

Responses to House Health, Education, and Welfare Committee Questions

Office of the Commissioner

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RIDE Rhode Island
Department
of Education

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Overview

Dear Chairman McNamara,

In this document you will find responses to the questions you provided in your May 27, 2020 letter regarding the state's adjustment to Distance Learning and how we plan to address learning in the 2020-21 school year.

We are in unprecedented times, and we appreciate the opportunity to share with you what we have learned over the last few months. I would like to reiterate your sentiment that our teachers have worked incredibly hard to make this transition as smooth as possible, and we would not be a national leader in Distance Learning if it was not for our amazing students across the state who have adapted to learning in a new way.

Our responses reflect the information we have at this time. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me and my staff if you have further questions.

In partnership,



Angélica Infante-Green

Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education



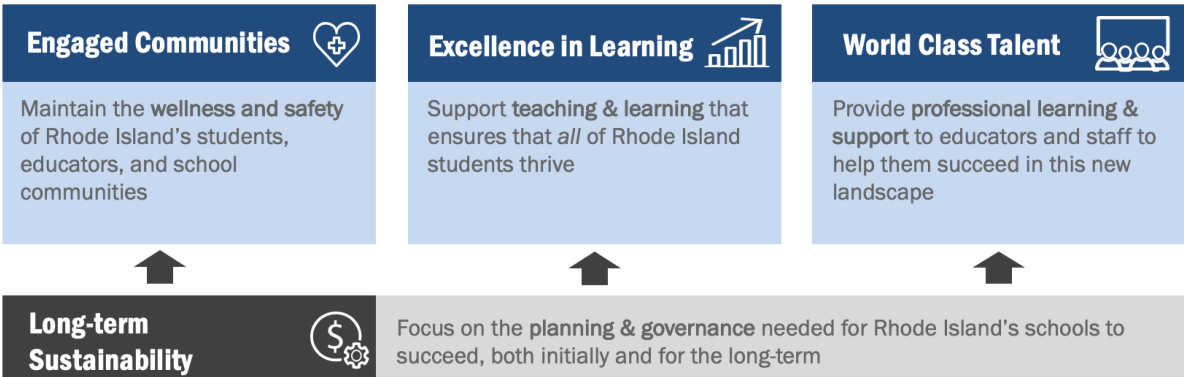
Questions from HEW Committee

Planning for fall 2020

How are districts planning to address the disruptions in education due to COVID-19 in the coming year? Are there plans to evaluate students' progress in the fall? Will there be resources to evaluate children with disabilities to see if their education plans need to be updated?

Since Governor Gina Raimondo and Commissioner Angélica Infante-Green announced on March 13, 2020 that school buildings would close due to the COVID-19 pandemic and all local education agencies (LEAs) would launch Distance Learning on March 23, 2020, the RIDE team has followed two key principles: (1) ensuring that learning continues and (2) prioritizing genuine connections with students and families. This was outlined in a [RIDE Distance Learning Guidance document](#) released in April 2020 that shared best practices for all schools in Rhode Island.

This support will continue as LEAs plan for summer and the 2020-21 school year, knowing that there will be shifts necessary as we respond to the public health conditions at any particular point in time. The [Reimagining RI Education: Reopening Plan Framework](#) is the first step in a series of guidance that RIDE will release in the coming weeks for LEAs to prepare for the next school year. It is consistent with Commissioner Infante-Green's vision for education in Rhode Island, and is organized around four key components: Wellness & Safety, Teaching & Learning, Professional Learning & Support, and Planning & Governance. RIDE will be building on our approach to Distance Learning – where we set clear guardrails, had every district submit a plan for feedback, and continue to provide support to each LEA.



Since April, RIDE has issued a monthly statewide school calendar, which has helped LEAs with their planning and has created the opportunity to provide statewide professional development. This approach will also be taken as we develop a unified calendar for the 2020-21 school year to give consistency to students and families across schools, educators the opportunity to engage in shared professional development opportunities, and school systems the opportunity to collaborate and share resources.

