decrease in the number of students who are chronically absent or at risk of chronic absenteeism compared to this time last year.

He expressed pride in the national recognition that RIDE is also receiving in other areas of work. He shared that recently, RIDE welcomed U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Assistant Secretary Dr. Miriam Delpin-Rittmon to Garden City Elementary School to spotlight National Children’s Mental Health Day where students gave a presentation on schoolwide efforts around inclusion and belonging following a tour of the school highlighting its wellness features and spaces. He shared that since 2018, RIDE has sought and received more than \$50 million in competitive grant funding.

Next, Deputy Commissioner Roldán shared that five school communities were designated as 2024

Green Ribbon awardees. The designation is awarded to schools for their commitment to high-quality sustainability practices and environmental education. He congratulated Garden City School in Cranston, William D'Abate Elementary School and Frank D. Spaziano Elementary School in Providence, Dunn's Corners Elementary School in Westerly, and the Chariho Regional School District. Additionally, two of our students were recently honored as U.S. Presidential Scholars. He congratulated Ryan Lukowicz from North Kingstown Senior High School and Margaret Luader of Portsmouth High School. He also shared that RIDE held the inaugural Menu for Success Food Truck Roundup where 9 districts participated and offered tasty dishes. Coventry won the Governor's Cup and Lincoln took home the Commissioner's belt. He noted that \$1.85 million was invested to help 15 local education agencies secure their own trucks.

He continued by sharing an update on FAFSA, noting that the U.S. Department of Education held a FAFSA week of action to promote the completion of the form. They recognized that Rhode Island was third in the country for submissions only behind Washington DC and Connecticut. Lastly, Deputy Commissioner Roldán shared that the Pre-K lottery for the school year 24-25 is officially open and applications must be submitted by June 24, 2024.

- **Commissioner of Postsecondary Education**

He began by acknowledging the recent documented challenges that students and institutions are experiencing with the rollout of the simplified form, which provides students and their families with access to federal student aid. For Rhode Island public institutions, this form is also required to access state aid. He emphasized the importance of understanding how the intersection of federal and state aid impacts the financing of higher education. Additionally, he would provide an overview of the report. He noted that, according to a 2019 study by the Pew Charitable Trusts, both state and federal governments have historically provided substantial financial support for higher education, however their respective levels of contribution have shifted significantly in recent years. He added that in the past, states provided a much larger share of financial support to postsecondary institutions and students than the federal government. However, over the past two decades, spending by both levels of government has converged as state investment has declined. As a result, the gap has narrowed considerably, with state funding per student in 2015 only 12 percent higher than federal levels.

He continued to add that this shift has changed the dynamics of public support for students and institutions, as well as the flow of higher education funding. The federal government primarily provides financial assistance to individual students and specific research projects, whereas state focuses on funding the general operations of public institutions. Together, federal and state funding still comprises a substantial portion of public college and university budgets. He emphasized that given the essential role of government funding in supporting higher education access and operations, policymakers nationwide often face difficult choices as they strive to balance support for students and institutions with other priorities and evolving economic conditions. Federal leaders are currently debating the renewal of the Higher Education Act, the law that governs most federal financial aid and was last authorized in 2008. The outcome of these discussions could impact on programs such as the Pell Grant, the largest federal grant for higher education. Lastly, he added that although many states have been restoring higher education funding after years of recession-driven

cuts, their overall spending remains below pre-recession levels when adjusted for enrollment and inflation.

4. OPEN FORUM

No individuals submitted written comments, and one individual signed up to provide verbal comments.

5. DISCUSSION ITEMS

a. FAFSA

Mr. Osborn began by outlining the objectives of the presentation, which included an overview of FAFSA, discussing the U.S. Department of Education's Better FAFSA initiative, examining the impact of the FAFSA transition on students and families, and detailing RI's efforts to support FAFSA completion. He explained the fundamentals of FAFSA and the types of financial aid it provides. He then introduced the Better FAFSA which simplified the application and highlighted that the changes are expected to expand Pell Grant access to an additional 610,000 high school graduates annually and ensure that 1.5 million more students receive the maximum Pell Grant award. Additionally, based on U.S. Department of Education projections, Better FAFSA will provide more than \$21M in federal funding to reduce the costs of college for RI high school graduates. Mr. Osborn noted that the national launch of the Better FAFSA was supported by the FAFSA Roadmap, released in March 2023, which offered a year of implementation support to targeted stakeholders. He also acknowledged that the transition to the Better FAFSA has posed challenges for students, families, educators, and postsecondary institutions. Additionally, he outlined the national challenge being encountered during the transition.

