



Minutes of November 13, 2024

RHODE ISLAND BOARD OF EDUCATION

The Rhode Island Board of Education met on Wednesday, November 13, 2024, at the Community College of Rhode Island, Warwick. Chair Grey welcomed everyone to the meeting of the R.I. Board of Education and called the meeting to order at 5:36 p.m. He turned the meeting to Christine Kechejian to conduct a roll call.

Present: Amy Beretta, David Caprio, Aimée Couto*, Patricia DiCenso, Dennis Duffy, Michael Grey, Thomas Izzo, Robert Mitchell, Marcy Reyes, Jeffery Williams

*Ex-officio, non-voting member

1. ACCEPTANCE OF THE AGENDA

Chair Grey asked for a motion to accept the agenda of the November 13, 2024, meeting.

On a motion duly made by Amy Beretta and seconded by Dennis Duffy, it was

VOTED: That, the Rhode Island Board of Education accepts the agenda for the meeting of November 13, 2024

Vote: 9 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative as follows:

YEAS: Amy Beretta, David Caprio, Patricia DiCenso, Dennis Duffy, Michael Grey, Thomas Izzo, Robert Mitchell, Marcy Reyes, Jeffery Williams

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

2. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES
Minutes of May 15, 2024, Meeting

Chair Grey asked for a motion to accept the minutes of the May 15, 2024, meeting and noted that Members, Barden, Beretta, Gaines, Martinez, Mello, and Williams must recuse themselves.

On a motion duly made by Patti DiCenso and seconded by David Caprio, it was

VOTED: That, the Rhode Island Board of Education approves the minutes of the May 15, 2024, meeting

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

YEAS: David Caprio, Patricia DiCenso, Dennis Duffy, Michael Grey, Thomas Izzo, Robert Mitchell, Marcy Reyes

NAYS: 0

RECUSE: Amy Beretta, Jeffery Williams

3. OPEN FORUM

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

4. REPORT OF THE COMMISSIONERS

- Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education

Commissioner Infante-Green began by sharing that RIDE continues to focus on supporting districts in addressing post-pandemic challenges, particularly in the areas of mental health and chronic absenteeism. State assessment scores reflect these challenges, showing slight gains in math and a small decline in ELA, aligning with national trends. To support districts, RIDE has launched several initiatives, including \$5 million in math and ELA coaching grants and a historic \$40 million federal literacy grant to support the implementation of the Right to Read Act over the next four years.

She shared that regarding standardized testing, the College Board transitioned to the digital SAT in 2024, establishing a new baseline for student performance. While the test measures reading, writing, and math, it now utilizes a more precise methodology, similar to national assessments like NAEP and PSAT. As a result, comparisons to previous years should be approached with caution. Notably, achievement gaps continue to widen between students who are chronically absent and those who are not. Chronic absenteeism, defined as missing 10% or more of the school year, has compounding negative effects on student outcomes. To address this, RIDE has expanded its #AttendanceMattersRI campaign with new attendance and achievement data visualization tools. Additionally, a free professional learning course, "Preventing Chronic Absenteeism," has been launched for school and district leaders, equipping them with research-backed strategies to improve attendance. Participants will receive two professional learning units upon completion.

Commissioner Infante-Green stressed that student health and wellness remain a top priority. RIDE recently established the Office of School Health and Wellness and is finalizing a partnership with Hazel Health to provide virtual healthcare services to approximately 130,000 students at no cost to schools. Hazel Health, which operates in 16 states, will help expand access to school-centered telehealth services across Rhode Island, positioning the state to become the first on the East Coast to provide comprehensive statewide telehealth support.

Next, in school infrastructure, she shared that voters in multiple communities, including Providence, North Kingstown, Central Falls, and Chariho, overwhelmingly supported school bond measures last week. In Providence, the approval of a \$400 million bond contributes to a historic \$1 billion school facilities plan. Construction projects are already underway, with the groundbreaking for the new Mary Fogarty Pre-K to 8 school and additional projects in the pipeline. Next month, Woonsocket will begin its elementary school project.

Additionally, Rhode Island has also received national recognition for academic excellence. The U.S. Department of Education recently named three Rhode Island schools as National Blue Ribbon Schools: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Elementary in Providence and Garvin Memorial Elementary in Cumberland were recognized for closing achievement gaps, while Sowams Elementary in Barrington was designated as an Exemplary High-Performing School. Additionally, Rhode Island continues to lead in career pathway programs, being one of only three states to meet all 15 key indicators identified by the U.S. Department of Education. These indicators span categories such as dual enrollment, work-based learning, workforce credentials, and career advising.

