



RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT
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Testimony Re: S-352, Planning for IDEA Essential Services During Emergencies

Senate Education Committee

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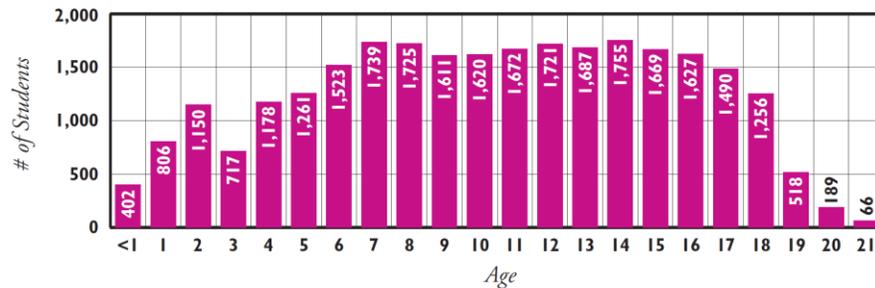
Rhode Island KIDS COUNT strongly supports S-352 which requires the Rhode Island Department of Education to develop and issue rules, regulations, and guidance for local education agencies regarding the delivery of essential special services to students age 3 to 21 with disabilities during a declared state of emergency.

We also recommend that the Executive Office of Health and Human Services be included in this bill as they are responsible for the Early Intervention program which provides IDEA services to children under age 3 who have developmental delays and disabilities.

The federal *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)*, passed in 1975, is a civil rights bill guaranteeing that children with developmental delays and disabilities are not excluded from public education and that special education services be designed and delivered to help children gain skills and knowledge.



Students Ages Birth to 21 Receiving Early Intervention and Special Education Services, Rhode Island, June 2019



Source: Rhode Island Executive Office of Health and Human Services, Center for Child and Family Health, Early Intervention enrollment, June 30, 2019. Rhode Island Department of Education, Office of Diverse Learners, Special Education Census, June 30, 2019. Includes parentally-placed students.

Approximately 17% of U.S. children ages 3 to 17 have a developmental delay or disability. Children in low-income families, children with low birthweight, and boys are more likely to have a delay or disability. Since passage of *IDEA*, outcomes for children with disabilities have steadily improved with more included in general education classrooms, reaching proficiency standards, graduating from high school, enrolling in post-secondary programs and becoming employed as adults. Despite these improvements, students with disabilities are still less likely to graduate from

high school and are more likely to be suspended than students without disabilities.

Special education services can be delivered to children who are not attending public school through telehealth options and in-person in settings outside a public school, including at home. In fact, pre-pandemic many young children with developmental delays and disabilities received their special education services at home or in community-based child care and Head Start programs. Some services for children ages 6-21 have also been delivered at home.

A survey conducted by the Rhode Island Parent Information Network in July 2020 found that **most students had access to some or all of the related services outlined in their IEP during the pandemic, but a substantial number of students did not receive any related services.** Asked about their child's access to related services like speech therapy, occupational therapy, behavioral and other supports, just over one-third (33.5%) of parents said they received "some" of these services. Nearly one-quarter (23.1%) said they did not receive any of the related services and supports outlined in their child's IEP.

We know there have been some improvements in the fall as schools reopened and delivery of IEP services to students was easier, but many children with developmental delays and disabilities remain at home as a "distance learning student." **Data from October 2020, show that only 38.5% of students ages 3 to 21 with developmental delays and disabilities were enrolled for in-person instruction while 43% of all students were receiving in-person instruction.**

It is important to develop a statewide plan and guidance for delivering essential IDEA services to children during an extended disaster or emergency. We know that children that receive early and effective special education services do better in school and life.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.