Frequently Asked Questions about Race to the Top Implementation in Rhode Island July 1, 2011

General Race to the Top

1. *Will an implementation timeline be provided to us?*

   We have developed a timeline (available on the RIDE website) showing when each Race to the Top (RTTT) project begins and ends. Each project is broken down into phases – development, training, and implementation. More specific dates have been provided to Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) for project activities taking place in the summer of 2011 and for the start of the 2011-12 school year, and we will continue to share dates with LEAs as soon as they become available.

2. *Will RIDE have the capacity it needs to achieve its ambitious goals? How will that capacity be shared with the LEAs?*

   Through RTTT, RIDE has been able to hire some additional staff to administer the grant program and to help develop and implement each system of support, but RIDE has also had to re-organize its resources to ensure sufficient capacity to carry out each RTTT project. Rhode Island is taking a statewide approach to spending its RTTT award. The state and LEAs are pooling their resources and working together to develop tools to help every school, teacher, and student in Rhode Island. For example, by working closely with a national expert on teacher induction, LEAs and the state are building their capacity to mentor new teachers together.

3. *Once the RTTT funds are gone, how are LEAs expected to fund the initiatives that are implemented through the RTTT award?*

   The RTTT program, and the Rhode Island RTTT plan specifically, are designed to be sustainable after the grant period ends. Rhode Island is using its RTTT funding to make one-time investments in supports for our schools, teachers, and students – and to train educators to use those tools. When the grant is gone, Rhode Island will have helpful tools that benefit students and educators for years to come.

4. *Where can I find more information about the RTTT budget?*

   The RTTT overview document (in your folder and available on the RIDE website) has one side devoted to summarizing the budget. The RTTT budget is available on the RIDE website as part of the state scope of work.

5. *How does the RTTT funding flow to the LEAs?*

   RTTT funding will flow to LEAs in the same way that other federal grants do. LEAs will receive funding on a reimbursement basis, using the Accelegrants web-based grants management system, for the approved activities in the LEA's scope of work.

6. *How will the Collaborative Learning for Outcomes (CLO) process address the varied needs of Rhode Island LEAs? Why are LEAs being asked to fund the CLO process?*

   Facilitated and coordinated by RIDE, the CLO process consists of regular meetings of small cohorts of LEAs during which the LEA RTTT Leadership Teams will engage in data-driven, problem-solving conversations with their peers. Through the CLOs, we will track progress, manage performance toward results, share effective practices, and improve communication between RIDE and participating LEAs. CLOs will enable small groups of LEAs to engage in performance management of their RTTT reform implementation efforts in each of the five Systems of Support. The CLO process will not present a cost to participating LEAs.

Educator Evaluation

1. *What is the timeline for the roll-out of the educator evaluation system? Does RIDE expect that all LEAs are going to begin full implementation of the educator evaluation system in 2011-12?*

   The Rhode Island Model Educator Evaluation System guide is now available on RIDE's website. In most LEAs, the Rhode Island Model will be implemented gradually beginning in school year 2011-12. Gradual implementation will enable LEAs to learn about and experience all components of the system in preparation for full implementation in the school year 2012-13.

   Some early adopter LEAs will begin with full implementation in 2011-12, receiving extra support from RIDE. The early adopter LEAs will help provide necessary information and data for validation and standard-setting purposes. We will use the information gathered from these LEAs, in addition to data gathered from the LEAs beginning with gradual implementation, to refine the system and ensure that it is fair, accurate, and reliable. Even beyond these initial years, the Model will be continuously improved based on educators' feedback and experiences.

   For the 2011-12 school year, training for evaluators consists of multiple modules delivered over a ten-month period beginning in late July 2011. We are strategically staggering training modules throughout the year, based on when different components of the Model need to be implemented. In order to accommodate schedules, each training module will be offered multiple times at different locations across the state. The second phase of training for full implementation will be developed and delivered beginning in April 2012.

WHAT WILL GRADUAL IMPLEMENTATION LOOK LIKE (FOR THE 2011-12 SCHOOL YEAR)?

Component	Teachers	Administrators
Evaluation Conferences	3 evaluation conferences between the teacher and the evaluator	3 evaluation conferences between the administrator and the evaluator
Observations	At least 1 long and 1 short observation (2 total)	At least 2 school visits (at least one long and one short)
Professional Growth Goals	At least 1 set at the beginning of the year	At least 1 set at the beginning of the year
Student Learning Objectives	At least 2 set by October	At least 2 set by October
RI Growth Model Rating	Not applicable in 2011-12	Not applicable in 2011-12
Final Effectiveness Rating	Ratings will be collected in 2011-12 but used for development purposes only	Ratings will be collected in 2011-12 but used for development purposes only

2. *Must every educator write/set goals for the 2011-12 school year? If so, how many goals must be written and to whom must they be submitted?*

   For the 2011-12 school year, every teacher and building administrator must set at least one Professional Growth Goal at the beginning of the year, and at least two Student Learning Objectives by October. Educators must submit their Professional Growth Goals and Student Learning Objectives to their primary evaluator.

