



State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations
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To: Superintendents and District School Improvement Coordinators

From: Mary Canole, Ed. D., Director of the Office of Progressive Support and Intervention

Subject: District Strategic Planning

Date: March 14, 2008

Please be aware that RIDE, in an effort to simplify the submission of your Consolidated Resource Plan and District Strategic Plan, will be implementing a new electronic planning and budgeting tool for districts called Acelegrant this May. As communicated to you in the March 12, 2008 letter from Carolyn Dias, RIDE's Director of the Office of Finance, the electronic strategic plan component will be part of Phase two of the Acelegrant application and will not be part of this year's Acelegrant submission. For this last year, please follow the following guidance for submitting your strategic plan.

The enclosed **Rhode Island District Strategic Plan Guidance and Templates 2007-2008** document identifies the specific elements required in your district strategic plan and provides you with models for developing your own plan. These elements include the mission, vision, objectives, strategies, and action plans. Over the past few years, RIDE has advised that districts structure their plan around the seven strategies found on page 7 of this document.

Each of the strategies requires a district to dedicate personnel and resources to these fundamentally important activities, as well as develop expertise in using these strategies to develop school capacity. These strategies provide a frame within which districts can respond to the legislative mandates that must be contained in your district plan (i.e. action plans to decrease obesity and improve the health and wellness of students and employees through nutrition, physical activity, health education and physical education), please see page 4 &5 of the 2007-2008 planning document.

New Developments for District Action Plans

Districts write action plans that are focused on building some important capacity across the district. Most often, districts write action plans that use the **Guide the Selection and Implementation of Curriculum/Instruction/Assessment** strategy and provide professional development to teachers. Sometimes their action plans are more focused on a grade level (impacting all elementary schools, for example) or implementing a program (Reading First, for example). Some of you know these as **DISTRICT-FOCUSED ACTION PLANS**. The templates that RIDE offers to districts to write this kind of action plan are found in this guidance document. Please note, however, that at this point in time RIDE does not require you to follow a particular template. You may wish to use one of the templates found in this document or you may choose to use a template of your own. The important part is to insure that you include all the required elements in your plan

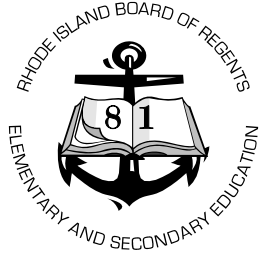
In addition, RIDE has been piloting two other kinds of action plans that districts may want to become familiar with and use. One is a **SCHOOL-FOCUSED ACTION PLAN**. **Districts use school-focused action plans in order to support schools that have high levels** of need, particularly student need. The district typically uses this type of plan after a school completes its SALT visit and needs specific help from the district or when a school is placed on corrective action. *Districts need to be aware that school-focused action plans are not the same as school action plans.*

RIDE is also piloting an action plan for the development of central office capacity, or a **CENTRAL OFFICE ACTION PLAN**. **These plans could be used when the central office identifies a gap in its capacity that it needs to fill.** The forms for district school-focused action plans and central office action plans are available through the PSI Website. It is our intent to solicit your feedback on your experience with these forms so we can improve their design and usefulness to you.

SY 2007-08 Submissions and Technical Assistance

RI General Law Chapter 16-7-1, “The Rhode Island Student Initiative”, requires that: “every school district... shall develop a district strategic plan” [which shall] “be based on high academic standards for student performance consistent with the statewide standards and benchmarks.” In addition, districts that fall short of performance goals outlined in their strategic plans may be identified for support and intervention.

In implementing this mandate, RIDE requires that districts submit any ACTION PLANS they will implement during the 2007-08 school year to Patti Ricci (Patricia.Ricci@ride.ri.gov) in the Office of Progressive Support and Intervention. In addition, if the district has substantially revised or rewritten its district strategic plan for the 2007-08 school year, it should submit its entire district strategic plan—not just its action plans—to the Office of Progressive Support and Intervention at this time. New legislative mandates that require additional strategic plan components should be reflected in the May 1st annual submission of your entire district strategic plan.



