



State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Peter McWalters
Commissioner

April 15, 2009

President Nancy Carriuolo
President, Rhode Island College
600 Mount Pleasant Avenue
Providence, Rhode Island 02998

Dear President Carriuolo:

Thank you for your continued support of the Rhode Island Program Approval Process and the improvement of educator preparation throughout the state. This letter summarizes the results of the March 23, 2009 interim visit to Rhode Island College's Feinstein School of Education and Human Development (FSEHD). The Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) interim team appreciated the opportunity to meet with Interim Dean Roger Eldridge and representatives from the various programs to discuss and learn of the growth that has occurred in the educator preparation programs since the 2007 Rhode Island Program Approval (RIPA) visit. The results of the interim visit indicate that "significant progress" is being made to meet RIPA Standards and the 2007 RIPA Report recommendations thereby meeting the expectations for the educator preparation programs to continue their approved status.

Purpose

The purpose of the interim visit on March 23, 2009 was to conduct a review of the progress of the educator preparation programs towards meeting the recommendations of the 2007 RIPA visiting team.

Possible Outcomes

The team was charged with reviewing the educator preparation programs to determine whether the programs have made "significant progress" in the areas identified by the review team in 2007. As you are aware, under Title II of the Higher Education Act, Rhode Island is required to identify "low performing" programs. During an interim visit, the Rhode Island Department of Education is charged with identifying programs that are "at risk of being low performing" at a subsequent visit. This designation could have been made as a result of the interim visit if "significant progress" was not determined to have been made in meeting the previous full team site visit recommendations.

Findings

Based upon a review of materials and interviews with faculty and staff, the RIDE interim team noted progress in each of the requested areas. Some of this progress is substantial, whereas progress in other areas is still developing. The RIDE interim team was impressed with the work being done by the Assessment and Program Improvement Standing Committee. Most notable was the work to re-envision the assessment system into a more performance-based, coherent system to guide and evaluate candidate growth that is aligned to the Rhode Island Beginning Teacher Standards (RIBTS) and FSEHD competencies. The RIDE interim team also noted that under the effective leadership of interim Dean Roger Eldridge, the FSEHD appears to have embraced the 2007 RIPA Report and is moving forward to meet its improvement recommendations. The RIDE interim team was concerned that while progress is being made in all areas, the Special Education and School Counseling Programs appear to be further behind in meeting the recommendations for their respective programs. Additional support from the FSEHD may be necessary to ensure these programs meet all RIPA Standards in anticipation of the 2011 RIPA on-site visit.

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RIDE expects that the ongoing improvement efforts will continue for all initial and advanced programs and that through diligent, focused, and collaborative work the FSEHD is well-poised to meet the recommendations of the 2007 RIPA Report prior to the next full team site visit in 2011. As such, the RIDE interim team found that “significant progress” is being made and confirms that the educator preparation programs at Rhode Island College continue as approved programs of study for the preparation of educators.

As the educator preparation programs at Rhode Island College look ahead to the next site visit, the RIDE interim team encourages the FSEHD to consider the following observations to assure that the institution maintains momentum to meet the Rhode Island Program Approval Standards.

