



RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT

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Testimony Re: House Bill 7020 Transparency in Arts Education Access and Proficiency Act

House Education Committee

January 24, 2024

Stephanie Geller, Deputy Director

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT supports House Bill 7020, the *Transparency in Arts Education Access and Proficiency Act*. We would like to thank Representative Brien for sponsoring this bill and Representatives Baginski, Craven, Corvese, Casimiro, Noret, Newberry, and Finkelman for co-sponsoring. This bill would support arts education at the middle and high school levels by mandating that each school submit yearly reports on accessibility and enrollment in arts education courses.

The *Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Factbook* provides a statistical portrait of the status of Rhode Island's children and youth and is an important tool for planning and action by community leaders, policy makers, advocates, and others working toward changes that will improve the quality of life for all children. For years, our Factbook has included information about students' reading and math skills, key skills important for success in college, careers, and life.

This year, we will be adding two new education indicators, one on Arts Education and one on Science Skills. The indicator on Arts Education will include information from a newly available [Rhode Island Arts Education Data Dashboard](#) that includes information on student enrollment in music, visual arts, theater, dance, and media arts courses. The indicator on Science Skills will include information on the results of the *Next Generation Science Assessment* which is aligned with Rhode Island's new Next Generation Science Standards and is given to students in grades 5, 8, and 11.

Studies have shown that offering more music, art, and theater is associated with lower chronic absenteeism rates, higher academic achievement, an increase in civic engagement, lower high school dropout rates, and more workforce opportunities. Having access to a high-quality science curriculum is an important part of increasing equitable access to a rigorous education that prepares every student for college and careers. We have been interested in adding these two new indicators for some time and have received requests for them from partners in government and in the community.

We are just beginning to develop these new indicators as we plan for our 30th anniversary release of the *2024 Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Factbook* on May 6, 2024. However, we know that our new Arts Education indicator will highlight the arts requirements contained in Rhode Island's Basic Education Program (BEP), which requires that elementary and middle school students have access to classes in visual arts and design and music and that high school students

have the opportunity to participate in multiple levels of coursework in visual arts and design and at least one performing art.

We anticipate that further review of this data will show that many schools and districts are not in compliance with the BEP requirement, that access to the arts differs by district and school, and that schools serving students in low-income families and Students of Color (and with less funding) likely have less access to these courses.

As we work together to improve our state's education outcomes, we need to consider how providing equitable access to the arts in our schools can help lower chronic absence rates, engage more students, improve achievement, and lower high school dropout rates. We look forward to sharing more data and information on this topic as we prepare this new indicator and invite this committee to contact us if we can provide any other information on this topic.

Thank you for investing in the education of Rhode Island's children and for the opportunity to provide this testimony.