Rhode Island District Strategic Plan

Guidance and Templates

Rhode Island Department of Education
2007-2008

This guidance document is meant to serve as a reference for district administrators who have the responsibility for initiating, implementing, evaluating, and reporting the district strategic planning process. This guide gives instructions about how to submit the district strategic plan with a focus on the requirements associated with action plans. RIDE organizes the planning process into seven major areas. These areas describe what districts need to be able to do in order to lead and support a district-wide improvement process. They can be thought of as strategies that districts use to initiate and support change processes in the conduct of learning, teaching, and school functioning, and, as such, should appear in district action plans. These seven areas will continue to be the organizational structure for the electronic form of the strategic plan which will be implemented in 2008-2009.

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Forward

This guidance has been developed to help districts fulfill their obligation to develop, use, and annually submit their strategic plan to the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE). It simultaneously aims to:

- help districts fulfill all the requirements in law and
- encourage districts to get the most effective use they can out of what is potentially a very powerful tool for improvement--the district strategic plan.

RIDE assumes that the purpose of district strategic planning is the continuous improvement of district leadership and support so that all schools and students reach the highest levels of achievement. Beyond this guiding assumption, RIDE recognizes that successful districts follow a basic set of processes that help them to:

1. Use the results of a district self-study to establish priorities for improvement;
2. Identify and employ effective improvement strategies that address these priorities;
3. Assign responsibilities, schedules and resources to the improvement process;
4. Implement, monitor and assess the improvement process;
5. Evaluate the improvement process; and
6. Publicly report and discuss these evaluations and use them as the basis for accountability.

RIDE expects each district to apply this cycle of continuous improvement to itself and its schools. This means that each district measures how well it achieves its objectives/goals, sets priorities for developing needed capacity, monitors, evaluates, and reports its improvement efforts at least annually, and readjusts improvement priorities and capacity needs based on evaluative judgment.

I: An Overview of District Strategic Planning

The District Strategic Plan is a Tool to Establish Accountability

A good district strategic plan is owned by every part of the community that produces it. It expresses community aspirations for the education of its children. In return, the community makes an effort to support the district with adequate resources and supportive governance. The strategic plan guides the entire education community as its members work together to translate goals into mutual responsibilities. Indeed, the success of a strategic plan lies in the ability and willingness of districts and schools to fulfill community-wide expectations and, in turn, for the community to support the district in these efforts.

Article 31 requires district strategic plans to be the product of a shared community-wide process that defines a vision of what students should know and be able to do.

As a written expression of this mutual accountability structure, the strategic plan must be a practical document that: a) describes what the professionals in the school system will do to fulfill the promises of the plan; b) identifies, in measurable terms, the goals it has for students; c) details the ways in which staff from central office and the schools will work to attain the district goals for its students, d) determines a way to resource this work; and e) articulates the activities that the central office and the schools will undertake to make progress towards those goals.

The District Strategic Plan is a Tool to Lead and Support School Improvement

Article 31 requires district strategic plans to encourage the development of school-based improvement planning and implementation, and to address the needs of each school in the district.

Strategic plans are used to *lead* and *support* school improvement efforts. Strategic plans lead the school improvement process by setting the district's policy framework and direction in mission, vision, and objective/goal statements. Strategic plans support school improvement efforts by describing the district's general approach to action as strategies, and by specifying the particular human, fiscal, and other resources the district will make available to a school's improvement efforts.

By leading and supporting school improvement efforts, the district creates mutual accountability between the central office and its schools in a way that parallels the mutual accountability the strategic plan establishes between the district and its community.

II. Requirements of District Strategic Plans

District plans are not just good practice: they are required by state and federal law.

RI General Law Chapter 16-7.1, The Rhode Island Student Investment Initiative, requires that every school district...shall develop a district strategic plan [which shall]:

- be based on high academic standards for student performance consistent with the Statewide standards and benchmarks;
- be the product of a shared community wide process which defines a vision of what students should know and be able to do;
- address the needs of each school in the district;
- encourage the development of school-based improvement planning and implementation;
- include a process for mentoring of new teachers;
- be designed to improve student achievement with emphasis on closing the performance gaps...correlated with poverty, gender, language background, and disability;
- include establishment of student intervention teams to address the instructional needs of diverse learners;
- include high standards for student behavior;
- be consistent with Rhode Island's Comprehensive Education Strategy;
- include strategies to improve the performance of students in mathematics, reading and writing;
- describe a scientific research based...reading instruction to improve the reading skills of all students in the early grades [K-3]...aligned with the Regents reading policy;
- develop, implement and evaluate a Personal Literacy Program for each student [K-3] who is performing below grade level;
- indicate the manner in which self-studies will be completed at the school level;
- indicate the method in which school administrators and staff shall achieve and maintain an orderly educational environment;

