



RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT

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**Testimony Re: Senate Bill 2035 Re: Competency-Based Learning Policy
Senate Education Committee**

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Madam Chair and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to voice its support for the intent of Senate Bill 2035 which is to encourage more schools and school districts to implement competency-based learning. This bill requires the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education to adopt a state competency/proficiency-based learning policy and a model district policy and approve these policies on or before June 1, 2021 and to issue guidance on the application of these policies.

Competency-based learning, often called mastery-based or proficiency-based learning, bases student advancement on mastery of skills and academic content, rather than age, seat time, or hours on task. In competency-based learning, students are provided with clear learning objectives, given control over their own learning and work pace, and able to demonstrate mastery in multiple ways to show a thorough understanding of the competencies being assessed (e.g., content knowledge or critical skills, such as communication and collaboration). Students receive timely, differentiated instruction based on their individual learning needs.

Rhode Island's *Secondary School Regulations* already support competency-based learning. These regulations clearly state that course completion is defined by "demonstration of the knowledge, skill, and competencies outlined in the course learning objectives" and focus on demonstrated proficiency rather than seat time. *Rhode Island's Strategic Plan for Public Education for 2015-2020* states that the Rhode Island Department of Education will "establish a policy and fiscal framework that enables students control over the pace, space, and content of their learning while meeting state and local requirements." The *Strategic Plan* also highlights as a key desired outcome "increased number of schools implementing a school-wide proficiency-based model for instruction and advancement."

Rhode Island was the first state to adopt a proficiency-based diploma, and the state's regulations and strategic plan show strong support for competency-based learning. However, competency-based learning is not being widely and fully adopted statewide. Instead, we only see some schools and districts "sticking their toes in the water" to test out this model. For example, we

highlight Cumberland High School's journey toward competency based learning in the attached *Spotlight* and have seen competency-based learning in action at other schools including 360 High School in Providence and Blackstone Academy, a charter school serving students from Pawtucket, Central Falls, and Providence.

We agree with Senator Picard that more needs to be done to support the implementation of competency-based learning in Rhode Island. We encourage this committee to support this bill and the development and dissemination of a state policy and a model district policy to expand competency-based learning across the state. Doing so will help ensure that our students are engaged in their own learning and have mastered the skills they need to succeed in college and careers.

Thank you to Senator Picard for his longtime support of competency-based learning and for the opportunity to testify today.