



RHODE ISLAND BOARD OF EDUCATION

The Rhode Island Board of Education met on Wednesday, February 5, 2025, 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 5:35 p.m. He turned the meeting to Christine Kechejian to conduct a roll call.

Present: *Gabriela Bolvito Bautista, David Caprio, Karen Davis, Rachelle Green, Michael Grey, Thomas Izzo, Robert Mitchell, Lawrence Purtill, Marcy Reyes, *Giana Rose, Jeffery Williams

*Ex-officio, non-voting member

1. ACCEPTANCE OF THE AGENDA

Chair Grey asked for a motion to accept the agenda of the February 5, 2025, meeting.

On a motion duly made by Karen Davis and seconded by Rachelle Green, it was

VOTED: That, the Rhode Island Board of Education accepts the agenda for the meeting of February 5, 2025

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

YEAS: David Caprio, Karen Davis, Rachelle Green, Michael Grey, Thomas Izzo, Robert Mitchell, Lawrence Purtill, Marcy Reyes, Jeffery Williams

NAYS: 0

ABSTAIN: 0

RECUSE: 0

2. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES
Minutes of November 13, 2024, Meeting

Chair Grey asked for a motion to accept the minutes of November 13, 2024, meeting and noted that members, Davis, Green, and Purtill must abstain.

On a motion duly made by Robert Mitchell and seconded by Karen Davis, it was

VOTED: That, the Rhode Island Board of Education approves the minutes of the November 13, 2024, meeting

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

YEAS: David Caprio, Karen Davis, Rachelle Green, Michael Grey, Thomas Izzo, Robert Mitchell, Lawrence Purtill, Marcy Reyes, Jeffery Williams

NAYS: 0

ABSTAIN: 0

RECUSE: Karen Davis, Rachelle Green, Lawrence Purtill

3. DISCUSSION ITEMS

3a. DISCUSSION ON THE RHODE TO PROSPERITY

His Honorable Governor Daniel J. McKee, joined by Senior Advisor Jeremy Chiapetta, Commissioner Shannon Gilkey, Department of Labor and Training Director Matthew Weldon delivered a presentation on the Rhode to Prosperity Initiative. He emphasized that the Rhode to Prosperity is a central component of the RI 2030 Plan. The RI 2030 Plan prioritizes strengthening K-12 education, advancing the Rhode to Prosperity framework, promoting a healthier Rhode Island, and investing in infrastructure and clean energy. He explained that his team is traveling throughout Rhode Island to meet with community groups and increase awareness of the RI 2030 Plan. He noted that the plan aims to improve academic outcomes in schools, with the goal of surpassing Massachusetts' performance. Significant investments are being made in K-12 education, including nearly \$6 billion in school improvements, of which \$3 billion is funded by the state. He added that the second major pillar of the plan focuses on increasing income and personal wealth for all Rhode Islanders. He also highlighted the importance of strengthening the state's infrastructure, along with promoting health, wellness, and preventive strategies to support the well-being of all Rhode Islanders.

Commissioner of Postsecondary Education, Shannon Gilkey opened by thanking the Governor for his leadership and continued focus on education and acknowledged his partnership with Commissioner Infante-Green. He provided an overview of the *Rhode to Prosperity* initiative, noting its collaborative approach with business leaders, labor organizations, higher education institutions, and government partners. The initiative aims to align existing programs and develop new efforts to strengthen Rhode Island's economic future.

He outlined the initiative's primary goals: increasing educational attainment; expanding credentials and degrees aligned with workforce needs; increasing per-capita personal income and workforce participation; and promoting homeownership. He highlighted that individuals with a four-year degree earn, on average, \$1.8 million more over their lifetime than those with only a high school diploma, with earnings increasing further for advanced degrees.

Director of Labor and Training, Matthew Weldon stated that his charge is to expand opportunities for Rhode Islanders to increase their earnings. He noted that monitoring statewide population-level data, including labor force participation, employment rates, and per-capita income, will help measure progress. He emphasized that the *Rhode to Prosperity* strategy relies on proven tools to help job seekers advance economically and support employers in securing needed talent.

He highlighted efforts to retool Real Jobs RI to better respond to employer demand, expand work-based learning, align public workforce systems, and foster innovation. He stated that Rhode Islanders are best positioned to succeed when they have clear pathways to higher-wage employment, access to skill development, and sufficient support.

Commissioner Gilkey added that aligning statewide initiatives will accelerate the initiative's outcomes, citing RI Connect, the Fresh Start Scholarship at CCRI, the Cybersecurity Institute at Rhode Island College, the Life Sciences program at the University of Rhode Island, and Community Learning Centers.

Director Weldon further noted that Governor McKee's FY26 budget invests significantly in education and workforce development for youth and young adults. He highlighted CCRI's *Ready to Build RI* program, which will provide recent high school graduates and adult job seekers with foundational skills for careers in commercial and residential construction and related fields. He also noted that the FY26 budget includes resources to build capacity within the RI Longitudinal Data System to better track education outcomes and alignment with economic needs.

The Governor concluded by encouraging members to review the state's 2030 plan and referenced the website for additional information.

Following the presentation, Board members and attendees engaged in discussion and shared feedback on the plan.