- include assurances that the district has adopted a plan to ensure continued education of students who are removed from the classroom because of a suspension of more than ten (10) days or who are chronically truant.
- include strategies to decrease obesity and improve the health and wellness of students and employees through nutrition, physical activity, health education and physical education.

Note: Districts that fall short of performance goals outlined in their strategic plans may be identified for support and intervention.

In addition, the RI Regents Regulations for High Schools, adopted January 9, 2003 require that district strategic plans:

- include strategies and a two year timeline for creating more personalized learning environments for high school students;
- include specific information about the methods and means by which students who are reading below grade level will attain at least grade-level abilities;
- describe how high schools will incorporate applied learning for all students through classroom, work-related and/or community service experiences;
- address strategies for responding to, recording, and planning for each individual student's social/emotional, academic, and career needs beginning [by] grade five.

Finally, No Child Left Behind, federal law requires that:

If the state identifies a district for improvement, that district must, within 3 months of being identified, revise its strategic plan to:

- address the fundamental teaching and learning needs of the school, especially the needs of low achieving students;
- define specific measurable goals and targets for each of the subgroups whose results are included in the state's definition of AYP;
- incorporate strategies grounded in scientifically-based research that will strengthen instruction in core academic subjects;
- include as appropriate before, after, summer and extended day programs;
- provide for high quality professional development that focuses on improved instruction;
- include strategies to promote effective parent involvement in the schools served by the district;
- include a determination of why the district's previous plan did not bring about increased academic achievement;
- specify the fiscal responsibilities of the district; and
- detail the required technical assistance the state will provide.



Please note that **all** of these requirements align with RIDE's strategic areas, outlined later in this document.

**** It is RIDE's intent that the introduction of the Acelegrant electronic plan submission will relieve the district, via assurances, of having to provide all of the documents mandated by legislation.**

III. The Essential Elements of a District Strategic Plan

The quality of a strategic plan relies on more than the inclusion of federal and state requirements. A high quality strategic plan---one which has the potential to guide effective practice at the district and school level---is a coherent and complete description of the district's **purpose** (Mission/Vision and Objectives/Goals) and **practice** (Strategies and Action Plans). Each of these sections of the strategic plan is outlined in detail in the following pages. Beneath each section (Mission/Vision, Objectives/Goals, etc) are examples of what the element might look like. A short checklist on page 10 of this document will help you determine whether you have included the components of a quality strategic plan. Appendix 1 provides sample action plan templates.

A. Mission/Vision – This is a broad statement that expresses the district's purpose, its specific function, identifies who it serves, and explains how the district is unique. Exemplary district mission/vision statements contain a commitment to providing services and opportunities to its students in an equitable fashion, and includes external partners (business, higher education, community) in its design.

Examples

The mission of the Vannmar School District is to ensure that each and every student is educated and prepared to succeed in life. We are dedicated to maximizing individual potential and developing lifelong learners and responsible citizens who will be contributing members in a global society

In partnership with parents and the community, the mission of Vannmar Public Schools is to provide all students with the knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary to achieve success in our ever-changing world.

B. Objectives/Goals – These 3-5 statements are expressions of the district's expected results for the achievement/performance of all students, stated in terms, which are measurable, demonstrable, and observable. At a minimum, district objectives must set forth clear and measurable goals for:

- a) ensuring that all students develop central proficiencies in **English Language Arts** and **mathematics**; and
- b) closing any equity gaps in these areas, as measured by assessments of performance among different groups of students, (socio-economic status, English language proficiency, ethnicity/racial background, educational need and gender¹).

Objectives should be about what students will change, and more particularly what proficiencies they will achieve. Exemplary objectives set forth improvement targets in student proficiency relative to standards and expectations the district and state have established for its students.

