



MINUTES OF THE MEETING
November 21, 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 5:36 p.m.

Present: Mary Barden, Amy Beretta, *Gabriella Bautista Bolvito, Colleen Callahan, Karen Davis, Patti DiCenso, Michael Grey, Robert Mitchell

*Ex-Officio Member

1. ACCEPTANCE OF THE AGENDA

On a motion duly made by Amy Beretta and seconded by Colleen Callahan, it was,

VOTED: That the Rhode Island Council on Elementary and Secondary Education accepts the agenda for the November 21, 2024, meeting

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

YEAS: Mary Barden, Amy Beretta, Colleen Callahan, Karen Davis, Patti DiCenso, Michael Grey, Robert Mitchell

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

2. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

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

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

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

YEAS: Amy Beretta, Colleen Callahan, Patti DiCenso, Michael Grey, Robert Mitchell

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

RECUSAL: 2

3. COMMISSIONER'S REPORT

Deputy Commissioner Lisa Odom-Villella presented the Commissioner's report on her behalf. She started with a brief update on Attendance Matters RI efforts sharing that with support from the Papitto Opportunity, RIDE is distributing over 140,000 magnetic calendars to school districts to help students and families monitor daily attendance. She also announced that RIDE has launched a comprehensive, free professional learning course titled "Preventing Chronic Absenteeism." This course is designed to support school leaders, district administrators, and attendance team members in utilizing research, data, and tools to prevent and address chronic absenteeism. Participants can earn two professional learning units upon completion. She highlighted that, within the first 40 days of the school year, Rhode Island has already achieved a 10.7% reduction in total student absences compared to the same period.

Deputy Commissioner Odom-Villella then discussed the Providence Public Schools (PPSD) and was pleased to announce that an agreement had been reached with the City of Providence to provide additional critical funding for the district. She was also excited to share that PPSD has reached an agreement with the Department of Justice to exit federal monitoring. This monitoring had been part of a settlement agreement by the City of Providence, prior to the state intervention, due to federal non-compliance issues and the failure to properly serve multilingual learners. She conveyed that the Commissioner was deeply grateful to the school leaders, staff, and community partners who have worked tirelessly and collaboratively to improve service for students, enabling PPSD to reach this significant milestone.

She mentioned that RIDE is preparing for an event in collaboration with the White House's Office of National Cyber Director. Director Harry Coker and his team will be at Cranston High School East for a discussion with LEA leaders, tech directors, educators, and industry partners about new federal cybersecurity resources available to schools and ongoing efforts in Rhode Island. She noted that this comes at a critical time, as cyber threats continue to pose risks to schools across the country, including Rhode Island.

Next, she stated that the Council had approved Act II of the ARTS Initiative, and shortly after RIDE kicked off the program at Hope High School for the Arts. She added that many districts and students

expressed their gratitude for the program. Lastly, she shared that since the Council delegated authority to the Commissioner in July 2023 to approve virtual instructional day plans for use by LEAs in the event of inclement weather or other emergencies, a total of 23 LEAs have submitted plans for the 2024-2025 academic year and another 6 plans are in the process of review and feedback.

4. OPEN FORUM

One individual addressed the Council, and no written statements were submitted.

5. DISCUSSION ITEMS

5a. Right to Read

Deputy Commissioner Odom-Villella introduced the discussion and handed the meeting over to Chief of Teaching and Learning, Lisa Foehr and Director of Instruction, Assessment, and Curriculum, Dr. Phyllis Lynch. Chief Foehr began by stating that the discussion would address not only the differences but also an in-depth exploration of decodable readers. She reviewed the distinctions between structured literacy and balanced literacy practices, emphasizing that decodable texts, phonics, and phonemic awareness are explicitly and systematically taught through a scope and sequence aligned with high-quality curriculum materials. She further noted that, in the balanced literacy approach, phonics and phonemic awareness instruction is inconsistently delivered, often through disjointed mini lessons that lack alignment. Misread words are frequently guessed and corrected, and leveled texts rely on the three-cueing system.

Dr. Lynch continued by discussing decodable texts and referenced a book included in the members' packets to illustrate an example. She emphasized that, through decodable texts, the phonics patterns presented align with the skills that have been explicitly taught. The targeted phonics patterns are intentionally repeated to provide ample practice, and high-frequency words introduced in the text have already been explicitly taught. She added that the texts progress in a structured scope and sequence, moving from simple patterns to more complex ones, with a focus on accurate decoding first, before comprehension. Dr. Lynch also addressed leveled texts, explaining that their complexity is determined by factors such as word count, sentence structure, and syntactic complexity. She noted that text selection is often guided by topic or student interest, with early texts frequently repetitive and predictable sentence patterns. However, she emphasized that leveled texts are not systematically aligned to phonics patterns taught to students. Furthermore, she highlighted that these texts often rely heavily on supportive illustrations, with primary focus on meaning-making rather than precise decoding.