3. *Must every educator be observed during the 2011-12 school year? By whom, how often, and against what measure?*

   For the 2011-12 school year, every teacher must be observed at least two times (at least one long and one short observation), and every building administrator must be observed (school visit) at least two times. Districts that have contracts that prevent them from gradually implementing an evaluation system in 2011-12 have two options. The first is to reach agreement to allow for gradual implementation. The second is to not engage in an evaluation process tied to an approved model until the 2012-13 school year, when evaluations are required to be fully implemented. If a district is unable to reach agreement to gradually implement in 2011-12, it would be a lost opportunity for district staff to practice and learn the model before fully implementing it in 2012-13.

   Districts are responsible for determining who will serve as evaluators. Every educator will have a primary evaluator (for teachers this will most likely be their principal or assistant principal). Primary evaluators conduct observations, lead evaluation conferences, and determine final effectiveness ratings. Some districts may also choose to use complementary evaluators. Complementary evaluators may supplement the work of a primary evaluator by conducting observations, providing feedback, or by gathering evidence.

   Any district evaluation system that meets the Rhode Island Educator Evaluation System Standards and is approved by RIDE must incorporate appropriate evaluation instruments, including observations of the educator's practice. Evaluators will use the specific evaluation instruments (e.g., rubrics and observation tools) that are part of their approved evaluation system.

4. *What feedback must be provided to educators from an observation?*

   Standard 2.2 of the Rhode Island Educator Evaluation System Standards states that, "Educator evaluation systems assure that all educators receive detailed feedback on their performance and recommendations for professional growth." Ensuring timely feedback is a top priority, and RIDE recommends that written feedback be provided to the educator within two to three school days from when the observation took place. For long, announced observations, RIDE recommends that a post-observation conference take place within seven school days from when the observation took place.

5. *What specific training will be required of evaluators prior to full implementation of the evaluation system?*

   All evaluators must be trained in the implementation of evaluation instruments and demonstrate their ability to make consistent judgments. All evaluators must also be reviewed on a regular basis to verify that they continue to make accurate, consistent judgments.

Districts implementing the Rhode Island Model will participate in multiple years of training. For 2011-12, training will prepare educators to begin with gradual implementation of the system. This will be followed by intensive training the following summer in preparation for full implementation during the 2012-13 school year. All evaluators will be trained in the implementation of Rhode Island Model evaluation instruments and must demonstrate their ability to make consistent judgments. All evaluators must also be reviewed on a regular basis to verify that they continue to make accurate, consistent judgments.

For districts implementing their own district-designed and approved system, the specific training required of evaluators must be included in the design of the system. Districts must include this training plan as part of the submission for overall approval and ensure that it is customized to their system and includes ongoing support and monitoring of evaluators.

6. *How will it be possible for administrators to devote so much time to conducting evaluations?*

   The primary focus of the Rhode Island Model Educator Evaluation System is to recognize, support, and develop excellent educators. It is premised on the idea that every educator has room to grow professionally and deserves our time, support, and specific and actionable feedback on their practice. It is up to the LEA to determine who will conduct evaluations. During gradual implementation, evaluators will be required to conduct fewer observations and conferences. Also, while every teacher will be evaluated annually in the first two years of implementation, in subsequent years the evaluation process may be differentiated based upon each teacher's level of experience, job assignment, and information from prior evaluations. Teachers and administrators who are rated effective or highly effective could participate in a differentiated process. Educators that are rated as developing or ineffective would continue to be evaluated using the comprehensive model.

7. *How will it be ensured that evaluators actually recognize "best practice?" How can you create an evaluation system that is equitable for all educators, not just regular classroom instructors, but also teachers of the arts and other special subjects?*

   The Rhode Island Model Educator Evaluation System is one mechanism to more precisely define and identify best practice aligned to the Common Core State Standards and other subject-specific content standards. Evaluators must be trained to know what best practice looks like, and how it changes based on grade level, content area, and student needs, so that they can identify professional development needs for their school or LEA.