¹ With the exception of gender, these are the disaggregated groups described in the document *School and District Performance and Accountability System*, available from the RIDE website <www.ride.ri.gov>.

Examples

By the end of the 20076-2008 school year, all students in the aggregate group and each significant subgroup will improve in their performance by 5% at all grade levels tested and in all subtest areas of the state assessment.

The Vannmar district will equalize the number of opportunities for students to take honors and advanced placement courses at all high schools by 2009.

C. Strategies – The strategies in a strategic plan are broad-based statements that describe how the district will achieve its mission and goals. RIDE expects that district strategic plans will address the following strategic areas:

- ⇒ Leading the Focus on Learning and Achievement
- ⇒ Ensuring Equity and Adequacy of Fiscal and Human Resources
- ⇒ Guiding the Selection and Implementation of Curriculum/Instruction/Assessment
- ⇒ Recruiting, Supporting, and Retaining Highly Qualified Staff
- ⇒ Using Information for Planning and Accountability
- ⇒ Engaging Families and Community
- ⇒ Ensuring Safe and Supportive Environments for Students.

These seven strategic areas of education reform are common to the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the Rhode Island Student Investment Initiative (Article 31), and RIDE’s system of Progressive Support and Intervention. It is the framework from which RIDE now offers varying levels of technical support and intervention to all of Rhode Island’s school districts.

As such, the Office of Progressive Support and Intervention, in reviewing district strategic plans, will be looking for evidence of effective practice in each of these strategic areas. A district may wish to have these seven strategic areas serve as strategy statements within their strategic plan. A written description of what each strategy might look like in an exemplary district is provided below.

Lead the Focus on Learning and Achievement

Central office leadership maintains a constant and productive focus on learning and achievement. This leadership articulates what good learning is and continuously communicates this to students, teachers, school leaders, parents, the school committee, and the community. District leadership describes what students need to know and be able to do to achieve the district’s goals for learning and development. Leadership is able to describe what teachers, school leaders, parents, the school committee, and the community need to do to ensure that students reach the goals set for student learning and development.

Guide the Selection and Implementation of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

The district curriculum is aligned with its mission and objectives/goals for student learning as well as with district and state standards for literacy, numeracy and other proficiencies. These curricula have a variety of embedded assessments that allow students and teachers to gauge

learning and to adjust instruction so that it maximally promotes the learning of each student. Curriculum directors and professional development directors have a thorough grounding in standards-based education, differentiated instruction, and managing learning-centered classrooms and are able to work with the District School Improvement Coordinator (DSIC) to help schools implement these practices.

Recruit, Support and Retain Highly Qualified Staff

The district actively and inventively recruits candidates with the highest qualifications and who are reflective of the community it serves. These professionals are provided with varied supports, including mentoring, job-embedded professional development, I-Plan, and evaluation systems. Professional development ties the professional development of individuals to district and school objectives/goals. The district has policies and procedures that encourage stability and distributed leadership. The Human Resource function reflects these priorities. The HR office is sufficiently budgeted to recruit competitively and works closely with school administrators to assess their needs. District, unions and school leadership evaluate staff effectively and fairly and connect personal professional development with needed school capacity.

Engage Families and the Community

The district uses a variety of ways to communicate with and connect to its families and community. The district facilitates processes in which parents, teachers, and students review progress and discuss strategies to support the learning of the student. The district ensures that parents and community members have ample opportunity to serve on school and district improvement teams and other important bodies in ways that enhance the quality of education for all students. It communicates regularly with the community about its plans, successes, and needs. Resources are earmarked to this public/community relations function.

Ensure Safe, Healthy, and Supportive Environments for Students

The district ensures that firm and constructive policies regarding school culture, individual behavior and the health and wellness of students and employees are consistently practiced in all its schools and other locations where students, teachers, and other adults interact. These policies create positive, supportive environments in which students can learn with the greatest individual freedom that is consistent with the safety of every member of the school community.

Ensure Equity and Adequacy of Fiscal and Human Resources

The district distributes its fiscal resources in relation to student need. To do this, the district implements and evaluates programs, services and external supports that effectively address different kinds of student needs, including academic, social, developmental, and health. It has procedures for effectively matching programs and adequate resources to the level of student need. The district business officer is connected to the strategic planning process and has a clear set of guidelines about how to budget to student need.

