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Testimony Re: S-177 Relating to Education – Establishing a Class Size Maximum for Kindergarten through Grade 2

Senate Education Committee

March 8, 2023

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Rhode Island KIDS COUNT supports passage of S-177 to set a maximum class size of 20 for children in kindergarten through grade 2.

Small class size in the early grades has been identified as an effective strategy for raising achievement levels, particularly for low-income students and students of color. Small class sizes enable teachers to use a variety of strategies to promote learning in the early grades, including more individualized attention, small group instruction, and re-teaching of concepts using alternate methods.

As of 2021, only 40% of third graders in Rhode Island were meeting expectations for reading and only 25% were meeting expectations for math, down from 48% (reading) and from 36% (math) in 2019. Reading and math proficiency in third grade are key predictors of school success and high school graduation. Research shows that children who are not proficient readers by the end of third grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school than proficient readers.

Improving reading and math instruction during the early grades is essential for addressing this challenge and requires personalized attention to each student. Reducing class size can be an important strategy to improve reading instruction, particularly as educators have to make up for lost instructional time during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Education Commission of the States lists at least 27 states with laws that establish maximum class sizes or provide funding to incentivize smaller class sizes, particularly in kindergarten and the early elementary grades.

The Rhode Island Department of Education has established maximum class size of 20 (with a teacher and a teaching assistant) for RI Pre-K, meeting national research-based recommendations.

Thank you for considering legislation to establish a class size reduction strategy for K through Grade 2.