

November 2009

RI Department of Education Teacher Assistants Newsletter



Promoting the Instructional Team model of teachers, teacher assistants and others ALL working together as valued team members to help students in Rhode Island achieve at high levels

Welcome to our Newsletter

This newsletter is produced by the RI Department of Education (RIDE) as a joint effort of the Office of Educator Quality & Certification & the Office for Diverse Learners. Our purpose is to keep you up-to-date on policy & practice related to teacher assistants (TAs). You can download this newsletter & back issues of the newsletter from the TA website at www.ritap.org/ta on the Resources webpage.

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TA Career Ladder Statewide 2008-09 Data

The September 2009 TA Newsletter had an article on the 2008-09 Statewide Report of Local TA Policy & Practice (available on TA website, About Us webpage). That article provided summary data for broad TA policy & practice categories reported by TA contacts in School Districts, Educational Collaboratives, State Operated Programs, Charter Schools & Non-Public Schools for Students with Special Needs. One of the TA Survey categories relates to TA Career Ladder supports. The following provides Career Ladder data reported for:

- ★ ALL 74 responding School Districts, Educational Collaboratives, State Operated Programs, Charter Schools & Non-Public Schools for Students with Special Needs (only 1 out of 75 did not respond) +
- ★ Data on districts only - separate from "ALL".
- ★ Item: Provide extra pay for TAs based on their educational level...27% of ALL responses/ 26% districts
- ★ Item: Provide extra pay for TAs based on their years experience...47% of ALL responses/ 60% districts
- ★ Item: TAs can take a leave of absence for educational purposes...42% of ALL responses/ 66% districts
- ★ Item: Fund TAs to take job-related college courses...42% of ALL responses/ 31% districts
- ★ Item: TAs can take leave of absence to accept another position, e.g., promotion within district on trial basis...16% of ALL responses/ 26% districts
- ★ Item: If TAs transfer from a TA to a teacher position, they can take their sick leave with them...24% of ALL responses/ 14% districts
- ★ Item: Promote from within...61% of ALL responses/ 54% districts

In 2007-2010, RIDE has collaborated with the Pawtucket School Department & the Providence Public Schools on Project RECRUIT, a federally funded time-limited 3-year project. One Project RECRUIT component has addressed the career ladder issue of supporting TAs "to take job related college courses" by supporting development of district-based programs in these 2 RI districts that are collaborations of RIDE, the districts, institutions of higher education & unions. These TA to teacher programs were individualized for each district with funding & related support for TAs for college courses to help them pursue goals of becoming certified teachers in areas of high need in the district. This issue of the TA newsletter will report on Project RECRUIT in Pawtucket & provide articles on various "non-RECRUIT" career ladder supports available to Pawtucket TAs now & that will be available to them after Project RECRUIT ends. It is not possible to extend Project RECRUIT beyond its end in June 2010 or to extend it to other districts. However, TAs throughout the state can access the "non-RECRUIT" supports described in this newsletter. The February 2010 TA Newsletter will report on Project RECRUIT in Providence. Hopefully Project RECRUIT learnings can help others with an interest in this important issue.

TA to Teacher Supports

If you are interested in becoming a Special Education Teacher, contact Keri Rossi, Recruitment Coordinator, Paul V. Sherlock Center on Disabilities at RI College (RIC), at 456-4730 or krossi@ric.edu. You can also link to Keri & her website through the TA website, under Training Opportunities.

Keri maintains a database on over 400 individuals interested in becoming special education teachers. Over 200 of them are TAs. Supports available include:

- ★ www.RISpecialEdCareers.net - special education recruitment
- ★ Meeting 1:1 with TAs who want to become special education teachers. She gives them information about RI certification requirements & types of special education certificates such as elementary, secondary, severe disabilities, etc. She can direct them to appropriate Institutions of Higher Education (IHE): RIC, URI, Providence College, Salve Regina University, Johnson & Wales University, or U-MASS Boston. She has a document with additional general information available online at <http://www.ric.edu/uap/publications/SPED.pdf>
- ★ Help for TAs & other CCRI students re: the correct courses to transfer to RI College for special education. She also has a transfer guide for these students online at the following website: <http://www.ric.edu/uap/RISIG/teachers/whatsnew.pdf>. She can evaluate transcripts of CCRI students wanting to transfer to RIC for Special Ed.
- ★ Provides general information about college admissions procedures, financial aid & finding employment as a special education teacher in RI.