Use Information for Planning and Accountability

The district increasingly practices the cycle of continuous improvement and is always engaged in some part of the planning and improvement cycle. The district frequently visits schools to assess their strengths and weaknesses. The district models and teaches the use of formative and

summative evaluation instruments to measure learning and teaching. The information resulting from these evaluations is accessible and transparent.

These strategies can help districts articulate a framework from which to organize vision/mission and objectives/goals into Action Plans.

Examples

Engage Families and the Community

Recruit, Support and Retain High Quality Staff

D. Action Plans – Whereas strategies are broad approaches to action, Action Plans detail the explicit step-by-step processes for realizing each strategy. Plans typically span one year, with the understanding that they will be modified and updated as needed.

In order to be effective, action plans must describe:

- The expected results from completing the action;
- The specific programmatic steps the district will take;
- The person (s) responsible for implementing each of these steps;
- The timeline for completing the steps;
- The ways in which the action plan will be supported, including all federal, state, and local funds committed to the plan; and,
- The plan for assessing and modifying the action plan.

Action plans are often used to accomplish objectives/goals that include several strategic areas; therefore it is possible for several strategies to be used in a single action plan. For example, an action plan to support a school in its efforts to improve the learning of its ELL students might require the use of *Guiding the Selection and Implementation of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment; Ensuring Equity and Adequacy of Fiscal and Human Resources; and Engaging Families and the Community*.

The impacts of action plans must be evaluated, reported, and discussed. This process creates a new level of information and understanding that is used to update the action planning process.

At this point in time, RIDE does not require districts to use a specific template for action planning. Sample action plan forms have been appended (Appendix I) to this document should districts choose to use them.

Indicators of Quality in a District Strategic Plan

- ❑ Does the Mission/Vision:
 - Clearly state a commitment to leading and supporting schools' efforts to educate all students to high standards?
 - Address the closing of performance gaps?
- ❑ Do the Goals/Objectives:
 - Specify expectations for all students achieving high levels of proficiency in reading, writing and mathematics?
 - Align with all commitments made in the Mission/Vision, including improvement on the state assessments in ELA and Math?
 - Address "closing performance gaps" among subgroups of students?
- ❑ Do the Strategies and Action Plans:
 - Focus on students developing essential literacy and mathematics abilities?
 - Focus on student social and emotional health and development?
 - Address the health and wellness of students and employees?
 - Focus on the elimination of gaps in student learning based on poverty, gender, language background, race/ethnicity, and disability?
 - Address the needs of low-achieving students and schools for extra support?
 - Address the professional development needs of staff related to the learning needs of their students?
 - Lead and support school improvement teams in their efforts to conduct self-study, plan, implement and evaluate action plans, and report to their families and the district?
 - Engage families and the community in district and school improvement efforts?
 - Specify how progress will be assessed?
 - Advance high standards for student behavior?
- ❑ Are the Strategies and Action Plans:
 - Aligned with the plan's objectives/goals?
 - Developed on the basis of accurate information from each of the district's schools and related to their needs?
 - Monitored and adjusted when necessary?
 - Reported to the school committee and the community, identifying progress and barriers?
 - Reviewed and revised at least annually?
 - Resourced appropriately to maximize success?

IV. Updating the Strategic Plan

The district strategic plan should be reviewed and updated annually, with the broad-based participation of such community representatives as parents, students, teachers, school administrators, elected officials, community and business leaders. When updating your strategic plan, please consider the following questions:

1. When was the current strategic plan most recently revised? What process was used and who was involved?
2. In what ways were data and information from each of the district’s schools (i.e. school improvement plans, state and local assessment results, SALT survey and visit reports, discipline and attendance data, etc.) used to inform this update of the strategic plan?
3. How does your district allocate fiscal and other resources in relation to the specific needs of students and schools?
4. What barriers exist to your efforts to implement your strategic plan?

Reporting Form for Completed District Action Plans

DISTRICT: _____ DATE ACTION PLAN COMPLETED: _____

District Strategy		
Intended result of action plan (describe the result for each completed action plan)	Extent to which the result was achieved	Evidence you used to support your judgment about achieving the result of the action plan.