RIDE is looking to partner with both local and national organizations to codify best practices for Distance Learning we've learned this spring to use in the coming school year, especially as we face potential disruptions in learning. To collect all this information together, RIDE has created a COVID-19 webpage that includes the latest guidance and resources for LEAs.

As to evaluating students, the Reopening Framework calls for LEAs to develop a plan for assessing students' learning progress and loss that includes multiple forms of assessment (e.g., diagnostics, formative assessments, student work, conferences, advisories, parent feedback). LEAs should consider what assessment information can be gathered before the close of the current school year and what assessment information they will collect at the start of SY20-21.

We have also asked LEAs to set an ambitious goal to ensure that every student is on track for success academically, socially and emotionally by the end of the 2021 school year. This could include developing a process for schools to create and implement individualized plans for each student based on their needs. We are strongly recommending that LEAs identify the most vulnerable students to recognize and prioritize their needs. (Examples include: students who are differently abled, multilingual learners, students who are homeless or live in temporary housing, migrant students, students 'at risk' for dropping out, students who live in poverty or whose families face other challenges, and students directly affected by COVID-19 due to a death or job loss in their family). We also want LEAs to plan for ways in which instruction can continue for students who are not able to access in-person learning for COVID-19 related reasons, even if their grade level/group/class has returned to in-person instruction.

We recognize that assessment of student learning is an important part of the teaching and learning process and that Distance Learning has made this challenging. Our goal is to ensure that all LEAs have systems of assessment that provide valuable information to inform student learning, whether teaching happens in schools or through Distance Learning. The RIDE assessment team surveyed LEAs in May 2020 to better understand unfinished learning of students and how and when they planned to administer interim assessments at each grade level from K-12 for both English Language Arts and mathematics. The team also wanted to see

which assessments could be conducted remotely. These assessments are primarily used for intervention, so we can ensure students receive the appropriate learning accommodations.

Based on the survey information, RIDE is talking to vendors and LEAs in order to better understand the strengths and challenges of assessments that are being implemented. We will also be contacting LEAs that have reported that they are implementing End of Year assessments to learn from their implementation. Once we gather this information, RIDE will be developing recommendations and guidance regarding the administration and analysis of assessment systems for the 2020-2021 school year.

Did each district establish a task force to formulate and evaluate their response to COVID-19? What is the membership and how often have they met? Please update us on their progress.

RIDE has encouraged, and will continue to encourage, LEAs to use a task force to guide their response to COVID-19. It is imperative that our LEAs have a rapid response team that reflects their school community as we continue to face public health challenges.

In our Distance Learning Guidance released in April 2020, we recommended that every LEA create a task force to develop and implement the district’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including Distance Learning. We recommended that this task force represent various departments, teacher representatives, parent representatives, and students – and that it meet on a regular basis. We also recommended that each LEA post information on their website with their Distance Learning Plan and additional resources.

In the just-released Reopening Framework, RIDE recommended that each LEA launch a Reopening Schools Committee and appoint a leader with single-point accountability, meaning there is one person who is ultimately responsible for decisions. This committee will assist in planning and implementing reopening plans according to the latest public health information and RIDE’s guidance.

We recommend that the Reopening Schools Committee include staff from various key stakeholder groups: (e.g. central office staff, Director of Maintenance, Head of Human Resources, Special Education Director, Technology Director, Certified and Noncertified Staff, Union President, Parent, School Committee Chairperson, Director of Food Services, and a School Nurse Representative). The Reopening Schools Committee should have a representative from each school in the district or at least one from each educational level.



Attendance

What are the attendance protocols for elementary, middle school, and high school? Do these protocols differ by district? If so, give a summary of each district's attendance protocol by level (elementary, middle school and high school).

