



I. COVER PAGE

Rhode Island Secretary of State Nellie M. Gorbea

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Project Title: *Rhode Island Department of State Educator Resources*

Project Description: A Department-wide focus on creating tools and programs for educators seeking to teach Rhode Island history and civics, and the creation of a staff position to serve as their designated point of contact.

General Subject Area: State Heritage.



II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

HISTORY

Upon entering office in 2015, Secretary of State Nellie M. Gorbea made increasing civic engagement, especially among young people, a priority of her administration. Secretary Gorbea understood the need for increased civic education and knowledge of Rhode Island history to bolster civic pride and participation throughout the state. To accomplish this, she realigned existing responsibilities within the Department of State (Department) to create a new full-time equivalent (FTE) position, Associate Director of Education and Public Programs. This position is responsible for collaborating with the Elections, State Library, and State Archives Divisions to manage existing programs related to Rhode Island history and civic education and identifying opportunities to develop new programs and teaching materials.

Historically, schools have provided the civics and history education that prepare students to become full participants in our democracy. In recent years, the de-prioritization of social studies curriculum in favor of science and math has created the most poorly informed, least engaged electorate in generations. In Rhode Island, only 44% of eligible voters cast ballots in the 2014 mid-term election. The turnout improved to 60% in the 2016 general election; however, these numbers are, on average, 15% lower than those from the 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s, a time when civics courses were offered in most high schools.

Rhode Island has a comprehensive set of Grade Span Expectations (GSEs) for Rhode Island history and civics. The GSEs were written in 2008 and updated in 2012; however, Rhode Island schools enjoy a great deal of independence when it comes to developing their curricula. As a result, Rhode Island history and civics are taught at different grade levels throughout the state, and sometimes not at all. Further, unlike English language arts, math, and science, there is no state-wide social studies assessment at any grade level, and the Rhode Island Department of Education does not plan to add one in the near future.

SIGNIFICANCE

Determined to improve the civic education landscape in Rhode Island, Secretary Gorbea challenged her team to create resources for educators that would make it easy and enticing to teach Rhode Island history and civics. The team began by assessing the Department's offerings, which at the time included State House tours and a children's activity book. The Associate Director of Education and Public Programs met with educators, history- and civics-oriented organizations and with leadership at the Rhode Island Department of Education to determine where the Department could have the greatest impact. These conversations generated significant improvements to existing programs and identified opportunities for new initiatives. The resulting portfolio of programs provides Rhode Island educators with materials they can use in the classroom as well as new experiential learning activities that can be done in school or as part of a field trip.

This multi-pronged approach to increasing civic pride through knowledge of Rhode Island's history and a greater understanding of how Rhode Island government works is having a demonstrated effect. Among the youngest generation of voters, also known as Gen Z, turnout increased from the 2016 presidential election to the 2018 mid-term election by 22%. Turnout of 18-20 year-olds in Rhode Island increased 64% from 2014 to 2018.

Declining Civic Participation

- Only 23% of 8th graders demonstrated proficiency in civics on the 2014 National Assessment of Educational Progress.¹
- According to a survey by the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Association, only 36% of American adults would pass the US citizenship test taken by immigrants working to attain citizenship.²
- A class-action lawsuit was recently filed in Rhode Island claiming that the state is failing "to provide all students a meaningful opportunity to obtain an education adequate to prepare them to be capable citizens."³

1. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences (2015, April). The nation's report card: 2014 U.S. history, geography, and civics at Grade 8. National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2015112>.

2. The Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation. (2018, October 3). National survey finds just 1 in 3 Americans would pass citizenship test [Press release]. Retrieved from <https://woodrow.org/news/national-survey-finds-just-1-in-3-americans-would-pass-citizenship-test/>.

3. Cook v. Raimondo, 1:18-cv-645, 2018.



CLASSROOM RESOURCES

State House Activity Book

The Department has long provided books that include information about Rhode Island history and government to students and educators. When Secretary Gorbea took office, there was a single 18-page book designed for K-12 students with content that ranged from coloring book-style pages to lists of elected officials. The new Associate Director of Education and Public Programs consulted with teachers, administrators, and students to assess the usefulness and content of the existing book. The book was taken apart, re-imagined, and now exists as two independent, age-appropriate books: a bilingual [State House Coloring Book](#) for preschool through 3rd grade students, and a more robust *Rhode Island History and Government* book, available in [Spanish](#) and [English](#), for students in 4th through 12th grades. The book for older students now includes more history and civics information including infographics on levels and branches of government, advocacy, and how laws are made. These resources are available for free online and in print.

