

Cumberland School Department

Office of the Superintendent & Cumberland School Committee

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RI RELAY 711

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April 9, 2026

Dear Governor McKee:

We are writing to express our strong support for the recommendations put forward by the Blue Ribbon Commission in its report, *Equalizing Opportunity: Creating a Fair and Transparent Funding System for Rhode Island's Public Schools*, prepared with research support from the Annenberg Institute.

The Commission's work represents a serious, thoughtful effort to modernize Rhode Island's school funding system. It acknowledges the progress made under the current formula while clearly laying out where the system is no longer meeting the needs of students, districts, or municipalities. Most importantly, it offers a practical path forward.

For too long, our funding system has excluded major cost drivers—transportation, building maintenance, early childhood services, and certain special education expenses—leaving districts to absorb significant financial pressure outside the formula. The Commission's recommendation to establish a comprehensive Core Education Amount better reflects the true cost of educating students today.

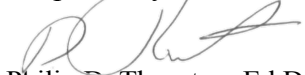
Equally important is the proposal to more precisely align funding with student need. Strengthening weights for economically disadvantaged students, multilingual learners, students with disabilities, and high-cost CTE programs is not about spending more for the sake of spending more; it is about investing where the needs are greatest and ensuring fairness across communities.

Additionally, the emphasis on fiscal transparency, strategic planning, and accountability strengthens public trust. Rhode Islanders deserve to know not only how much we invest in education, but how those dollars are connected to student outcomes.

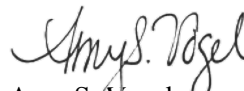
The Commission has provided you with a balanced framework that is student-centered, transparent, and fiscally responsible. Moving these recommendations forward would send a clear signal that Rhode Island is serious about building a world-class public education system and creating long-term economic opportunity for our state.

I urge you to give this report the careful consideration it deserves and to take action to modernize Rhode Island's education funding system.

Respectfully,



Philip D. Thornton, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools



Amy S. Vogel
School Committee Chairperson

CC: David Cicilline & Nora Gordon, Commission Co-chairs, RI Foundation

[Representative Mia Ackerman](#), [Representative Robert Phillips](#), [Representative Alex Marszalkowski](#), [Representative Brandon Voas](#), [Senator Ryan Pearson](#), & [Senator Brian Thompson](#)
Cumberland Town Council

Executive Summary

Investing in public education is essential to Rhode Island's future, both for the success of its children and the long-term strength of its economy. Research demonstrates that education investments yield significant long-term economic returns, yet inequitable funding practices have constrained the state's potential. Building a world-class education system is fundamental to Rhode Island's shared prosperity.

The Blue Ribbon Commission brought together diverse leading voices across the state to build a consensus vision for a new state funding system. Drawing on evidence and best practice informed by national experts and local partners, the Commission presents a set of recommendations to make the way Rhode Island funds public education more fair, transparent, and effective.

Members of the Blue Ribbon Commission:

• **David Cicilline**

Rhode Island Foundation, Commission Co-Chair

• **Nora Gordon**

Georgetown University, Commission Co-Chair

• **Rania Aghia**

Rhode Island Teachers of English Language Learners

• **Mary K. Barden**

National Education Association Rhode Island

• **Marcela Betancur**

Latino Policy Institute

• **Maribeth Calabro**

RI Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals

• **Peter Chung**

Young Voices

• **Chiara Deltito-Sharrott**

Rhode Island League of Charter Public Schools

• **Michael DiBiase**

Rhode Island Public Expenditure Council

• **Timothy C. Duffy**

Rhode Island Association of School Committees

• **Michael D. Hassell**

Rhode Island Association of School Principals

• **Lisa A. Hildebrand**

RI Association for the Education of Young Children

• **John Kelly**

Meeting Street

• **Weayonnoh Nelson-Davies**

Economic Progress Institute

• **Jeannine Nota-Masse**

Rhode Island School Superintendents Association

• **Paige Parks**

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT

• **Randy R. Rossi**

Rhode Island League of Cities and Towns

• **Ramona Santos Torres**

Parents Leading for Educational Equity

The Blue Ribbon Commission met eight times between Winter 2024 and Fall 2025 and was facilitated by the Annenberg Institute at Brown University. At their meetings, the Commission heard from national, regional, and state experts and deliberated on implications for Rhode Island's education funding system. To ensure broad and diverse input, the Annenberg Institute conducted over 45 interviews with local stakeholders and national experts and convened two working groups: a Youth Working Group of 14 students from eight districts, and an Accountability Working Group of national school finance and accountability experts. This report presents the Commission's recommendations.

The Commission built its proposal on a shared vision supported by seven core guiding principles. The system must be sufficient to fully support the needs of all students, and student-centered to ensure dollars follow students. It must be comprehensive, covering a broader range of district costs, and predictable yet flexible, offering stability while remaining responsive to unforeseen needs. The system should result in equitable fiscal burden across the state, aligning local contributions with local fiscal capacity, and be transparent, timely, and accountable to deliver improved educational results.

The Commission recommends four core shifts in how Rhode Island's education funding system works:

01

Account for the full cost of education in the funding system and share those costs more equitably.

02

Tailor costs to student needs more directly.

03

Require local contributions according to a municipality's ability to pay.

04

Increase fiscal responsibility, reporting, and strategic management.

These recommendations represent a consensus vision from the Commission, offering an interconnected framework designed to fundamentally clarify and equitably distribute the essential costs of public education between the state and its municipalities.

For more information:

<https://rifoundation.org/news/equalizing-opportunity-creating-a-fair-and-transparent-funding-system-for-rhode-islands-public-schools>