   The components of the evaluation model – professional practice, professional responsibility, and student growth and learning – are relevant to all educators. For example, evaluators will be trained on how a professional practice feature such as "providing timely and high-quality feedback to students to support their learning" might look in an art class versus a math or English class. Similarly, student growth and learning will be shaped to reflect differences in grade levels, content areas, and class assignments. The model recognizes that students begin the school year at different academic starting points, and it expects effective educators to move students ahead from where they started. Additional model development will take place to create practice components relevant to central office administrators and support professionals.

8. *Will confidentiality be part of the teacher evaluation system?*

   State law requires that the content of individual teachers' evaluations be kept confidential. As a result of an inquiry from LEA leadership, RIDE has asked the Attorney General to provide an opinion as to the extent to which aggregate student achievement data used to inform individual teachers' evaluations is likewise protected from disclosure. RIDE will disseminate the Attorney General's opinion to the field as soon as it becomes available.

9. *What flexibility do teachers, superintendents, or school committees have in how they implement the new educator evaluation system? How will RTTT funding be distributed to LEAs committed to the Innovation Consortium Educator Evaluation and Support System regardless of the potential creation of one system with "pathways" delineating each of the RIDE-approved evaluation systems?*

   Each LEA has the option to develop its own educator evaluation system, provided it meets the Board of Regents' Educator Evaluation System Standards. There are three models that are, or are expected to be, aligned to these standards. The first is the "Coventry Model" – Coventry has its own educator evaluation system that has been approved as meeting the Educator Evaluation System Standards. The second model is the AFT Innovation Model being developed by Cranston, Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, West Warwick, and Woonsocket. This model is under review and, if approved, will begin with gradual implementation in the 2011-12 school year. These LEAs have access to the RTTT funds that were allocated to support the implementation of the evaluation system based on an approved plan for use of those funds. The third model is the Rhode Island Model Educator Evaluation System – a majority of LEAs have indicated an interest in using this approved model. These LEAs will be trained and receive implementation support using RTTT funds. Measures of student learning are consistent across all three models. They are defined by RIDE and will be integrated into each model.

10. *What makes up the 51% (51% of the evaluation system that is based on student growth and achievement)?*

    At the core of the Rhode Island Model Educator Evaluation System is a focus on improving student outcomes. The early images of "51%" based on one test score are no longer accurate to describe how we are capturing how educators contribute to student growth and learning. The Rhode Island Model uses multiple measures to assess student learning. The multiple measures take into consideration students' academic starting points when determining the amount of progress or the level of achievement students make by the end of the year. The Rhode Island Model accounts for the circumstances and roles of all teachers, whether they are teachers of special education students, English language learners, AP and honors courses, the arts, etc.

11. *Is the state providing criteria on measurability for Student Learning Objectives (SLOs)?*

    There is great potential that these objectives will be different in each district as we start this process. RIDE acknowledges that SLOs, in the first years of implementation, will be difficult to get started and maintain a degree of comparability. Some measures of comparability will be developed over time. We will develop comparability based on curriculum-embedded measures (in math, ELA, social studies, and science). The Instructional Management System (IMS) will allow teachers to access many examples of student work and anchor grading decisions in the annotated work contained in the IMS. Principals will be held accountable for SLOs that they have signed off on in their school. This is a work in progress and is challenging, but we are making progress in the right direction.

12. *Is there a performance growth element in grades K-2?*
    No, there is not, but we are working with the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and other RTTT states to develop common measures to guide assessment in K-2.

13. *What educators will not have student growth percentiles as part of their evaluations?*
    It will vary by district and depend on the structure of a school. Teachers have given us the feedback that we should not set rules and procedures for who “owns” kids – everyone is responsible for them. These decisions will be based on how schools are structured and how teachers work together. Districts will need to answer this question internally: What are the responsibilities and expectations for teachers in your districts? It will be an important discussion to have at the local level.

14. *How are the elements of evaluation system weighted?*
    The pieces are put together and fed into matrices – all observations, evidence from classrooms, professional responsibilities, SLOs, and student growth and learning measures. All tools and parts of the model can be found on the RIDE website.

Induction

1. *Do LEAs have to participate in the new-teacher induction model?*

   The new-teacher induction model under development is based on research documenting both the type and extent of support beginning teachers need in order to be successful as new professionals. This new model of induction is being developed using RTTT funds. Each LEA was given a choice whether to participate when the RTTT Memoranda of Understanding were developed and signed. Participation is not mandatory. However, most LEAs recognize that current efforts, while well-intended, do not fully address the core support that new teachers need – having an expert practitioner in their classrooms observing them teach, providing extensive feedback, co-planning, and using data for focused conversations around practice and student achievement.

