



RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT

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Testimony Re: Article 11 Regarding Strengthening Neighborhood Schools

House Finance Committee

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Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Article 11 which proposes several changes related to the funding of Rhode Island's public schools.

English Language Learners (ELLs)

Currently, Rhode Island is one of only four states (others are Delaware, Mississippi, and Montana) with an education funding formula that does not include designated ELL funding. 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.

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

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

Article 11 proposes a categorical fund equal to 10% of the core instructional amount be created and distributed to districts based on the number of ELLs they serve and used exclusively to provide "high-quality, research-based services" to ELL students. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT strongly supports this funding strategy because it would ensure that districts with high proportions of ELL students receive the additional resources they need and that the funds are targeted to address ELL students' needs.

High-Cost Special Education Students

Effective and appropriate special education services are important for improving long-term outcomes for children and youth with special needs. Article 11 proposes to reduce the threshold for qualifying for high-cost special education funds from five times the core foundation amount to four times. This change would provide additional funding to local districts that pay for most of the costs of special education services.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT strongly supports this proposal which would increase the resources available to serve students with special education needs and reduce the financial burden on local school districts.

Promotes Transparency, Long-Term Investments, and Regular Review

We also support three other key aspects of Article 11:

- (1) **Maintenance of Effort:** Section 16-7-23 would require that communities contribute local funds to its school committee that are the greater of the local contribution made the previous fiscal year or an amount adjusted to account for increased enrollment.
- (2) **Transparency:** Section 16-2-9.4 requires that each public school district post its adopted budget with breakdowns by program and school level on its district website and through a link on the Rhode Island Department of Education website.
- (3) **Regular Review:** Section 16-7.2-1 requires that the Rhode Island Department of Education review the education funding formula at least once every five years and make recommendations for adjustment to the General Assembly.

Thank you for your commitment to a predictable and equitable funding formula and for the opportunity to comment today.