APPENDIX 1

District Focused Sample Action Plan Template # 1			
Strategy: (i.e. Lead the Focus on Learning and Achievement, Guide the Selection and Implementation of Curriculum/Instruction/Assessment, etc.)			
By the end of ____ years, the following policies, practices, and other capacities will be established:			
By the end of this school year (or some similar short-term time), the following results will be achieved:			
Logistics:			
Major steps or events that will be completed to achieve the result.	Persons responsible for completing each major step or event.	Resources (time, people, and money) dedicated to each major step or event.	Completion date for each major step or event.
Step 1.			
Step 2.			
Step 3.			
Evaluation:			
Formative Evaluation: What evidence will we use to evaluate the progress we are making towards this result?			
Summative Evaluation: What evidence will we use to evaluate the progress we will have made at the end of our timeline?			
Should an outside party work with the district and/or RIDE to evaluate part or all of this effort?			

District Focused Sample Action Plan Template # 2

Result Statement

What is the Action Step?	What benchmarks/evidence/assessment tools will be used to show progress toward the result statement?	What is the incremental timeline for monitoring progress?	How will the formative and summative evaluation of this step be conducted and reported?	Who are the person(s) responsible for this step?	How will this work be resourced?

SAMPLE

District Focused Sample Action Plan Template # 3

District Strategy #5: “We will promote family involvement in all of our schools and in the learning of all of our students.”

<i>Action Plan</i>	<i>Person(s) Responsible</i>	<i>Timeline</i>	<i>Result(s) Expected</i>	<i>How will work be evaluated?</i>	<i>How will work be supported/financed?</i>
<i>5.a Develop Web site and e-mail versions of the district-wide parents’ newsletter</i>	<i>Ann Attov, Tech. Coor.</i>	<i>Completed by Dec., 2006</i>	<i>Parents will have better access to information</i>	<i>Survey of readership – Jan.-Mar., 2007</i>	<i>Title I-\$ 1,500 Title II Part D-\$ 1,500</i>
<i>5.b Provide “Family Math” training and follow-up support for all elementary schools</i>	<i>Francis Martin, Math Coor.</i>	<i>Completed by May, 2006</i>	<i>“Family Math Night” coordinated in all elem. schools</i>	<i>Standard parent evaluations of training and public events.</i>	<i>Title II-\$ 2500 IDEA Part B-\$ 2000 Art. 31 PD-\$ 3000</i>
<i>5.c Recruit more parents/family members for all School Improvement Teams</i>	<i>Lorie Cruz, Outreach Coordinator</i>	<i>January, 2007</i>	<i>Increased presence of parents on SITs</i>	<i>By Jan., 2007 each SIT will have balance of parents/teachers</i>	<i>Title I-\$ 3,000 IDEA Part B-\$1,500</i>

District Focused Sample Action Plan Template # 4

Target: An increase in test scores by a specified amount.

Result Statement: What will students know and be able to do by the end of next year? (Keep AMO's, Assessment Results, and self-study data in mind.)

<p>Changes in student learning behavior: What will students do in classrooms and other settings in order to achieve the results specified above? (These changes may be specified for the district as a whole, for different grade levels, different student groups, etc.)</p>	<p>Changing Instruction: What will teachers do to ensure students reach the intended results? (These changes should be specified for the teachers who are responsible for the learning of the students specified in the previous column.)</p>	<p>Monitoring Progress with Timelines and Adjustments: How will central office and school leadership measure progress and make adjustments towards the described changes in learning behavior and teaching? How often will this occur?</p>	<p>Leadership Focused on Learning and Achievement: When will central office and school leadership find time to collaborate and discuss the information they get from monitoring to strengthen the school improvement process?</p>	<p>District Support for the School Improvement Process: What district supports and resources will be dedicated to this action plan in the following areas:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lead the Focus on Learning and Achievement, 2. Guide the Selection and Implementation of Curriculum/Instruction/Assessment 3. Recruit, Support, and Retain Highly Qualified Staff, 4. Engage Families and Community, 5. Ensure Equity and Adequacy of Fiscal and Human Resources, 6. Ensure Safe, Healthy, and Supportive Environments for Students, and 7. Use Information for Planning and Accountability, <p>(For each area that the district will provide support, fill out the attached supplemental action plan form.)</p>
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