Standards and Curriculum

1. *When will we receive copies of the Common Core State Standards?*

   RIDE received copies of the Common Core State Standards from the printer during the week of June 24, 2011. LEA representatives are to pick them up after that date and develop plans to distribute the Common Core State Standards throughout their LEAs.

2. *When will study of standards and curriculum work begin?*

   This work is underway. Study of the Standards sessions began in March 2011 and will continue through September 2012. The curriculum efforts began before RTTT funding was awarded and will continue and expand with this funding. The following table outlines the curriculum work planned over the next several years.

Curriculum Cohort	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14
Math3 (Chariho, East Greenwich, Exeter-West Greenwich, Jamestown, Narragansett, New Shoreham, North Kingstown, South Kingstown, Westerly)	Year 1	Year 2	
Math4 (Barrington, Bristol-Warren , Little Compton, Newport, Portsmouth, Tiverton)		Year 1	Year 2
Science3 (Central Falls, Beacon Charter School, Segue Charter School)		Year 1	Year 2
ELA1 (East Providence, Pawtucket)	Year 1	Year 2	
ELA2 (Foster, Glocester, Scituate, Warwick)			Year 1
SS1 (Burrillville, Cumberland, Lincoln, Smithfield, Woonsocket)			Year 1

Certification Redesign

1. *What is the status of certification and re-certification requirements in the state of Rhode Island?*

   The certification system is being redesigned. There have been numerous public meetings to roll out the tentative design and gather feedback. The certification redesign plan can be found on RIDE's website. Any questions or suggestions can be submitted to CERTREDESIGN@ride.ri.gov. The Board of Regents expects to vote to send the redesign to public hearing in September, and public hearings will be held shortly thereafter. The new certification system is planned to go into effect in January 2012.

2. *Will the certification redesign result in increased fees for educators? When will the credit card process be available again?*

   Although RIDE has no plans to change the current fee structure for certification, certification fees may need to be adjusted to reflect the revised system. The credit card process has been reinstated as of May 2011.

3. *Are there any plans to tie compensation to evaluation results or certification?*

   Those would be local decisions. There is a small allocation of RTTT funding for two LEAs interested in developing plans to tie compensation to performance. The funding will be awarded through a grant process in 2012.

4. *How will the re-designed certification system affect teachers with lifetime certification?*

   Lifetime certification will continue to be honored. However, all educators, even those with lifetime certification, must participate in the educator evaluation process.

Instructional Management System

1. *How will the Instructional Management System (IMS) relate to our own student data system, will I need to upgrade, to what, and with what support?*

   RIDE is committed to continuing its current practice of extracting data from LEAs using technology that allows LEAs to maintain information systems of their own choosing. The decision was recently made at a joint meeting of the Rhode Island School Superintendents Association (RISSA), Rhode Island Society of Technology Educators (RISTE), and RIDE to expand the current Automated Data Transfer model for the short term, given its familiarity to users and its ability to accept data from both student and staff information systems. In the longer term, RIDE and the LEAs have agreed to explore the possibility of "native" solutions similar to the approach taken with the Uniform Chart of Accounts (UCOA). RIDE is exploring the possibility of a technology bond that could, in part, fund this development work.

Collective Bargaining

1. *What is the relevance of RTTT in our contract negotiations versus the Basic Education Program (BEP)?*

   There are several complicating factors in understanding potential contractual impediments to implementation, which make it difficult to generalize on a statewide basis:

   - In addition to the commitments made by participating LEAs through their LEA scopes of work, there are underlying legal requirements that must be taken into account, notably the Educator Evaluation System Standards, effective date of promulgation December 3, 2009, and the BEP, effective date of promulgation July 1, 2010.

   - The date of expiration of the collective bargaining agreement (CBA) in question, given that, under state law, the legal requirements of existing law are effectively read into contracts whether or not explicitly stated; the relative dates of effectiveness of applicable law; and the expiration dates of contracts become critical factors.

   - Is the precise language contained in a given CBA clear and is it mutually agreed that the contract actually presents a barrier to implementation?

   Given that the Michaelson Act requires management and labor to negotiate the *impact* of LEA actions on "salary, hours, working conditions, and terms of professional employment," it has been RIDE's consistent position that labor and management should be in a continuing dialog about these issues in the spirit of moving forward together toward a shared, statewide strategy of improving teaching and learning.

2. *Where in the BEP is the elimination of seniority? Does it impact job assignments and transfers or only new hires?*

   The Commissioner's memorandum of October 20, 2009, remains the official interpretation of the BEP in regard to seniority. RIDE encourages unions and LEAs to negotiate what replaces a seniority-governed job fair, and failure to do so should be considered to render contrary contract language unenforceable, not "illegal." In the Commissioner's memo of 10/20/09, she clarifies this exact point: "Contract language cannot conflict with existing state law, including regulations, and contract language that conflicts with existing law may be unenforceable." The 10/20/09 memo further clarifies that the BEP does not allow for hiring and assignment decisions to be governed "solely by seniority."

