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Testimony Re: Senate Bill 2554 Regarding Elementary Education
Senate Education Committee
March 30, 2016
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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 2554. This bill would ask the Board of Education and the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education to adopt a statewide goal of closing the achievement gap in third-grade reading and third-grade math by 50% by 2020 and in its entirety by 2025.

Rhode Island's Strategic Plan for Public Education already has goals for increasing overall performance in third-grade reading and math by ten percentage points. Adding a specific goal around closing achievement gaps would strengthen the strategic plan and help us meet this goal.

Currently, we see startling achievement gaps by income, race and ethnicity, disability, and English language learner (ELL) status in both English language arts and mathematics. For example, on the 2015 *Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC)*, 21% of low-income third graders met expectations in English language arts, compared to 53% of higher-income third graders.

Achievement Gaps

Third-Grade Students Meeting Expectations in *PARCC*
ELA/Literacy, by Student Subgroups, Rhode Island, 2015

Subgroup	Percent Meeting Expectations
Males	33%
Females	43%
English Language Learners	8%
Students With Disabilities	10%
Students Without Disabilities	42%
Low-Income Students	21%
Higher-Income Students	53%
Native American	17%
Hispanic	18%
Black	22%
Asian	47%
White	48%
All Students	37%

Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, *Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC)*, 2015.

We see similar achievement gaps in mathematics. On the 2015 *PARCC*, 13% of Native American, 18% of Hispanic, and 21% of Black third graders met expectations in math, compared to 52% of Asian and 46% of White third graders.

Achievement Gaps

Third-Grade Students Meeting Expectations in PARCC
Mathematics, by Student Subgroups, Rhode Island, 2015

Subgroup	Percent Meeting Expectations
Males	35%
Females	37%
English Language Learners	11%
Students With Disabilities	12%
Students Without Disabilities	41%
Low-Income Students	21%
Higher-Income Students	53%
Native American	13%
Hispanic	18%
Black	21%
Asian	52%
White	46%
All Students	36%

Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, *Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC)*, 2015.

We see even bigger gaps in achievement between English language learners and non-English language learners and between students with and without disabilities.

We can help close these achievement gaps by setting targets, identifying and implementing effective interventions, and tracking our progress. Strategies to close these achievement gaps include:

- Supporting parents in providing literacy-rich home environments
- Raising awareness about the connection between third-grade reading proficiency and high school graduation
- Increasing developmental screening rates so we can identify children with special needs and provide needed services as early as possible
- Increasing access to high-quality preschool and Pre-K programs
- Improving curriculum, instructional materials, classroom practice, teacher preparation, and professional development
- Identifying children who are struggling through timely assessments and early warning systems and providing personalized support
- Increasing access to high-quality summer and after-school enrichment programs with focused literacy and numeracy components
- Continuing to focus on reducing chronic absenteeism so children are in school and learning every day.

Many of these interventions are already explicitly stated in Rhode Island's Strategic Plan for Public Education. This bill would strengthen the state's current plan by focusing on the need to raise achievement for all students, a key goal of the Rhode Island Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, which is lead by the United Way of Rhode Island in partnership with Rhode Island KIDS COUNT.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.