Project RECRUIT in Pawtucket

Over 2007-2010, RIDE has collaborated with the Pawtucket School Department on a federally funded time-limited 3-year project known as Project RECRUIT. This project is not available to any "new" districts or TAs & ends in summer 2010. The following provides a project summary.

Project RECRUIT Purpose: Create a district-based TA Transition to Teaching Program through which TAs are supported in taking college courses relevant to their current jobs & that are directed toward enrollment in teacher preparation programs.

RECRUIT Leadership: Pawtucket RECRUIT Steering Committee is district administration, Local #1352, URI School of Education & Providence Special Programs Office & RIDE + ex-officio members for the final project year from the Paul V. Sherlock Center on Disabilities at RIC for "non-RECRUIT" support for TAs wanting to be special education teachers (see article p. 2) & Northern RI Collaborative. The committee has coordinated project development, implementation & evaluation. Susanne Williams has served as district point person for the project.

Participants: Participants were organized into 2 Cohorts:

- ★ **Cohort 1** – Those having or nearing completion of a BA who needed to complete college courses &/or practicum & student teaching needed for teacher certification. Cohort 1 members took some classes with other Pawtucket participants but, given their varied needs, mostly pursued teacher certification on their own. Most participated in a specially designed & RIDE approved district-sponsored internship program for practicum & student teaching.
- ★ **Cohort 2** – Those with no or some college for whom project emphasis was on support in completing general education courses & 2nd major courses needed to enter a teacher preparation program. The primary partner for these courses was the URI School of Education CCE Providence Program (see p. 3). Cohort 2 members had similar course needs & took most classes together as a cohort & support system.

Participant Supports:

- ★ College courses were at no cost to students, funded mostly with RECRUIT funds & to a limited degree by "non-RECRUIT" support thru' Local #1352 & FAFSA accessed by individual TAs. (see p. 3.)
- ★ Tutoring & other supports re: knowledge/skills to help them be successful college students & in preparation for the Praxis Exam.
- ★ Most URI CCE classes were at the district administration office after school & taught by instructors with skills in working with adult learners.
- ★ Text costs mostly thru' project, costing participants only \$25 per text.

Accomplishments: Total # of college courses taken by participants as a result of Project RECRUIT through & including Fall 2009 semester are:

Cohort 1 – Average of 6 teacher preparation courses taken by each participant; 0-4 courses in content area of certification specialty. Courses mostly through Providence College, URI or CCRI.

Cohort 2 – 12 (teacher preparation or general ed.) courses attended by all or most of Cohort 2; 15 "singleton" courses taken "outside" of cohort, e.g., in major or if participant had already taken gen. ed. "cohort" course. Courses mostly through URI + some CCRI courses.

By project end in 2010, 4 Cohort 1 members will have met requirements to be certified teachers. 17 Cohort 2 members will have completed most general education requirements, have individualized plans for continuing on their own toward their educational goals of teacher certification & been linked to "non-RECRUIT" support as described in this newsletter.

Financial Resources for TAs

RI Higher Education Assistance Authority (RIHEAA) provides financial aid to students & their families to enhance educational access & choice for RI residents by promoting equal opportunity for postsecondary education to those who would otherwise be restricted financially from participating in educational programs best suited to them. RIHEAA administers the RI State Grant – a need-based grant program for RI residents who have not yet achieved their 1st bachelor's degree & are enrolled in a Title-IV eligible program at an accredited college, university or postsecondary institution in the U.S., Canada or Mexico. Eligibility is determined by financial info from the student & his/her family on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) that can be done online at www.fafsa.ed.gov. FAFSA must be submitted annually during each year the student is enrolled. The new FAFSA becomes available each year on Jan. 1. The RI State Grant program application deadline is March 1 every year. For the Sept. 2010 to May 2011 academic year, the application deadline will be March 1, 2010. Individuals should complete the FAFSA as early as possible each year. Although federal tax info is required to complete FAFSA, a student should not delay until his/her taxes are done. Instead, to meet deadlines, submit FAFSA with *estimated* or *prior year tax info* then go back online & update FAFSA when actual tax returns are complete. In addition to RIHEAA's program, FAFSA is used by colleges to determine student eligibility for federal financial aid, e.g., Federal Supplemental Ed. Opportunity Grant (FSEOG), Stafford Loan & Pell Grant. Direct questions on these programs to the student's college financial aid office. For more info, go to www.riheaa.org.

