



Testimony Re: Senate Bill 2017 Re: A 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 Senate Bill 2017. This bill would require that the Board of Education's Council on Elementary and Secondary Education adopt a competency-based learning policy and a model district policy.

Today we know more than ever about how students learn and how we can best engage them. We know that competency-based learning, in which a student's progress is based primarily on mastery of a skill or body of knowledge, rather than solely age, hours on task or credits earned, helps engage students in their own learning and prepares them for success in college and career.

Rhode Island is already identified as a leader in competency-based education. Districts such as Central Falls, Providence, and Woonsocket are offering opportunities for students to earn high-school credit through expanded learning opportunities in health care, technology, leadership, and the arts at community-based organizations including RiverzEdge, Young Voices, the Rhode Island Urban Debate League, and the Rhode Island School of Design as well as with local businesses. These opportunities provide students an opportunity to explore an interest, learn a skill, develop a relationship with an adult mentor, and demonstrate competency in a skill or subject. Rhode Island also has the Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center, a national model for student-centered learning.

Despite these "bright spots," we know we could do more as a state to support competency-based learning. Doing so will require clear state policies that move the state toward a proficiency-based model of college and career readiness. A solid state policy to support competency-based learning would do the following:

- **Support the needs of students:** Focus on student learning and student learning outcomes.
- **Expand student options:** Expand, not limit, the options that students have to reach learning outcomes.
- **Ensure that high academic standards are met:** Be vigilant to ensure that academic expectations do not slip and that we have high expectations for all students.

- **Offer districts and schools flexibility:** Be clear about desired outcomes and provide incentives for educators to innovate or to take different pathways to achieve the goal.

Rhode Island's Secondary School Regulations already support competency-based learning. In Section 6.3.1, the regulations state that "LEAs shall formally adopt coursework graduation requirements that (1) apply to all students within the LEA and (2) require successful completion of at least twenty academic courses **or the equivalent that include demonstrations of proficiency in the six core content areas.**" The regulations further state that students can meet coursework requirements through "enrollment in a state-approved career and technical program, expanded learning opportunities, dual enrollment, on-line learning, and other non-traditional academic and career readiness programs."

Rhode Island's high school graduation requirements that include performance-based assessments (e.g., portfolios, senior projects, etc.) and the "bright spots" across our state that demonstrate the value of competency-based learning position us to be a leader in this area. But, Rhode Island could do more to encourage districts and schools across the state to adopt competency-based learning practices. We encourage this committee to support this bill and the development of state policy and model district policy to expand competency-based learning practices 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, career, and life.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.