Throughout Distance Learning, RIDE maintained the expectation that attendance be collected and reported daily, although approaches to capturing that attendance data varied depending upon whether a district and its schools adopted a synchronous or asynchronous approach to Distance Learning. Synchronous means students are learning at the same time, while asynchronous means the work is happening through virtual channels without real-time interaction. To allow for these different approaches, LEAs have an additional day to report their attendance data. For instance, on June 2, LEAs reported to RIDE their attendance for June 1.

In our April Distance Learning document, guidance on taking attendance was given, with a focus on gauging meaningful participation in learning. At the elementary level, when learning was synchronous, RIDE suggested that educators take attendance at the commencement of a lesson or learning unit and again after an extended break, such as lunch. When learning was asynchronous, RIDE suggested educators leverage the completion of assigned material as a proxy mechanism for presence or absence in an attendance calculation, so that a visual confirmation was not necessary.

Consistent with the recommendations for elementary grades, documenting attendance at the secondary level also focused on gauging meaningful participation based on ensuring students have access to and complete assignments; there is a structure for frequent interpersonal interactions framed around coursework; feedback opportunities exist; and there is an opportunity for relationship maintenance. RIDE recommended that LEAs create a framework for recording attendance that offered reasonable discretion to teachers for determining attendance. RIDE also recommended LEAs maintain a strong focus on ensuring frequent school-student/family contacts per week to discuss student progress.

What are the attendance trends in each level of schooling? What is the attendance rate for children with disabilities in elementary, middle and high school? Please provide a summary by district.

Throughout Distance Learning, RIDE has regularly compared attendance by LEA with totals from the same week in 2019. Attendance rates in 2020 were similar to the attendance rate from a year ago, with some districts actually reporting a higher attendance rate during Distance

Learning. We have, however, seen a lower attendance rate in our urban core secondary schools.

We have provided an excel document that includes tables that show by-district attendance rates in March, April and May 2020, compared to the same weeks in 2019. This table is also broken down by elementary, middle, and high school levels. We have also provided the same information for students with IEPs.

Evaluation

Which districts have adopted a credit/no credit model in elementary, middle and high schools? Have the districts changed their evaluation methods for elementary, middle and high schools? If so, explain and give a summary by district.

In our April Distance Learning Guidance, RIDE strongly encouraged all districts and schools to consider moving toward employing pass/no pass, complete/incomplete, or credit/no credit options for elementary schools—at least for the time being, to ensure greater equity. Making a uniform decision in this regard would remove questions of uncertainty, inequity, and access from the realm of concern. For secondary schools, while each district implements grading policies through decisions that are in the best interest of their schools and communities and in accord with best practices, RIDE recommended that LEAs adopt a holistic “credit/no credit” model, based largely on performance assessments and/or open-resource summative assessments. There is still the expectation that student learning is at the level of our State Standards.

Absent standardized testing, how is each district tracking the students’ learning progress? Are these metrics being used for fall 2020 planning? If so, please explain by each district.

As mentioned previously, in May 2020, RIDE surveyed LEAs to better inform our understanding of how LEAs would gauge and assess student learning at each grade level from K-12, for both English Language Arts and mathematics. These assessments will primarily be used for intervention to ensure students receive the appropriate learning accommodations. Below are the results of when LEAs plan to implement their interim assessments.

ELA Interim Assessment Implementation

Total LEAs that responded: 56

	Administer before the end of this school year.	Administer the tests during the summer.	Administer the tests in the fall of 2020-21.
K-2	11	2	29
3-5	15	3	38
6-8	12	2	33
9-12	10	2	22
Not administering	32	51	8

Note: Most LEAs submitted that the percentage of students they estimated have (or will have) technology (either school provided or their own) that meets technical requirements to take interim assessments remotely was:

- *90-100% for current/by end of this school year and in the start of next school year, or one device per family*
- *50% to 100% during the summer, with a number of unknowns and N/As*