URI School of Education CCE Providence Program

The URI School of Education & CCE Providence Campus serves as the higher education partner for the Pawtucket RECRUIT project (see p. 2 of this newsletter). The URI School of Education CCE Providence Program goal in Project RECRUIT has been to support TAs in their pursuit of college courses to help them attain the goal of becoming certified teachers in areas of high need in their district. In meeting the needs of the participating TAs, each TA applied to the URI CCE Providence for admittance & review of any prior college transcripts. To begin the educational process, the URI School of Education delivered 2 foundational education courses to help establish a "cohort" model that would support & encourage TA learning & begin by building on prior knowledge of education given their work (e.g., as TAs) within a school district. Subsequent course selections were based on meeting university requirements as well as building core academic learning that could strengthen their current work assignment skills within the district; i.e., course selections included writing, communication, English, music, Spanish, astronomy, psychology & math to date. All courses were delivered in a nontraditional way in that classes were run in the district with flexible beginning & ending dates to align with the public school schedule; coursework components, where applicable, were tailored to suit local initiatives & preferences; & use was made of a district support system for TA students experiencing any academic difficulties.

To help highlight their acceptance & role as university students, several things were planned to connect the TAs with the campus environment given most of their courses were held in-district in Pawtucket & it was recognized that after project end, in order for TAs to pursue their goals, they would then need to take courses in a more traditional way, e.g., on campus. TAs were given an extensive tour of the Providence campus & its resources including the issuance of URI ID cards & introduction to on-site staff. For TAs who had prior college transfer credits & needed to take general education classes other than those offered in the district, they were enrolled in regular CCE Providence campus night classes. And finally, the program scheduled a Kingston-based summer course offering a general education courses.

Looking towards the full attainment of their goal of becoming teachers, TAs have been assigned an advisor & have received extensive information on what they need to achieve completion of University general education course requirements & other coursework in their second major discipline area before they can formally apply to the "regular" university course-based teacher education program.

Our project partnership with Pawtucket RECRUIT has seen a collaboration of effort not only with the district & their TAs but also among many university entities including the URI's College of Arts & Sciences faculty & instructors, the School of Education & the Providence campus offices of Special Programs, Admissions & Advising.

For all who would like information on how to start planning your college goals at URI, we encourage all interested TAs to contact any of the below mentioned people who have been instrumental in working with the Pawtucket TAs on this project.

- ★Christine P. Dolan, Education Specialist, URI School of Education/
CCE Providence Special Programs Office, Christine@uri.edu
- ★Jeff Johnson, CCE Providence Advisor, Jeff_Johnson@mail.uri.edu
- ★William Molloy, CCE Providence Education Advisor,
billmolloy@mail.uri.edu

Liston, A.G., Nevin, A. & Malian, I. (2009). **What do paraeducators in inclusive classrooms say about their work? Analysis of national survey data & follow-up interviews in California.** TEACHING Exceptional Children Plus, 5(5), Article 1. Retrieved 8/25/09 from <http://escholarship.bc.edu/education/tecplus>. TAs providing instructional support in inclusive classrooms reported that their roles included supporting students in subject matter content via instructional strategies, e.g., (in order of frequency) directing student behavior, delivering individual instruction, teaching appropriate social skills, supervising peer tutoring, coaching homework, supporting cooperative learning groups, data collection & materials preparation. They emphasized the need for ongoing PD to increase their knowledge about their students & their changing needs & new ideas to support students in meeting state standards & goals established for them. The study authors recommend to teachers working with TAs to (1) make the TA your “partner in the teaching/learning process”, (2) ask the TA’s opinion about student progress & behaviors, & (3) engage in PD with the TA – as a team, e.g., “to learn a new instructional technique, improve collaborative skills, etc.” Supports to help TAs in their roles are: (1) initial training, reflective coaching from supervisor re: tutoring, small group instruction & collecting data, (2) development & use of staff & student social skills norms with opportunities for role playing, (3) enhancing peer tutor use via cooperative group structures, (4) increasing “staff ownership, mutual respect, consistency in” using behavior supports, (5) more structured planning time for all involved staff each week & (6) PD, time & resources for materials development.

