Testimony Re: Senate Bill 756 Reading and Math Specialists
Senate Education Committee
April 28, 2021
Paige Clausius-Parks, Senior Policy Analyst

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 the intent of Senate Bill 756. This bill would provide school districts with state reimbursements for hiring of school-based reading and math specialists.

Reading proficiency in third grade is a key predictor 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. In 2019, only 48% of third graders in Rhode Island met expectations for reading.

Students must rely on math to perform everyday activities, advance their education, and navigate today's technological world. Strong math skills predict higher college attendance and success rates and increase students' employability. In 2019, only 36% of third graders in Rhode Island met expectations for math. Interim assessments administered in Rhode Island in the Fall of 2020 suggest the pandemic significantly impacted student math skills, especially for students in grades two through seven.

Lost instruction time caused by school closures, the challenges of distance learning, and the social-emotional stresses of the pandemic are expected to result in significant loss of academic progress, especially among low-income students, Multilingual Learners, students with disabilities, and Black and Latino students.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT supports efforts to increase the capacity of schools to provide culturally relevant, high-quality curriculum and instructional supports including the hiring of educators with special training to help students struggling in reading and math.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.