3. *Has any contract language been approved at the local level that specifically addresses the issue of seniority rights in relation to layoffs?*

   The BEP does not require the use of specific mechanisms for determining which employee should be laid off or terminated in the event of downsizing or reorganization. Obviously, RIGL § 16-13-6, often referred to as the Reduction in Force (RIF) statute, will apply in cases in which teaching positions are eliminated due to "a substantial decrease in pupil population." In those cases, 16-13-6 mandates a specific "suspension and recall" protocol based on seniority. Where positions are eliminated for reasons other than decrease in pupil population, such as reorganization or a change in program, arguably the RIF statute does not apply and the LEA must have an alternate means of making its layoff decisions. RIDE has endorsed approaches built on the concept of mutual consent but has not dictated a single model. In cases in which teachers are terminated for cause, it is presumed that the statutory due process rights set forth in Chapter 16-13 shall apply.

4. *Historically, there has been a decidedly local emphasis on teacher hiring, evaluation, and firing. Does the Rhode Island RTTT award support the continuation of this local emphasis using tools that meet the requirements of the Rhode Island Board of Regents?*

   Yes. The Board of Regents has established legal parameters in a number of areas through its authority to promulgate regulations. These regulations aim to ensure certain levels of functioning in the many systems that comprise LEAs. RIDE often refers to these requirements as "management responsibilities." However, given that these regulations stop short of dictating the precise manner in which LEAs will meet these requirements, there remains considerable latitude at the local level for policy-making and creation of protocols that work best in the local context.

5. *There are a number of areas in which legal requirements and RTTT expectations overlap. Given that there is considerable leeway for interpretation at the local level, how can LEAs be assured that they are receiving consistent messages from various sources within RIDE? Further, what can RIDE do to help LEAs communicate information within their LEAs when there is so much to be communicated?*

   It is certainly true that there is overlap between legal requirements and programmatic expectations in a number of areas impacted by RTTT. We have found that focusing solely on "role alike" interactions can inadvertently lead to the nuances of certain answers being taken as inconsistencies, when they are actually consistent. For example, a question as to what is "required" of an educator evaluation system may trigger a different response depending on whether the question is answered from the legal perspective (regulation) or from what the Rhode Island Model Educator Evaluation System requires for full participation. That is the very reason that RIDE has greatly expanded its use of cross-constituency interactions. The Moving Forward Together grouping of superintendents, union presidents, and school committee chairs is one example. RIDE has also met with superintendents and their attorneys, and we have had a series of meetings with superintendents and technical directors. These meetings are in addition to the myriad of meetings with assistant superintendents, union officials, technical directors, school committee members, principals, teachers, and many other discrete groups.

Communication will continue to be a challenge, given the breadth and complexity of the shared work before us. RIDE is open to suggestions as to how we can continually improve our own communication strategies, as well as how we might broker conversations among LEAs facing their own communication challenges. We are hopeful that the new CLO process will address that very need, as well as other implementation issues at the local level.

6. *If an LEA is not in compliance with the BEP (after contracts expire), what will the consequences be?*

   RIDE has stated repeatedly that the BEP is not self-implementing, nor does the BEP prevent LEAs from failing to remove language from their CBAs that pose impediments to meeting regulatory requirements. As stated previously, the BEP, as well as other Board of Regents' regulations, describe a series of "management responsibilities." Contractual language that impedes or prevents LEA leadership from meeting those responsibilities, if such language has been adopted or retained after renegotiation post regulation promulgation, should be considered to be unenforceable and should not be seen as a valid defense of failure to come into legal compliance. The Commissioner is empowered to order compliance with state law, enforceable in Superior Court. Further, under certain circumstances, the Commissioner can cause state aid to be suspended or diverted. RIDE does not relish such scenarios and believes it will be unnecessary provided that we continue to work together to implement our statewide approach to improving student outcomes.

7. *What is to be done if a current CBA prohibits parts of RTTT from being implemented in a given district?*

   State law limits CBAs to three years. The current BEP is fully applicable in districts signing CBAs after December 2010, and there should be compliance with the BEP in current contracts. If you have a contract that conflicts with some elements of the BEP or educator evaluation system, it does not mean that you "get a free pass" to not comply with the other aspects of the BEP, educator evaluation system, or other requirement that are not prohibited by the CBA.