



MINUTES OF THE MEETING
January 6, 2025

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 5:31 p.m.

Present: Mary Barden, Amy Beretta, Gabriella Bautista Bolvito*, Karen Davis, Patt DiCenso, Jo Eva Gaines, Michael Grey, Robert Mitchell

*Ex-Officio Member

1. ACCEPTANCE OF THE AGENDA

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

VOTED: That the Rhode Island Council on Elementary and Secondary Education accepts the agenda for the January 6, 2025, meeting

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

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

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

2. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

On a motion duly made by Amy Beretta and seconded by Mary Barden, it was,

VOTED: That the Rhode Island Council on Elementary and Secondary Education approves the minutes of the December 17, 2024, meeting

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

YEAS: Mary Barden, Amy Beretta, Patti DiCenso, Michael Grey, Robert Mitchell

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

RECUSAL: 2: Karen Davis, Jo Eva Gaines

3. COMMISSIONER'S REPORT

Commissioner Infante-Green started by extending warm wishes for a Happy New Year. She highlighted that the beginning of the new year brings much to be proud of and expressed her gratitude to the council members for their support in efforts to help students and school communities thrive. She emphasized that, together, historic investments are being made to expand access to 21st-century schools across the state. She expressed excitement about the ongoing school construction projects throughout Rhode Island, which are designed to enhance learning and foster students' skills and interests. She underscored the importance of ensuring that students learn in modern, 21st-century schools to prepare them to compete and succeed in a 21st century economy. Commissioner Infante-Green highlighted that Rhode Island has gained national and international recognition for its efforts to improve school attendance and close the achievement gap. She noted that during the 2023-2024 school year, nearly 90% of school districts successfully reduced their chronic absenteeism rates.

She went on to share that RIDE has secured millions of dollars in funding to address the growing academic and social-emotional needs for students following the pandemic. This includes obtaining a \$40 million literacy-focused federal grant, the largest grant in the agency's history. She noted that RIDE launched a groundbreaking initiative with Hazel Health to provide children across Rhode Island with access to mental health support at no cost to districts. Additionally, RIDE has supported and expanded access to high-quality curricula, instructional materials, and professional development opportunities for educators. She highlighted that RIDE has been working to ensure that Providence Public School District (PPSD) continue to move in the right direction. After more than three decades of chronic underperformance and dysfunction, progress is being made. She reminded the council that independent reviews by SchoolWorks and Harvard have demonstrated notable improvements in PPSD under the state intervention. The recent accountability results further emphasized this progress. She also shared that PPSD celebrated a historic milestone with its first-ever Blue Ribbon elementary school, Martin Luther King Jr. Elementary School.

Next, she highlighted a recent announcement regarding career and technical education (CTE). The FY2025 state budget includes a provision for CTE categorical funding, allocating \$2.0 million to support the development of new programs aimed at providing workforce training for jobs that

currently lack active training programs. She shared that RIDE is soliciting competitive proposals from local education agencies (LEAs) to encourage the development of new CTE programs. Grant applications are available on RIDE's CTE page and must be submitted by February 28, 2025, at 4 p.m.

Lastly, she provided an update on the virtual learning plans. Since the council delegated authority to her as Commissioner in July 2023 to approve virtual instructional day plans for LEAs in the event of inclement weather or other emergencies, a total of 32 LEAs have submitted plans for the 2024-2025 academic year. Of these, 28 have been approved, and another four are currently under review and feedback.

4. OPEN FORUM

Twenty-six individuals addressed the council, and four written statements were submitted.

5. DISCUSSION ITEMS

5a. High Quality Curriculum Materials Update District Perspective - Lincoln

Deputy Commissioner framed the discussion and turned the meeting to Chief of Teaching and Learning Lisa Foehr, and Director of Instruction, Assessment and Curriculum, Dr. Phyllis Lynch. Chief Foehr began by outlining the objectives of the presentation, which included demonstrating the progress and expansion of access to high-quality curriculum materials (HQCM), sharing valuable insights and experiences from a district leader on implementing these materials, and highlighting the systems and strategies necessary for sustaining and enhancing student learning, as well as the continued implementation of HQCM. She outlined the timeline of the 2019 legislation, beginning in January 2021 when HQCM were first selected for English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics, through June 2025, when all LEAs will be required to select and adopt HQCM in K-12 Science for implementation at the start of the 2025-2026 school year. She emphasized that RIDE and LEAs will continue to offer professional learning opportunities to support the implementation of HQCM, ensuring that every student has access to grade-level materials and that student outcomes are improved.

