



Ken Wagner
Commissioner

State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Shepard Building

255 Westminister Street

Providence, Rhode Island 02903-3400

Rhode Island Special Education Advisory Committee

The Rhode Island Special Education Advisory Committee is an active voice in advocating that all students receive superior educational services enabling each student to achieve optimum success throughout the school years and into the world of adulthood.

**January 14, 2016
6:00 pm – 8:00 pm**

RI Parent Information Network
1210 Pontiac Avenue Cranston, RI 02920

Present: Edward Angilly, Sharon Bissonnette, Jennifer Connolly, Lori DiPina, Susan Donovan, Cindy Duckworth, Gillian Elliott Pearis, Rosemary Gomes, Patti Hien, Barbara Irons, Heather Kennedy, Jennifer Munroe, JoAnn Nannig, Douglas Pierson, Brian Quigg, Maria Silvestri-Golotto

Absent: Eileen Botelho*, Cris Brodeur*, Deborah Garneau*, Robert Mattis*, Paige Ramsdell*, Sharon Ursini-Quimby*

**Denotes that prior notice was given regarding absence*

RIDE/RITAP Attendees: David Sienko, Kerri Sorensen and Dr. Susan Wood

Call to Order, Welcome and Agenda Review: The meeting was called to order at **6:06 pm** by Sue Donovan. Sue welcomed all members and reviewed the agenda.

Announcements:

- Transition night at Narragansett High School on January 12th went well. Cindy Duckworth announced the highlights of the evening; the student panel was funny and enjoyable.
- CCRI – Real World Transition Day on January 14th went very well. Brian Quigg announced seven Providence Schools went and other schools across the State attended and it was a great turn out.
- College Forum – **March 5th** at Providence College, no cost to parents and lunch will be provided.
- Eric Rowles will be presenting at Bryant University on May 24th for **Middle School DARE to DREAM** and on May 25th will be presenting **High School DARE to DREAM** at Tollgate High School.
- Sadly, the RISEAC Committee has lost a member. Tarin Byrne passed away. The leadership members will send a sympathy card to the family on behalf of the RISEAC Committee.

New Business:

- Dr. Susan Wood reviewed the SPP/APR 20 indicators with the committee; RISEAC input comments/feedback are due to Sue by January 21st for a letter to be sent out to Susan Wood by February 3rd.
- Approval of December 17, 2015 minutes. **Motion** by Jennifer Connelly **Seconded** Rosemary Gomes. All approved. **Motion passed.**
- Reviewed/feedback on RISEAC PowerPoint for Commissioner Wagner's 30 min. visit in February.

RISEAC Directors Report January 2016

ARIASE Announces January Legal Conference

The Association of RI Administrators of Special Education will be hosting a Legal Conference on January 21, 2016. The Keynote Speaker on January 21st is Tiffany Winters, Esq. LRP National Speaker, member of the U.S. Supreme Court and District Court. Ms. Winters will be presenting on EDGAR & IDEA meeting new Federal rules.

US Department of Justice Consent Decree Update

RIDE and the Regional Transition Centers have developed a checklist to assist in gathering information for continuous improvement and to target ongoing technical assistance. The Regional Transition Coordinators will be contacting special education administrators and TLS representatives over the next few months to review the information on the checklist and obtain your input for a statewide process of continuous improvement.

Memo Forwarded from OSEP Regarding State Assessment Participation Rates

A message was sent from Ruth Ryder, Deputy Director of OSEP on December 23, 2015 reminding states that the ESEA and the newly authorized ESSA require states to maintain participation rates for students on the state assessment at 95% or better. Rhode Island was one state that had participation rates fall below the 95% threshold last year and the Commissioner has issued a letter in response to the US Department of Education about how the state will improve the participation rate. We share this with RISEAC to remind all how important participation in state assessment is and that the US Department of Education is concerned when states fall below the 95% mark.

RI Statewide Transition Institute

The Fourth Annual Rhode Island Transition Institute will be March 10-11th 2016 at Rhode Island College. This event brings together teams from every high school to examine their secondary transition practices

State assessments will not be a graduation requirement for Class of 2020

As we noted in last week's Field Memo, the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education discussed the need to change the date by which students must succeed on state assessments in order to earn a high-school diploma. Under the current [Secondary Regulations](#), students have to meet a state-assessment requirement beginning with the Class of 2020 – students currently in grade 8. Because some of these grade-8 students will take high-school assessments this spring (i.e., Algebra 1 or Geometry), before the Council has finalized any potential changes to the graduation requirements, we proposed that the Council hold back on implementing the regulations, and we are going forward with that proposal. Therefore, state assessments will not be a component of the graduation requirements for students in the Class of 2020. We will continue to seek input from stakeholders regarding the Rhode Island Diploma System, and we will bring the matter before the Council for further discussion and review later in the school year.