Aurelio Caetano, Acaetano@fg.k12.ri.us, 710-7500 is the TA Contact in Foster-Glocester with back-up from Denise Brierley, Northwest Special Education Region, 647-4106, dbrie56@hotmail.com. A regional district, it serves grades 6-12 in Foster & Glocester. 12.5 instructional TAs work with resource & general education teachers to support inclusion; replacement curriculums in reading, math & writing; & organizational skills. TAs are valued & integral instructional team members participating in various team planning & decision making including IEP meetings, service team meetings & inclusion planning.

District supports for effective TA use include:

- ★ Have local guidelines for TA assignment that reflect (1) individual class &/or student needs, (2) IEP determination, (3) some TA assignments requiring special training.
- ★ Have performance-based job descriptions for different positions, some specific to disability categories, 1 for technology dependent students & 1 for instructional TAs.
- ★ Orient newly hired TAs via training specific to the position. Have newly hired TAs shadow an experienced TA. The TA’s immediate supervisor (usually teacher) provides job specific orientation.
- ★ Ensure teachers are aware of federal & state law require that TAs work under the supervision & direction. Make teachers aware of RIDE Guidelines for Instructional Teams, Supervision & Performance Evaluation related to TAs including the roles & responsibilities of both teachers & TAs as defined in these guidelines. Train teachers to ensure they are able to fulfill their legal responsibilities for providing appropriate supervision & direction to TAs as specified in federal & state law & guidelines. Dr. Debbie Goessling has provided training in this regard. Use routine meetings with teachers to discuss various issues, including effective TA use.
- ★ TA evaluations are in the pilot stage now. They are performance-based, linked to TA job descriptions & conducted by an administrator.
- ★ Make TAs aware of the need for ongoing PD & use RICERT TA to document TA PD as required by law. Encourage TAs to attend RIDE TA Network sessions. Provide TA specific training in-district based on annual PD needs assessment. Teachers & TAs attend training together – as a team. Training topics addressed over the past year: Assessment & development of social skills for students with ASD; Writing measurable goals & objectives; Data collection; CPI/de-escalation; SCERTS-social communication; SCERTS-transactional supports; Safe lifting techniques; Adapted books; PECS; TEACCH; Inclusion; Reasonable accommodations; Confidentiality; & Wilson Reading. Allow cross-program visitation so that TAs can observe other programs. Fund TAs to attend job-related training out-of-district. Keep TAs informed of state & local TA issues & resources through the dissemination of electronic & written information including RIDE’s TA Newsletter.
- ★ Recruit TAs via the newspaper. Have a pool of qualified substitute TAs from which to draw permanent TAs. TA salary & benefits are incentives for recruiting & retaining TAs. PD offered by or through the district is an incentive for TA retention. Having a good working environment & teachers who know how to effectively work with TAs in an instructional team approach serves as a factor in TA retention. This team philosophy extends to the good relationship with the TAs’ union – a true partnership to support student achievement.

Autism Networks

The ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorders) Network assists school personnel (including TAs), families & students in developing quality programs for students with ASD that meet the same high standards established for all students. The network offers training on various ASD-related topics. Sessions are free & held 4:00-6:00 p.m. at the RI College in the Gaige Auditorium. RIDE PD Credits are available.

Upcoming ASD Network:

- ★ Dec. 2, 2009 on Transition

REGISTER ONLINE for ASD Networks on the ASD website at <http://www.ritap.org/asd/>. This ASD website has many resources for your review. Check it out!

TA Newsletter Distribution

We email this newsletter to: TA Contacts; Principals; Special Education Directors; Title I Coordinators; State Union Identified TA Contacts; Approved TA Training Programs; Teacher Preparation Programs; Education Collaboratives; & people on our TA Master Email List.