She shared that while the adoption rate of HQCM is strong, consistent usage remains a concern. The percentage of teachers using HQCM for more than 75% of instructional time is notably low. Additionally, many teachers reported relying on online resources such as YouTube and Teacher Tube. She emphasized that effective curriculum implementation requires teachers to consistently utilize the materials, enhance the quality of their use, and address students' needs while maintaining grade-level learning in the classroom. She shared teachers' perceptions of HQCM, noting that Rhode Island teachers reported the materials as being too challenging for their students. They also discussed both the strengths and challenges they experience with the curriculum. Additionally, she highlighted the strengths and needs of curriculum-based professional learning. She emphasized that to improve

consistent usage, teachers require dedicated time, meaningful support, and targeted coaching to internalize lessons and effectively address their students' needs through a collaborative planning process.

Next, Lincoln Assistant Superintendent Kevin McNamara, a grade 5 teacher from Saylesville, Cindy Soares, and Karen Costa, a Grade 4 teacher from Lincoln Central Elementary, shared insights and experiences from their district on implementing HQCM in Lincoln Public Schools. She discussed the systems and strategies for advancing student learning through the implementation of HQCM, emphasizing a holistic, system-wide approach that integrates coherent planning, regular data usage, leadership focus, and collaborative practices.

Dr. Lynch referenced a report titled *The Opportunity Makers: How a Diverse Group of Public Schools Helps Students Catch Up and How Much Further They Can Go* from TNTP. She highlighted the themes from the report, which included belonging, consistency, and coherence – critical elements for advancing student learning. She emphasized that RIDE supports LEAs and educators in advancing student learning and shared the specific areas in which they are providing support. The members asked questions and expressed concerns, to which the RIDE team provided appropriate responses.

5b. Charter Renewals

State Strategy and Opportunity Officer. Osborn began the presentation by referencing Rhode Island General Law § 16-77-5.1(b), which designates the Council as the authorizer for charter schools. As the authorizer, the Council is responsible for the approval, renewal, and revocation of charter schools. RIDE is tasked with managing a comprehensive system for charter school accountability, including review, monitoring, and overall system management. He then outlined the renewal process, explaining that the Student Opportunities Unit led the charter renewal process in collaboration with other RIDE offices. The following charter schools are currently undergoing the renewal process: Apprenticeship Exploration School, Blackstone Academy Charter School, RISE Prep, Southside Charter School, The Greene School, and Times2 Academy. He provided a detailed overview of the charter school renewal process, starting with the initial application and concluding with the council's decision and vote. He then reviewed the various recommendations offered by RIDE. Additionally, he emphasized the importance of school accountability, highlighting that the core appeal of the charter school model lies in its commitment to greater accountability for student achievement in exchange for increased school autonomy.

Mr. Osborn reviewed each charter recommendation, highlighting a 3-year renewal for Blackstone Academy Charter School and Southside Charter School, as well as a 5-year renewal for Apprenticeship Exploration School, RISE Prep, The Greene School, and Times2 Academy. Additionally, he outlined the key factors influencing each recommendation and any associated conditions. The members asked questions and expressed concerns, to which the RIDE team provided appropriate responses.

6. ACTION ITEMS

6a. RISE Prep: Major Amendment Request

On a motion duly made by Michael Grey and seconded by Robert Mitchell, it was,

VOTED: That the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education moves to have a discussion on RISE Prep's major amendment request to operate as an independent charter school effective July 1, 2025.

Vote: 7 members voted in the affirmative,

0 member voted in the negative

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

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

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 approves to pause the meeting due to the computer restarting.

Vote: 7 members voted in the affirmative,

0 member voted in the negative

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

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

On a motion duly made by Mary Barden and seconded by Jo Eva Gaines, it was,

VOTED: That the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education approves to restart the meeting.

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

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

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

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

VOTED: That the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education tables action
Item 6a: RISE Prep: Major Amendment Request

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

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

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

7. ADJOURNMENT

On a motion duly made by Mary Barden and seconded by Jo Eva Gaines 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: Mary Barden, Amy Beretta, Karen Davis, Patti DiCenso
Jo Eva Gaines, Michael Grey, Robert Mitchell

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

The meeting was adjourned at 8:42 p.m.