



*SPECIAL JOINT LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION TO
STUDY THE RETURN OF CENTRAL FALLS SCHOOLS
TO LOCAL GOVERNANCE*

Final Report

April 6, 2026

**Report Submitted to the
Rhode Island House of Representatives and Rhode Island Senate**

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Commission Members

- James Parisi, Chairperson, Rhode Island Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals
- Senator Jonathon Acosta, District 16 – Central Falls, Pawtucket
- Representative Joshua J. Giraldo, District 56 – Central Falls
- Brian Daniels, Governor Appointee
- Sarah Friedman, City of Central Falls
- Drew Echelson, Rhode Island Department of Education
- Randy Rossi, Financial Leader

Introduction and Background

In June 2025, the Rhode Island General Assembly established the Special Joint Legislative Commission to Study the Return of Central Falls Schools to Local Governance (S1156 / H6255). The Commission was charged with examining the feasibility of returning the Central Falls School District to local governance and producing a report that includes: (1) a sustainable financial pathway and timeline for the City of Central Falls to contribute its local share of foundation education aid, and (2) a comprehensive plan for the transfer of operational and fiscal responsibility from the State to the City, with an effective implementation date of July 1, 2026.

The Commission's work was undertaken in the context of more than three decades of state involvement in the governance of the Central Falls School District. Over that period, at the then request of the City, the State has assumed primary responsibility for the operation and oversight of the district, as well as a substantial share of its financial support. This long-standing arrangement reflects both historical challenges within the district and broader structural issues related to funding, governance, and educational equity.

Central Falls is one of the most economically disadvantaged communities in Rhode Island, with limited municipal capacity to generate local revenue through property taxation and other sources. As a result, the State currently provides the vast majority of funding for the district. At the same time, the Commission heard extensive testimony and reviewed data demonstrating that the existing education funding system does not fully capture the total cost of educating students—particularly costs outside of the core funding formula, commonly referred to as “non-core” expenditures. These include transportation, facilities maintenance, out-of-district placements, and other essential services. Because these costs are not fully incorporated into the formula, they can create disproportionate financial burdens for municipalities with limited fiscal capacity, such as Central Falls.

Throughout its work, the Commission heard from state and local officials, national experts, community organizations, educators, labor representatives, and residents. Presentations and testimony addressed a wide range of issues, including governance structures, fiscal capacity, education funding, and the broader structural challenges associated with concentrated poverty and inequity. These discussions made clear that the question of local governance cannot be considered in isolation from the financial and systemic conditions that shape the Central Falls School District.

The Commission recognizes that the question before it is both a policy and a community issue. It implicates fundamental considerations of democratic accountability, fiscal sustainability, and educational equity. While state intervention may be appropriate in periods of crisis, the Commission also recognizes the importance of local voice, community engagement, and accountability to residents in shaping the future of public education.

Accordingly, the Commission's work has focused on identifying a path forward that balances these considerations—one that supports a return to local governance while ensuring that the City of Central Falls is positioned for long-term financial stability and that the educational needs of its students continue to be met.

Commission Process

The Commission convened a series of meetings between December 2025 and March 2026 to gather information, hear testimony, and deliberate on the feasibility of returning the Central Falls School District to local governance.

The Commission held its initial meeting on December 3, 2025, during which members reviewed the enabling resolution, outlined the scope of work, and identified key areas of focus, including governance structures, education funding, municipal fiscal capacity, and operational transition planning.

In January 2026, the Commission received foundational presentations designed to establish a shared understanding of the policy and fiscal landscape. These presentations included an overview of Rhode Island’s education funding formula and foundation aid, a detailed review of the City of Central Falls’ financial condition, and an examination of the structure and operations of the Central Falls School District. The Commission also heard presentations addressing broader structural inequities affecting education outcomes, including the impacts of concentrated poverty and segregation.

In February 2026, the Commission expanded its review to include national research and expert analysis. The Commission heard from national experts in public finance and education policy regarding education funding systems, governance models, and the outcomes associated with state takeovers of local school districts. The Commission also received a detailed financial analysis from the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE), including projections related to both core education costs and non-core expenditures. These presentations raised important considerations related to fiscal sustainability, long-term cost growth, and the allocation of financial responsibility between the State and the City.

The Commission provided an opportunity for public comment at its February 11, 2026 meeting, during which it received testimony from community organizations, labor representatives, local officials, and residents. This testimony offered important perspectives on community readiness, democratic accountability, and the role of local governance in shaping educational outcomes.

A meeting scheduled for February 25, 2026, was postponed due to a significant winter storm affecting the region. The Commission reconvened on March 16, 2026, at which time it received additional expert input and continued its deliberations.