To get a copy:

- ★ Get on the TA Email List. Mail, fax or email name, phone & email to: Shirley Medeiros; RIDE; Office of Educator Quality & Certification; Shepard Building; 255 Westminster St.; Providence, RI 02903; Fax: 401-222-2048; shirley.medeiros@ride.ri.gov;

OR

- ★ Go to www.ritap.org/ta - Resources webpage. Download this or back newsletters. You can also subscribe to the newsletter online.

OR

- ★ Ask someone in your district (Another TA, principal or TA Contact) to make you a copy.

2009-10 TA Network Schedule & Registration Information

TA networks are a partnership of Educational Collaboratives that serve as network "sponsors" & RIDE.

JANUARY NETWORKS

Topic: Differentiated Instruction in Literacy & Math – The TA's Role

- ★ What differentiated instruction is & is not
- ★ Helping students make sense of content & organize thinking & writing
- ★ Ways to support teachers in their instruction in literacy & math
- ★ How to increase student engagement & offer choice to students

Presenter: Debbie Kolling & Jenn Jendzejec

Schedule-Registration & Directions thru' Collaborative Network Sponsor:

- ★ Wed, Jan. 6, (Snow backup Jan. 13), Northern RI Collaborative, www.nric-ri.org
- ★ Thurs., Jan. 7, (Snow backup Jan. 14) **OR** Thurs, Jan. 21, (Snow backup Jan. 28), West Bay Collaborative, Contact Lisa Kilby at LKILBY@mail.ri.net. Specify which of these 2 dates are desired & she'll send registration form & directions.
- ★ Mon., Jan. 11, (Snow backup Jan. 25), East Bay Collaborative, www.ebecri.org
- ★ Tues., Jan. 12, (Snow backup Jan. 26), Southern RI Collaborative, www.ri.net/sorico/

APRIL NETWORKS

Topic: Educational Technology & Assistive Technology

- ★ Educational Technology to use in the classroom
- ★ Engage students using technology tools for research, reading & writing
- ★ Using info & resources available on-line for Mathematics & Literacy
- ★ Universal Design in Learning
- ★ Supporting students using Assistive Technology

Presenter: Lisa Labitt

Schedule-Registration & Directions thru' Collaborative Network Sponsor:

- ★ Mon., Apr. 5, East Bay Collaborative, www.ebecri.org
- ★ Tues., Apr. 6, Southern RI Collaborative, www.ri.net/sorico/
- ★ Wed, Apr. 7, Northern RI Collaborative, www.nric-ri.org
- ★ Thurs, Apr. 15, West Bay Collaborative, www.westbaycollaborative.org
- ★ Thurs, Apr. 29, West Bay Collaborative, www.westbaycollaborative.org

Register through the Network Sponsor (see info above).

- ★ Fee is \$10 per network, payable to Collaborative network sponsor by registration deadline (2 weeks prior to network session date).
- ★ If you intend to seek reimbursement for the \$10 network fee from your district/employer, it is your responsibility to seek & obtain permission from your district/employer PRIOR TO network registration.
- ★ The Collaborative network sponsor will send you registration confirmation verifying payment of the \$10 fee. *This confirmation is for:*
 - You to bring to the network...your ticket of admission. NO WALK-INS.
 - You only. Confirmation IS NOT TRANSFERRABLE. If you cannot attend after registered, you cannot let someone use your confirmation.
 - Your records & if applicable, for your use in seeking reimbursement from your district/employer for which you have PRIOR approval.

Networks are designed for TAs, but teachers, administrators & others interested in TAs are welcome. Networks offer RIDE approved PD with a RIDE PD Credit Report from the Collaborative network sponsor for your records & for you to share with your district/employer to document your PD. TAs should also document their PD in the RICERT TA system. YOU MUST BE REGISTERED TO ATTEND. Networks fill up fast. Attendance is on 1st come-1st served basis.

