



MINUTES OF THE MEETING
December 17, 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 5:30 p.m.

Present: Mary Barden, Amy Beretta, Gabriella Bautista Bolvito*, Colleen Callahan, Aimée Couto*, Patt DiCenso, Michael Grey, Marta Martinez, 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 December 17, 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, Patti DiCenso, Michael Grey, Marta Martinez, Robert Mitchell

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

2. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

On a motion duly made by Colleen Callahan and seconded by Michael Grey, it was,

VOTED: That the Rhode Island Council on Elementary and Secondary Education approves the minutes of the November 21 meeting

Vote: 6 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative as follows:

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

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

RECUSAL: 1: Marta Martinez

3. COMMISSIONER'S REPORT

Commissioner Infante-Green began by enthusiastically announcing a new partnership with Khan Academy, highlighting that it will provide a no-cost opportunity to improve SAT preparation and foster student success in high schools across the state. The initiative, Khan Academy Districts, complements Khan Academy's free resources by equipping local education agencies (LEAs) with school-level implementation plans to help schools monitor student progress, growth, and academic strengths and weaknesses. She added that participating LEAs will gain access to a variety of services offered by the program. She noted that these programs were recently featured in *60 Minutes* and encouraged everyone to watch the segment.

Next, she spoke about a RIDE event held in partnership with The White House titled the Cybersecurity Education Summit: *Preparing Schools for a Digital Future*. She proudly announced that Rhode Island will become the first state in the nation to protect students at all K-12 schools with a key cybersecurity tool called Protective Domain Name Service (PDNS). She noted that National Cyber Director Harry Coker joined her at Cranston High School East to make the announcement. She expressed her gratitude to the Office of the National Cyber Director and to all LEAs that pledged to adopt the service.

She also highlighted Computer Science Education Week, sharing that RIDE visited Smithfield High School to present Governor McKee's proclamation officially marking the occasion. She noted that computer science proficiency is now a graduation requirement and praised the innovative work being done by students and educators in this field. Throughout the week, multiple student and program spotlights from across the state were featured on social media and the RIDE website. Additionally, she shared that the CS4RI High School grant enables recipient schools to offer work-based learning opportunities and up to 16 college credits at no cost. Beyond programmatic support, the grant also provided professional development for educators.

Next, Commissioner Infante-Green provided an update on the school construction projects made possible by the Council. She shared that she recently joined Governor McKee for the groundbreaking of Woonsocket's new state-of-the-art elementary school, which is expected to open in 2027. The school

will serve students from pre-K through 4th grade and will consolidate Bernon, Coleman, and Globe Park Elementary Schools. She announced that the school will be named in honor of the late George Nasuti, a beloved principal, teacher, athletic director, and coach for baseball, football, and Special Olympics in Woonsocket.

She also announced that Providence will soon have a new Spaziano Middle School. With a \$34.5 million investment, PPSD will construct a new campus featuring cutting-edge learning environments designed for STEAM education, collaborative spaces, and innovative classrooms. She added that Providence has additional groundbreaking planned and expressed excitement about continuing progress toward the goal of having 100% of students in new or like-new classrooms by 2030.

She announced that RIDE is now accepting applications for the federally funded Child and Adult Care Food Program. This program provides free, nutritious meals and snacks daily at hundreds of locations across the state. Eligible participants include public and private childcare centers, adult day care centers, day care homes, schools, and emergency shelters.

Lastly, Commissioner Infante-Green provided an update on virtual instructional day plans. Since the Council delegated authority in July 2023 to approve such plans for LEAs to use during inclement weather or other emergencies, a total of 31 LEAs has submitted plans for the 2024-2025 academic year. Of these, 24 have been approved, and another 7 are currently undergoing review and feedback.

4. OPEN FORUM

Three individuals addressed the Council, and two written statements were submitted.

5. DISCUSSION ITEMS

5a. District Update - Bristol-Warren STEAM Efforts

Kerri Krawczyk, the 2024 Rhode Island STEAM Educator of the Year, delivered a presentation on the STEAM initiatives at Kickemuit Middle School in the Bristol-Warren Regional School District. She provided an overview of her professional background and outlined the school's transition to a STEM-focused curriculum. Krawczyk highlighted the new opportunities recently secured for students at KMS and shared that the school has achieved recognition in both national and international competitions. She also noted that elementary schools in the district offer foundational gateway programs to prepare students for STEM learning prior to middle school. In discussing future plans, she emphasized the importance of strategic planning, fostering meaningful connections, and ensuring access to the necessary resources to sustain and expand the program's success.

