



**MINUTES OF THE MEETING
October 28, 2025**

COUNCIL ON ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

Chair Patti DiCenso welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education and began the meeting with the Commissioner's Report and Open Forum. Once a quorum was declared a motion was made by Mary Barden and seconded by Jo Eva Gaines to accept the Commissioner's Report and Open Forum. Chair DiCenso called the meeting to order at 6:19 p.m. and welcomed Alexandra Ford, a senior at Barrington High School, as the new Chair of the Student Advisory Council and RI's Student Representative on the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education.

Present: Mary Barden, Colleen Callahan, Patti DiCenso, *Alexandra Ford, Jo Eva Gaines, Marta Martinez, *Milissa O'Neil

* Ex-Officio Non-Voting Member

1. ACCEPTANCE OF THE AGENDA

On a motion duly made by Colleen Callahan and seconded by Mary Barden, it was,

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

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

YEAS: Mary Barden, Colleen Callahan, Patti DiCenso, Jo Eva Gaines, Marta Martinez

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

RECUSAL: 0

2. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

On a motion duly made by Marta Martinez and seconded by Pattie DiCenso, it was,

VOTED:	That	the Rhode Island Council on Elementary and Secondary Education approves the minutes of the August 26, 2025, meeting
	Vote:	5 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members voted in the negative as follows:
	YEAS:	Patti DiCenso, Marta Martinez
	NAYS:	0
	ABSTAINS:	Mary Barden, Colleen Callahan, Jo Eva Gaines
	RECUSAL:	0

3. COMMISSIONER'S REPORT

Commissioner Infante-Green began by expressing that it was a pleasure to be there to provide an update on the ongoing efforts to continue Rhode Island's momentum. She reminded everyone that, as she mentioned in her last update, the most recent assessment scores show Rhode Island is moving in the right direction—progress that is not accidental but intentional. She highlighted that the recent gains are significant and demonstrate that the work being done, the investments being made, and the frameworks being established are helping Rhode Island's students and schools recover. She also noted that Rhode Island's education system is recovering faster than others in New England.

She continued by noting that, in recent weeks, two major initiatives have been announced to advance math and ELA achievement across the state. Through the largest federal literacy grant RIDE has ever secured, 23 grantees have been awarded \$6.5 million in first-year funding to launch the RI Reads Program, which will strengthen literacy instruction from early childhood through secondary education. Additionally, RIDE announced a strategic partnership with New Classrooms to enhance the Math Matters RI initiative by integrating personalized, competency-based learning. This innovative platform will deliver tailored math pathways to approximately 50,000 students over the next three years, providing customized, data-driven instruction that meets each student's individual learning needs.

She further reported that RIDE recently released two comprehensive statewide frameworks designed to ensure that Rhode Island's most vulnerable students are supported through a focused, multi-year strategy centered on their academic success and overall well-being. In recognition of Dyslexia Awareness Month in October, RIDE unveiled *The Blueprint & Strategic Plan for Differently-Abled Students' Success*—a research-driven framework developed through an extensive, multi-year collaborative process involving students, educators, administrators, families, advocacy organizations, and community leaders. Additionally, RIDE

introduced a new *School Counseling Framework* to strengthen and align counseling services across the state. This framework will guide counseling programs at the elementary, middle, and high school levels, is aligned with the American School Counselor Association's National Model and emphasizes comprehensive postsecondary readiness for all students.

She highlighted that RIDE's strategic approach is being recognized by external partners. A recent report from the Annenberg Institute at Brown University specifically commended RIDE's commitment to professional learning and the implementation of high-quality instructional materials. This external validation underscores that resources are being directed where they have the greatest impact—empowering students and educators with the tools and support they need to succeed. The recent increases in math and ELA proficiency serve as clear evidence that RIDE's strategic decisions are yielding results and are firmly rooted in the best interests of Rhode Island's students.

Lastly, she provided an update on the virtual learning plans, noting that a total of 14 LEAs have submitted plans for the 2025–2026 academic year. Since the last Council meeting, 12 LEAs have received approval, and two additional plans are currently under review with feedback being provided.

4. OPEN FORUM

Six individuals addressed the council, and three written statements were submitted.

5. DISCUSSION ITEMS

5a. Executive Pay Plan Update

Chief of Human Resources, Dr. Anadé Long presented the Executive Pay Plan update, noting that RIDE is recommending an Executive Pay Update for the Council's approval. She outlined the revisions made since the Council's last review and approval, emphasizing that there were no modifications to the salary ranges within any pay grade category. She further noted that the salary ranges for FY2026 and FY2027, as presented, have been approved, and confirmed that all non-union positions will be designated as exempt.

