



**MINUTES OF THE MEETING
April 28, 2026**

COUNCIL ON ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

Chair Patti DiCenso welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education and called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

Present: Amy Beretta, Colleen Callahan, Patricia DiCenso, Jo Eva Gaines, Michael Grey, Marta Martinez, *Milissa O'Neil

*Ex-Officio Non-Voting Member

1. ACCEPTANCE OF THE AGENDA

On a motion duly made by Jo Eva Gaines and seconded by Colleen Callahan, 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, Colleen Callahan, Patricia DiCenso, Jo Eva Gaines, Michael Grey, Marta Martinez

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

RECUSAL: 0

2. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

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

VOTED: That the Rhode Island Council on Elementary and Secondary Education approves the minutes of the March 31, 2026, meeting

Vote: 6 members voted in the affirmative and 0 members

voted in the negative as follows:

YEAS: Amy Beretta, Colleen Callahan, Patricia DiCenso, Jo Eva Gaines, Michael Grey, Marta Martinez

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: Amy Beretta, Jo Eva Gaines

RECUSAL: 0

3. COMMISSIONER'S REPORT

Commissioner Infante-Green began by sharing several updates that reflected not only recent announcements, but also clear evidence of progress within Rhode Island's education system. She noted that attendance remains one of the state's core priorities, as it is recognized as one of the strongest predictors of student success. She further shared that, last week along with Governor McKee, RIDE formally launched a new partnership with Rhode Island FC, naming the organization the first official ambassador of Attendance Matters RI and introducing the RIFC Attendance Matters Challenge. The statewide competition will run from April 27 through May 22. She continued by highlighting that this initiative builds upon measurable progress already achieved, noting that Rhode Island recorded the fifth-highest improvement in the nation. She added that, throughout the challenge, schools will receive weekly recognition not only for achieving the highest attendance rates, but also for demonstrating the most improved attendance.

She next highlighted that the week marks National Apprenticeship Week and emphasized the importance of the proposed \$50 million Career and Technical Education bond included in the Governor's FY 2027 budget proposal. She shared that, since 2019, Rhode Island has nearly doubled the number of RIDE-approved CTE programs statewide, growing from approximately 200 to nearly 400 programs, while student participation has increased from roughly 12,000 to more than 20,000 students. She stated that this growth reflects strong student interest, workforce demand, and the success of the state's focus on high-wage, high-demand career pathways. She added that, if approved by voters in November, the bond would modernize existing lab spaces, expand access to underserved career pathways, and increase capacity in high-demand fields such as healthcare, maritime trades, and green technologies.

Commissioner Infante-Green continued by sharing information about the incoming Rhode Island STEAM Expo, part of the Math Matters RI initiative. She noted that the Expo will take place on Saturday, May 9, at the Providence Career and Technical Academy and is part of the state's broader effort to strengthen math achievement, engagement, and relevance across grade levels. She emphasized the importance of this work, noting that Rhode Island has made steady gains in advanced coursework participation over the past decade, including increased access to higher-level math and STEM pathways. She added that Math Matters RI promotes hands-on, engaging learning experiences designed to help students and families connect math and STEAM education to real-world applications and career opportunities.

Next, in her report, she shared that the Rhode Island Pre-K lottery for the 2026-2027 school year is now open, offering more than 2,800 free, high-quality seats across 20 communities statewide. She noted that Rhode Island's Pre-K programs continue to meet all 10 quality benchmarks established by the National Institute for Early Education Research, resulting in Rhode Island consistently ranking among the top states in the nation for preschool quality. She added that families with eligible four-year old children have until June 22, 2026, to apply.

She then shared that tickets are now on sale for the third annual "Menu for Success" Student Food Truck Roundup, scheduled for Saturday, May 16, at Crescent Park in East Providence. She noted that, since its launch in 2022, the initiative has expanded to more than a dozen districts statewide. She explained that students gain hands-on experience in culinary arts, entrepreneurship, budgeting, marketing, and customer service, with the food trucks as mobile CTE classrooms that support the state's expansion of career pathways. She added that students will compete for the Governor's Cup and the Commissioner's Belt, showcasing skills developed through the program, and concluded by noting the state's continued focus on supporting consistent attendance and preparing students for success in college and careers.

Lastly, Commissioner Infante-Green shared an update regarding the litigation involving Highlander Charter School. As part of the collective bargaining agreement between Highlander and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 2323, the union agreed that the teachers it represents would not engage in a strike during the term of the agreement. Pursuant to that agreement, the union withdrew its federal court complaint, effectively resolving the litigation. While the court has not yet entered the formal dismissal order, that remaining step is procedural.

4. OPEN FORUM

One individual addressed the council, and two written statements were submitted.

5. DISCUSSION ITEMS

5a. ELA and Math Standards Endorsement

Dr. Phyllis Lynch, Director of Instruction, Assessment and Curriculum, and Aréema Sweeney-Ashby, Associate Director of Instruction, Assessment and Curriculum, began the presentation by announcing that RIDE is seeking the continued endorsement of the Rhode Island Core Mathematics and Rhode Island Core English Language Arts/Literacy Standards. They explained that pursuant to RIGL 22-30-33, academic standards have been adopted to establish high expectations for student performance, promote respect for the cultural, ethnic, and racial diversity of Rhode Island, and reflect sensitivity to varying learning styles.

Aréema reviewed the timeline of the standards process, noting that the legislation was enacted in July 2019 and that Rhode Island adopted the Common Core Standards for English Language Arts/Literacy and Mathematics. She further shared that the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education initially endorsed the standards in March 2021, and that the first review cycle occurred during the 2025-2026 school year, during which public feedback was gathered, reviewed, and synthesized before RIDE

presented its formal recommendation to the Council. She emphasized that the review process is ongoing, with standards reviewed every four years following the date of endorsement.