Initial Programs

- The revision to the assessment system, particularly the Teacher Work Sample and the Classroom Observation Tool, appear to be effective means to revise the assessment system to make it more performance-based and better connected to the RIBTS. The work represents a systematic approach to the 2007 RIPA Report assessment recommendations. The challenge remains to continue to learn from the piloting of these efforts as they are brought to scale.
- The RIDE interim team observed that although a 2007 recommendation identified the need to “ensure that there is a strong connection between candidate assessment results and candidate feedback and progress through the program” it was not clear what progress has been made to address this recommendation.
- The campus-wide universal advisement system appears to have significantly transformed the advisement of candidates within the FSEHD. Evidence was provided to the RIDE interim team that the mandatory advisement sessions prior to allowing candidates to register for courses is making advisement an appropriately proactive, rather than reactive process. Adjustments to the advisement system may still be necessary for those candidates who have multiple advisors to ensure that all candidates receive accurate information as to their education studies.
- The future role of the Career Commitment Essay as part of the admissions process remains in question. It appears that the FSEHD is reviewing the purpose of this admissions instrument. Evidence was provided to the interim team as to its value in focusing on issues in teaching and learning and as a marker for candidate growth. If the Career Commitment Essay remains as part of the admissions process, clear guidance as to its purpose and scoring should be communicated to all candidates and faculty. Evidence was also provided to the interim team that the Elementary Program has revised its admission requirements to better ensure candidates have appropriate content knowledge as they enter the program.
- Due to the substantial changes under development in the assessment system, the RIDE interim team was not able to determine specific plans for ensuring the validity and reliability of the revised assessment system. It appears initial plans are in place to test for content validity and ensure necessary training for consistency of scoring of candidate work within the revised system. Both efforts will be important as the revisions are brought to scale.
- Based upon the evidence provided to the RIDE interim team it does not appear that the Special Education Program is fully engaged in or connected to the collective work to revise the assessment system as it may have focused its efforts in other areas. As such, the Special Education Program may not be well prepared to implement the revised assessment system according to the FSEHD’s established timeline. The interim team was further concerned that the program’s revised observation rubrics were inconsistent and not connected to clear criteria for candidate performance or the expectations of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) Standards.
- The RIDE interim team did not request evidence of revision to the program curricula. However, evidence was provided that suggests that appropriate revisions are underway including expanding the Middle School Program through the addition of a fourth course and further integrating technology and state initiatives in programs such as Art Education, Early Childhood Education, Elementary Education, and Music Education.
- The FSEHD has received approval to hire an Assistant Dean for Partnerships and Placements to lead the effort to oversee the revision and implementation of the field placement system. Although limited work was completed to address the field-based recommendations from the 2007 RIPA Report prior to the interim visit, the FSEHD has a plan to utilize this position to address issues such as ensuring a variety of sites, effective sites, and clear criteria for cooperating teachers as well as working to develop meaningful partnerships with school districts.
- Evidence was presented to the RIDE interim team that the following actions have been taken to begin to address the field recommendations including meeting with district superintendents to identify their needs and how the FSEHD might better meet these needs, revising the FSEHD’s strategic plan to increase the emphasis on partnerships, and

continuing to work with current partner districts such as Central Falls, Newport, Pawtucket, and Providence to ensure urban placements for all candidates.