5b. Alternative ACCESS Exit Score

Chief of Teaching and Learning, Lisa Foehr presented on the exit criteria recommendation for the Rhode Island Alternate ACCESS assessment, explaining that RIDE is seeking the Council's approval of a proposed new cut score for exiting students who take the state's Alternate ACCESS (Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State) assessment. She noted that the state's exit criteria were last revised in 2019, following updates and rescaling of the assessment at that time. Since the Alternate ACCESS was again updated and rescaled in 2023–2024, a revision to the state exit cut score is now required.

She provided an overview of both the ACCESS and Alternate ACCESS assessments, explaining how students qualify for participation in the Alternate ACCESS. She then outlined the process used to develop the

recommendation, noting that—consistent with past practice—RIDE analyzed two years of results data from the updated assessment to determine the most accurate statewide exit score.

She added that WIDA recommends setting the cut score at the lowest proficiency level where multilingual learners' (MLLs) Alternate ELA and Math proficiency rates exceed those of non-MLLs. Based on a logistic regression analysis, that proficiency level was identified as Performance Level 4. She further noted that exit rates from the previous Alternate ACCESS to the updated version indicate that a cut score of PL4 would maintain consistent exit rates while aligning with a more rigorous assessment.

She concluded by sharing that RIDE presented its analysis and recommendation to the MLL Advisory Council on September 29. The Council expressed appreciation for the thoroughness of RIDE's analysis and affirmed its support for the recommendation to establish an exit cut score that appropriately allows eligible students to exit across all grade levels.

5c. FY 2027 Capital & Operating Budget

Director of Finance, Brandon Bohl presented an overview of the Capital Budget, explaining that the timeframe spans FY2027 through FY2031 and beyond, with a total budget of \$474.9 million. This amount includes projected expenditures of \$436.2 million for FY2026–FY2031, \$37.6 million in pre-2026 expenditures for ongoing projects, and \$1.1 million in post-2031 projections for continuing initiatives. The capital plan encompasses a total of twenty projects, fifteen of which were previously approved and five that are newly proposed.

The new projects include statewide investments in Career and Technical Education (CTE) public school facilities, with funding available to LEAs to support the upgrading and expansion of high-quality CTE and early childhood education facilities, including the William M. Davies Jr. Career & Technical High School. Another statewide project involves workspace modernization at the Shepard Building, where funding will be used to update and reconfigure workspaces across the three floors occupied by RIDE—spaces that were originally installed 30 years ago. Additionally, HVAC upgrades are planned for the Rhode Island School for the Deaf, initiating the process of replacing and improving the system, as three of the eight current units are failing.

The final new project focuses on Nowell Academy, where funding will support the development of a master plan for a permanent facility, as the school's current lease has only two years remaining. The capital plan also includes a Facility Equity Initiative, a pay-go funding mechanism designed to prioritize LEAs with reimbursement rates greater than 60%, including Central Falls, Providence, Woonsocket, Pawtucket, and West Warwick. This pay-go approach provides a financial advantage by reducing borrowing needs and avoiding bond interest and issuance costs.

Director Bohl also provided an overview of the FY2027 Operating Budget, explaining that RIDE's adjusted base totals \$27.7 million, with the largest FY2026 expenditure already removed. He noted that the constrained budget reduction requires a decrease of \$2.1 million, representing approximately 7.5% of the adjusted base. He reviewed the agency's key priorities and presented a detailed breakdown of the budget by funding source and program area. In addition, he shared that RIDE will be submitting requests for budget increases above target levels and discussed both the anticipated impact of these proposals and the effects of expiring federal funding.

He explained that IDEA Part B funds have historically supported several state programs and that RIDE is requesting the establishment of permanent state funding for the Rhode Island Auditory-Oral Education Program, the Rhode Island Vision Education Services Program, and the Rhode Island Surrogate Parent Program. Establishing these programs as permanently state-funded will ensure their continued operation regardless of fluctuations in federal IDEA funding. This change would also enable RIDE to reallocate approximately \$1.3 million in IDEA funds directly to LEAs to enhance special education services statewide.

Of the \$27.7 million adjusted base budget, RIDE anticipates drawing primarily from approximately \$16 million in non-personnel expenditures to achieve the \$2.1 million constrained reduction target. To meet this target, RIDE has proposed reducing Adult Basic Education funds by \$2.4 million, representing the largest adjustment within its expenditure categories. He concluded by noting that the performance measures included in RIDE's FY2027 budget reflect a sample of the metrics used to monitor and evaluate agency outcomes. These measures are aligned with RIDE's strategic priorities and the broader goals outlined in the Rhode Island 2030 Plan.

