



MINUTES OF THE MEETING
October 29, 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 5:33 p.m.

Present: Amy Beretta, *Gabriella Bautista Bolvito, Colleen Callahan, *Aimée Couto, Patti DiCenso, Jo Eva Gaines, Michael Grey, Marta Martinez, Robert Mitchell

*Ex-Officio Member

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 October 29, 2024, meeting

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

YEAS: Amy Beretta, Colleen Callahan, Patti DiCenso, Jo Eva Gaines, Michael Grey, Marta Martinez, Robert Mitchell

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

2. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

On a motion duly made by Marta Martinez and seconded by Robert Mitchell, it was,

VOTED: That the Rhode Island Council on Elementary and Secondary Education approves the minutes of the September 25 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: 2

3. COMMISSIONER'S REPORT

Commissioner Infante-Green began by expressing a sentiment shared by educators and families across the state: our students, along with the academic and social-emotional challenges they face, have changed significantly since the pandemic. She continued, emphasizing that COVID-19 disrupted learning, set students back academically, increased chronic absenteeism rates nationwide, and intensified an already well-documented national youth mental health crisis. She added that RI's latest assessment results reflect these challenges. Additionally, states nationwide are adapting to changes in the SAT, which will be addressed during the presentation. She noted that RI's RICAS scores are comparable to those of neighboring states, including Massachusetts and Connecticut. Like other communities, the state saw a slight increase in math scores but a decline in ELA scores. She highlighted that RIDE is taking proactive steps to help districts address these challenges immediately. This includes supporting districts in improving instruction and implementing high-quality curriculum and instructional materials. She added that RIDE has secured a historic \$40 million federal grant to enhance literacy efforts and provide additional coaching support to schools. This funding complements the \$5 million in coaching grants awarded to LEAs, made possible through the Team RI budget.

Commissioner Infante-Green continued, emphasizing that the data highlights the critical importance of attendance. She noted that attendance directly impacts student performance, with significant achievement gaps between students who are chronically absent and those who are not. This gap persists across the state and is not limited to urban or suburban areas. She shared that RIDE would maintain its commitment to the nationally recognized AttendanceMattersRI campaign. She observed that significant changes in student demographics have also occurred, with an increase in multilingual and differently abled students. RIDE is actively working to ensure their needs are met. She further emphasized that mental health remains a central focus in strategies aimed at promoting well-being and improving student outcomes.

Next, she shared that a recent meeting with school leaders focused on mental health highlighting that parents and children are facing new struggles. There is an urgent need for mental health support for both parents and caregivers. To address these challenges, she noted that RIDE has successfully secured nearly 50 million in competitive federal funds to support LEAs. Additionally, she proudly announced that RIDE is finalizing a partnership with Hazel Health, the nation's largest school-based telehealth provider. This service will be provided free of charge to the schools and will be accessible to around 130,000 students. This annual event highlights food education, school gardens, and lunch trays filled

with nutritious, locally sourced ingredients. She commended Warwick Public Schools for their efforts in teaching students' healthy habits. Additionally, they hosted this year's annual Apple Crunch event at Norwood Elementary School which was one of the schools that had broken ground on outdoor classrooms thanks to RIDE's Learning Inside Out grant program, which the Council approved last year. She thanked all the partners in the work including R.I. DEM, Rhode Island Commerce, The Rhode Island Farm to School Network, the Rhode Island Healthy Schools Coalition and many more.

Lastly, Commissioner Infante-Green shared an update on virtual learning plans. Since the Council delegated authority, 18 LEAs have submitted plans for the 2024-2025 academic year. Of those, 4 have been approved, and the remaining 14 are currently under review and feedback. She added that RIDE will continue to provide updates to the Council regarding virtual learning plan approvals and will revisit the review and approval process in the summer of 2025.