- Evidence was also presented to the RIDE interim team that the FSEHD's field and partnership efforts have identified future work that will be necessary to ensure an effective field component for all candidates. These efforts include establishing clear criteria for the assignment and evaluation for all placements and cooperating teachers, providing professional development options for cooperating teachers including training them in the revised assessment system, working to identify and support teacher leaders, and revising and developing field placement monitoring systems. A specific recommendation from the 2007 RIPA report, ensuring that professional development is provided to all cooperating teachers, has not yet been addressed.
- The Special Education Program has initiated efforts to address some of the field-based recommendations that were specific to this program including developing supervised practicum experiences, establishing criteria for field sites and cooperating teachers, and monitoring the quality of both. These efforts are in the early stages; it was not clear to the RIDE interim team that these efforts represent an appropriate, purposeful or systematic response to the 2007 RIPA Report recommendations or will be sufficient to ensure that all candidates experience field placements that are varied and effective. The Special Education Program should consider more closely aligning its efforts with the work of the FSEHD and the incoming Assistant Dean for Partnerships and Placements to meet these recommendations.
- Evidence was provided to the RIDE interim team that the FSEHD continues to successfully recruit, support, and retain a diverse student body. Evidence was also provided to the visiting team that the FSEHD recognizes the need to continue efforts to achieve similar successes at the faculty level.
- A cultural competency assessment was piloted as part of the student teaching experience and found to provide a valuable lens for supporting candidate growth in this area. Results from the pilot implementation suggested the need to introduce this assessment earlier in the candidates' experience. The cultural competency assessment holds potential as one important means to address the 2007 RIPA Report diversity recommendations.
- The Art and Music Programs have initiated work to revise courses and course curriculum to better integrate issues of diversity and varied learning needs. The Teacher Work Sample proposed for all initial candidates also holds potential to support candidates to identify and learn issues of diversity as they connect course learning, reflection, and their beginning practice. The Foundations of Education course that is required of all candidates has been redesigned to include a greater focus on cultural competency; this is also an important step to address diversity recommendations. The FSEHD will need to continue this work to ensure that these initial learnings continue as integral parts of each program's curriculum design and field experiences.
- Evidence was provided to the interim team that all candidates engage in diverse placements as part of their field experience through service learning projects, observations, practicum experiences, and student teaching. The FSEHD should continue this work to ensure effective and diverse placements while looking to expand opportunities for all candidates to engage issues of working with English Language Learners. An additional area for future work is to develop systems so that candidates can build upon and integrate what they learn from their diverse placements.
- Several recommendations in the area of resources have been addressed that represent important areas for ongoing improvement. These include the impending addition of the Assistant Dean for Placements and Partnerships, a new faculty mentoring program, and increasing the release of faculty for candidate supervision. Resources were also made available to support the appointment of a data collector in each program who is responsible for gathering, organizing, and supporting a focus on the use of data to drive program improvement. One recommendation that was not addressed is needed improvements to the Art Program facility; this should remain a priority area.
- The FSEHD has undertaken several important efforts at continuous program improvement as suggested by the above observations. A notable example is the Assessment and Program Improvement Committee's use of backwards design to envision the educator candidate RIC would like to graduate and then to begin to construct an assessment system that would lead to the development of that candidate. Evidence was provided to the RIDE interim team of efforts to crosswalk NCATE, SPA, and RIPA recommendations to guide comprehensive reform. Additional evidence was also provided of the aforementioned data collector and an employer survey that has been developed to help inform ongoing improvement efforts. These initial efforts should provide important momentum as the programs continue to meet the full range of recommendations from the 2007 RIPA Report.

