

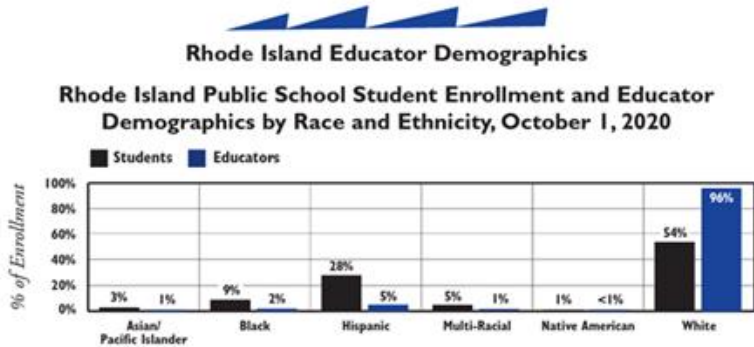


Testimony Re: House Bill 5421: An Act Relating to Education
House Education Committee
March 1, 2023
Jessica Vega, Senior Policy Analyst



Chairperson 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 House Bill 5421 and thank Representative Giraldo for sponsoring this bill and Chairman McNamara and Representatives Alzate, Morales, Biah, Henries, Diaz, Abney, Hull, and Sanchez for co-sponsoring. This bill would require that a written report with concrete proposals to recruit and retain educators from diverse and traditionally underrepresented backgrounds be issued and submitted to the Governor, Speaker of the House, Senate President, and Chairs of the House and Senate Education Committees by January 1, 2024. Such a report would be an important follow-up to the work done by the House Commission on Persons of Color in Education and lay the foundation for supporting the recruitment and retention of a diverse pool of educators, a critical step to improving educational outcomes for Children and Students of Color in Rhode Island. We ask that you also consider broadening the bill language to include plans to recruit and retain diverse early educators to work in community-based programs with young children from infancy through kindergarten entry.

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



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, State Report Card, 2020-2021 school year. Hispanic educators may be included in any race category. Educator percentages based on the total number of educators who reported race/ethnicity.

Rhode Island’s student population is increasingly diverse, yet only a small fraction of Rhode Island teachers are Teachers of Color. In October 2020, 96% (12,281) of Rhode Island public school educators identified as white, 5% (514) as Hispanic, 2% (292) as Black, 1% (134) as Asian/Pacific Islander, 1% (116) as multi-Racial, and less than 1% (30) as Native American. Educators who work with young children are much more likely to be racially and ethnically diverse than K-12 educators, but most are paid low wages, and some have not earned an educational credential. In 2019, a state survey found that 18% of preschool classroom

teachers, 25% of infant/toddler teachers, 57% of home visitors, and 16% of Early Intervention staff were People of Color. We know from child care licensing data that at least 70% of family child care providers are People of Color with many speaking Spanish as their primary language.

Educators of Color benefit all students, especially Students of Color. When Educators of Color teach Students of Color, they demonstrate long-term academic achievement, including higher reading and math test scores, decreased likelihood of dropping out of high school, increased likelihood of going to college, and increased social and emotional development.

In our most recent *Issue Brief: Racial and Ethnic Disparities in K-16 Education in Rhode Island*, we identify several steps the state can take to recruit and retain more Educators of Color. For example, the test-based admission requirement for entry into Rhode Island's teacher preparation programs disqualifies many candidates and disproportionately impacts People of Color. In Rhode Island, only 43% of test takers pass the elementary licensure test (*Praxis*) on their first attempt. Excluding Brown University, less than one-third of Test Takers of Color pass on their first attempt.

Thirty states, not including Rhode Island, have state-funded Grow-Your-Own programs to recruit high school students, paraprofessionals, and community members to become teachers. Forty states, including Connecticut and Massachusetts, have at least one financial program to recruit teachers to underserved schools or shortage areas. Half of the states in the U.S. have legislative initiatives to encourage People of Color to enter the teacher pipeline. Currently, Rhode Island is one of only four states that does not offer any financial incentives (loan forgiveness, scholarships, and bonuses) to help recruit and retain Teachers of Color, teachers in shortage areas, or teachers willing to work in underserved areas. The Governor's FY 2024 budget proposal to expand the Wavemaker scholarship to teachers is one important step, but we need to do more.

This bill is an opportunity to create a blueprint for the steps Rhode Island needs to take to support early childhood educator and K-12 Educators of Color to enroll and succeed in teacher preparation programs and limit unnecessary barriers to the profession. Maintaining and expanding the diversity of Rhode Island's education workforce, from early childhood through high school, will help ensure access to high-quality education, increase cultural competencies, reduce significant disparities in suspension rates, improve high school graduation and college enrollment rates, and decrease barriers between parents, communities, and schools.

Thank you for the leadership the General Assembly has shown on this issue and for the opportunity to testify today.