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Testimony Re: House Bill 7123 Related to Elementary and Secondary Education FY2023 Budget
Senate Finance Committee
March 24, 2022
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Mr. Chairman 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 several key elements of the proposed budget relating to education.

Education Funding Formula

We were pleased to see that the Governor’s proposed budget fully funds Year 12 of the implementation of the education funding formula that was enacted by the General Assembly in 2010. We thank the General Assembly leadership and the Senate Finance Committee for all of your hard work to establish the funding formula through legislation and to ensure that it is fully funded.

Multilingual Learners (MLLs)

In recent 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. These key steps included instituting an education funding formula that is based on five key principles – equity, adequacy, predictability, accountability, and efficiency and later improving this funding formula to provide additional funds to support the additional needs of MLL/EL students, although more support is needed in this area.



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2009-2010 through 2019-2020 school years.

The demographics of students in Rhode Island public schools has become increasingly diverse since the adoption of the education funding formula in 2010. In the 2019-2020 school year in Rhode Island, MLLs/ELs were 11%

(15,306) of total students, a two-fold increase from the 2009-2010 school year when there were 7,642 MLLs/ELs. Multilingual students are an incredible asset to all of Rhode Island. However, research shows that we have much work to do to ensure that these students have what they need to succeed.

There are large and unacceptable disparities in academic outcomes by language status. In Rhode Island in 2021, 12% of third-grade MLLs/ELs met expectations in reading compared to 45% of Non-Multilingual Learners, and 6% of third-grade MLLs/ELs students met expectations in math compared to 28% of Non-Multilingual Learners on the *Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS)*. Multilingual Learners need additional supports in order to achieve proficiency in reading and math.

We support the proposed investment in a new position at the Rhode Island Department of Education to develop and train educators in model practices for teaching MLL/ELs and \$5 million for the MLL categorical fund as outlined in the Governor's proposed budget and strongly believe that even more funding and resources are needed to support the needs of Multilingual Learners.

College and Career Readiness

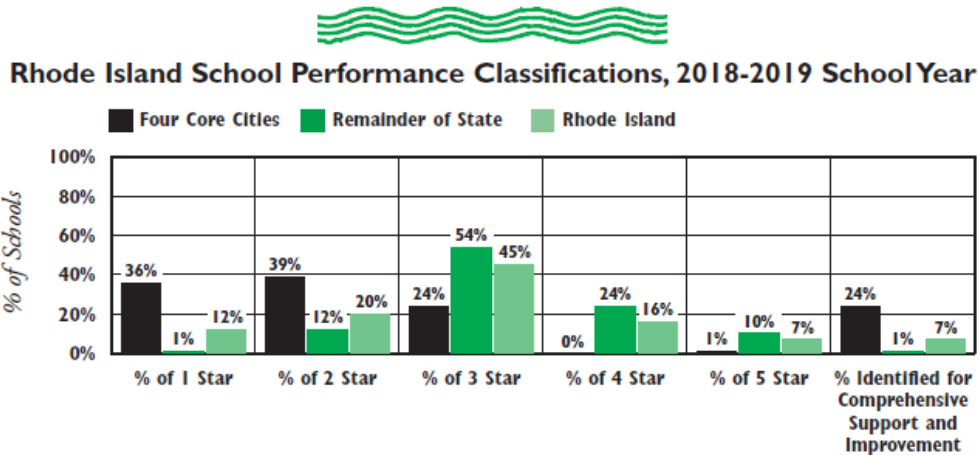
Between 2019 and 2029, jobs requiring a postsecondary degree or certificate are projected to grow faster than jobs requiring less education. However, many students, especially low-income students face barriers to college enrollment and success. States can help address barriers and improve college access by ensuring that all students have access to advanced coursework, including Advanced Placement (AP) courses and dual and concurrent enrollment courses. The Governor's budget includes important proposed investments that will help increase college readiness for Rhode Island students including \$2.3 million from tuition savings for the **Dual/Concurrent Enrollment Initiative** to allow more students to earn college credit at their high school or at state public higher education institutions at no cost to students or families.

We urge you to continue funding the Dual/Concurrent Enrollment Initiative at levels that make these engaging and rigorous advanced courses available to all students, especially low-income students and students of color who attend school in the urban core and may especially benefit from these opportunities that will help prepare them for success in college and careers.

Support of Low-Performing Schools

The U.S. Department of Education approved Rhode Island's new accountability system under the *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)* in 2018. The new system is structured to promote collective responsibility for continuous improvement at all levels of education through the use of measurements to differentiate school performance, a school classification system, and state, district and school report cards.

The accountability system uses a five-star rating system to summarize overall school performance. Schools with five-star ratings have strong performance in all the indicators and no low-performing student subgroups. Schools with one-star ratings are low performing schools in multiple indicators.



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, School and District Report Cards, 2018-2019 school year.

In Rhode Island in the 2018-2019 school year, 35 schools (12%) were given a one-star rating, 59 schools (20%) were given a two-star rating, 134 schools (45%) were given a three-star rating, 49 schools (16%) were given a four-star rating, and 22 schools (7%) were given a five-star rating. Seven percent of schools in Rhode Island are identified as in need of Comprehensive Support and Improvement, and 17 of these 22 schools were located in the four core cities – Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket.

We support the Governor’s proposal to create a new position at RIDE to support persistently low performing schools.

Child Opportunity Zones

In Rhode Island, Child Opportunity Zones (COZs) sustain and expand the community school model which aims to improve the academic outcomes of students by creating a partnership between school, families, and community partners. Community schools integrate academic, health, and social services to provide a range of supports and opportunities to students and families. Community schools are coordinated by a school or community agency. In Rhode Island, COZs serve nearly 10,000 children and more than 8,000 adults each year.

Community schools are a powerful equity strategy because they are designed to identify and address inequitable practices, disrupt the systems that perpetuate educational and economic disparities, and increase opportunities for all students through partnerships with organizations that impact children. Many community schools have the existing infrastructure that enabled them to mobilize support services and connect with students and families quickly during the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent school closures.

We support the Governor’s proposed investment of \$395,000 to support Child Opportunity Zones. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.