4. OPEN FORUM

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

5. DISCUSSION ITEMS

5a. State Assessment Results

Commissioner Infante-Green began the presentation by reviewing the Table of Contents. She reminded everyone of the agency's priorities and RIDE's commitment to improving outcomes for Rhode Island students. She highlighted the key performance metrics identified by the Governor, which aim to focus efforts and inspire stakeholders to support schools in improving outcomes by 2030. These include RICAS ELA, RICAS Math, student chronic absenteeism, and FAFSA completion. Before addressing the key takeaways, she provided an overview of teaching and learning, highlighting the ongoing impact of the pandemic. She also emphasized the importance of student attendance and discussed the increasing diversity of Rhode Island's student population, including multilingual and differently-abled learners. Additionally, she acknowledged the mental health challenges many students are currently facing.

She shared that participation in the 2024 Rhode Island assessments for ELA and Math RICAS continues to show an upward trend, with participation rates exceeding 98%. Additionally, participation in the ELA and Math SAT has increased by approximately 1.5% resulting in rates above 95%. Furthermore, participation in the NGSA has continued to rise, with rates now exceeding 96%. Commissioner Infante-Green provided a comprehensive analysis of the key takeaways, including a decline in ELA performance, stable results in math across all grades, and a significant gap in proficiency levels for multilingual learners and differently-abled students in both ELA and Math. She also noted that 2024 establishes a new baseline due to changes in the SAT assessment. Additionally, the performance gap with Massachusetts is narrowing as evidenced by cross state comparisons. In terms of urbanicity, suburban and urban-ring LEAs are recovering at a slower pace than urban

LEAs. Regarding science, she shared that NCSA science performance showed a modest overall increase. Finally, she emphasized the critical role of attendance, citing that students who are not chronically absent are consistently outperforming their chronically absent peers across all assessments.

After discussing the key takeaways, she outlined the next steps, focusing on mental health, attendance, and instruction. She shared that RIDE will continue its statewide, nationally recognized Attendance Matters RI campaign to reduce chronic absenteeism. She also highlighted RIDE's partnership with Hazel Health to offer comprehensive virtual mental health services to students across the state. Additionally, RIDE, in collaboration with the College Board, will provide all LEAs access to Khan Academy for district-level support, aimed at strengthening PSAT and SAT preparation in high schools.

Lastly, she outlined the next steps for LEAs at both the district and school levels, emphasizing key areas such as communication, addressing absenteeism, mental health, and instructional gaps. She stressed the importance of reviewing assessment results, revising plans to align actions with identified needs, and ensuring the implementation of high-quality curricula. Additionally, she highlighted the necessity of establishing systems to support students who require additional assistance. Council members asked questions, and RIDE responded to each inquiry accordingly.

5b. FY 2026 Capital and Operating Budget

Chief Dunham began the presentation with a summary, outlining a capital budget of \$821.3 million spanning FY 2026-2030 and beyond. He detailed projected expenditures of \$548.2 million for the period 2025-2030, \$252.6 million in pre-2025 expenditures for ongoing projects, and \$20.5 million in post-2030 projections for continuing initiatives. Additionally, he noted that the portfolio comprises of 17 projects, including 10 previously approved and 7 newly proposed. He outlined the new projects, which include a Facility Equity Initiative and the Rhode Island Solar Schools Initiative. The plan also includes the purchase of two new vehicles, gymnasium upgrades, the removal and replacement of joints at the Rhode Island School for the Deaf to prevent water infiltration, and the development of an athletic field for the Davies Career and Technical Center. He informed everyone that the presentation includes an appendix containing the complete project list, along with associated costs and schedules.

Chief Dunham proceeded to discuss the FY 2026 Operating Budget, noting that due to uncertainties regarding available resources, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) is strongly discouraging discretionary, unconstrained budget requests from agencies. Instead, each agency was required to submit a two-part budget request: a base budget reflecting current service levels and a constrained budget reflecting a 7.5% reduction for FY 2026. He also emphasized that OMB strongly discourages the submission of new or expansionary requests, given the projected deficit outlook. Chief Dunham informed the group that RIDE's adjusted base budget is \$34.9 million, with the largest expenditures already excluded. These include a \$5 million instructional coaching initiative aimed at improving math and ELA achievement, \$3 million for out-of-school learning grants under Learn 365RI, and a \$2 million categorical increase for career and technical education. The required reduction for the constrained budget is \$2.6 million from the adjusted base. He explained that of the \$34.9 million

