



**MINUTES OF THE MEETING
October 6, 2025**

COUNCIL ON ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

Chair Patti DiCenso welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education, declared a quorum present and called the meeting to order at 5:32 p.m. Chair DiCenso welcomed Milissa O'Neil to the Council. Milissa served as RI's 2025 Teacher of the Year. She began her career in education over twenty years ago as an early childhood educator.

Present: Amy Beretta, Karen Davis, Patti DiCenso, Michael Grey, Marta Martinez, Robert Mitchell

1. ACCEPTANCE OF THE AGENDA

On a motion duly made by Amy Beretta and seconded by Karen Davis, it was,

VOTED: That the Rhode Island Council on Elementary and Secondary Education accepts the agenda.

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

YEAS: Amy Beretta, Karen Davis, Patti DiCenso, Michael Grey, Marta Martinez, Robert Mitchell

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

RECUSAL: 0

2. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

On a motion duly made by Amy Beretta and seconded Karen Davis, it was,

VOTED: That the Rhode Island Council on Elementary and Secondary Education

approves the minutes of the August 26, 2025, meeting

Vote: 4 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members
voted in the negative as follows:

YEAS: Amy Beretta, Karen Davis, Patti DiCenso, Marta Martinez

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: Michael Grey, Robert Mitchell

RECUSAL: 0

3. COMMISSIONER'S REPORT

Commissioner Infante-Green began by providing an update on the latest developments in education, starting with the most recent assessment results. She was enthusiastic to share that Rhode Island continues to see momentum, with academic performance increasing on both the RICAS and SAT assessments. The newest results indicate that most student subgroups have made progress, demonstrating that academic recovery is occurring equitably.

While she expressed satisfaction with this upward trend, she emphasized that Rhode Island is still far from reaching its goals. She also highlighted that the assessment results reinforce the critical importance of attendance, showing significant achievement gaps between chronically absent students and their peers. To address this, RIDE will continue its efforts to reduce absenteeism through the *Attendance Matters RI* campaign. She noted that during the 2024–25 school year, chronic absenteeism declined by approximately 2.6%, representing 142,360 fewer absences compared to the previous year. More broadly, the state has seen a 12-percentage-point reduction since the 2021–22 school year, demonstrating that these targeted efforts are making a measurable impact.

She continued by noting that RIDE established the State of Rhode Island Blue Ribbon Schools Award Program to recognize and celebrate the state's highest-performing schools. This new state program was created in response to the U.S. Department of Education's abrupt discontinuation of the longstanding National Blue-Ribbon Schools Program in late August. The original federal program, founded in 1982 under the Reagan Administration, had served as a national benchmark for school excellence for decades.

She explained that, using the same well-established federal criteria, three schools were submitted to the U.S. Department of Education in January and are awaiting a formal announcement. She congratulated **Melville Elementary School** in Portsmouth, selected as an *Exemplary High Performing School*; **Pocasset Elementary School** in Tiverton, recognized as an *Exemplary Achievement Gap-Closing*

School; and **Robert Bailey Elementary School** in Providence, also recognized as an *Exemplary Achievement Gap-Closing School*. She noted that Bailey is the second consecutive Blue Ribbon School in Providence under state intervention – and only the third in the city’s history.

She took a moment to thank everyone who attended *WaterFire: A Salute to Educators*. She expressed her excitement in hosting another wonderful celebration honoring 85 educators for their service and dedication to students. The honorees were joined by family and friends, with nearly 500 people attending the event.

The celebration featured performances by the Narragansett High School Jazz Band, the Narragansett High School Drum Line, and the Beacon Charter High School Living Statues. Food was prepared by culinary students and chef instructors from Career and Technical Education programs across the state. She also extended her appreciation for the food trucks from East Providence High School and the culinary programs from Coventry High School, the Providence Career and Technical Academy, and Davies Career and Technical High School.

She noted that Sarah Dully, Rhode Island’s 2026 Teacher of the Year, was in attendance and shared a brief biography highlighting her accomplishments.

4. OPEN FORUM

Two individuals addressed the council, and five written statements were submitted.