Rhode Island: Taking Shape & Shaping History Printed Timeline

The Department created a large-format timeline that uses documents from the Rhode Island State Archives to highlight important people and events from the state's history. The timeline was distributed to 30 classrooms around the state in a pilot program. Due to the overwhelmingly positive response, the Department printed 200 additional timelines the following year. This second printing was promoted to teachers in the August 10th issue of the Rhode Island Department of Education Field Memo, and all timelines were claimed within a week. Teachers at multiple grade levels report that the timeline has been a useful tool to spark classroom discussions and helps students recognize Rhode Island's significant contributions in shaping the United States.

Online Teacher Resources

The online [Teacher Resources](#) offers a single point of entry for any teacher interested in learning about programs and resources available through the Department. From the home page, teachers can access: civics and elections information; an interactive timeline of Rhode Island History; PDFs of student activity books; and eight curated collections of primary source documents from the State Archives. Presenting information through simple infographics, images, and primary sources ensures that the materials are usable by multiple grade levels with minimal adjustment by teachers.

Civics and Rhode Island Government page:

The [Civics page](#) offers information for teachers wishing to plan a State House field trip and includes information about the mock legislative sessions offered by the General Assembly. Although mock sessions are free and extremely popular with students, many teachers do not know about them or do not understand the procedure for requesting one. By putting the information on our webpage, we expect to increase the number of schools and students accessing this exceptional experiential learning opportunity.

The Civics page also includes infographics about branches and levels of government, how a bill becomes a law, the composition of municipal government (each town is different in Rhode Island), and a link to the [Voter Information Center](#) (VIC). The VIC is a major initiative of the Elections Division that offers data about past elections, detailed information about how elections work in Rhode Island, allows users to look up their elected officials, and provides address-specific ballots in the weeks preceding an election.

Interactive Timeline:

An [interactive digital timeline](#) was built to complement the printed timeline. Using a free tool developed by Northwestern University's Knight Lab, staff were able to incorporate images of documents from the Rhode Island State Archives and link to more in-depth information about important people and events in the state's history.

Online Teacher Resources at a Glance

- Eight curated collections of State Archives documents with documents available as high-resolution images and as transcripts;
- Discussion questions for classroom use;
- Interactive timeline of Rhode Island history;
- Downloadable civics infographics and activity books in Spanish and English; and
- Direct link to Voter Information Center.

**Themed Collections:**

The Themed Collections are curated selections of State Archives' documents that relate to eight areas of study identified through a teacher survey. Each collection includes two to eight documents (including photographs and other graphic images) that are presented as high-resolution, zoomable images and in transcript form. Each Themed Collection ends with discussion questions geared towards upper elementary or middle/high school students. The questions relate to the learning expectations outlined in the Rhode Island History and Civics Grade Span Expectations and were developed in consultation with educators. The Themed Collections and questions highlight civic participation from Rhode Island's past to illustrate the vital role of advocacy and civic participation in Rhode Island's future.

The Themed Collections leverage an increased interest in exposing ever younger students to primary sources. Primary sources bring history to life, inviting students to consider the time period, setting, and other factors in the creation of the document: Who did the writing? What writing materials were available? Why did some people sign with marks instead of their names? Providing images of the documents also gives students the opportunity to work as historians, another new area of emphasis among educators, by doing their own transcriptions. The ability to zoom into an image to see minute details is both fun and important for transcribers. Recognizing that not all classrooms will be able to spend time transcribing, the provided transcriptions give teachers and students an easier entry point into the documents' content.

The presentation of archival materials in the Teacher Resources has been an important testing ground for the long-term evolution of the State Archives' online catalog. While it is not practical to present the Archives' entire collection in this way, the Teacher Resources supplement the dynamic materials available in the Archives' catalog and assist the Department in its goal of providing access to primary sources for those unable to visit the Archives in person. Since launching the Teacher Resources in 2017, an additional 2,467 items have been digitized and are available online via the Digital Archive.