List of Presenters

Presenter	Title	Organization	Presentation Date
Jeremy Giller	Data, Finance and Policy Analyst	City of Central Falls	1/7/2026
Dr. Sarah Friedman	Chief of Education Strategy	City of Central Falls	1/7/2026
Mary Signer	Finance Director	City of Central Falls	1/14/2026
Dr. Stephanie Downey Toledo	Superintendent	City of Central Falls School Department	1/14/2026
Dr. Stephen Owens	Director of Policy and Advocacy	Brown's Promise	1/21/2026
Kim Rueben	Public Finance Economist	Previously of the Lincoln Land Institute	2/4/2026
Domingo Morel	Associate Professor	New York University	2/4/2026

Brandon Bohl	Director of Finance and Accounting	Rhode Island Department of Education	2/11/2026
Kristen Cole	Senior Finance Officer	Rhode Island Department of Education	2/11/2026
John Papay	Director of Annenberg Institute	Brown University	3/16/2026

Presentations can be found in the Commission Documents folder on the Rhode Island General Assembly website

The Commission held meeting on March 25, 2026, which was dedicated to discussion and development of the Commission’s findings and recommendations. This meeting reflected the culmination of the Commission’s work, incorporating the information, testimony, and analysis gathered over the preceding months.

Throughout its process, the Commission sought to ensure a thorough and balanced review of the issues, considering both the opportunities associated with a return to local governance and the fiscal and structural challenges that must be addressed to ensure long-term success.

Public Testimony and Stakeholder Input

The Commission received both in-person and written testimony from a broad range of stakeholders, including community organizations, labor representatives, local officials, educators, and residents of Central Falls. Thirteen individuals testified at a Commission meeting open for public testimony. This testimony provided important insight into community perspectives on governance, funding, and the future of the school district.

Among those who testified before the Commission was Central Falls Mayor Maria Rivera, who spoke to the City's efforts to prepare for a return to local governance, including investments in financial stability, operational planning, and community engagement. The Mayor's testimony emphasized both the City's commitment to assuming greater responsibility and the importance of establishing a sustainable and realistic funding framework to support that transition.

Testimony presented to the Commission consistently emphasized the importance of restoring local governance to the Central Falls School District. Stakeholders highlighted the role of public education as a cornerstone of democratic participation and stressed that communities should have the ability to make decisions that directly affect their schools.

Community organizations described extensive engagement efforts involving students, families, educators, and local leaders in developing a shared vision for the district's future. Written testimony emphasized that those most directly impacted by the education system bring valuable lived experience and expertise, and should play a central role in shaping policies and priorities.

Additional testimony underscored the importance of civic participation and local accountability, noting that governance capacity is strengthened through active engagement and responsibility. Stakeholders expressed the view that restoring local control would not only improve decision-making but also reinforce the broader civic fabric of the community.

Organized labor also expressed support for a return to local governance, while emphasizing the importance of maintaining fiscal responsibility, transparency, and long-term sustainability. Testimony reflected an understanding that any transition must balance local control with sound financial planning and accountability.

Across all testimony, a consistent theme emerged: while state intervention may be appropriate during periods of crisis, it should not be indefinite. Stakeholders broadly supported a return to local governance paired with a sustainable financial framework and continued collaboration between the State and the City to ensure long-term success.

Findings

1. The Commission finds that the City of Central Falls has made significant progress emerging from the bankruptcy proceeding 15 years ago, progress that should not be jeopardized by implementation of an excessive local education funding contribution.
2. The Commission finds that the City of Central Falls has taken steps to prepare for a return to local governance, including the establishment of a 9-member hybrid school board (5 appointed, 4 elected) and the implementation of a training program for recently elected and appointed Central Falls School Board members.
3. The Commission finds that there is community support for returning governance of the school district to the City of Central Falls.
4. The Commission finds that the City has developed a detailed operational transition plan to support a return to local control.
5. The Commission finds that the City of Central Falls has limited fiscal capacity relative to other municipalities, which affects its ability to assume full financial responsibility for the school district.
6. The Commission finds that a phased local contribution model tied to municipal revenue provides a viable and sustainable pathway for increasing local investment in education.
7. The Commission finds that the Central Falls Stabilization Fund plays a critical role in supporting both core and non-core educational costs and will remain essential under any governance structure.

Recommendations

1. Return to Local Governance

The Commission recommends the repeal of **R.I.G.L. § 16-2-34** to facilitate the return of the Central Falls School District to local governance, effective July 1, 2026.

2. Transition Implementation and Oversight Measures

School Board Appointment

The Commission recommends that the General Assembly direct the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education to promptly appoint a member to fill the vacant seat on the Central Falls School Board. The Commission further recommends that the Council prioritize candidates with demonstrated expertise in municipal finance or public budgeting to support the Board's fiscal oversight responsibilities.

Transition Coordination

The Commission recommends that representatives of the City of Central Falls, the current Central Falls School District Board of Trustees, the newly established Central Falls School Board, and the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) meet regularly in advance of July 1, 2026, to coordinate and implement the transition to local governance. These meetings should be guided by the City's transition plan and focus on ensuring continuity of operations, clarity of roles and responsibilities, and alignment on financial and administrative processes.

Enhanced Reporting and Oversight (Initial Transition Period)

The Commission recommends that, beginning July 1, 2026, and continuing for a period of two years, the Central Falls School Board participate in an enhanced reporting and oversight process with RIDE.