Mathematics Interim Assessment Implementation

Total LEAs that responded: 56

	Administer before the end of this school year.	Administer the tests during the summer.	Administer the tests in the fall of 2020-21.
K-2	11	2	28
3-5	15	3	40
6-8	12	2	34
9-12	10	2	21
Not administering	32	51	7

Note: Most LEAs submitted that the percentage of students they estimated have (or will have) technology (either school provided or their own) that meets technical requirements to take interim assessments remotely was:

- *90-100% for current/by end of this school year and in the start of next school year, or one device per family*
- *50% to 100% during the summer, with a number of unknowns and N/As*

Has each district tracked how many students are in danger of failing/staying back in elementary, middle and high school? Please provide this summary by district and compare that data to previous years. How is each district addressing these issues? How is this data being used for Fall 2020 planning. How many high school seniors broken down by district are in danger of not graduating on time? How does this compare to previous years? What accommodations by district, if any are being made for seniors who are struggling with distance learning?

RIDE will not have the data for retention and graduation rates until the end of the school year, when it is reported by LEAs. [Here is a link](#) to RI Graduation Rates for historical context, with graduation, retention, and dropout rates by district for the graduating classes of 2016, 2017, and 2018, on Slide 6.

In the Reopening Framework, we recommend LEAs develop a plan for assessing students' learning progress and loss that includes multiple forms of assessment (e.g., diagnostics, formative assessments, student work, conferences, advisories, parent feedback). LEAs are being asked to consider what assessment information can be gathered before the close of the current school year and what assessment information they will collect at the start of the 2020-21 school year.

Earlier this year, RIDE revamped the [Early Warning System \(EWS\)](#), a tool built with the help of The Policy Lab at Brown University that identifies students at risk of dropping out. The EWS tool is available to Rhode Island educators and presents five historical data point indicators for students in grades 6-12, including school attendance, whether or not they've been held back a grade, number of suspensions, and performance on student assessments. Students are assigned a color-coded "risk band" for each of the indicators. RIDE has encouraged LEAs to use this tool to identify at-risk students and support them during Distance Learning.

Multilingual Learners and Differently Abled Students

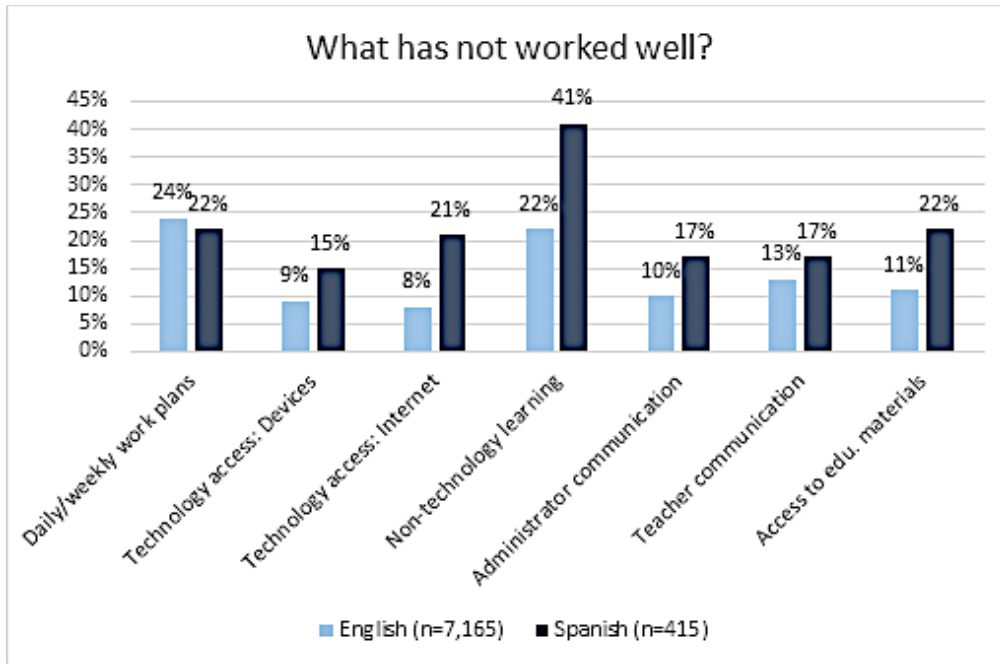
Since Distance Learning began, RIDE has supported LEAs to ensure they are helping differently abled students and multilingual learners receive equitable and high-quality experiences. RIDE shared best practices in the April Distance Learning Guidance document and is regularly posting updated information to its website to support all student populations in Distance Learning, and

