Rhode Island
kids
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**Testimony Re: FY 2021, FY 2020 Revised & Capital Budgets,**
**Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education**

**House Finance Committee**
**May 5, 2021**
**Paige Clausius-Parks, Senior Policy Analyst**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to voice its strong support for several key elements of the proposed budget for the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE).

**Education Funding Formula**

We were pleased to see that the Governor's proposed budget fully funds Year 11 of the implementation of the education funding formula that was enacted by the General Assembly in 2010. We thank the General Assembly leadership and the House Finance Committee for all of your hard work to establish the funding formula through legislation and to ensure that it is fully funded.

**Multilingual Learners (MLLs)**

In recent years, Rhode Island has taken a number of steps to ensure that all children have access to the kind of high-quality education they need to succeed in school, career, and life. These key steps included instituting an education funding formula that is based on five key principles – equity, adequacy, predictability, accountability, and efficiency and later improving this funding formula to provide additional funds to support the additional needs of MLL/EL students, although more support is needed in this area.

The demographics of students in Rhode Island public schools has become increasingly diverse since the adoption of the education funding formula in 2010. In the 2018-2019 school year in Rhode Island, students who were MLLs/ELs were 10% (13,792) of total students, and 39% of all MLLs/ELs students in Rhode Island were in grades preschool to grade three. The number of MLLs/ELs in Rhode Island has nearly doubled (increased by 93%) from the 2009-2010 to 2018-2019 school year.

Multilingual students are an incredible asset to all of Rhode Island. However, research shows that we have much work to do to ensure that these students have what they need to succeed.

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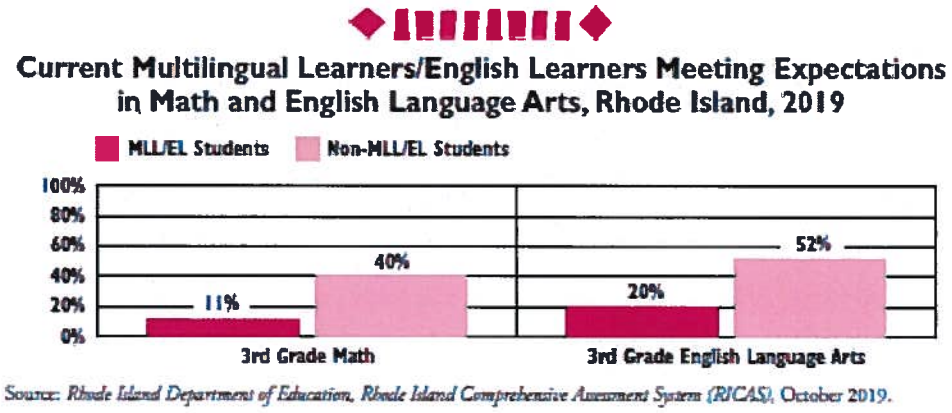



There are large and unacceptable disparities in academic outcomes by language status. In Rhode Island in 2019, 20% of third-grade MLLs/ELs met expectations in reading compared to 52% of Non-Multilingual Learners and 11% of third-grade MLLs/ELs students met expectations in math compared to 40% of Non-Multilingual Learners on the *Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS).* Multilingual Learners need additional supports in order to achieve proficiency in reading and math.

We support the proposed investment of $5 million for the MLL categorical fund as outlined in the Governor's proposed budget and acknowledge that even more funding and resources are needed to support the needs of Multilingual Learners.

**Resources to Teach Mental and Behavioral Skills**

Mental health influences children's health and behavior at home, in school, and in the community. Untreated mental health conditions can impair daily functioning, affect academic achievement, increase involvement with the juvenile justice and child welfare systems, result in high treatment costs, diminish family incomes, and increase the risk for suicide. In the U.S. and in Rhode Island, the impact of COVID 19 has increased the mental health needs of students.

In Rhode Island,

- One in five (19.0%) children ages six to 17 has a diagnosable mental health condition.
- One in ten (9.8%) has significant functional impairment.
- More than one-third (36%) of children ages three to 17 who needed mental health treatment or counseling had a problem obtaining needed care.

According to the *2019 Rhode Island Youth Risk Behavior Survey*,

- Seventy-six percent of high school students reported having at least one day in the past month where their mental health was not good.
- About one in three (32%) Rhode Island high school students reported feeling so sad or hopeless for two or more weeks that they stopped doing some normal activities.
- One in seven (15%) reported attempting suicide one or more times during the past year.

According to the 2020 *SurveyWorks* results,

- Sixty percent of Rhode Island students in grades 6-12 report stress has interfered with their ability to participate in school. In Rhode Island

Adverse childhood experiences, toxic stress, and trauma can be experienced by any child at any point in their life. Children living in poverty, children who experience or witness racism, children removed from their families and placed into foster care, and children with disabilities often suffer trauma and attend schools that are unequipped to meet their mental health and emotional needs which can perpetuate or introduce new traumas.