5b. Accountability Update

Chief for Innovation, Improvement, and Data Brian Darrow began the presentation by outlining its structure, which will include a recap of the accountability overview with key updates, a review of the 2024 overall results and key trends, and a preview of how RIDE, districts, and schools plan to utilize the results. He explained that RIDE's statewide accountability system, developed in compliance with federal law and guided by a committee of practitioners, incorporates holistic components and performance measures designed to highlight student performance and support targeted improvement efforts. He explained that Rhode Island utilizes a rules-based system for school accountability, assigning an overall rating to each school based on its performance across various accountability measures. He also outlined how RIDE identifies the state's lowest-performing schools, designating them as needing Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI). He explained that, following a public comment process in summer 2024, key updates were incorporated into RIDE's recent Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) plan amendment and will be reflected in the 2024 accountability system. These updates include revisions to the English Language Proficiency (ELP) measure, adjustments to the denominator for Diploma Plus measures, a requirement of a 95% participation rate in science to qualify for a 5-star rating, and modifications to the exit criteria for CSI schools and schools identified for Additional Targeted Support and Improvement (ATSI). Another update pertains to the Seal of Biliteracy, which honors students who demonstrate proficiency in multiple languages. Beginning in 2025, RIDE will publicly release data on students who earn the Seal of Biliteracy and will integrate these results into the school star ratings.

Chief Darrow then provided an overview of the 2024 accountability results, focusing on key trends and changes from 2023 to 2024. He reported that 29 schools experienced a decline in star ratings, while 48 schools saw an improvement. He offered a comprehensive analysis of the school star ratings, performance by indicator, and acknowledged schools existing or currently in CSI status. He also highlighted the inaugural results for postsecondary success and the Seal of Biliteracy. Additionally, he discussed the performance of low-performing student subgroups and addressed the issue of chronic absenteeism among both students and teachers.

Lastly, he provided a preview of how LEAs, schools, and RIDE will utilize the 2024 accountability results. The next steps for RIDE include the official publication of report cards, followed by regional meetings with LEAs and school leaders. RIDE will also provide content-specific and differentiated support to LEAs, with a particular focus on assisting the lowest performing districts. Additionally, RIDE plans to leverage school accountability data to launch planning for CSI schools, initiate the school redesign process, and inform charter school renewal decisions. Finally, RIDE will continue reviewing and identifying potential enhancements to Rhode Island's accountability system in early 2025. The next steps for LEAs and schools include reviewing the report card data and sharing the accountability results with both LEA-level and school-level stakeholders. LEAs and schools will update their strategic and school improvement plans to ensure that existing plans address any identified focus areas. They will also ensure alignment between LEA and school plans, communicate the updated plans to stakeholders, and take advantage of RIDE's support and technical assistance. Council members made comments and asked questions, all of which were addressed appropriately during the discussion.

5c. Providence Public School District Update

Deputy Commissioner Echelson began the presentation by outlining the context of RIDE's interventions and support for the Providence Public School District (PPSD), the Central Falls School District, and schools identified for CSI providing examples to illustrate what this looks like in practice. He highlighted that on August 29, the council received reports and recommendations on the turnaround status of PPSD and subsequently voted to extend the state intervention through October 15, 2027. Following this decision, Commissioner Infante-Green issued formal communication to the Mayor's Office, City Council, PPSD, and school board leadership.

The correspondence underscored the importance of collaborative efforts with RIDE to prioritize key areas, including student outcomes, governance, and financial and facility management. It also called for the establishment of a working group to demonstrate preparedness, provide evidence-based progress, and report on their findings. He discussed the importance of establishing conditions in four critical, non-negotiable areas: Student Outcomes, Governance, Finances and Facilities, and Collaboration. He emphasized that, through extensive collaboration and strong commitment from the PPSD community, including students, families, educators, and central office leaders, that the district is in a stronger position today compared to its pre-intervention state. He also provided specific examples to illustrate the progress made since the intervention began. He stated that the district is maintaining an academic focus and improving steadily each day.

