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**Testimony Re: FY 2020, FY 2019 Revised & Capital Budgets,
Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education**

House Finance Committee

March 27, 2019

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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.

Education Funding Formula

We were pleased to see that the Governor's proposed budget fully funds Year 9 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.

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 2017 *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 2020 budget for the English Language Learner categorical fund and increase this amount to at least \$5.0 million as initially planned.

Curriculum Development

According to the American Teacher Panel, 48% of teachers in Rhode Island report curriculum and instructional materials that are rigorous and engaging as the most important indicator for meeting the needs of students. However, it is estimated that students in the U.S. spend 581 hours each school year on assignments that are not high quality. The majority of school districts in Rhode Island use locally-developed instructional materials that have not been reviewed by RIDE or an independent agency. We support the Governor's proposed investment of \$100,000 which will allow RIDE to support the implementation of high-quality curriculum in all Rhode Island districts.

College and Career Readiness

By 2020, 71% of jobs in Rhode Island will require post-secondary education beyond high schools. However, many students, especially low-income students face barriers to college enrollment and success. States can help address barriers and improve college access by ensuring that all students have access to advanced coursework, including Advanced Placement (AP) courses, dual and concurrent enrollment courses, etc. The Governor's budget includes many important proposed investments that will help increase college readiness for Rhode Island students, including:

- \$2.3 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 2019 funding.
- \$700,000 for the **Advanced Coursework Network**, 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. This is an increase of \$250,000 over FY 2019 funding.

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 that will help prepare them for success in college and careers.

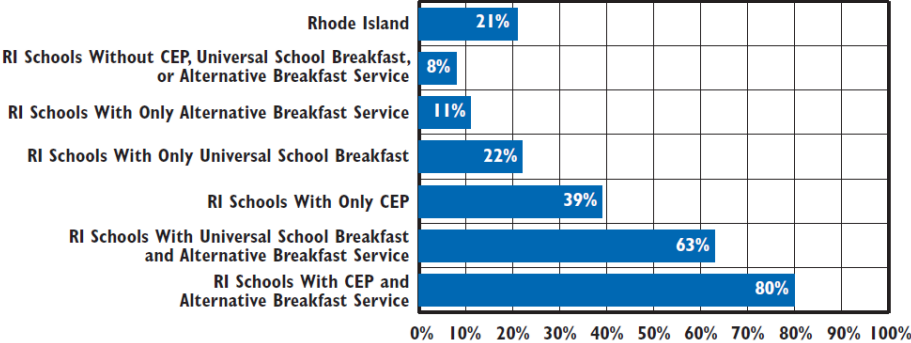
School Meals

We previously testified before this committee on Article 15 and want to reiterate Rhode Island KIDS COUNT's strong support for the Governor's proposals to require:

- That eligible schools participate in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) and offer free meals to all their children unless doing so would present a financial hardship in which case they can apply for a limited waiver
- That all schools with 70% or more students identified as low-income offer alternative breakfast services, such as breakfast after the bell, "grab-and-go," or breakfast in the classroom.

Eating breakfast at school helps children perform better in the classroom. Students who eat breakfast have better attendance, behavior, and academic performance, especially in math. More days in the classroom and higher achievement set students on a path to graduate and earn higher wages. Data we include in our annual *Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook* clearly show that alternative breakfast models and CEP increase school breakfast participation.

**Children Participating in the School Breakfast Program,
Rhode Island, October 2017**



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, Child Nutrition Programs, Office of Statewide Efficiencies, October 2017.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.