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Rhode Island Science and Technology (STAC) Advisors Focus on Education

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Federal Education Reform Funding, Science and Technology Standards Top STAC Meeting Agenda

The Rhode Island Science and Technology Advisory Council (STAC) met today to discuss the vital link between education and workforce development in the state's growing innovation economy. Governor Donald L. Carcieri, who created STAC in 2005 to advise his office and the General Assembly in prioritizing Rhode Island's investment in science and technology, took part in today's discussions.

"Improving student performance in math and science, and investing strategically in the development of curriculum and instructional practices aligned with our expectations in those areas, have been a top priority of my administration. I applaud the current work of Achieve, the nationally recognized leader in education reform, as it supports the development of common mathematics and science standards and assessments, and appreciate the work of our Science Technology Advisory Council in helping us to advance our common goals," said Governor Donald Carcieri. "It is critical that our students gain proficiency in these important subjects to prepare for post-secondary education and high-paying jobs. In order to be competitive for the Race to the Top funds in the short term, and for the jobs of the future in the long term, we need all districts and stakeholders to engage in the process of improving student learning and achievement in math, science, and technology."

RI Economic Development Corporation (RIEDC) Executive Director Keith Stokes cited a properly educated workforce and the ability of businesses to obtain capital for innovation investments as two critical components of a vibrant knowledge economy. A proposed Jobs Guaranty Program, now before the General Assembly, would provide established, growing and new Rhode Island companies striving to innovate with needed capital to facilitate growth and job creation.

"Rhode Island's economy is in the midst of a transition into innovation and knowledge-based growth. Educating our kids and providing innovative companies with access to capital are integral to ensuring our economic development efforts are aligned with the changing landscape," said Keith Stokes, Executive Director of RIEDC. "STAC brings in the voices we need to understand how we can capitalize on our science and technology assets to create and retain jobs in Rhode Island."

Education Commissioner Deborah A. Gist reported on Rhode Island's efforts to secure up to \$75 million from the federal government's Race to the Top education reform program. The state's application for the second round of funding is due on June 1. Gist explained the significant weight given to science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) education by grant evaluators and the importance of public input and support in advancing STEM education.

"Although we have a long way to go to achieve our goals for student achievement in mathematics and science, Rhode Island has laid the groundwork for improvement with our strong STEM initiatives," said Deborah A. Gist, Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education. "Through inquiry-based instruction like the Nautilus Live Initiative for deepwater exploration, many of our students are not just learning science – they are becoming scientists! We will continue working with our partners on the Science & Technology Council to develop top-quality science teachers, to provide excellent training and support for our educators, and to provide our students with a multitude of opportunities to become the best in the world in math, science, and technology."

Dr. Jean Slattery, a leading education expert, updated STAC on the development and impact of national standards and assessments on STEM education. Dr. Slattery is the Senior Associate for Science at Achieve, Inc., a Washington, D.C.-based independent, bipartisan education reform

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organization.

Governor Carcieri has been an Achieve board member since 2007. Under his leadership, Rhode Island was one of the first states to join Achieve's Governor American Diploma Project Network early in 2005. The goals of this initiative are to raise academic standards and ensure more students graduate from high school ready for college and work. Currently, 35 states are participating in the ADP Network.

STAC members agreed supporting quality STEM education that focuses on training Rhode Islanders for knowledge-based jobs in the 21st century needs to be at the top of the science, technology and business community's agenda.

"Strengthening Rhode Island's role as an incubator of scientific and technological innovation is essential for developing a healthy, stable and dynamic economy in the coming decade," said Clyde Briant, Vice President of Research at Brown University and STAC co-chair. "That's why improving STEM education and developing a technology literate workforce should be a top priority for public officials and community and business leaders. Everyone needs to bring their best ideas to the table and find ways to effectively implement them."

About STAC

STAC was launched in 2005 and sustained by legislative statute in 2006 to make innovation central to the state's leadership agenda. STAC seeks to assist state leadership in developing programs and policies that:

1. Increase Rhode Island's research and development capacity;
2. Encourage entrepreneurship and new company creation; and
3. Enable all organizations to innovate.

The Council meets on a regular basis to review progress, get updates on specific programs and projects, and develop clear recommendations about enhancing research competitiveness, entrepreneurial activity and innovation capacity in Rhode Island. Council membership consists of leaders in academic, business and public sectors who work collaboratively to advance these important issues. For more information, please visit www.stac.ri.gov.

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