Mr. Osborn presented data on the national impact, stating that, as of April 26, only 35.6% of the high school class of 2024 had completed a FAFSA, reflecting a 24.3% decrease compared to the same period last year. He further noted that as of April 26, high schools serving historically underserved populations have been disproportionately affected by the transition of the Better FAFSA. He explained that in RI, 41.7% of high school graduates completed the form, marking a 20.1% year-over-year decline in completion rates. He pointed out that this represents a decrease of 1,314 students who submitted their FAFSA compared to the previous year.

He emphasized that RIDE has taken thoughtful and deliberate actions to mitigate the impact of the FAFSA release on students and families in RI. He shared that RIDE surveyed high schools to identify and highlight their most successful strategies for increasing FAFSA completion. Additionally, RIDE is expanding statewide capacity to better support students, families, and educators throughout the FAFSA process. He noted that, because of these efforts, RI has achieved the 7th highest FAFSA submission rate in the country, with the 11th lowest reduction in FAFSA submissions year over year. He also discussed how colleges and universities have also been adversely impacted through the

Better FAFSA transition and have taken commendable steps to provide additional time for students and families to review financial aid applications. Mr. Osborn concluded by mentioning that postsecondary leaders are assessing the potential impact of FAFSA completion on higher education enrollment. The presidents of the higher education institutions also participated in the discussion with the board members.

b. Financial Literacy

Mr. Osborn began by outlining the objectives of the presentation, which included providing an update on the financial literacy proficiency requirements outlined in Rhode Island secondary regulations, reviewing recent accomplishments by RIDE in advancing financial literacy, and discussing the upcoming initiatives aimed at further supporting financial literacy in schools. He clarified that R.I.G.L. §16-22-13 mandates that all students, starting with the class of 2024, must demonstrate proficiency in financial literacy. He noted that students are not currently receiving experiences that align their learning with their passions and goals. The financial literacy requirement, he emphasized, empowers students and families to make informed decisions that will significantly impact their career paths and post-secondary opportunities. Mr. Osborn provided examples of the feedback the team received on financial literacy.

He proceeded by presenting a timeline of key milestones, starting from June 2021 and extending through May 2024, with ongoing developments beyond that period. He referenced the financial literacy legislation RIGL 16-22-13, which mandates that all students, starting with the class of 2024, demonstrate proficiency in financial literacy prior to high school graduation. Local Education Agencies (LEAs) have the flexibility to allow students to demonstrate proficiency through one or more criteria from a specified list. He provided examples of financial literacy from schools such as the Janita Sanchez Educational Complex, Westerly High School CTE, PPSD Central High School, Scituate High School, and Cranston High School West. He also highlighted partnerships and collaborations with Fidelity Investments, the Office of the General Treasurer, and the Providence After School Alliance.

Additionally, he mentioned that RIDE is actively engaged in discussions about expanding its efforts. He noted that RIDE continues to partner with Next Gen Personal Finance to ensure access to high-quality professional development in financial literacy for middle and high school educators. Finally, he shared that RIDE has developed a sustainable system that supports schools through free, open-source curricula.

Board members expressed comments, concerns, and questions, all of which were addressed thoroughly by the presenter.

6. UPCOMING MEETINGS

The next meeting of the RI Board of Education is scheduled for Wednesday, August 7, 2024, at 5:30 p.m.

7. ADJOURNMENT:

Chair Grey called for a motion to adjourn tonight's meeting.

On a motion duly made by Rachelle Green and seconded by Colleen Callahan, it was

VOTED: That, the Rhode Island Board of Education adjourns.

Vote: 11 members voted in the affirmative, 0 members voted in the negative, as follows:

YEAS: Colleen Callahan, David Caprio, Karen Davis, Patricia DiCenso, Dennis Duffy, Rachelle Green, Michael Grey, Thomas Izzo, Robert Mitchell, Lawrence Purtill, Marcy Reyes

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

The meeting adjourned at 7:02 p.m.