Advanced Programs

School Counseling Program

- Evidence was provided to the RIDE interim team that some revisions have been made to the assessment system and curriculum for the School Counseling Program. Among these are adopting the full ASCA performance standards and the CACREP curriculum standards as the basis for the assessment system and program curriculum. Work has begun to implement these changes in the program design and curriculum. The program has also worked through the advanced program FACAS Committee to revise advanced competencies for all programs. Emerging from this work is a planned Program Intervention Project for all advanced candidates. While these actions represent responses to the 2007 RIPA Report recommendations, it is not clear that the work of the School Counseling Program has resulted in significant progress toward meeting these recommendations. As such, substantial work remains to be done prior to the 2011 on-site visit.
- The RIDE interim team reviewed an evaluation/observation form for candidates that is aligned to the ASCA Standards as well as revised rubrics for School Counseling Program projects. The RIDE interim team also saw evidence of changes that have been made to the comprehensive exam. These appear to be initial efforts to ensure that candidates are evaluated against rigorous standards and content-based expectations.
- The School Counseling Program has developed two additional courses for the program curriculum, Foundations of Counseling and Counseling Children and Adolescents, to provide candidates with a more expansive and developmental focus on issues directly related to School Counseling. This appears to be an important effort to support the development of candidates for school counseling.
- The addition of the two courses, Foundations of Counseling and Counseling Children and Adolescents was also identified by the School Counseling Program as important efforts to expand the focus of the program's curriculum on issues relating to diversity.
- The School Counseling Program provided evidence that it has increased program and course technology requirements to increase candidates' interaction with technology in their field placements.
- The School Counseling Program discussed plans to address RIPA recommendations regarding field placements and internship supervisors that were consistent with clear criteria and standards-based expectations for school counseling. Upon candidate entry into the program, the School Counseling Program plans to assess the effectiveness of the candidates' field placement to provide targeted support in order to ensure the placement and internship supervisor are consistent with the program's expectations. The plan appears to be an innovative response to the recommendations. The interim team cannot comment upon its potential to meet the recommendations as the plan appears to be in the early stages of development.
- The School Counseling Program also discussed plans to increase partnerships with selected Providence schools and Child Opportunity Zones to support field placement and partnerships with the PK-12 community. Again, this appeared to be at the discussion stage and its potential for program improvement was unclear to the RIDE interim team.
- The School Counseling Program provided evidence that it conducted outreach efforts during its recent hiring process for program faculty including historically black colleges, targeted contacts, and other recruitment efforts although the selected candidate did not increase the diversity of the program faculty. The program did not identify any substantial new efforts that were undertaken to increase the diversity of program candidates.
- The School Counseling Program provided evidence that several on-campus forums such as colloquia, conferences, and workshops are held to contribute to a curriculum and campus environment that values diversity and supports program candidates to develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to support diverse students.
- Recent hiring of additional faculty members for the School Counseling Program as well as release time for faculty to engage in professional activities such as research and writing are positive resource allocations that support both professional development and the potential for program improvement. The program and the FSEHD should consider if there is a need to dedicate a full-time coordinator for the School Counseling Program to ensure that it has the personnel resources necessary to implement the 2007 recommendations and meet RIPA Standards.
- Evidence was provided to the interim team that some of the recommendations from the 2007 RIPA Report have been considered and actions taken in an effort to ensure program improvement. The absence of a full-time coordinator in conjunction with recent faculty additions may have limited the program's progress in working towards meeting the recommendations. In order to address all recommendations and meet RIPA Standards by the 2011 visit, substantial work remains.

Reading Specialist

- The Reading Specialist Program provided evidence that it added a tutoring requirement to program curriculum, courses ELED 685, ELED 686, and ELED 629, to increase candidate opportunities to work with students from diverse backgrounds. As the students who are tutored come from Project Goal, many of whom will be participants in the summer reading clinic, this appears to be an appropriate effort to expand candidate opportunities to support diverse learners.
- The Reading Specialist Program provided evidence that it initiated Diversity Dinners to create an environment that values diversity. It was also indicated that these dinners were suspended due to funding issues. While the dinners may have been one effort to contribute to an environment that values diversity, it is not clear that this was a sufficient response to meet the 2007 RIPA recommendations.
- The Reading Specialist Program provided evidence that it conducted outreach efforts during its recent hiring process for program faculty including historically black colleges, targeted contacts, and other recruitment efforts although the selected candidate did not increase the diversity of the program faculty. The program did not identify any substantial new efforts that were undertaken to increase the diversity of program candidates.
- Evidence was provided to the RIDE interim team that the Reading Specialist Program has identified additional resources to support the program faculty including reassigned time for research, additional technology resources, and travel allowances.
- The Reading Specialist Program received limited recommendations from the 2007 RIPA Report. It was evident that some of these recommendations have begun to be addressed. The program is encouraged to continue this effort prior to the 2011 RIPA on-site visit to address all of the recommendations including those that focus on issues of diversity.

The RIDE interim team noted that important progress has been made at Rhode Island College since the last full team visit. The interim team believes that program graduates will enter schools better prepared to meet the needs of their students as a result of the changes you have already made and they will be even better prepared once the additional changes are in place by 2011. I know that you will take the observations from this interim visit and use them to create even stronger programs for your candidates.

If you have any questions or need further explanation please contact Lisa Foehr in the Office of Educator Quality and Certification.

Best wishes,

Paulajo Gaines, NBCT
Director
Office of Educator Quality and Certification