Assessment – The TA’s Role

October TA Networks presenters Cindy Vanavery & Bob Dagesse addressed the TA’s role in assessment. They noted that assisting with assessment is a legitimate role of TAs. RIDE Guidelines for Instructional Teams, Supervision & Performance Evaluation (access on TA website, Legal Requirements webpage) identify recommended practice re: Roles & Responsibilities of Team Members (teacher & TA) including (but not limited to) TA roles under teacher direction & supervision of carrying out informal assessment activities & observing & recording information on student performance. The presenters defined assessment as “any tool you currently use in your classroom to determine what each student knows’. Assessment can be:

- ★ **Summative** – Conducted at the end of teaching to determine mastery of standards & gather evidence of learning; Administered periodically; Used to inform others about the student; Used to make judgments about students; Used for program evaluations; Used to make curriculum alignment decisions.
- ★ **Formative** (often a role for TAs under teacher direction & supervision) - Usually informal; Takes place in the classroom & among daily responsibilities of teacher & TA; Used to track learning during instructional process; Used to inform instructional next steps; Must be a routine part of the classroom activity, not an interruption; Allows for immediate adjustments & total & immediate student engagement; Does not result in a grade.

RI Alternate Assessment (RIAA)

- ★ **Who is it for?** – Students who cannot participate in large-scale assessments even with accommodations.
- ★ **What does it assess?** – The RIAA is based on Alternate Assessment Grade Span Expectations (AAGSEs) in reading, mathematics, science, & writing that are an extension of the NECAP Grade Level Expectations (GLEs). The RIAA assesses content knowledge through a series of Structured Performance Tasks. These tasks also incorporate & promote enhanced capacities & integrated life opportunities for students with moderate, severe & profound disabilities. Teachers collect data & student work to assess the student’s progress, accuracy & independence. The collected evidence provides documentation to ensure that there is a connection between the academic content contained the AAGSEs & the classroom instruction the student receives.
- ★ **What resources are available to support RIAA?** - Go to www.ride.ri.gov/assessment/Altassessment.aspx, www.ric.edu/herlockcenter/ or www.measuredprogress.org.
- ★ **What are RIAA timelines for data collection periods in 2009-10**– Collection Period 1: Oct. 5 – Nov. 13; Collection Period 2: Jan. 11 – Feb. 5; Collection Period 3: Mar. 15 – Apr. 9; All binders picked up Mon., May 3.
- ★ **What roles can the TA play?** - (1) Work with your teacher to make sure you know exactly what you need to be doing/data you are to be collecting, how & when - to ensure you are collecting appropriate data that is evidence of student performance; (2) Ask your teacher what you can do to help (such as ideas presented in this list here); (3) Help teachers remember timelines for data collection points; (4) Do entries into the RIAA database from teacher notes &/or double check teacher entries in the database & on written materials for accuracy, dates, grades in % or decimals, initialing by the teacher, signatures as required, page #s on binders submitted to RIDE, etc.; (5) Work with your teacher to determine if data collection meets criteria (help by playing devil’s advocate); & (6) Collect, organize & maintain documentation as directed by the teacher.

Alternative Pathway to Teaching Certification: RI Teaching Fellows (RITF)

RI Teaching Fellows (RITF) is a program that may be applicable to a # of TAs interested in becoming teachers. It is designed to recruit & train socially-driven individuals who are motivated to close the achievement gap in RI by becoming teachers in some of our highest-need public schools. RITF seeks outstanding professionals & recent graduates who want to make a difference in the lives of our students in RI. This highly selective program offers the opportunity to join a rigorous, accelerated route to becoming a teacher. RITF is looking for candidates to teach in the critical shortage subject areas of secondary math, science & special education in urban RI school districts. RITF strongly encourages candidates with experience in schools & high-needs communities, but experience is not required. Candidates will benefit from a streamlined application & selection process &, if selected, will have the opportunity to participate in an intensive Training Institute in summer 2010 while seeking full-time teaching positions for the fall. When a Fellow secures a full-time teaching position for the 2010-2011 school year (s)he will begin teaching as highly qualified & with a full-time teacher’s salary. Fellows will pursue their full professional teaching certification while teaching during their first year in the classroom. At this time, RITF is only recruiting candidates to teach in the high-need subject areas of secondary **math, science & special education**. **To be eligible candidates must have:** (1) At least a BA in math, science or English (or a closely related field); (2) At least a 3.0 GPA & (3) No more than 16 credit hours in education courses. *Note:* Anyone who has ever been enrolled in an education degree program is not eligible. Anyone who has ever held a permanent teaching certification is not eligible. RITF will begin accepting applications for its 2010 cohort on **November 4, 2009**. To learn more, refer a friend or find out how to apply, visit www.RhodeIslandTeachingFellows.org.