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES**State House Tour Program**

The Department of State oversees and manages the tour program for the Rhode Island State House. Through this program, over 16,000 visitors a year take guided tours of the State House. Over 10,000 of these visitors are K-12 students. Before the Associate Director of Education and Public Programs joined the Department, the program had been managed by the Public Information Division, a division with two FTEs who lacked experience in education and public programs.

The Associate Director of Education and Public Programs worked to improve tour content for students, increasing the focus on the legislative process and the fundamentals of Rhode Island history. The ratio of guides to students was also improved, with each guide taking no more than one class at a time. To increase tour capacity, a new partnership with Rhode Island College (RIC) was established to provide additional docents. The RIC/Rhode Island State House Tour Project benefits the docents, offering them a valuable real-world experience in their field of interest, and allows the Department to welcome more students than ever to the Rhode Island State House. Through improvements to tour content and delivery and the new partnership with RIC, the tour program saw a 31% increase in docent-led tours between 2016 and 2018.

Student Government Elections

In 2016, the Department purchased new voting machines and on-demand ballot printers. This allows for in-house printing of small runs of ballots and paved the way for a civic engagement initiative that has made it easier for Rhode Island's youngest citizens to learn about the voting process. Since 2017, Secretary Gorbea has offered every high school in the state the opportunity for its students to elect their student government leaders using real voting machines and real ballots. The program demystifies elections by giving students a real voting experience on something that directly impacts them: their student government officials and ballot measures. The Secretary's goal is for every student to experience voting on the state's voting equipment at least once during their four years of high school to ensure that they are well-prepared to vote when they turn 18.

To date, Secretary Gorbea has held 20 student government elections across Rhode Island. Schools and students have immersed themselves in the experience, generating campaign posters and robust social media campaigns, and advocating strongly for positions and candidates. On school election day, students hand out ballots, monitor machines, and assist with other activities, all of which prepare them to be poll workers and voters in the future. They even get an "I Voted" sticker to wear with pride.



School Visits to the Archives

The State Archives has always welcomed student groups; however, the interest level has been historically low for K-12 students, averaging fewer than one visit per year. Marketing of the new Teacher Resources web portal and direct outreach by Secretary Gorbea and the Associate Director of Education and Public Programs resulted in a significant increase in school visits. Since 2017, nine school groups, totaling 219 students ages 10-18, have come to the Archives to view exhibitions and participate in activities tailored to their curriculum. By adapting programming to different and changing classroom needs, the Archives has showcased how its work and holdings are relevant and accessible to classroom teachers around the state.

Archives and Public Programs staff have also gone into schools to host transcription parties for high school and college students and introduce the Archives and its holdings to younger students through presentations. These off-site programs have informed the development of in-house programs and materials and made the Archives accessible to groups that it otherwise could not accommodate due to space restrictions.

Foundations in Rhode Island History

Foundations in Rhode Island History was developed in response to teacher interest in Rhode Island history programming and their struggle to secure field trip funding. The program brought three independent organizations, the Rhode Island Foundation, Tomaquag Museum, and Roger Williams National Memorial, to the Rhode Island State House to offer a history education program in partnership with the State Archives and the RIC/Rhode Island State House Tour Project. Over the course of eight days, over 1,500 students participated in the program which was offered at no cost to Rhode Island schools. *Foundations in Rhode Island History* benefited the partner organizations by giving them the opportunity to host far more students than any of them could individually serve at their own smaller sites, and benefited Rhode Island students and teachers by offering them a free, high-quality educational program. As many participants had not previously visited the Rhode Island State House, that introduction was an added benefit for both the participants and the Department.

IMPACT

Young people are not going to engage in a government they do not understand or feel connected to, and schools are where much of the education concerning civics and government takes place. Secretary Gorbea recognized both the problem and the opportunity, and challenged her team to create a portfolio of materials and programs that would help Rhode Island educators bring information about Rhode Island's history and government back into their classrooms.

To support program development and to offer teachers a resource within the Department, she also repurposed an FTE to create a new staff position, Associate Director of Education and Public Programs. Using in-house design and production staff to create materials kept program costs to a minimum. The only direct cost was to print and distribute the timelines.

