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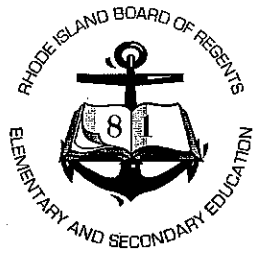

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NEWS RELEASE

Contact: Elliot Krieger, Communications - (401) 222-8471
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New Financial System Provides Unprecedented Data on School Spending
RIDE's Uniform Chart of Accounts Enables Comparisons Across Schools, Districts

A new system of financial reporting that goes on line today (March 25, 2011) will give Rhode Islanders an unprecedented amount of information about how schools, districts, and the state spend tax dollars on education

For the first time, school leaders, teachers, parents, legislators, and other education stakeholders can compare financial data across school districts in a reliable, consistent manner.

The Uniform Chart of Accounts (UCOA), which the R.I. Department of Education (RIDE) developed in partnership with the Auditor General and all school districts in the state, is a system of numbers and a method of accounting that provides transparency, uniformity, accountability, and comparability of financial information for all schools and districts.

School districts will use UCOA to track revenues and expenditures in their day-to-day accounting and to inform their financial decisions. UCOA will help districts ensure that they are using their investments to improve instruction and to advance learning.

"Rhode Islanders invest more than $2 billion a year in public education, and this investment is vital to the future of our state," said Governor Lincoln D. Chafee. "The Uniform Chart of Accounts will help all Rhode Islanders understand how we invest taxpayer dollars and what return we're getting on our investment."

"The Uniform Chart of Accounts will enable school districts throughout the state to realize important cost savings and to make better-informed and more transparent decisions on all their spending," said House Speaker Gordon D. Fox. "This new system was envisioned many years ago by the late Paul Crowley, when he served as the education chairman on the House Finance Committee. UCOA is an enduring legacy to Paul's lifelong commitment to improving all aspects of public education in Rhode Island."

President of the Senate M. Teresa Paiva Weed said: "Much of the cost savings available at the local level is through the consolidation of services and efficiencies achieved through coordination. In this way, we have successfully achieved savings in areas such as coordination of school busing and food services. The Senate has embraced the initiative of establishing a

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uniform chart of accounts across all school districts because this important tool will better enable schools to accurately access their costs and achieve efficiencies so that tax dollars can be more effectively used to foster excellence in education in our state. It is great news that this years-long effort has come to fruition."

"At RIDE, we will use UCOA to identify effective practices," said Deborah A. Gist, Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education. "Using the UCOA system, we can examine our data to see where investments in education have led to improved student achievement. More important, we will share this information in order to help all schools and districts invest their resources wisely."

"I recognize the hard work and sustained effort that RIDE and the school districts have expended in implementing UCOA," said Dennis E. Hoyle, CPA, the acting Auditor General. "The resulting UCOA data should dramatically enrich budget deliberations and enhance efforts to better align resource inputs with desired educational achievement."

As of Friday, March 25, all UCOA reports are available to the public through the RIDE Web site, under Offices/Finance/Uniform Chart of Accounts, or directly at:

http://www.ride.ri.gov/Finance/funding/Uniform%20Chart%20of%20Accounts/Default.aspx

On the UCOA page of the RIDE Web site, the public can access a set of pre-populated reports showing statewide data and district and school comparisons (e.g., per-pupil expenditures, revenue sources), data-analysis reports for each district showing expenditures by category (e.g., personnel compensation, supplies), and a comprehensive database of education revenues and expenditures. Those familiar with developing Excel spreadsheets can use this database to issue queries and to generate customized reports.

The UCOA page of the Web site also contains FAQs, an executive summary, and other documents to introduce users to the UCOA.

Among the information available on the UCOA reports are detailed, school-level data that can answer questions such as: "How much did we spend for mathematics instruction at our high school, and how does that compare with expenditures at other high schools in the state?"

"I believe that all Rhode Islanders will find UCOA data to be accessible, informative, and useful," Commissioner Gist added. "The UCOA data may raise many questions about how districts invest their resources. I encourage all users of the UCOA data not to make assumptions based solely on the data. Ask us at RIDE or ask your local school officials about expenditures in order to get a full understanding of the financial picture."

The vision and advocacy of the late Representative Paul Crowley, President of the Senate Paiva Weed, and Senate Education Committee Chairwoman Hanna Gallo led to the establishment of a uniform system of accounting for all school districts. In 2004, the Legislature added language to the state budget requiring the Rhode Island Auditor General to work with RIDE to promulgate a uniform system of accounting, including a standardized chart of accounts, in order to standardize the way in which districts account for expenditures and to provide greater accountability to assist decision-makers at all levels. The Legislature added a $1.1-million appropriation in the 2008 budget for a pilot UCOA program.

RIDE began implementing the UCOA system three years ago, with 13 districts. RIDE used information from these pilot districts to improve the UCOA so as to ensure that the system meets the needs of the school-district officials and other users of the data. All districts, charter public schools, and state-operated schools began operating under UCOA system during the previous fiscal or school year (2009-10). RIDE is releasing the 2009-10 data today.

"Superintendents and central-office administrators look forward to this new fiscal tool that allows us greater access to data that show how resources are allocated across school districts," said Colleen Jermain, president of the Rhode Island School Superintendents Association. "This system will provide insight and access to information that we have not had in such detail in

the past, allowing us to make better-informed decisions as we seek more effective ways to allocate resources - time, money, and people - to increase student achievement and provide the best education to all Rhode Island children. Now, let's see what we learn through UCOA for the schools' side of the budgets and then apply a similar process to entire town and city budgets."

"The Uniform Chart of Accounts will provide the necessary data for districts to link financial investments to student outcomes," said Ron Tarro, president of the R.I. Association of School Business Officials. "Access to this level of data comparability will allow local districts the opportunity to explore additional efficiencies in every area at every level. This was a significant effort by the business managers. They played a major role in the design and implementation of this invaluable tool, which will benefit all stakeholders at the local and state level, and ultimately the students."

Independent accounting firms, which the Auditor General will monitor, will audit UCOA data annually.

"This is Year One of the UCOA," Commissioner Gist noted. "As we get more and better data and as we get feedback from those using UCOA reports, will continue to improve and refine the UCOA system every year."

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