Lastly, Commissioner Infante-Green expressed gratitude for the collective efforts of educators, administrators, and community members in ensuring the success of Rhode Island students.

- **Commissioner of Postsecondary Education**

Assistant Commissioner Greg Ebner presented the Commissioner's report on behalf of Commissioner Gilkey. Assistant Commissioner Ebner shared that the Council is currently in the process of beginning a 12-month search for a new president of CCRI, with the office reviewing

executive search firm proposals and selecting a firm by November 11. He added that on September 26, CCRI successfully completed its accreditation process after presenting its comprehensive self-study to the NECHE board, earning accreditation for the institution. Additionally, Rhode Island College (RIC) enacted changes to several degree and certification programs, including the creation of a Cybersecurity Certification, a revised Master of Education in Advanced Studies of Teaching and Learning, a new Public Policy baccalaureate program, and an online RN-to-BSN Program. RIC also replaced the Health Education degree with a Health and Physical Education degree. CCRI introduced a new Photography certificate program.

Assistant Commissioner Ebner also presented that Rhode Island voters approved a \$160.5 million higher education facilities bond, allocating funds to the University of Rhode Island's Life Sciences Building and the Rhode Island College Institute for Cybersecurity and Emerging Technologies. The system's unrestricted budget request for FY2026 totals \$323.0 million, with a \$15.0 million increase compared to the FY2025 budget. He noted that this includes state appropriations, tuition revenue, and other revenue sources. Additionally, the Council also approved tuition increases for CCRI and RIC for FY2026. The capital improvement plan for FY2026-2030 was approved, totaling \$604.6 million for 13 projects, none of which are new.

Furthermore, he shared that for Fall 2024, RIC saw a 6.8% increase in total enrollment, with new student enrollment rising by 22.8%. CCRI's enrollment stood at 13,062 students, with 42% attending full-time. The 2024 state budget established the Foster Youth Scholarship at RIC, with nine students currently enrolled. In efforts to improve affordability, the Promise Scholarship policy was amended to require 24 credits per year instead of 12 credits per semester, allowing students to use Promise dollars year-round. Additionally, an advertising campaign was launched to increase FAFSA completion, targeting districts with historically low completion rates. He noted that RIC anticipates 401 Hope-eligible students for Fall 2024. The Westerly Education Center is fully booked with courses through FY25, including maritime manufacturing courses, while the Woonsocket Education Center is offering various workforce development courses. The Rhode Island Nursing Education Center is operating at over 70% capacity, with a notable increase in simulation activities. The policy on transfer was updated to allow CCRI students to meet RIC's general education requirements upon transfer, reducing the cost of earning a bachelor's degree at RIC for some students. Additionally, Title IX and other policies, including those on Athletics and Military Reservists, were amended, and an AI policy workgroup is developing guidelines for teaching, data governance, and ethical considerations.

In personnel changes, Jess Key was named Assistant Commissioner of Workforce and Executive Director of the Rhode Island Higher Education & Industry Centers, overseeing Rhode Island's postsecondary workforce strategy. He disclosed that CCRI held a Workforce Summit in July to discuss labor market and workforce training needs and launched a pilot program for incoming students needing additional academic preparation. Additionally, the college received a \$2 million philanthropic gift to support CCRI Advantage, the largest individual private gift in the college's history. Finally, CCRI and RIC are negotiating housing arrangements for CCRI students in RIC dorms, and an agreement was made for the use of space at the Rhode Island College Workforce Development Hub in Central Falls.

5. FY 2026 CAPITAL & OPERATING BUDGET FOR ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY EDUCATION

a. DISCUSSION ON THE PROPOSED FY 2026 CAPITAL & OPERATING BUDGET FOR ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY EDUCATION

Deputy Commissioner Lisa Odom-Villella framed the discussion and turned the meeting over to Chief Financial Officer Mark Dunham to present and lead the discussion. Mr. Dunham shared that the Capital Budget for FY 2026–FY 2030 totals \$821.3M. The projected expenditures from FY 2025–2030 are \$548.2M, with \$252.6M allocated for ongoing projects before 2025 and \$20.5M for post-2030 projections. The budget includes 17 total projects, 10 previously approved and 7 new. Key initiatives include the Facility Equity Initiative, which prioritizes LEAs with reimbursement rates over 60%, and the Rhode Island Solar Schools Initiative, aligning with state priorities on greenhouse gas reduction and energy resiliency. Other projects include vehicle purchases for the Rhode Island School for the Deaf, gymnasium upgrades, athletic field improvements, and a joint expansion project.