Together, these efforts have yielded impressive results. More schools are visiting the Rhode Island State House and State Archives than ever before, and thousands of Rhode Island students are experiencing the power of advocacy and voting by participating in student government elections that use real voting machines and ballots. We have also seen more students staging demonstrations at the State House and we know youth turnout at the polls is increasing.

Leveraging the rich history of activism in Rhode Island documented in the State Archives, the new programs have also raised awareness of the Archives' significant holdings while helping Rhode Islanders recognize their own potential as civic actors.

Results

- State House Tours: 31% increase in docent-led tours from 2016-2018;
- Elections: 20 student government elections held using state voting machines;
- School Visits to the State Archives: 9 schools, totaling 219 students, visited the State Archives;
- Activity Books: Over 20,000 books distributed to Rhode Island students;
- Teacher Resources: Over 2,600 unique page views; and
- Educational Programs: Over 1,500 participants in new State House educational programs.



CLASSROOM RESOURCES

Themed Collections



[African Americans](#)



[American Revolution](#)



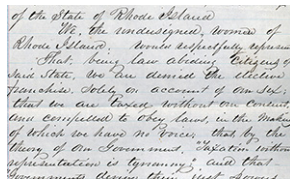
[Industrialization & Immigration](#)



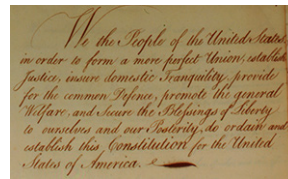
[Native Americans](#)



[Rhode Island's Royal Charter](#)



[Suffrage](#)



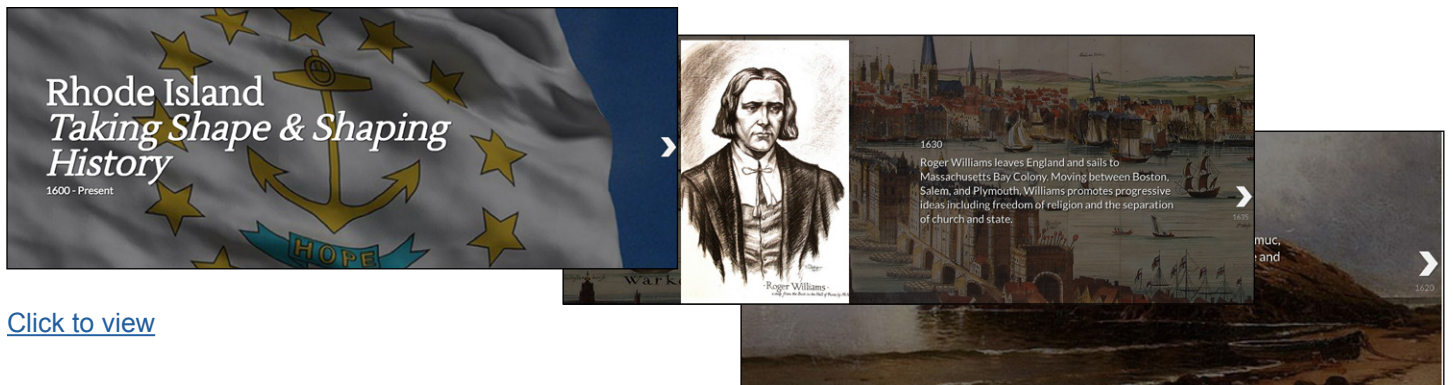
[US Constitution](#)



[Women](#)