specifically have created a [COVID-19 Special Education Resources](#) webpage and a [COVID-19 resources for multilingual learners](#) webpage.

We understand that these two populations are at the most risk of learning loss, and we are planning for summer and the next school year with them in mind. In the Reopening Framework guidance, RIDE is asking LEAs to identify their most vulnerable students to recognize and prioritize their needs, including multilingual learners and differently abled students, and begin to plan for ways in which instruction can continue for students who are not able to access in-person learning for COVID-19 related reasons, even if their grade level/group/class has returned in-person.

Please describe each district’s plan to engage multilingual learners in distance learning. Please provide metrics on the success of each district.

From May 7-15, 2020, Rhode Island families completed a Distance Learning survey. The goal of the survey was to gather statewide data on what is working well and what needs to be improved from the perspective of families. Seventy-five hundred (7,500) families from 55 LEAs completed the survey (7,165 in English and 415 in Spanish). While there were positive themes from the survey, including more than 78% of families thinking support and communication from teachers is going well and 75% of families reporting access to devices is going well, there were notable differences between the families who answered the survey in Spanish compared to families who answered in English. For families who answered in Spanish, they reported more barriers with non-technology learning, technological access, and access to technology, books, and other materials.



RIDE is working with LEAs on how to incorporate their feedback into their Distance Learning Plans, and this will also be taken into consideration as we plan for the 2020-21 school year.

By district, please explain whether a child’s IEP and/or other learning plans adjusted to account for distance learning? If so, how and provide metrics as to the success of each district’s plan.

The services in a student’s IEP are individually determined by the LEA or school’s IEP team, and RIDE does not collect each goal on a student’s IEP. RIDE has not observed broad based re-writing of IEP as a result of Distance Learning. We know some goals have been able to continue through Distance Learning, while other goals are difficult to implement without in-person instruction. As mentioned above, the RIDE team has provided guidance and resources for both LEAs and parents of differently abled students. RIDE has also worked with LEAs so they could make reasonable attempts to meet the needs of all students to sustain learning. RIDE is working on guidance for schools and parents to examine the goals in the IEP for which ones have progressed during Distance Learning and which goals will need additional time and support for recovery of skills.

This support is continuing into the Extended School Year (ESY) program for students who receive special education services. RIDE asked each LEA to share an ESY plan for feedback. This plan includes hybrid approaches through Distance Learning and in-person supports, while

following all health and safety protocols to continue instruction for our students. While the public health situation is changing daily and anticipating the level of direct, in-person services for students may be difficult to project, having a plan available to families in each community will help communicate expectations as conditions change. RIDE also shared ideas for LEAs to consider in ESY, including combinations of Distance Learning and in-person scheduled appointments exercising appropriate social distancing, cleaning, and safety protocols.

Is there a segment of the children with disabilities who are receiving minimal services or no services because of the switch to online learning because of COVID-19? Please break this data down by district. How is each district following up with these students?

There are students whose needs are best met through in-person instruction that we are concerned about, and we have heard from parents of students who are worried about their regression of skills. The first priority is to keep our students safe, continue to address the goals we can through Distance Learning, and work closely with our LEAs to bring students back as quickly as possible to safe school environments to address goals that can only be met through in-person instruction.

