



RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT

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**Testimony Re: Governor's FY 2018, FY 2017 Revised & Capital Budgets,
Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
House Finance Committee**

April 10, 2017

Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. I am here today to voice Rhode Island KIDS COUNT's strong support for several key elements of the proposed budget for the Rhode Island Department of Education.

Education Funding Formula

We were pleased to see that the Governor's proposed budget fully funds Year 7 of the implementation of the education funding formula that was enacted by the General Assembly in 2010. We thank the General Assembly leadership and the House Finance Committee for all of your hard work to establish the funding formula through legislation and to ensure that it is fully funded.

Grade-Level Reading

Achieving the Governor's Third Grade Reading Goal of doubling the number of third-graders reading at grade level by 2025, will require increased attention to young children's learning and development. We support the Governor's proposals in this area, including increasing Pre-K funding, providing performance-based quality incentives for child care assistance, providing permanent designated funding for English learners, and supporting the establishment and implementation of a Kindergarten Entry Profile, all as part of her larger focus on improving grade-level reading.

Pre-K

When the General Assembly adopted the education funding formula in 2010, you made the wise decision to include Pre-K as a categorical program in the formula with a gradual, ten-year expansion plan so that this critical program can incrementally expand to serve more young children. In doing so, you paid attention to the national research that shows that improved educational outcomes depend on access to high-quality Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K), especially for at-risk students.

Including the 1,305 low-income four-year-olds enrolled in Head Start in Rhode Island and the 995 children enrolled in State Pre-K, approximately 38% of the state's low-income four-year-olds are enrolled in a public preschool program (State Pre-K or Head Start).

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT supports the Governor's FY 2018 budget proposal to fully fund the early learning/Pre-K categorical program based on the expansion plan that is part of the education funding formula. This expansion, combined with federal Preschool Development Grant funds will allow the State Pre-K program to serve more than 1,000 children next year.

Kindergarten Entry Profile

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT supports the Governor's plan to include \$200,000 in the FY 2018 budget to begin implementing a Kindergarten Entry Profile to inform kindergarten instruction and guide early childhood education policy.

As of January 2017, 32 states were using an assessment tool to track skills and knowledge at kindergarten entry. Rhode Island has not yet implemented a statewide tool, but has worked with a consortium of states led by North Carolina to develop and field test a new, comprehensive Kindergarten Entry Profile that incorporates best practices for young children.

English Learners (ELs)

Before FY 2017, Rhode Island was one of only four states (others were Delaware, Mississippi, and Montana) with an education funding formula that did not include designated EL funding.

Recent reports, including a 2013 report by the Latino Policy Institute, have noted that Rhode Island's EL students are among the lowest performing students in the nation as measured by the *National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)*, also known as the Nation's Report Card.

In 2016, 13% of third-grade EL students met or exceeded expectations on the *Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC)* English language arts assessment, compared to 43% of non-EL students. In 2016, only 1% of seventh-grade EL students met or exceeded expectations on the *PARCC* math assessment, compared to 30% of non-EL students. The overall four-year graduation rate for Rhode Island students entering the ninth grade during the 2012-2013 school year was 85%, but only 77% for ELs.

For these reasons, we have strongly supported the Funding Formula Working Group's recommendations that Rhode Island:

- (1) Provide additional financial support for English Learners
- (2) Calculate funding to support ELs based on the number of ELs in a district
- (3) Include reasonable restrictions to ensure that funding is used to benefit ELs

Article 18 proposes a permanent categorical fund equal to 10% of the core instructional amount be created and distributed to districts based on the number of ELs they serve and used exclusively to provide "high-quality, research-based services" to EL students. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT strongly supports this funding strategy because it would ensure that districts with high proportions of EL students receive the additional resources they need and that the funds are targeted to address EL students' needs.

Other Budget Items

In addition to the above-mentioned budget items, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT also strongly supports:

- **SAT Tests:** The Governor's budget includes \$500,000 to continue to work of increasing SAT participation by paying for PSAT-taking for sophomores and SAT-taking for juniors in public schools. Only slightly more than half (59%) of Rhode Island students who graduated from high school in the Class of 2015 immediately enrolled in college, and there are large gaps in college enrollment between low- and higher-income students. This initiative helps ensure that the cost of paying for SATs and PSATs is not a barrier for students, but perhaps more importantly, it gives all students the opportunity to see themselves as college goers.
- **School Construction:** The Governor's budget proposal includes \$80.0 million for school housing aid to district, including \$70.9 million for school housing aid and \$9.1 million for the School Building Authority Capital Fund established last year, consistent with the FY 2017 allocation. A growing body of research has linked student achievement and behavior to school building conditions and overcrowding. We must ensure that our schools provide the kinds of learning environments that support the health and morale of both staff and students.
- **Dual Enrollment:** The Governor's budget proposal includes \$1.8 million to continue funding Prepare RI, a dual enrollment initiative that allows qualified students to earn credit at their high schools and at state public higher education institutions, at no cost to students or families.

- **Advanced Coursework Network:** The Governor's budget proposal includes \$550,000 to help high school and middle school students access personalized, advanced coursework opportunities. This initiative is helping students participate in advance coursework not normally available at their own school and earn middle school, high school, Advanced Placement, and/or postsecondary credit, depending on the course.

Thank you for your leadership on all of these issues and for the opportunity to testify today.