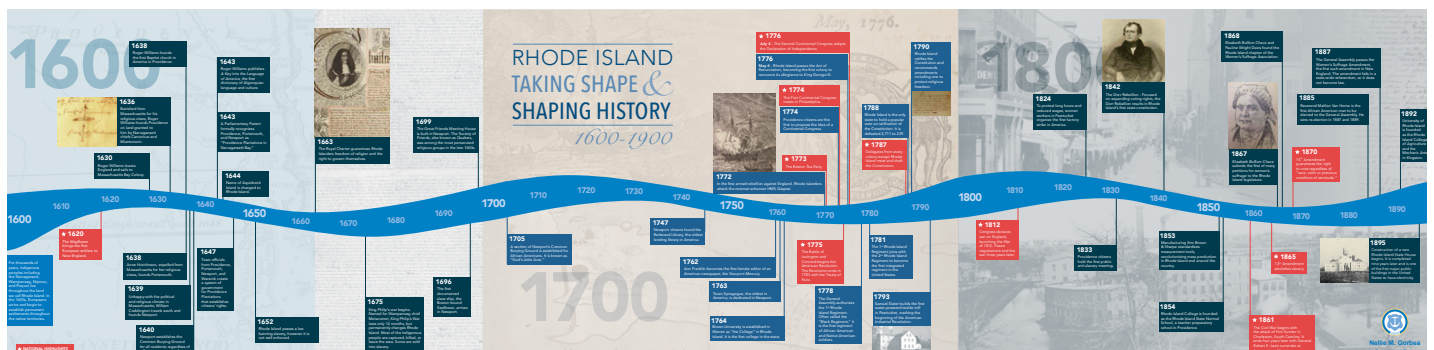
The primary source documents included in the themed collections can be used to support Common Core Reading and Writing requirements, as well as Literacy in History/Social Studies for grades 6-12. Each collection also includes suggested activities and discussion guides.

Interactive Timeline



[Click to view](#)

Printed Timeline





Civics and Government



Federal and State branches of government

This infographic shows the Federal and State branches of government

Download PDF [English](#) | [Español](#)



How a bill becomes a law in Rhode Island

Understanding the legislative process is important to know how and when you can best make your voice heard. This infographic shows how a bill becomes a law in Rhode Island.

Download PDF [English](#) | [Español](#)



Municipal Government

Rhode Island cities and towns have many different forms of government. This infographic to understand your local government.

Download PDF [English](#) | [Español](#)



Voter Information Center

At the Voter Information Center students can type in their address to find their elected officials and learn about upcoming elections. They can also view sample ballots before election day.

[Voter Information Center](#)



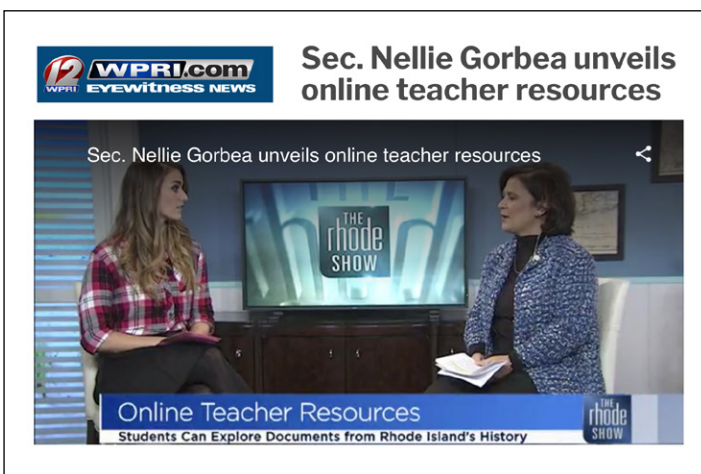
Levels of government – Federal, State and City/Town

Are you talking about certain policy issues or current events in your classroom? This infographic shows the levels of government – Federal, State and City/Town– and which level has decision making authority.

Download PDF [English](#) | [Español](#)

[Click to view](#)

PROMOTING THE RESOURCES



[WPRI](#)



RIDE Rhode Island
Department
of Education

Commissioner's Weekly Field Memo

Friday, November 3, 2017

Secretary of State Nellie M. Gorbea has recently launched new [online resources](#) for educators to help them bring primary source documents from the Rhode Island State Archives into their classrooms. The "Teacher Resources" page on the Department of State website ([sos.ri.gov](#)) features an interactive timeline of Rhode Island's history from 1600 to the present, themed collections of significant archival documents, and resources for teaching about state and local government.

The themed collections related to Rhode Island's history are: African Americans; American Revolution; Industrialization and Immigration; Native Americans; the Royal Charter; Suffrage; U.S. Constitution; and Women. Each collection consists of primary source documents that students can *view up close using a zooming feature*; each document is accompanied by a *corresponding transcription*. These resources can be used to support Common Core Reading and Writing requirements, as well as Literacy in History/Social Studies for grades 6-12.