Next, Dr. Lynch reviewed the Right to Read timeline, which began in 2019 with the passage of legislation and extends through 2025, by which time all educators are expected to meet the requirements outlined in the Right to Read Act. Chief Foehr continued with an overview of the Right to Read Act, outlining the requirements for proficiency and awareness. She highlighted that by the

end of the 2025 academic year, all educators are expected to meet either awareness or proficiency requirements and that, by Spring 2025, all graduates of Rhode Island Educator Preparation Programs will also meet these standards. She also shared data on the current progress as of November 14, 2024. Dr. Lynch highlighted the Mississippi success story, emphasizing that the state was ranked 49th in reading proficiency in 2013. Through the implementation of comprehensive legislation and an annual investment of \$15 million to support these efforts, Mississippi advanced to 22nd in the nation by 2022. She contrasted this with Rhode Island, which improved from 26th in 2013 to 21st in 2022 following the passage of the 2019 legislation, despite the absence of dedicated state funding.

Chief Foehr continued by outlining RIDE's efforts to support professional learning opportunities through various funding sources, including the Comprehensive Literacy State Development Grant in both 2019 and 2024, as well as the State Personnel Development Grant. Additionally, RIDE has partnered with Decoding Dyslexia to provide targeted support. She also recognized four RIDE staff members were honored as recipients of the Decoding Dyslexia Rhode Island Educator Ally Award.

5b. Educator Certification Regulations for Public Comment

Deputy Commissioner Odom-Villella gave a brief overview of the presentation and then passed the meeting to Chief of Teaching and Learning, Lisa Foehr and Director of Educator Excellence and Certification, Gina Masiello. Chief Foehr opened by reminding the Council that preliminary concepts for proposed changes were shared during the summer, along with a commitment to stakeholder engagement. She emphasized that after extensive discussions with various stakeholder groups, the regulations are now ready to proceed to the public comment phase.

Chief Foehr proceeded to review the materials included in the meeting packets, which consisted of a redlined version of the regulations, an overview document summarizing key topics with corresponding page numbers, and a PowerPoint presentation. She continued by highlighting certification trends that reflect a shifting workforce, presenting data from 2013-2014 to 2022-2023. The data revealed an increase in the number of certificates issued through emergency certifications, expert residency certifications, and reciprocity, accompanied by a decline in the number of program completers. She emphasized that the primary objective is to enhance flexibility while maintaining rigorous professional standards, expanding pathways into the educator workforce, and promoting greater diversity within Rhode Island's educator workforce. She further explained that the proposed regulatory changes are categorized into three focus areas: expanding pathways, providing greater flexibility, and refining standards and language.

Director Masiello, accompanied by Chief Foehr delivered a comprehensive overview of each proposed change within the identified focus areas. Throughout the presentation, Council members posed questions and shared concerns, all of which were addressed appropriately.

Lastly, Chief Foehr presented a timeline outlining the next steps. She explained that the proposed changes presented to the Council would require approval to proceed to public comment. Following the public hearings, internal revisions will be made at RIDE, after which the Council will vote to

provide final approval. Upon receiving final approval, the regulations will be filed with the Secretary of State, and guidance documents and communications will be disseminated to the LEAs.

6. ACTION ITEMS

6a. Educator Certification 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 Certification of Educators in Rhode Island for the purpose of public review and comment and scheduling of public hearings.

Vote: 7 members voted in the affirmative,

0 member voted in the negative

YEAS: Mary Barden, Amy Beretta, Colleen Callahan, Karen Davis, Patti DiCenso, Michael Grey, Robert Mitchell

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

7. EXECUTIVE SESSION:

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: 7 members voted in the affirmative,

0 member voted in the negative

YEAS: Mary Barden, Amy Beretta, Colleen Callahan, Karen Davis, Patti DiCenso, Michael Grey, 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: 7 members voted in the affirmative,
0 member voted in the negative

YEAS: Mary Barden, Amy Beretta, Colleen Callahan, Karen Davis, Patti DiCenso, Michael Grey, Robert Mitchell

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

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 to seal the minutes of the Executive Session.

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

YEAS: Mary Barden, Amy Beretta, Colleen Callahan, Karen Davis, Patti DiCenso, Michael Grey, Robert Mitchell

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

8. ADJOURNMENT:

On a motion duly made by Amy Beretta and seconded by Colleen Callahan 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 7:43 p.m.