



RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT

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**Testimony to the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education
Relating to Proposed Revisions to the Secondary School Regulations
April 26, 2016
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First, I want to thank the Rhode Island Department of Education for providing so many opportunities for students, parents, teachers, and other key stakeholders to provide input on these regulations at community meetings and role-alike meetings throughout the winter.

As you know, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT has been tracking Rhode Island's high school graduation rate for many years. We have seen steady progress, with Rhode Island's four-year high school graduation rate increasing from 70% in 2007 to 83% in 2015. However, we are still seeing large gaps between high school graduation rates for low-income students (76%) and higher-income students (93%). We also know that many students arrive at college without the necessary skills to succeed in higher education and require remedial courses. Among students in the Class of 2014, two-thirds (66%) of students enrolling at the Community College of Rhode Island needed remediation in reading, writing, or math.

As you look at the proposed revisions to the Secondary School Regulations, we hope you will consider three important issues:

1. Do these regulations ensure that **systems are in place to identify students who are struggling academically** and offer the types of individualized supports that students need to succeed?
2. Will these regulations ensure that schools offer **rigorous and personalized learning opportunities** that engage students in their own learning and allow them to dig deeper in their areas of interest and explore possible career paths?
3. Do these regulations ensure that students are getting a **meaningful diploma** when they graduate from Rhode Island schools and that they graduate with the skills they need to be successful?

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT was pleased to see that the proposed regulations include:

- **Early Warning Systems and Literacy and Numeracy Supports:** Strong and specific language requiring that districts identify students struggling in literacy and numeracy and provide needed support beginning no later than the sixth grade.
- **Opportunities for Personalization:** Clarification of the definition of a course to include state-approved career and technical programs, expanded learning opportunities, dual enrollment, experiential learning opportunities, and other non-traditional learning experiences and a focus on personalized pathways.

However, we are concerned that other changes proposed could “water down” our state’s high school diploma and result in students graduating without the skills they need to succeed.

For many years, we have spoken out about the need for high school graduation requirements that ensure that students are getting a meaningful diploma when they graduate from Rhode Island schools and that they graduate with the skills they need to be successful.

We continue to believe that there should be an **objective measure** of a student’s readiness to graduate and succeed in college and careers. This measure could be a standardized test, such as the *Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC)* or the SAT, or another measure of a student’s achievement of competency in core subject areas.

We are also concerned about proposals to allow students to substitute two required content-area courses (i.e., math, science, or social studies) to pursue a personalized learning goal. We would recommend that these regulations instead encourage districts to allow students to meet content area course requirements by pursuing personalized learning opportunities that are aligned to subject standards.

Students who do not take an adequate number of courses in English Language Arts, math, science, social studies, **and foreign languages** (or demonstrate a high level of competency in these content areas) will not meet the minimum requirements needed for entrance into many colleges, will be limited in their choice of major, and will not have the skills they need to succeed in college once they get there. We encourage and support opportunities for personalized learning but also want to make sure that we are not closing off opportunities for our students.

We hope to have the opportunity to continue working with all of you and with the Rhode Island Department of Education as you develop high school graduation requirements that:

- Support students;
- Encourage students to pursue their own goals and interests; and
- Ensure that students graduate with the skills they need to succeed.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.