He also shared information regarding the Operating Budget stating that due to resource uncertainty in FY 2026, OMB is advising against discretionary requests. Agencies must submit a two-part budget request: a current services level and a constrained budget with a 7.5% reduction for FY 2026. RIDE's adjusted base budget is \$34.9M, and it faces a \$2.6M reduction target. With personnel costs at \$19M, RIDE plans to meet the target by reducing non-personnel expenditures such as Adult Basic Ed contracts, Pre-K expansion, and assessment contracts. Key cuts include reducing Pre-K Expansion by \$1M and Adult Basic Ed funding by \$1.6M, which will impact services to adult learners.

Additionally, Mr. Dunham noted that RIDE is legislatively required to determine a new poverty factor. Recommendations include a direct certification for TANF, SNAP, and Medicaid, plus a 3% increase in the student success factor for LEAs with high poverty rates. This will increase costs by approximately \$20M. Additionally, the Met School expects a \$1.7M increase request to support staff retention, competitive compensation, healthcare, transportation, and addressing learning loss in math and literacy. The constrained budget will significantly affect educational services.

b. APPROVAL OF THE PROPOSED FY 2026 CAPITAL & OPERATING BUDGET FOR ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY EDUCATION

On a motion duly made by Patti DiCenso and seconded by Amy Beretta, it was

VOTED: That, the Rhode Island Board of Education approves and transmits the FY2026 Capital Budget request to the Rhode Island State Budget Office.

Vote: 9 members voted in the affirmative, 0 members voted in the negative, as follows:

YEAS: Amy Beretta, David Caprio, Patricia DiCenso, Dennis Duffy, Michael Grey, Thomas Izzo, Robert Mitchell, Marcy Reyes, Jeffery Williams

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

On a motion duly made by Amy Beretta and seconded by Robert Mitchell, it was

VOTED: That, the Rhode Island Board of Education approves and transmits the FY2025 Revised and FY 2026 Operating Budget request to the Rhode Island State Budget Office

Vote: 9 members voted in the affirmative, 0 members voted in the negative, as follows:

YEAS: Amy Beretta, David Caprio, Patricia DiCenso, Dennis Duffy, Michael Grey, Thomas Izzo, Robert Mitchell, Marcy Reyes, Jeffery Williams

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

6. FY 2026-2030 CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN FOR POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

a. DISCUSSION ON PUBLIC POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION SYSTEM’S (RIC, CCRI, AND OPC) CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN FOR FY 2026-2030

Chief Financial Officer Zach Saul began the presentation by sharing the proposed Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) outlines projects funded through a combination of General Obligation Bonds, RI Capital Funds, Federal Funds, Asset Protection Funds, and private donations, with a total projected cost of \$604.6 million for FY 2025–FY 2030. This plan includes thirteen projects, all of which are continuing, with a \$370 million GO Bond request.

For Rhode Island College (RIC), the CIP allocates \$357.7 million for five projects, including \$124.7 million for continuing projects and a \$233 million GO Bond request. Key projects include renovations to Fogarty, Whipple, and Adams Library (\$233.5M), RICAP Asset Protection (\$43.3M), Infrastructure Modernization (\$40M), Clarke Science Modernization (\$37.7M), and Horace Mann Renovation (\$3.2M).

At the Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI), the CIP totals \$244.8 million for six projects, with \$107.8 million for continuing projects and a \$137 million GO Bond request. Major projects include Renovation & Modernization Phases II-IV (\$147.7M), Phase I (\$46.4M), Data, Cabling, & Power Infrastructure (\$19.1M), RICAP Asset Protection (\$18.1M), Lincoln Campus Renewal (\$11.6M), and Accessibility Improvements (\$1.9M).

The Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner (OPC) has a total CIP of \$2.1 million, covering two continuing projects with no new projects. Key initiatives include the Westerly Education Center Expansion Annex (\$1.2M) and COPS Funded Projects (\$0.9M). This CIP discussion provided an overview of the funding structure and planned capital projects for higher education institutions across Rhode Island.

b. DISCUSSION ON PUBLIC POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION SYSTEM'S (RIC, CCRI, AND OPC) UNRESTRICTED AND RESTRICTED BUDGET REQUESTS, TUITION AND FEE RATES, AND TABLES OF ORGANIZATION FOR FY 2026 AND THE UNRESTRICTED AND RESTRICTED BUDGET ALLOCATIONS FOR FY 2025

Rhode Island has set an ambitious goal for 70% of working-age residents to attain a postsecondary degree or certificate by 2030. Achieving this target requires collective effort, additional revenue, and strategic investments in higher education. On October 23, 2024, the Council on Postsecondary Education approved the public postsecondary education system's FY2026 budget requests and FY2025 budget allocations.

For FY2025, the system-wide revised unrestricted budget request is \$308.0 million, with restricted budgets totaling \$173.0 million. The FY2026 budget request is \$323.0 million, reflecting a \$15.0 million increase. Enrollment is projected at 13,101 Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) students. Rhode Island College (RIC) requests \$153.9 million in unrestricted funds, a 5.1% increase, with a 3.1% rise in tuition and fee revenue. The Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI) seeks \$136.3 million, a 3.3% increase, with stable enrollment at 7,679 FTE students. The Office of the Postsecondary Commissioner (OPC) requests \$32.8 million for FY2026, supporting key programs like the RI Promise and Hope Scholarship.

Tuition rates are rising moderately, with RIC in-state tuition increasing by 3.6% and CCRI by 5.7%. The budget also reflects strategic investments, including additional FTE positions at OPC to enhance program delivery. These funding requests align with state priorities to close equity gaps, support economic competitiveness, and ensure postsecondary success for Rhode Island students.

c. APPROVAL OF THE PUBLIC POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION SYSTEM’S (RIC, CCRI, AND OPC) CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN FOR FY 2026-2030

On a motion duly made by Dennis Duffy and seconded by Marcy Reyes, it was

VOTED: That, the Rhode Island Board of Education approves the recommendation from the Council on Postsecondary Education regarding the public postsecondary education system’s (RIC, CCRI, and OPC) Capital Improvement Plan for the Fiscal Year 2026-2030

Vote: 9 members voted in the affirmative, 0 members voted in the negative, as follows:

YEAS: Amy Beretta, David Caprio, Patricia DiCenso, Dennis Duffy, Michael Grey, Thomas Izzo, Robert Mitchell, Marcy Reyes, Jeffery Williams

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

d. APPROVAL OF THE PUBLIC POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION SYSTEM’S (RIC, CCRI, AND OPC) UNRESTRICTED AND RESTRICTED BUDGET REQUESTS, TUITION AND FEE RATES, AND TABLES OF ORGANIZATION FOR FY 2026, AND THE UNRESTRICTED AND RESTRICTED BUDGET ALLOCATIONS FOR FY 2025

On a motion duly made by Dennis Duffy and seconded by Marcy Reyes, it was

VOTED: That, the Rhode Island Board of Education approves the recommendation from the Council on Postsecondary Education regarding the public postsecondary education system’s (RIC, CCRI, and OPC) Capital Improvement Plan for the Fiscal Year 2026-2030

Vote: 9 members voted in the affirmative, 0 members voted in the negative, as follows:

YEAS: Amy Beretta, David Caprio, Patricia DiCenso, Dennis Duffy, Michael Grey, Thomas Izzo, Robert Mitchell, Marcy Reyes, Jeffery Williams

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

7. UPCOMING MEETINGS

The Rhode Island Board of Education's next meeting is set for February 2025, with the exact date yet to be determined. The meeting will begin at 5:30 p.m.

8. ADJOURNMENT:

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

On a motion duly made by Jeffrey Williams and seconded by Patti DiCenso, it was

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

Vote: 9 members voted in the affirmative, 0 members voted in the negative, as follows:

YEAS: Amy Beretta, David Caprio, Patricia DiCenso, Dennis Duffy, Michael Grey, Thomas Izzo, Robert Mitchell, Marcy Reyes, Jeffery Williams

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

The meeting adjourned at 6:50 p.m.