Social-emotional learning, restorative practices, and positive disciplinary practices are effective approaches for addressing student trauma and help to create positive student-teacher relationships, improve students' sense of belonging, build safe schools, and increase academic outcomes.

We support the Governor's proposed investment of $590,000 to provide teacher training, curricula, and resources to teach mental and behavioral skills and to intervene when mental and behavioral health challenges are presented in the classroom and also urge the General Assembly to provide the funding needed to increase the number of mental health professionals in schools.

**College and Career Readiness**

Between 2018 and 2028, jobs requiring a postsecondary degree or certificate are projected to grow faster than jobs requiring less education. However, many students, especially low-income students face barriers to college enrollment and success. States can help address barriers and improve college access by ensuring that all students have access to advanced coursework, including Advanced Placement (AP) courses, dual and concurrent enrollment courses, etc. The Governor's budget includes important proposed investments that will help increase college readiness for Rhode Island students including $2.3 million from tuition savings for the **Dual/Concurrent Enrollment Initiative** to allow more students to earn college credit at their high school or at state public higher education institutions at no cost to students or families.

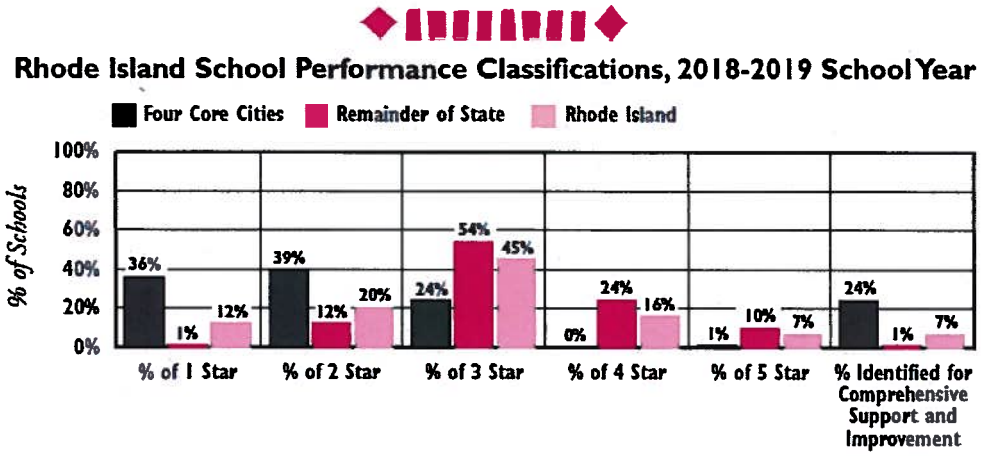
We urge you to continue funding the Dual/Concurrent Enrollment Initiative at levels that make these engaging and rigorous advanced courses available to all students, especially low-income students and students of color who attend school in the urban core and may especially benefit from these opportunities that will help prepare them for success in college and careers.

**Support of Low-Performing Schools**

The U.S. Department of Education approved Rhode Island's new accountability system under the *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)* in 2018. The new system is structured to promote collective responsibility for continuous improvement at all levels of education through the use of measurements to differentiate school performance, a school classification system, and state, district and school report cards.

The accountability system uses a five-star rating system to summarize overall school performance. Schools with five-star ratings have strong performance in all the indicators

and no low-performing student subgroups. Schools with one-star ratings are low performing schools in multiple indicators.




Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, School and District Report Cards, 2018-2019 school year.

In Rhode Island in the 2018-2019 school year, 35 schools (12%) were given a one-star rating, 59 schools (20%) were given a two-star rating, 134 schools (45%) were given a three-star rating, 49 schools (16%) were given a four-star rating, and 22 schools (7%) were given a five-star rating. Seven percent of schools in Rhode Island are identified as in need of Comprehensive Support and Improvement, and 17 of these 22 schools were located in the four core cities – Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket.

We support the Governor's proposal to create a new position at RIDE to support persistently low performing schools.

**Child Opportunity Zones**

In Rhode Island, Child Opportunity Zones (COZs) sustain and expand the community school model which aims to improve the academic outcomes of students by creating a partnership between school, families, and community partners. Community schools integrate academic, health, and social services to provide a range of supports and opportunities to students and families. Community schools are coordinated by a school or community agency. In Rhode Island, COZs serve nearly 10,000 children and more than 8,000 adults each year.

Community schools are a powerful equity strategy because they are designed to identify and address inequitable practices, disrupt the systems that perpetuate educational and economic disparities, and increase opportunities for all students through partnerships with organizations that impact children. Many community schools have the existing infrastructure that enabled them to mobilize support services and connect with students and families quickly during the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent school closures.

We support the Governor's proposed investment of $345,000 to support Child Opportunity Zones. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.