4. REPORT OF THE COMMISSIONERS

- Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education

Commissioner Infante-Green began by outlining RIDE's ongoing efforts to support Providence Public Schools, highlighting several exciting updates. She noted that the district recently released a progress report on the community-led Providence Turnaround Action Plan. She also reminded everyone that RIDE published statewide school and district accountability results in December. The PPSD results reflect the findings of the independent SchoolWorks and Harvard reports: while there is still work to be done, the district is making meaningful progress. She highlighted that seven PPSD schools improved their STAR rating, reducing the number of Comprehensive Support and Improvement schools from 11 to 9. She highlighted Asa Messer Elementary School, which was featured in Governor McKee's State of the State address as the only 1-star school to improve to 3 stars. She noted that PPSD has reduced its number of CSI schools from 13 in 2019 to 9. She also reported that in recent years PPSD has decreased chronic absenteeism by 20 percentage points, opened four new school buildings, and celebrated its first-ever National Blue Ribbon elementary school – Martin Luther King Jr. Elementary. In addition, the district has expanded its 5-star pre-K and high-quality CTE programs and reached an agreement with the U.S. Department of Justice to exit federal monitoring of 8,000 multilingual learners.

She went on to provide an update on recent executive orders issued by the White House, explaining that RIDE has been closely monitoring any that could impact K-12 schools. She added that, in partnership with the Attorney General's Office, RIDE issued joint guidance to school leaders outlining steps they can take – consistent with state and federal law – to protect student privacy and maintain safe, welcoming learning environments.

She concluded by elevating two initiatives: RIDE's recent launch of SurveyWorks, the statewide education survey, and a call for community organizations interested in helping fight hunger during summer break. This program provides free meals to children in targeted communities and is designed to maintain and expand nonprofit food services for children during the summer months.

- Commissioner of Postsecondary Education

Commissioner Gilkey began by providing a federal update, noting that President Trump has signed several executive orders rolling back Biden-era directives. He explained that while there was a temporary pause on all activities related to the obligation or disbursement of federal financial assistance, this did not apply to Pell Grants, Direct Loans, VA benefits, or other forms of direct student aid. He stated that OPC will continue to monitor these developments and assess their immediate and long-term impact on postsecondary education in Rhode Island. He added that he has established a framework for monitoring, analyzing, and proposing actions related to federal directives.

He then provided a leadership update, noting that the Council distributed information to faculty, alumni, staff, and students at CCRI regarding the presidential search process, including the committee composition, member biographies, the timeline, and the selection of the search firm. Negotiations have been finalized with AGB Search, the firm awarded the contract. He also shared that Governor McKee invited a RI Reconnect participant and CCRI student, Stacy Carrion – whose story is featured on the OPC website – to be his guest at the State of the State address.

He reported that the higher education affordability mechanisms study is underway. Initial meetings with key stakeholders have concluded, and the Rhode Island Longitudinal Data System (RILDS) Data Governance Committee has approved OPC's request to use RILDS data for the analysis. The project remains on track to deliver a substantive update by the Chief Financial Officer, in consultation with the Finance and Facilities Committee.

He noted that the Governor released the FY2026 budget on January 16, 2025, which includes a \$9.6 million investment in the state's higher education system. The CFO, Zachary Saul, will present further details later in the meeting.

Commissioner Gilkey continued with operational updates, sharing that OPC staff completed a site visit of Empower Training Academy in Warwick, a CNA-training institution seeking approval to operate. A recommendation will be presented to the Academic Affairs and Student Success Committee. He added that the Direct Admissions Working Group met to continue developing a system that will automatically notify qualified public high school seniors in the fall that they have been admitted to CCRI, RIC, URI, or all three.

He also noted ongoing development of artificial intelligence policy recommendations for the state's public postsecondary system. AI and technology leaders from RIC, CCRI, and URI have met regularly since May 2024, and policy drafting is underway. The working group will continue refining the language before presenting a draft to institutional leadership between June and August 2025.

He reported that on January 9, 2025, a federal district court vacated the U.S. Department of Education's 2024 Title IX regulations, rendering the Council's recently adopted Title IX Sex Discrimination Policies and Procedures (P-17 and S-17), which were based on those regulations, no longer in effect. Revisions have been made to both policies to conform with the court's decision.

He concluded by noting that the office has posted several part-time, temporary job openings, including navigators for RI Reconnect, simulated patient actors for the RI Nursing Education Center, and a financial navigator to assist with FAFSA completion. An announcement regarding the new director of the Rhode Island Longitudinal Data System is expected later in February.

5. OPEN FORUM

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

comments.

6. DIVERISTY MOMENT

Chair Grey took a moment to recognize Black History Month and shared several key facts. Dr. Carter G. Woodson launched “Negro History Week” in 1926, selecting February to align with the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass. In 1976, the observance was expanded to the full month of February, and the 2025 theme is *African Americans and Labor*.

He also shared suggestions for celebrating Black History Month, including honoring African American ancestors and reflecting on their cultural heritage through the seven principles of Kwanzaa – unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity, and faith. He noted that individuals can also participate in ASALH’s Black History Month Virtual Festival, hosted by the Association for the Study of African American Life and History.

7. UPCOMING MEETINGS

The Rhode Island Board of Education’s next meeting is set for May,14, 2025. 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 David Caprio and seconded by Rachelle Green, 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:	David Caprio, Karen Davis, Rachelle Green, Michael Grey, Thomas Izzo, Robert Mitchell, Lawrence Purtill, Marcy Reyes, Jeffery Williams
	NAYS:	0
	ABSTAIN :	0
	RECUSE:	0

The meeting adjourned at 6:49 p.m.