



Testimony in Support

H8351 - The Rhode Island Education Funding & Accountability Act

April 28, 2026

The Latino Policy Institute (LPI) strongly supports H8351, the Rhode Island Education Funding and Accountability Act. LPI was a participant in the Rhode Island Foundation Blue Ribbon Commission, and fifteen years ago, our former Executive Director was among the community stakeholders who helped shape Rhode Island's current education funding formula. That work reflected a shared commitment to equity, transparency, and adequacy in school funding. Today, this legislation represents an important evolution of that vision—building on what was created and responding to the needs we now know more clearly.

This legislation represents a critical step toward building a more equitable, transparent, and student-centered education funding system, one that more accurately reflects the needs of Rhode Island's diverse student population.

For more than a decade, LPI has documented persistent and alarming disparities in educational outcomes for Latino students in Rhode Island. In our 2013 report, ***Latino Students in Rhode Island: A Review of Local and National Performance***, we found that Rhode Island has some of the largest Latino-White achievement gaps in the nation, particularly in 4th- and 8th-grade mathematics. Even more concerning, Latino students in Rhode Island consistently **underperform compared to Latino students nationally**, often by as much as half to a full grade level.

These disparities are not incidental. They are structural. This bill directly addresses several of the root causes LPI has identified:

A Student-Centered and Needs-Based Funding Formula

The proposed formula, particularly the inclusion of a student success factor (50% weight for economically disadvantaged students) and tiered supports for multilingual learners, is essential. Our research shows that ***economic disparities are a major driver of achievement gaps—Latino median household income in Rhode Island is roughly half that of White households***. By allocating resources based on student need, this bill moves Rhode Island closer to true equity rather than equal distribution.

Building on Recent Investments in Multilingual Learners (MLLs)

LPI applauds the General Assembly's recent investments to strengthen support for multilingual learners. The integration of MLL students into the core funding formula, moving beyond categorical funding, is a pivotal shift toward more equitable and sustainable resource allocation.

Recent changes include a 20% student success factor for MLL students in the lowest-performing categories, replacing the previous 15% weight, and ensuring that funding better reflects the intensity of need. Importantly, this structure allows state aid for this population to grow automatically over time. Additionally, the allocation of \$6.6 million in new funding for MLL students demonstrates a strong commitment to addressing longstanding gaps.

This bill builds on that momentum by embedding multilingual learner supports directly into the funding formula through tiered weights based on language proficiency. *This is critical.* As our research shows, approximately **75% of English Language Learners in Rhode Island are Latino, and Rhode Island ranks among the lowest-performing states for ELL achievement.** MLL investment is not a side issue—it is central to improving outcomes statewide.

Transparency and Accountability

LPI strongly supports the bill's emphasis on transparency, including the requirement for public reporting, a statewide dashboard, and linking expenditures to student outcomes. Historically, it has been difficult to track how funding decisions impact student performance, particularly for Latino and MLL students. This legislation creates the infrastructure needed to hold systems accountable and to make data-informed decisions.

Addressing Systemic Inequities Across Districts

Our research highlights that Latino achievement gaps in Rhode Island are particularly pronounced in urban districts. This bill's approach, grounded in equitable municipal contributions based on ability to pay and a normalized statewide funding structure, helps mitigate disparities driven by local wealth differences. This is essential to ensuring that where a student lives does not determine the quality of their education.

Alignment with Longstanding Recommendations

This legislation reflects many of LPI's longstanding recommendations, including:

- Prioritizing equity in state education policy
- Strengthening supports for multilingual learners
- Investing more resources in high-need, urban districts
- Creating systems that link funding to student outcomes

While this bill is a strong step forward, we encourage continued attention to complementary strategies identified in our research, such as increasing the diversity of the educator workforce, strengthening culturally responsive teaching practices, and investing in high-quality instruction in urban schools.

Rhode Island cannot close its achievement gaps without fundamentally rethinking how it funds education. H8351 does exactly that. It replaces outdated structures with a transparent, equitable, and responsive system that meets student needs. For Latino students—and for all students—this bill represents an opportunity to move from a system that perpetuates disparities to one that actively works to eliminate them.

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