



RIPEC

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Representative Marvin L. Abney
Chair, House Committee on Finance
Room 35
Rhode Island State House
Providence, RI 02903

April 28, 2026

RE: House Bill 8351—Relating to Education—The Rhode Island Education Funding and Accountability Act

Dear Chairperson Abney,

I am writing on behalf of the Rhode Island Public Expenditure Council (RIPEC) in strong support of House Bill 8351—Relating to Education—The Rhode Island Education Funding and Accountability Act. The legislation would totally revise and revamp the state's school funding formula for K-12 education.

I had the privilege of serving as a member of the Blue Ribbon Commission, a diverse group of education and community leaders convened by the Rhode Island Foundation and guided by the Annenberg Institute at Brown University. Over the course of more than a year, our Commission worked to develop a consensus set of recommendations for a fair, equitable, and adequate school funding system for Rhode Island. This legislation reflects those recommendations.

RIPEC has long been involved in analysis and reporting on Rhode Island's system for funding K-12 education. In an April 2022 report on the state's funding formula after ten years, RIPEC found that stubborn funding inequities among school districts remained despite a large increase in state

investment and redistribution of state funding to needier districts.¹ Analyzing legislative changes to the funding formula contained in the fiscal year (FY) 2024 state budget, RIPEC reported that the changes reversed progress made toward more equitable funding, and recommended comprehensive reform of the funding formula.² More recently, finding that local contributions to K-12 education grew much more slowly than state aid, RIPEC recommended reforming the funding formula to better direct state resources toward urban districts while also requiring meaningful contributions from local governments.³

We must now recognize that the state’s funding formula is fundamentally broken and beyond repair. The current financing system fails to deliver adequate and equitable funding for our neediest districts, fails to hold cities and town responsible for meeting the needs of their schools, and fails to provide accountability that funding dollars are used efficiently and effectively.

Incorporating best practices from around the country, House Bill 8351 offers a path forward built on a comprehensive set of interconnected changes:

1. Accounting for the full cost of education and sharing those costs more equitably by expanding the formula to include costs such as transportation, building maintenance, and early childhood screening, while shifting unpredictable, high-cost expenses to the state.
2. Tailoring instructional costs to student needs more directly by increasing funding for economically disadvantaged students, multilingual learners, students with disabilities, and students in high-cost career and technical education programs.
3. Ensuring greater predictability for municipalities by requiring local contributions based on a community’s ability to pay, creating consistency and fairness.
4. Requiring transparency and strategic management by introducing accountability measures that tie spending to educational outcomes, including robust reporting and a tiered system of support for districts.

The members of the Commission did not agree on every detail from the start. But through honest conversation and a shared commitment to Rhode Island’s children, we arrived at a consensus vision. That consensus is one of this legislation’s greatest strengths. I stand behind these recommendations alongside my fellow Commission members

¹ RIPEC, [“Rhode Island’s Funding Formula After Years: Education Finance in the Ocean State,”](#) April 2022.

² RIPEC, [“Rhode Island’s Funding Formula Revised: RIPEC Analyzes Changes to State Education Aid in the Enacted Fiscal Year 2024 Budget,”](#) July 2023.

³ RIPEC, [Rhode Island’s State and Local Tax Shift: Local School Funding Lags State Aid Amid Exploding Property Values and Growing Taxpayer Disparities,”](#) March 2025.

I strongly urge that the Finance Committee advance HB 8351 and take this important step toward building a school funding system that is fair, transparent, and effective.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Michael DiBiase". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Michael DiBiase
President & CEO
Rhode Island Public Expenditure Council

RIPEC is a nonpartisan and nonprofit public policy research organization dedicated to providing objective research and analysis that addresses the critical challenges surrounding public finance and economic opportunity in Rhode Island.