

Members of the Rhode Island General Assembly,

I am writing as an educator to urge you to take action to modernize Rhode Island's public school funding formula. After more than 15 years without a meaningful update, the current system no longer reflects the realities of educating students in today's schools, and it is increasingly failing to meet the needs of our communities.

As an educator, I see the need for these changes in my classroom every day. Our MLL students, who should be embraced with as much support as possible, struggle to achieve the same growth as their classmates as they try to master material in a new language without a robust support system. I see dedicated special educators who are overwhelmed with meeting the diverse and ever growing needs of the students on their caseloads. I see it in grossly staggered start times, where high school students arrive, partly asleep, at 7:00 AM and some elementary students are in school until almost 4 PM due *entirely* to the exorbitant cost of transportation.

The recent Blue Ribbon Commission—composed of educators, parents, municipal officials, union representatives, charter school advocates, and community leaders—spent a full year studying this issue and reached unanimous agreement: Rhode Island's school funding system requires reform. That level of broad, bipartisan consensus is rare and should signal the urgency of this moment.

The current formula fails to account for the true cost of educating a child in a modern school system. Critical expenses such as transportation, building maintenance, and early childhood screening are largely borne by municipalities. This places an uneven burden on local communities and creates disparities in opportunity based on geography rather than student need.

Equally concerning is the fact that the formula does not adequately fund students who require additional support. Students who are economically disadvantaged, English language learners, or students with disabilities often do not receive the level of resources necessary for them to succeed. A fair funding system must recognize that different students require different levels of support and allocate resources accordingly.

The result is a system in which educational opportunity is too often determined by where a student lives, rather than what they need. This undermines our shared commitment to equity and excellence in public education.

The Blue Ribbon Commission has outlined a clear and practical path forward. Its recommendations call for:

- Funding the full cost of education by more equitably sharing expenses between all parties
- Allocating resources based on the actual needs of students
- Creating a more predictable and transparent funding system to support effective long-term planning
- Ensuring accountability so that investments are clearly tied to student outcomes

I respectfully urge you to support legislation that enacts these recommendations and begins the process of building a fairer, more modern, and more effective school funding system for Rhode Island. Our students, educators, and communities cannot afford to wait any longer.

Thank you for your time, your leadership, and your commitment to the future of Rhode Island's children.

Sincerely,

Ryan Lafond
Davisville Middle School
North Kingstown School Department