5. DISCUSSION ITEMS

5a. State Assessment Results

Commissioner Infante-Green began the presentation with an overview of the topics to be discussed, starting with data on Rhode Island’s student population and the importance of meeting the needs of all learners. She highlighted the Governor’s 2030 performance metrics, which are designed to focus and mobilize stakeholders around improving student outcomes by 2030.

She commended Rhode Island’s continued progress in addressing chronic absenteeism, noting that it has been a key area of focus for RIDE. Chronic absenteeism rates continued to decline last year, and data consistently shows its strong negative impact on academic performance, graduation rates, and student health outcomes.

She emphasized that behavioral health challenges remain a persistent and growing concern, affecting students across demographics and increasing demand for mental health resources. While acknowledging the lingering effects of the pandemic, she pointed out that Rhode Island ranks 14th

nationally in math recovery and 13th in reading recovery from 2019 to 2024, leading New England in both areas.

She reported that student participation rates continue to rise each year and shared that recently exited MLL students are outperforming their non-MLL peers. She also announced that RIDE will launch the DAS Blueprint this fall to support strategic improvement efforts for DAS schools, ensuring a more cohesive and data-informed approach to continuous improvement statewide. Among the key takeaways, she noted steady gains in grades 3–8 in both ELA and math, as well as improved performance at the high school level, with SAT scores exceeding prior years. Overall, Rhode Island's NAEP rankings have improved, and the state continues to narrow the performance gap with Massachusetts. Science performance has remained relatively stable; however, national NAEP data indicate a broader decline in science achievement across the country. She concluded by underscoring the impact of early attendance, noting that kindergarten students who are not chronically absent perform twice as well on RICAS assessments as those who are.

Commissioner Infante-Green delved deeply into the data for each key takeaway, offering a thorough analysis and highlighting important trends, patterns, and areas for continued focus and improvement.

Lastly, she outlined the next steps for LEAs at both the district and school levels, which include strengthening communication, developing and refining improvement plans, continuing to implement strategies to address identified challenges, reviewing existing plans to ensure alignment with areas of greatest need, and ensuring that the necessary structures and systems are in place to effectively support students requiring additional assistance.

5b. Praxis Bridge

Chief of Teaching and Learning, Lisa Foehr began the presentation by providing context on the Content Proficiency Pilot. This initiative is designed to create opportunities for promising educators who fall just short of the passing score on ETS content tests, maintaining high standards while offering greater flexibility. She shared a demonstration of the pilot and noted that, by December 2026, RIDE will implement at least one pilot pathway for educators to demonstrate content proficiency without having to meet the traditional minimum passing score.

Director of Educator Excellence and Certification Services, Gina Masiello, continued noting that additionally, individuals who score within one standard error measurement of the required minimum on the appropriate content assessment may be eligible for certification through this pilot. Before implementation, the Council will review and approve the pilot's design and requirements. The Council will also conduct a review of the pilot after five years to determine whether it should continue.

She further shared the elementary, secondary, and special education tests that are ready for implementation, as well as the states currently using the Praxis Bridge model.

5c. English Proficiency Assessment

Lisa Foehr began the presentation on the new English Language Proficiency Test for educators by providing background information. She explained that in 2011, Rhode Island adopted a regulation requiring teachers to demonstrate English language competency. Most educators meet this requirement through coursework completed at a U.S.-sponsored institution of higher education or an American university overseas. However, for individuals who do not have that opportunity, an alternative method to demonstrate English language competency is necessary.

Since 2014, the Versant assessment offered by Pearson has been used for this purpose. However, Pearson is discontinuing the test as an option for individual registration, requiring RIDE to identify a new assessment. After careful review, RIDE is proposing two strong alternatives to ensure flexibility and choice. Both assessments effectively measure English language competency and will replace the Versant for individuals who need to demonstrate proficiency.

The first proposed assessment is the ACTFL-TEP (Test of English Proficiency) with a recommended cut score of Advanced Low, which will be added to the suite of assessments previously approved by the Council. Gina Masiello continued and shared that the second option is the ETS Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL iBT), with a minimum score of 79, aligning with standards used by both URI and RIC. The tentative implementation, or “go-live,” date for these new assessments is November 1.

