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Testimony Re: FY 2019, FY 2018 Revised & Capital Budgets, Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

House Finance Committee

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Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to voice its strong support for several key elements of the proposed budget for the Rhode Island Department of Education and recommend that the Committee consider recommending additional funding in two specific areas (English Language Learners and the Advanced Coursework Network).

Let me start with our endorsement of several items in the Governor's budget.

Education Funding Formula

We were pleased to see that the Governor's proposed budget fully funds Year 8 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.

State Pre-K

When the General Assembly adopted the education funding formula in 2010, you made the wise decision to include State 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 State Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K), especially for at-risk students. The State Pre-K program is managed by RIDE and implemented by both public schools and community-based programs (child care and Head Start agencies). The Rhode Island State Pre-K program is one of only two in the U.S. that is recognized for meeting all 10 research-based benchmarks of quality.

Rhode Island is making progress in ensuring access to high-quality public preschool (either Head Start or State Pre-K). Approximately 41% of the state's low-income four-year-olds are enrolled in either State Pre-K or Head Start, including the 1,187 low-income four-year-olds enrolled in Head Start in Rhode Island and the 1,080 children enrolled in State Pre-K.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT supports the Governor's FY 2019 budget proposal to increase funding for the State Pre-K categorical program by \$1.1

million based on the expansion plan that is part of the education funding formula. The state funding, combined with federal Preschool Development Grant funds will allow the State Pre-K program to maintain 60 classrooms serving 1,080 children.

High-Quality Kindergarten Curriculum

RIDE's efforts to support implementation of high-quality curriculum in kindergarten classrooms have been highly successful. Fifty-seven kindergarten teachers from across the state have received support to implement a research-based curriculum developed in Boston that recognizes that young children learn best through play-based experiences. Teams of kindergarten teachers from Cranston, North Providence, Central Falls, Foster, Chariho, Tiverton, Cumberland, Westerly, and East Providence have received training, materials, and coaching to implement the curriculum. Teachers report that the Boston curriculum develops children's curiosity, persistence, interpersonal skills, and joy for learning. The Governor's proposed increased investment of \$100,000 will allow this program to expand to more kindergarten classrooms in the state.

English Language Learners (ELLs)

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 ELL funding. And then in 2016 the General Assembly established a pilot categorical program to provide additional support for the costs associated with educating English Language Learners and provided \$2.5 million to support evidence-based English Language Learner programs in FY 2017. In 2017, the General Assembly continued this progress by making permanent the English Language Learner categorical fund in the state's educational funding formula. However, the General Assembly did not follow through on a planned increase to \$5.0 million as initially proposed.

Recent reports, including a 2013 report by the Latino Policy Institute, have noted that Rhode Island's ELL 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. The recently released *Race for Results* report also shows Rhode Island's Latino children having the lowest opportunity index in the Nation.

While funding is always tight, we cannot afford not to do more. We would urge you to consider increasing the amount set aside in the FY 2019 budget for the English Language Learner categorical fund and increase this amount to \$5.0 million as initially planned.

School Construction

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT also would like to voice its strong support for Budget Article 5, Question 1, the School Construction Bond, and Article 9. We have provided additional information on these budget articles in the appropriate hearings, but wanted to reiterate our strong support.

We know that the condition of school facilities affects the learning and performance of students and teachers. We cannot have world-class education in Rhode Island without facilities to support learning and teaching, and the time to make this investment is now.

College and Career Readiness

The Governor's budget includes many important proposed investments that will help increase college access for Rhode Island students, including:

- \$650,000 in general revenue and \$133,600 in federal funds, a \$150,000 increase over last year, to enable all students in public high schools to take the **PSAT and SAT tests** during the school day at no cost. As you know, the SAT is taking the place of the *PARCC* as the assessment test in high school.
- \$115,000 in general revenue to pay fees associated with the **Advanced Placement (AP) exams**. Combined with a waiver available through the College Board, this program will allow eligible low-income students to pay a reduced fee of \$15 per AP exam, \$79 less than the standard fee of \$94 per exam.
- \$1.8 million from tuition savings for the **Dual/Concurrent Enrollment Initiative** to allow more students to earn college credit at their high school or at state public higher education institutions at no cost to students or families. This is an increase of \$500,000 over FY 2018 funding.

One area where we would recommend an increase in funding beyond the Governor's proposals is the **Advanced Coursework Network (CAN)**, a program that allows middle and high school students to access career preparatory and college credit bearing courses through a network of providers, including postsecondary institutions, community organizations, and school districts. The Governor recommends \$450,000 (\$300,000 from the Permanent School Fund and \$150,000 in general revenue), \$100,000 less than the FY 2018 budget. The ACN serves a much higher percentage of low-income and urban students than the Dual/Concurrent Enrollment Initiative, perhaps because courses are more accessible via public transportation, so we urge you to continue funding both the Dual/Concurrent Enrollment Initiative and the Advanced Coursework Network at levels that make these engaging and rigorous advanced courses available to all students, especially low-income students and students of color who attend school in the urban core and may especially benefit from these opportunities.

Only slightly more than half (59%) of Rhode Island students who graduated from high school in the Class of 2016 immediately enrolled in college, and there are large gaps in college enrollment between low- and higher-income students. These initiatives help ensure that the cost of paying for PSAT, SAT, and AP tests is not a barrier for students and that students have access to rigorous and engaging advanced coursework, but perhaps more importantly, they give all students the opportunity to see themselves as college goers.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.