Commissioner's Commentary: A Conversation about Rhode Island Education

As you may know, I spoke to the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education on Wednesday about bringing trust and joy back into our schools while dramatically improving teaching and learning for all students. My remarks were built upon conversations I have had over the past several weeks with you and with other education stakeholders – and on the feedback we have received from these conversations. I have submitted a “commentary” essay to the Providence Journal, which summarizes some of the ideas and proposals I presented to the Council. Here is an excerpt from the commentary:

Teaching is the engine that powers great schools. Great instruction happens when we provide teachers with time to collaborate, develop curriculum and lessons, review student work, observe one another, and reflect on their practice. We must recruit, support, and retain a diverse staff of teachers and principals into our professional community.

But what if we did even more? What if we also re-imagined how we do schooling? What if we truly empowered the teachers, students, families, and principals who lead a school community? And what if we made these activities voluntary at the school level? Innovation and coercion do not go hand in hand.

Although it is our mission to prepare students for the 21st century, the way we do schooling was largely designed in the 19th century. The way most schools divide up time, knowledge, and learning just doesn't make sense for many students – or for their teachers. Why not change that? Why not re-imagine schooling through hands-on, integrated, project- and problem-based approaches?

We know that far too many of our students do not have access to or are not prepared for advanced learning experiences in high school. There is some good work under way, such as Governor Raimondo's Prepare Rhode Island and P-TECH initiatives – and we need to continue expanding opportunities. Persisting in challenging coursework is one of the best ways for our students to develop the social and emotional skills – the so-called “essential skills” – they will need for success in life. Let's prepare our children for their futures, starting with early childhood fluency with words and numbers through a deep and engaging high-school course of study.

We need grade-level standards to ensure equity of access to the teaching and learning that prepares students for success in life, but these standards need not stifle innovation. We need tests that measure student progress so we know where our students stand, but these tests need not produce worry and fear. Assessment serves instruction – not the other way around – and the primary purpose of a test should be to provide the feedback that prompts a culture of constant growth.

Teachers, students, families, and principals would need additional autonomy and support to implement this kind of vision. What can we do to dramatically empower our school communities?

What if principals and their teacher leadership teams had the autonomy and authority to design and implement a school's instructional program, including authority over budget and hiring decisions and freedom from the state and local rules and regulations that seem to constrict rather than enhance education? We would need shared leadership among a school's principal and teachers, with the support of superintendents and school committees, anchored in partnerships with students and their families.

If we are serious about innovation and empowerment, why couldn't we allow students to enroll in another district if the district had the space and wanted to welcome more students? One size doesn't fit all. If we could provide opportunities for true autonomy, all schools would have the power to create learning environments that are so compelling no one would want to leave, even if they could.

These ideas are not new. For the past 20 years, Massachusetts has taken a similar approach, focusing on high standards and school empowerment. These are long-standing features present in all high-achieving organizations, not just in education. These are the ideas that could make our state and our economy strong.

Let's create that culture of school leadership, feedback, innovation, and continuous improvement. If we give them the opportunity, I believe our teachers and students will achieve even more than we thought possible.

RIDE prepares summary of issues before Funding Formula Working Group, group to meet Monday (January 11)

Based on meeting materials, public comment, and discussions of the Funding Formula Working Group over the course of its initial six meetings, the staff at RIDE has drafted a set of initial recommendations for the group to consider and discuss at its meeting on **Monday** (January 11). These are not RIDE recommendations to the group; rather, they represent the best effort of the RIDE staff to summarize the work of the group to date. We have posted the initial recommendations here:

http://www.ride.ri.gov/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Funding-and-Finance-Wise-Investments/Funding-Sources/State-Education-Aid-Funding-Formula/FundingFormulaWorkingGroup/Mtg7-Issue_recommendations_issued_DRAFT.pdf

PARCC seeks feedback from parents, teachers on score-release process

Individual PARCC score reports for the spring 2015 assessments have been released in most PARCC states, and the PARCC consortium wants to hear from parents and teachers on what

went well and what can be improved. Parents whose child has received a score report can fill out this [survey](#). Educators whose students took PARCC assessments in the previous school year can fill out this [survey](#). Your opinions will provide valuable feedback that will be used to make the next score-release process even better.

Old Business: None

Advisory Time: None

Public Comment: None

Motion to adjourn made by Sharon Bissonnette; seconded by Doug Pierson. All approved.

Meeting was adjourned: 8:10 pm