6. ACTION ITEMS

6a. Praxis Bridge

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

VOTED: That the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education approves the Praxis Bridge as presented as an alternative to retaking the required certification.

Vote: 5 members voted in the affirmative,

1 member voted in the negative

YEAS: Karen Davis, Patti DiCenso, Michael Grey, Marta Martinez,
Robert Mitchell

NAYS: Amy Beretta

ABSTAINS: 0

6b. English Proficiency Assessment

On a motion duly made by Amy Beretta and seconded by Marta Martinez, it was,

VOTED: That the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education approves the change to English Language Proficiency Tests as presented.

Vote: 6 members voted in the affirmative,

0 member voted in the negative

YEAS: Amy Beretta, Karen Davis, Patti DiCenso, Michael Grey, Marta Martinez, Robert Mitchell

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

7. EXECUTIVE SESSION

On a motion duly made by Amy Beretta and seconded by Karen Davis it was,

VOTED: That the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education move into executive Session pursuant to R.I. Gen. Laws § 42-46-5(a)(2) with respect to:

Discussion and possible action with respect to potential litigation Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) Charge No. 523-2023-01383 filed by Mr. Ameer Benno with the area office of the EEOC; and

Discussion and possible action with respect to the proposed Tentative

Agreement between the Providence Public School Department and Local 1033 of the Laborer’s International Union of North America.

Update and discussion with respect to pending and contemplated litigation involving the termination of federal funding related to public Education including, inter alia, State of New York, et al. v. Donald Trump, et al., Case 1:25-cv-00039-JJM-PAS, ECF 161 (D.R.I. 2025), State of New York, et al. v. Linda McMahon, et al., Case 1 :25-cv-10601-MJJ (D. Mass. 2025), State of New York et al, v. U.S. Dep’t of Educ., et al., Case 1:25-cv-1116 (D. Mass. 2025), State of Washington, et al. v. U.S. Dep’t of Ed., Case No. 2:25-cv-01228 (D. Wash. 2025) and State of Maryland, et al. v. Corp. for Nat’l and Community Service, et al., C.A. 1:25-cv-01363-DLB (D. Md. 2025).

Update and discussion with respect to pending litigation by the U.S. Department of Justice alleging violations of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 in *USA v. State of R.I., the R.I. Department of Education and The Providence School District*, C.A. No. 1:23-cv-466 (D.R.I. 2025)

Roll Call was taken by Christine Kechejian

Vote: 6 members voted in the affirmative,

0 members voted in the negative

YEAS: Amy Beretta, Karen Davis, Patti DiCenso, Michael Grey, Marta Martinez, Robert Mitchell

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

Following Discussion

On a motion duly made by Amy Beretta and seconded by Michael Grey it was,

VOTED: That the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education approve to go back into Open Session.

Vote: 6 members voted in the affirmative,

0 members voted in the negative

YEAS: Amy Beretta, Karen Davis, Patti DiCenso, Michael Grey, Marta Martinez,
Robert Mitchell

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

Chair DiCenso noted for the record that one vote was taken with respect to the matters discussed in Executive Session.

On a motion duly made by Amy Beretta and seconded by Marta Martinez it was,

VOTED: That the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education voted unanimously to approve the proposed Tentative Agreement between the Providence Public School Department and Local 1033 of the Laborers 'International Union of North America.

Vote: 6 members voted in the affirmative,

0 members voted in the negative

YEAS: Amy Beretta, Karen Davis, Patti DiCenso, Michael Grey, Marta Martinez,
Robert Mitchell

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

8. ADJOURNMENT

On a motion duly made by Amy Beretta and seconded by Marta Martinez it was,

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

Vote: 6 members voted in the affirmative,
0 members voted in the negative

YEAS: Amy Beretta, Karen Davis, Patti DiCenso, Michael Grey, Marta Martinez,
Robert Mitchell

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

The meeting was adjourned at 7:34 p.m.