"Our state has such a rich and diverse history of everyday people advocating for a better Rhode Island. That's why a key goal of my administration is to increase Rhode Islanders' knowledge of state history and their engagement in civic life," Secretary Gorbea said. "These resources are meant to complement efforts in the classroom or at home. I hope they will prompt thoughtful conversations about how our state's past relates to civic engagement today."

Educators with questions about the materials provided are encouraged to contact Lane Sparkman, Education and Public Programs Coordinator, at 401-330-3182 or lsarkman@sos.ri.gov.

[Rhode Island Department of Education](#)



SHARING THE RESOURCES





EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Student Elections

 **Nellie M. Gorbea** ✓
@RISecState

Great visit with @CharihoRegional High School to talk #CivicEngagement and what it means to #BeAVoter.




 **Nellie M. Gorbea** ✓
@RISecState

Students from Cranston High School West holding their student council elections using real ballots! If your school is interested in holding student council elections with real voting machines, contact the Elections division at elections@sos.ri.gov @CranstonSchools



THE VALLEY Breeze

NSHS student Malian takes aim at low voter turnout with senior project



Rhode Island Secretary of State Nellie Gorbea addresses juniors and seniors about the importance of voting during an assembly at NSHS last week. (Breeze photo by Lauren Clem)

[The Valley Breeze](#)

Cranston HERALD
cranstononline.com

The votes are in: Horseshoe crab prevails as Rhodes mascot

By Jen Cowart

For months, the fourth grade students at E.S. Rhodes Elementary School in Susan Weber's and Stephanie Pearson's classes have been working hard researching, educating and lobbying their school community for a change in the traditional school mascot, the tiger, for a more meaningful mascot, the horseshoe crab.

On Wednesday, April 26, the fourth-graders were on the edge of their seats during the final phase of their project: voting day.


A representative from the office of the Secretary of State, Lane Sparkman, brought an authentic voting machine and real ballots, created for the Rhodes voting event, to the school and each student and staff member was given the opportunity to place their vote, as well as the opportunity to proudly show that they had voted, by wearing the red, white and blue "I voted" sticker afterwards.

Much like during a real government election, at the end of the morning, as the votes were tallied, Weber and Pearson were both nervous, awaiting the final count, hopeful that all their students' hard work, time and effort would pay off for them, hoping the vote would go their way.

[Cranston Herald](#)

Warwick BEACON
warwickonline.com

Gorbea encourages students to vote, live up to Rhode Island traditions



YOUTH VOTERS: Secretary of State Nellie Gorbea encouraged nearly 200 Pilgrim High School Seniors to vote, saying that if the generation "steps up to the plate" their concerns for this country would come to the forefront.

WARWICK BEACON PHOTOS

[Warwick Beacon](#)



Interacting with the State Archives



Nellie M. Gorbea
@RISecState

Secretary Gorbea and RI State Archives staff with students from @lincoln1884 learning about RI's history with artifacts from the State Archives, as well as the tools State Archivists use to preserve them.



During their visit, students also got to take a closer look at our current exhibition on 380 years of Voting in Rhode Island. Don't miss your chance to see the exhibit, open through the end of November!



These students also saw the copy of the Declaration of Independence sent to West Greenwich and learned about the restoration of RI's official Declaration of Independence during a tour of the State Archives vault.



Nellie M. Gorbea
@RISecState

High school students and newly registered voters exploring the State Archives exhibit on 380 years of voting in Rhode Island
#AmericanArchivesMonth #BeAVoter



Nellie M. Gorbea
@RISecState

State Archivist Ashley Selima and Lane Sparkman, Associate Director of Education and Public Programs talking about how #Archives work and why they matter. Part of an #ActOfRenunciation visit with Guiteras Elementary School's 5th grade class.
#RIArchives @BWRSD



Nellie M. Gorbea
@RISecState

These 7th graders from @BayViewAcademy stopped by the #RIArchives to do some research for their #NationalHistoryDay project. The Rhode Island State Archives is a great resource for students looking up information on #RIHistory!





Foundations in Rhode Island History Program



Over the course of eight days, over 1,500 students participated in *Foundations in Rhode Island History*, a new partnership with the RI Foundation, Tomaquag Museum, Roger Williams National Memorial, and RI Department of State.

From top: students with Lorén Spears, Tomaquag Museum; John McNiff, Roger Williams National Memorial; and Lane Sparkman, RI State Archives.

