

RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT
ONE UNION STATION
PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND 02903
401/351-9400 • 401/351-1758 (FAX)

Testimony Re: House Bill 5200, Article 8 Relating to Education
House Finance Committee
March 1, 2023
Stephanie Geller, Deputy Director

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today.

Over the years, Rhode Island has taken a number of steps to ensure that all children have access to the high-quality education they need to succeed in school, career, and life. In 2010, the General Assembly enacted the state's first education funding formula which was based on five key principles – equity, adequacy, predictability, accountability, and efficiency. We thank the General Assembly leadership and the House Finance Committee for all of your hard work to establish the funding formula through legislation, to ensure that it is fully funded, and to seek improvements to the formula to better meet the needs of Rhode Island students.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to voice its support for two key elements of Article 8 of the proposed budget relating to education -- the proposal to increase the student success factor from 40% to 42% to better meet the needs of students in low-income families and the proposal to create a new component of the education funding formula to support students experiencing homelessness.

Meeting the Education Needs of Low-Income Students

On average, economically disadvantaged students have lower levels of academic achievement than their peers, a gap that has not narrowed in the past 50 years, and when poverty is concentrated in a school -- that is, when a high percentage (50-60% or more) of students in a school come from low-income households -- the impact on performance is compounded. In response, according to FutureEd at the Georgetown University McCourt School of Public Policy, 41 states have policies that specify additional dollars for students living in poverty and 22 provide additional funding for districts with concentrated poverty.

Rhode Island's education funding formula includes two important elements that support students in low-income families and communities.

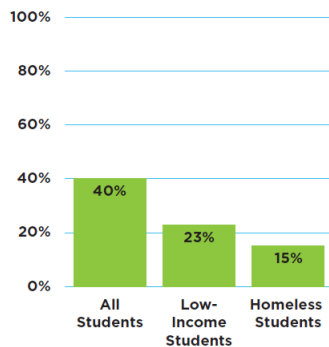
1. The education funding formula provides a core amount of funding per student, and for low-income students a **student success factor** equal to 40% of this core amount is added, recognizing that it costs more to education a high-need student from a low-income family.
2. The funding that comes from the state versus the local community is based on **local fiscal capacity (i.e., the property tax base) and concentrated poverty**, so the state share is higher in low-income communities.

Article 8 of the Governor’s proposed budget includes a proposal to increase the student success factor from 40% to 42%. We support this proposal, and in fact we think the student success factor should likely be higher, given the additional needs of low-income students and studies that show that such students may require as much as 2-3 times more funding. **We also recommend an increase in the state portion of funding to support communities like Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket that have limited fiscal capacity so they are not forced to bear this additional cost.**

Children Experiencing Homelessness

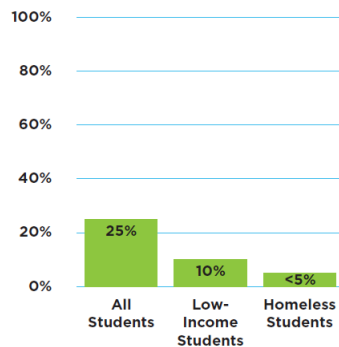
The federal *McKenney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act* defines a child as homeless if they do not have a “fixed, regular and adequate night-time residence” and includes children who are doubled up with other families, living in hotels or motels, living in shelters, or unsheltered. This *Act* also requires that states identify homeless children, allow them to enroll in school even if they lack required documents, allow them to stay in their “home school,” provide transportation when needed, and provide access to all services and programs that the child is eligible for, including preschool, before- and after-school care, school meals, and services for Multilingual Learners/English Learners. While all schools are required to provide these services, not all schools receive the funding they need to do so.

Third Graders Meeting Expectations on the RICAS English Language Arts Assessment, Rhode Island, 2020-2021 School Year



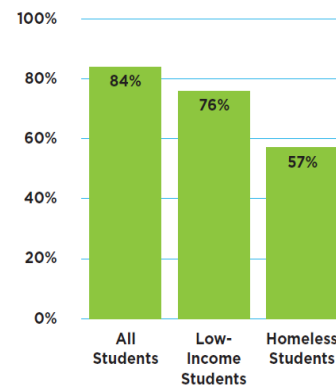
Source: Rhode Island Department of Education. *Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS)*, 2020-2021 school year. Student performance may have been influenced by disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Third Graders Meeting Expectations on the RICAS Math Assessment, Rhode Island, 2020-2021 School Year



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education. *Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS)*, 2020-2021 school year. Student performance may have been influenced by disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Class of 2020 Four-Year High School Graduation Rates, Rhode Island



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education. Class of 2020.

Homeless children are more likely to change schools, be chronically absent from school, and have lower academic achievement than children who have housing. Rhode Island data is now available that shows these stark educational disparities.

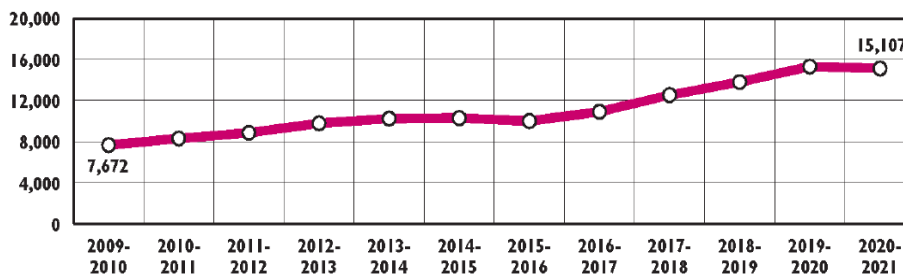
Students experiencing homelessness need more support than other students, even more support than other low-income students. For this reason, **we support the Governor’s proposal to create a new component of the education funding formula to support students experiencing homelessness.**

During the 2020-2021 school year, Rhode Island public school personnel identified 1,019 students as homeless. This is most certainly an undercount, but these students were identified in almost every school district in the state. The language in Article 8 states that the amount to support homeless students beyond the core-instruction amount shall be determined by multiplying a factor of 25% by the core instruction per-pupil amount and applying that amount for each resident child whose family is experiencing homelessness. We would also **request that the language of this Article be amended to include all students experiencing homelessness, including not only children in homeless families but also unaccompanied homeless youth.**

Multilingual Learners (MLLs)

Just this past Monday, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT released a new *Issue Brief on Multilingual Learners in Rhode Island* that focused on the increase in the number of Multilingual Learners in Rhode Island, the assets and needs of these students, and how we can better support these students' success.

**Multilingual Learners/English Learners, Rhode Island,
2009-2010 Through 2020-2021 School Years**



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2009-2010 through 2020-2021 school years.

During the 2020-2021 school year, there were 15,107 MLL students in Rhode Island, representing 11% of all students enrolled in public school from preschool through grade 12. **The number of MLL students nearly doubled from the 2009-2010 to 2020-2021 school year.**

Nationally, states that have seen strong outcomes from their school funding reforms have implemented strategies that provide continuity and flexibility in funding so school districts can invest in high-quality evidence-based programs that deliver results, so we would also ask that you also consider including a **separate student success factor for MLLs** in our state's education funding formula, so we can better meet the needs of this important and growing group of students.

Thank you for all of your hard work to establish the funding formula through legislation, to ensure that it is fully funded, and to seek improvements to the formula to better meet the needs of Rhode Island students and thank you for the opportunity to testify today.