He highlighted the implementation of a continuous improvement cycle supported by tiered interventions and accountability measures. He highlighted that PPSD demonstrated accelerated growth from the Fall to Spring administration of iReady assessments, outperforming other Council of Great City Schools (CGCS) LEAs. He added that PPSD experienced a greater reduction in chronic absenteeism this year compared to 95% of school districts in Rhode Island. He explained that the data indicates PPSD has shown performance increases in both ELA and Math on the 2024 RICAS assessments, both overall and in comparison, to statewide results.

Deputy Commissioner Echelson then provided a detailed overview of the actions taken by the working group as well as the planned future actions. He explained the financial situation, noting that the settlement resulted from two separate legal actions filed by the City of Providence against the commissioner for withholding state funds due to the city's failure to meet its statutory obligations. He provided a detailed breakdown of the settlement and outlined what it covers for the next four fiscal years. He shared that the Commissioner has established a clear goal for providing PPSD students with access to new or like-new buildings. He emphasized the need for a unified voice among the city, City Council, RIDE, PPSD, and the Providence School Board to achieve this goal.

5d. Charter New Seats & Expansions

Deputy Commissioner Odom-Villella framed the conversation and then handed the meeting over to State Strategy and Student Opportunity Officer Stephen Osborn and Charter School Coordinator Jermaine Curtis to deliver the presentation. He commenced by outlining the process for the allocation of new charter seats, which includes the submission of an application, a local impact analysis conducted by RIDE, a public hearing process, followed by the Commissioner's recommendation, and ultimately the Council's decision and vote. He clarified that RIDE prioritizes proposals for new charter seats that are focused on increasing access to high-quality educational options for students in communities with schools identified for CSI, as well as for educationally disadvantaged, economically disadvantaged, differently abled, and multilingual learners. He noted that each of the four applicants for new charter seats has withdrawn their proposal.

He proceeded to discuss the annual updates, highlighting that parent demand for charter schools has increased since 2014. He also mentioned that in June 2023, Stanford University's Center for Research on Education Outcomes released the National Charter School Study III, which examines the academic progress of students enrolled in charter schools compared to those in traditional public schools. According to the study, Rhode Island charter schools provide students with 90 additional days of reading and 88 additional days of math compared to traditional public schools. Furthermore, he shared that the *Minnesota Star Tribune* published an article discussing how Rhode Island's charter schools succeeded where Minnesota's charter schools had faced challenges. He added that RIDE's approach to charter school authorization is playing a key role in driving these positive outcomes.

5e. RISE Prep: Major Amendment Request

Officer Osborn and Charter Coordinator Curtis began the presentation, which was regarding RISE Prep's request for a major amendment. They began by explaining what constitutes a major amendment, referencing Section 2.3.1 of the K-12 Council's Charter School Regulations, titled "Charter Amendment Process." He shared the relevant quote: "If a charter school plans to make a major change in its operations, the school's governing board shall submit in writing to the Council a request to amend the school's charter. The Council shall act in public session whenever a major change is made to a charter. Major changes are defined as those that fundamentally affect a school's mission, organizational structure, or education program." He clarified that RISE Prep's major amendment request would fundamentally alter the school's organizational structure. He added that nearly all major charter amendments received in recent years have been related to charter school expansions. As a result, the K-12 Council's established process for approving major amendment requests involves discussing and voting on them in two separate meetings. He outlined the anticipated schedule, noting that the discussion of RISE Prep's major amendment would take place on December 17, with a vote scheduled for January 6, 2025. He emphasized that each meeting would allow for public comment. He shared the recommendation, which states that the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education moves to approve RISE Prep's major amendment request to operate as an independent charter school effective July 1, 2025. He noted that the key drivers behind this recommendation were RISE Prep's strong track record of student achievement and operational performance, as well as its consistent outperformance of Woonsocket in RICAS, NGSA, and ACCESS

assessments. The change in charter type is expected to remove RISE Prep from many of the political challenges it has faced as a mayoral academy. Additionally, he highlighted that RISE Prep will participate in the Employee Retirement System of Rhode Island (ERSRI) effective July 1, 2025.

6. ADJOURNMENT:

On a motion duly made by Michael Grey and seconded by Marta Martinez 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, Colleen Callahan, Patti DiCenso, Michael Grey, Marta Martinez, Robert Mitchell

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

The meeting was adjourned at 7:54 p.m.