5d. Providence Public School District Update

Deputy Commissioner Dr. Drew Echelson provided an update on the current conditions and progress within Providence Public Schools. Key takeaways include that the district continues to demonstrate meaningful academic and operational advancements, as evidenced by student outcomes and opportunities. The Commissioner has clearly articulated benchmarks for return, encompassing Governance, Finances, Facilities, Legislation, and the Transition Plan which RIDE remains actively engaged in by supporting these priority areas. While PPSD has made significant progress, substantial improvements are still required in several areas identified by the Commissioner as critical to sustaining progress and expediting the return process.

He highlighted that, like statewide trends, PPSD has experienced performance gains in both ELA and Math on the 2025 RICAS assessment. Notably, PPSD is one of only six traditional LEAs that have now surpassed their pre-pandemic 2019 results in both RICAS ELA and Math. He also noted that PPSD experienced the highest percentage of student exits in 2025, among multilingual learners demonstrating proficiency in English, reflecting a recovery to pre-pandemic levels. Additionally, chronic absenteeism continues to decline, with students who have historically been chronically absent now missing fewer days.

Dr. Echelson noted that PPSD's four-year graduation rate has demonstrated consistent improvement over the past five years when compared to pre-intervention and pre-pandemic levels. PPSD continues to broaden its Career and Technical Education (CTE) offerings in high-demand, high-wage fields. He further emphasized that advancements in operational systems have played a critical role in driving academic progress. PPSD has also established intentional and strategic structures to monitor performance, enabling the district to identify areas of growth as well as those requiring intensified strategies. He underscored that governance remains the most essential of the five conditions and provided an overview of key accomplishments and persistent challenges in the areas of governance, facilities, funding, and legislation. He concluded his presentation by outlining the next steps.

6. ACTION ITEMS

6a. Executive Pay Plan Update

On a motion duly made by Jo Eva Gaines and seconded by Marta Martinez, it was,

VOTED: That the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education approves the Executive Pay Plan Update, as presented.

Vote: 5 members voted in the affirmative,

YEAS: Mary Barden, Colleen Callahan, Patti DiCenso, Jo Eva Gaines, Marta Martinez

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

6b. Alternative ACCESS Exit Score

On a motion duly made by Colleen Callahan and seconded by Jo Eva Gaines, it was,

VOTED: That the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education approves the Proposed Statewide Alternative ACCESS Exit Score of PL 4 as presented.

Vote: 5 members voted in the affirmative,

0 member voted in the negative

YEAS: Mary Barden, Colleen Callahan, Patti DiCenso, Jo Eva Gaines, Marta Martinez

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

6c. FY 2027 Capital Budget

On a motion duly made by Marta Martinez and seconded by Jo Eva Gaines, it was,

VOTED: That the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education approves the
FY 2027 Capital Budget Request, as presented.

Vote: 5 members voted in the affirmative,

0 members voted in the negative

YEAS: Mary Barden, Colleen Callahan, Patti DiCenso, Jo Eva Gaines, Marta
Martinez

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

6d. FY 2026 Revised and Fiscal 2027 Budget Submittals

On a motion duly made by Marta Martinez and seconded by Mary Barden, it was,

VOTED: That the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education approves and
transmits the FY 2027 Budget request and the FY 2026 Revised Budget
to the RI State Budget Office. We further approve their transmission to
The RI Board of Education for final approval, as presented.

Vote: 5 members voted in the affirmative,

0 members voted in the negative

YEAS: Mary Barden, Colleen Callahan, Patti DiCenso, Jo Eva Gaines, Marta
Martinez

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

7. EXECUTIVE SESSION

On a motion duly made by Colleen Callahan and seconded by Jo Eva Gaines 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 the proposed Tentative Agreement between the Providence Public School Department and Council 94, AFSME, Local 1339.

Roll Call was taken by Christine Kechejian

Vote: 5 members voted in the affirmative,

0 members voted in the negative

YEAS: Mary Barden, Colleen Callahan, Patti DiCenso, Jo Eva Gaines, Marta Martinez

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

Following Discussion

On a motion duly made by Colleen Callahn and seconded by Jo Eva Gaines it was,

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

Vote: 5 members voted in the affirmative,

0 members voted in the negative

YEAS: Mary Barden, Colleen Callahan, Patti DiCenso, Jo Eva Gaines, Marta Martinez

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 Council 94, AFSCME, Local 1339.

Vote: 5 members voted in the affirmative,

0 members voted in the negative

YEAS: Mary Barden, Colleen Callahan, Patti DiCenso, Jo Eva Gaines, Marta Martinez

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

8. ADJOURNMENT

On a motion duly made by Colleen Callahan and seconded by Marta Martinez it was,

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

Vote: 5 members voted in the affirmative,

0 members voted in the negative

YEAS: Mary Barden, Colleen Callahan, Patti DiCenso, Jo Eva Gaines, Marta Martinez

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

The meeting was adjourned at 7:59 p.m.