adjusted base budget, RIDE plans to focus on approximately \$16 million in non-personnel costs to achieve the \$2.6 million constrained budget reduction target. He noted that this includes a \$1 million reduction in Pre-K expansion funding and a \$1.6 million reduction in Adult Basic Education funds to meet the required budget constraints. He further explained that RIDE will be submitting budget increase requests exceeding the established targets. These include funding for the legislatively required education aid formula and additional support for the Met School. The Met School's request covers areas such as staff retention and recruitment, competitive compensation for non-certified staff, healthcare costs, transportation expenses, and initiatives to address learning loss in math and literacy. Lastly, he shared a list highlighting areas where RIDE's constrained budget would significantly impact essential educational services and resources needed to support Rhode Island students. Members raised questions and made comments, to which Chief Dunham responded accordingly.

5c. Arts Act II – Facilities Grant

Chief Carreño began the presentation by announcing the successful implementation of ARTS Part 1. The inaugural RIDE ARTS grant allocated \$4.5 million to LEAs across the state to support the integration of the arts in schools. He highlighted several key uses of the funds: Davies established a school band for the first time in its history; East Providence enhanced Riverside Middle School with new lighting and audio equipment, as well as purchased choir risers for elementary school student performances; Providence utilized the funding to send the Mt. Pleasant Marching Band to the National Memorial Day Parade in Washington, D.C., and to acquire new kilns and instruments for its elementary schools; and Chariho used the grant to invest in state-of-the-art theater equipment, procure musical instruments, support in-residence programs, and create scholarship and mentorship opportunities for students.

The state is committing an additional \$5 million from the SBA Capital Fund to support LEAs in their continued work with ARTS Part II. This funding will benefit 53 eligible LEAs serving a total of 126,000 students. The funds will be distributed on a per-student basis, with 16 districts receiving over \$100K each. Additionally, \$500K in equity boost funds will be allocated to the five most challenged districts in the state. The funds can be used for a wide range of art-related expenses, including musical instruments, art supplies, audio/visual equipment, culinary tools, murals, art installations, performing arts, or even artist residencies.

6. ACTION ITEMS

6a. FY 2026 Capital and Operating Budget

On a motion duly made by Jo Eva Gaines and seconded by Marta Martinez, it was,

VOTED: That the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education formally approves the FY 2026 Capital Budget Request, as presented

Vote: 7 members voted in the affirmative,
0 member voted in the negative

YEAS: Amy Beretta, Colleen Callahan, Patti DiCenso, Jo Eva Gaines, Michael Grey,
Marta Martinez, Robert Mitchell

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

On a motion duly made by Marta Martinez and seconded by Jo Eva Gaines, it was,

VOTED: That the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education approves and transmits the FY 2026 Budget request and the FY 2025 Revised Budget to the Rhode Island State Budget Office and further approves transmission to the Rhode Island Board of Education for final approval

Vote: 7 members voted in the affirmative,
0 member voted in the negative

YEAS: Amy Beretta, Colleen Callahan, Patti DiCenso, Jo Eva Gaines, Michael Grey,
Marta Martinez, Robert Mitchell

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

6b. Arts Act II - Facilities Grant

On a motion duly made by Colleen Callahan and seconded by Marta Martinez, it was,

VOTED: That the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education approves the allocation of \$5,011,114 of the FY 2025 Arts Initiative SBA Capital Fund

Vote: 7 members voted in the affirmative,
0 members voted in the negative

YEAS: Amy Beretta, Colleen Callahan, Patti DiCenso, Jo Eva Gaines, Michael Grey,

Marta Martinez, Robert Mitchell

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

7. ADJOURNMENT:

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

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

Vote: 7 members voted in the affirmative,

0 members voted in the negative

YEAS: Amy Beretta, Colleen Callahan, Patti DiCenso, Jo Eva Gaines, Michael Grey, Marta Martinez, Robert Mitchell

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

The meeting was adjourned at 7:12p.m.