



Testimony Re: House Bill 8351 Re: The Rhode Island Education Funding and Accountability Act
House Finance Committee
April 28, 2026
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Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. We would also like to thank Representative McNamara for sponsoring this important bill and Representatives Cortvriend, Ackerman, Tanzi, Kislak, Ajello, Furtado, J. Brien, Sanchez, and Phillips for co-sponsoring. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is in strong support of House Bill 8351, which would establish the *Rhode Island Education Funding and Accountability Act* and would include a revised and revamped formula for funding all levels of public education in Rhode Island.

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**. We thank the General Assembly leadership and the Finance Committee for all your hard work to establish the education 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. 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. More recent improvements included important changes in how the needs of Multilingual Learners are addressed, which helped our state improve its grade for equity in funding in the Education Law Center's 2025 [Making the Grade report](#).

However, we think that now is the time to look at and revise the entire funding formula rather than just tinkering around the edges. Earlier this year, the Blue Ribbon Commission, organized by the Rhode Island Foundation, released a report - [Equalizing Opportunity: Creating a Fair and Transparent Funding System for Rhode Island's Public Schools](#). I served on this Commission, and we are grateful that House Bill 8351 will codify the strong recommendations of the report in its entirety.

Rhode Island's original funding formula, enacted over 15 years ago, needs to be modernized to address the current state of need. Currently,

the amount invested in a child's education varies greatly based on where they live, not what they need to succeed, which creates inequity. Investing in education yields significant economic returns not only for our students but for our state as a whole. Under the proposed new formula, more costs will be shifted to the state from municipalities, thus directing more dollars directly to educational outcomes and removing some of the costs that municipalities need to plan for.

H-8351 will make several important shifts in the state's funding formula, including:

- Accounting for the full cost of education in the funding system and sharing those costs more equitably.
- Tailoring educational costs per student more directly.
- Requiring local contributions in line with a municipality's ability to pay.
- Increasing fiscal responsibility, reporting, and strategic management - linking spending to student outcomes.

Meeting the Education Needs of Low-Income Students

Children in poverty are more likely to attend schools that lack resources and have fewer opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities. And as a result, 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. Currently, [44 states](#) and D.C. have policies that provide increased funding for low-income students, whether through additional dollars for students living in poverty or by additional funding for districts with concentrated poverty. Of these, 19 provide increased funding both for individual students from low-income households and based on the concentration of low-income students in the district. Studies suggest that show such students may require as much as 2-3 times more funding to meet their additional needs.

The new formula that would be established through H-8351 would increase the Student Success Factor weight from 40% to 50% to support economically disadvantaged students. It also recommends a few strategies for accurately identifying these students, including using the state's income tax system or direct certification based on eligibility for a broad set of public benefits (e.g., Medicaid, SNAP, etc.).

Fair and Equitable Funding

Students who are economically disadvantaged, Multilingual Learners, or have disabilities require more support to succeed and are currently not receiving adequate resources. The proposed funding formula strategically directs resources to those students who need them most. The proposed core educational amount more accurately captures the true costs of educating our children – an area where the current core instructional amount falls short.

Under our current funding formula, costs like transportation, building upkeep, and early childhood screening fall entirely on municipalities, regardless of their ability to pay, which diverts funding from other needed areas of education. H-8351 would shift those costs to the state, offering relief to municipalities so they can better plan and predict their total educational costs each year. Under the current system, school administrators often need to make major budget decisions without knowing what funding they will receive from the state, which makes long-term planning nearly

impossible. The proposed structure will ensure predictable, comprehensive, and sufficient funding.

H-8351 also makes the state responsible for creating and funding a system to ensure **universal early childhood screening for all children ages 3-5**. The state will also bear the cost of transportation for students who need to be transported across districts, including those in Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs, foster care, and students experiencing homelessness.

Additional enhancements include the integration of funding for students with disabilities directly into the funding formula using a tiered weight system, rather than relying just on categorical funds. Funding for Multilingual Learners will be set on a tiered weight system (ranging from a 60% weight to a 10% weight) based on English proficiency levels rather than the current flat rate structure.

Year after year, we consistently increase education aid, but it is being funneled through a funding structure that no longer works to meet the needs of Rhode Island students. This legislation will create a funding system where those dollars are maximized and spent efficiently in directly supporting students. Full implementation of this legislation is designed to be implemented in a phased, fiscally responsible way and is worth the investment in our students' future success and our state as a whole.

House Bill 8351 will ensure a student-centered framework for funding Rhode Island's public schools where funding reflects actual student need and is tied to student outcomes. We strongly recommend passage of H-8351. Thank you for your hard work to ensure that our state's education funding formula meets the needs of Rhode Island students and thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

Funding Rhode Island's Schools



S3015 and H8351

Senate Bill 3015 and House Bill 8351 will establish the Rhode Island Education Funding and Accountability Act, which would include a revised and revamped formula for funding all levels of public education in Rhode Island.

Why does Rhode Island need a new funding formula?

- Rhode Island's original funding formula was enacted 15 years ago and needs to be modernized to address the current state of need.
- Currently, the amount invested in a child's education significantly depends on where they live, not what they need to succeed which is inequitable.

How will students' needs be better met with a new funding formula?

- Investing in education yields significant economic returns not only for our students but for our state as a whole. Under the proposed new formula, more costs will be shifted to the state from municipalities, thus directing more dollars directly to educational outcomes.
- Students who are economically disadvantaged, multilingual learners, or have disabilities require more support to succeed and are currently not receiving adequate resources. This proposed funding formula strategically directs resources in an equitable way to those who need them most.





What will be different?

- Under the current funding formula, costs like transportation, building upkeep, and early childhood screening fall entirely on municipalities, regardless of their ability to pay, which diverts funding from other needed areas of education.
- Under the new proposed formula, the state would be responsible for creating and funding a system to ensure **universal early childhood screening for all children ages 3-5**.
- The new formula will **increase the Student Success Factor weight from 40% to 50%** to support economically disadvantaged students, and will use administrative data (such as tax records and public benefits) to identify these students more accurately.
- **The state will bear the cost of transportation** for students who need to be transported across districts, including those in Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs, foster care, and students experiencing homelessness.

Primary Shifts in How Education will be Funded and Accounted for

01

It will account for the **full cost of education** in the funding system and share those costs more equitably between the state and the municipality.

02

Tailor educational costs per student more directly.

03

Require local contributions in line with a municipality's **ability to pay.**

04

Increase fiscal responsibility and reporting - visibility on how funds are being used and whether they're making a difference.