



**RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT**  
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**Testimony Re: House Bill 5398, An Act Relating To Education --  
The Education Equity And Property Tax Relief Act  
House Finance Committee  
May 15, 2025  
Kelsey Bala, Senior Policy Associate**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. We would like to thank Representative Felix for sponsoring this important bill and Representatives Cruz, Morales, Batista, Hull, Tanzi, J. Lombardi, Kislak, Potter, and Furtado for co-sponsoring. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to voice its support for House Bill 5398, which would revise the calculation for the student success factor in the education-aid formula by adding an additional multiplier of twenty-five percent (25%) for each resident child who is identified as a multilingual learner as well as for each resident child whose family income is below one hundred eighty-five percent (185%) of the federal poverty guidelines.

Over the years, Rhode Island has taken several 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 Finance Committee for all 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 has made meaningful progress to ensure all children receive a high-quality education and to elevate multilingualism as an asset. Key actions include incorporating Multilingual Learner (MLL) funding into the state's core education funding formula, updating MLL regulations for the first time in 17 years to align with federal standards—emphasizing the expansion of dual language programs—and adopting the Seal of Biliteracy. This seal allows high school students who earn a Silver or Gold designation to receive college credit toward a minor or major in a world language at Rhode Island's public colleges and universities.

During the 2023-2024 school year in Rhode Island, MLL students were 14% (19,674) of the total student population. **Although, the potential for these students is endless, they do require extra supports.** MLLs/ELs are the fastest-growing groups of students in large urban districts and many smaller cities and suburban communities. In 2024, 19% of third-grade MLL/EL students met expectations in math, compared to 43% of non-MLL students, and 14% met expectations in English language arts on the *Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS)*, compared to 42% of non-MLL students. In addition, the overall four-year high school graduation rate for the Class of 2024 was 84%, while the rate for MLLs/ELs was only 74%.

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### **Meeting the Education Needs of Low-Income Students**

On average, low-income 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.

**Article 7 of the Governor's proposed FY 2026 budget included a proposal to continue these improvements** by increasing the student success factor from 40% to 43% to better meet the needs of students in low-income families who live in Rhode Island communities with the highest concentration of poverty (more than 65% of students).

**In our testimony on this budget article, we indicated our support for this measure but also noted that** we would recommend that the student success factor should be even higher, given the additional needs of low-income students and evidence from studies that show such students may require as much as 2-3 times more funding.

Given the additional needs of multilingual learners and those of low-income students, we support amending the state's education funding formula to ensure that districts receive the aid they need for their most vulnerable students to thrive. **It is time to take a fresh look at the state's education funding formula to ensure that high-need districts receive the aid they need and to ensure that we are adequately funding transportation, special education, early childhood, and other needs.**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.