She discussed the legislative criteria for the Academic Standards Review, outlined the guiding principles of the review process, and provided an example of an academic standards review summary along with stakeholder feedback received throughout the process. Based on the findings of the review, she reported that no changes to the reviewed standards are being recommended. Accordingly, RIDE recommends the continued endorsement of the Rhode Island Core Standards for English Language Arts/Literacy and Mathematics.

In closing, she highlighted recent academic progress in Rhode Island, noting that the state improved its national ranking in fourth grade reading scores from 25th to 14th. They also shared that, according to the Education Recovery Scorecard, Rhode Island ranked 14th nationwide in math recovery and 13th nationwide in reading recovery.

5b. Update on Providence Public Schools

Deputy Commissioner Dr. Drew Echelson began by highlighting a key takeaway from the presentation, noting that Providence Public School District is making measurable, systemic progress that is resulting in improved student outcomes. He stated that the strategic systems implemented by RIDE have contributed to significant improvements across nearly all operational measures, particularly in student achievement and outcomes. He further emphasized that this progress is fragile, and that continued success will require a local governance team that remains focused on student outcomes, as well as a sustained commitment from the city to address persistent barriers facing students, families, and educators identified in the 2019 John Hopkins report.

He continued the presentation by highlighting that Providence Public School District is leading Rhode Island's academic recovery, citing its status as the state leader in academic recovery, achieving the largest reduction in chronic absenteeism, attaining its highest graduation rates to date, and expanding access to college and career pathways through high school redesign efforts.

He stated that PPSD continues to demonstrate strong post-pandemic academic recovery and is one of only six traditional LEAs nationwide exceeding pre-pandemic performance levels in both Mathematics and English Language Arts, based on the 2025 RICAS results. He also shared data regarding multilingual learners, noting that the percentage of multilingual learners successfully exiting services between 2018 and 2025, as measured by ACCESS scores, reached its highest level in 2025 and surpassed pre-pandemic rates. He further explained that, because of focused efforts to improve outcomes for multilingual learners, recently exited multilingual learner students are now outperforming PPSD students who were never multilingual learners, as well as overall statewide performance averages.

He continued by presenting data demonstrating that PPSD achieved the largest reduction in chronic absenteeism among Rhode Island traditional LEAs and is now outperforming pre-intervention absenteeism levels. He highlighted that PPSD's 2024 four-year cohort graduation rate reached 79.4 percent and that the gap between the district's graduation rate and the statewide graduation rate has been reduced by more than half since the state intervention began in 2019.

He further emphasized that more PPSD students than ever before are taking Advanced Placement exams and that students, particularly Hispanic/Latino and Black students, are increasingly likely to achieve scores of 3 or higher compared to the previous year. He added that PPSD is rapidly expanding access to career pathways and is on track to nearly double the number of RIDE-approved Career and Technical Education programs by the 2027–2028 school year compared to the period prior to the intervention. He noted that, for the first time, every high school in the district will offer at least one approved program aligned with high-demand, high-wage career fields.

He also highlighted the significant investment being made in school facilities, describing it as a once-in-a-generation opportunity to improve learning environments across the district. In closing, he stressed that PPSD’s long-term success will require sustained commitment from both state and local leaders to prevent a return to prior practices, noting that without continued support, the district’s recent gains may not be sustained.

6. ACTION ITEMS

6a. ELA and Math Standards Endorsement

On a motion duly made by Amy Beretta and seconded by Colleen Callahan, it was,

VOTED: That the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education endorses the following Content standards, as presented

RI Core Standards for English Language Arts/Literacy

RI Core Standards for Mathematics

Vote: 6 members voted in the affirmative,

0 members voted in the negative as follows:

YEAS: Amy Beretta, Colleen Callahan, Patricia DiCenso, Jo Eva Gaines, Michael Grey, Marta Martinez

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

7. EXECUTIVE SESSION

On a motion duly made by Patricia DiCenso and seconded by Amy Beretta 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)(1) with respect to job performance discussion of the Central Falls Superintendent.

Roll Call was taken by Christine Kechejian

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

YEAS: Amy Beretta, Colleen Callahan, Patricia DiCenso, Jo Eva Gaines
Michael Grey, Marta Martinez

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

Following Discussion

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 approve to go back into Open Session.

Vote: 6 members voted in the affirmative,

0 members voted in the negative

YEAS: Amy Beretta, Colleen Callahan, Patricia DiCenso, Jo Eva Gaines
Michael Grey, Marta Martinez

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

Chair DiCenso noted for the record that no votes were taken in Executive Session.

On a motion duly made by Marta Martinez and seconded by Michael Grey it was,

VOTED: That the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education approve to seal the minutes.

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

YEAS: Amy Beretta, Colleen Callahan, Patricia DiCenso, Jo Eva Gaines
Michael Grey, Marta Martinez

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

8. POST EXECUTIVE SESSION ACTION ITEMS

8a. Approval of the proposed contract for the Central Falls Superintendent

On a motion duly made by Michael Grey and seconded by Jo Eva Gaines it was,

VOTED: That the meeting of the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education approves the proposed contract for the Central Falls Superintendent.

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

YEAS: Amy Beretta, Colleen Callahan, Patricia DiCenso, Jo Eva Gaines,
Michael Grey, Marta Martinez

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

9. 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, Colleen Callahan, Patricia DiCenso, Jo Eva Gaines,
Michael Grey, Marta Martinez

NAYS: 0

ABSTAINS: 0

The meeting was adjourned at 6:51 p.m.