This process should include:

- Bi-monthly written reports submitted to RIDE detailing the School Board's governance activities, with particular attention to:
 - FY2027 district finances, including revenues and expenditures; and
 - development of the FY2028 budget
- Quarterly meetings between the Executive Committee of the Central Falls School Board and a designated representative of RIDE, with meeting agendas jointly developed in advance

3. Sustainable Local Contribution Framework

The Commission recommends amendments to **R.I.G.L. § 16-7.2-6(d)** to establish a predictable and sustainable funding framework for the Central Falls Stabilization Fund.

This framework shall include:

- An annual City contribution equal to:
 - one percent (1%) of the City’s prior year total tax levy plus the amount of the prior year’s education allocation; and
 - contribution from the school department's fund balance as outlined in School Contribution Model with a target end point that meets GFOA standards and aligns with RIDE's fiscal accountability standards and annual reporting to ensure adequate funding of the foundation education aid for all Central Falls students

School Contribution Model

	Tax Levy*	1.00% of Prior Year	City Contribution	Fund Balance Contribution	Total Contribution	Cumulative Fund Balance
FY 2026	\$16,753,339					
FY 2027	17,423,473	\$167,533	\$167,533	\$500,000	\$667,533	\$10,926,443
FY 2028	18,120,411	174,235	341,768	450,000	791,768	10,476,443
FY 2029	18,845,228	181,204	522,972	400,000	922,972	10,076,443
FY 2030	19,599,037	188,452	711,425	350,000	1,061,425	9,726,443
FY 2031	20,382,999	195,990	907,415	300,000	1,207,415	9,426,443
FY 2032	21,198,318	203,830	1,111,245	250,000	1,361,245	9,176,443
FY 2033	22,046,251	211,983	1,323,228	200,000	1,523,228	8,976,443
FY 2034	22,928,101	220,463	1,543,691	150,000	1,693,691	8,826,443
FY 2035	23,845,225	229,281	1,772,972	100,000	1,872,972	8,726,443
FY 2036	24,799,034	238,452	2,011,424	50,000	2,061,424	8,676,443
FY 2037	25,790,996	247,990	2,259,414	0	2,259,414	8,676,443
FY 2038	26,822,636	257,910	2,517,324	0	2,517,324	8,676,443
FY 2039	27,895,541	268,226	2,785,550	0	2,785,550	8,676,443
FY 2040	29,011,363	278,955	3,064,506	0	3,064,506	8,676,443
FY 2041	30,171,817	290,114	3,354,620	0	3,354,620	8,676,443
FY 2042	31,378,690	301,718	3,656,338	0	3,656,338	8,676,443
FY 2043	32,633,837	313,787	3,970,125	0	3,970,125	8,676,443

Notes:

*Starting in FY 2027 levy increase is assumed at 4% per year

Central Falls School District Fund Balance as of June 30, 2025: \$11,426,443

- 75% of the allocation will be dedicated to the *local share of the foundation aid* and 25% to “*non-core*” expenses, unless the City and State deem it necessary to modify distribution of this allocation
- A formula-based approach to determining total Stabilization Fund allocations, including:
 - the local share of foundation education aid
 - non-core expenditures
- Continued State support to fund the balance of the Stabilization Fund
- A requirement that the City assume responsibility for any operating deficit incurred by the school district

A formal review of the funding framework, including appropriations of the stabilization fund prior to the FY2032 budgeting cycle

This approach establishes a gradual and sustainable pathway for increasing local investment while maintaining financial stability.

4. Ongoing State-Local Partnership

The Commission recommends continued collaboration between the State and the City of Central Falls to ensure:

- Fiscal stability
- Transparency and accountability
- Continued progress in student outcomes

5. Ongoing Training for the local School Board

The Commission recommends continued training for the City of Central Falls School Board

Appendix 1

2025 Senate Resolution 383 Senate Bill 2025-1156

<https://webserver.rilegislature.gov/BillText/BillText25/SenateText25/S1156.pdf>

2025 -- S 1156

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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2025

JOINT RESOLUTION

CREATING A SPECIAL JOINT LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION TO STUDY THE RETURN
OF CENTRAL FALLS SCHOOLS TO LOCAL GOVERNANCE

Introduced By: Senator Jonathon Acosta

Date Introduced: June 16, 2025

Referred To: Senate Finance

1 WHEREAS, The City of Central Falls does not currently have operational or fiscal
2 responsibility over its public schools; and

3 WHEREAS, The City of Central Falls, through resolution of the City Council, expressed
4 unanimous support in possessing operational and fiscal responsibility over its public schools; and

5 WHEREAS, The responsibility over local concerns are best understood and addressed by
6 the elected and appointed officials of a given locality; and

7 WHEREAS, The residents of the City of Central Falls are uniquely qualified to
8 administer the public education of their children; now, therefore be it

9 RESOLVED, That a special joint legislative study commission be and the same is hereby
10 created consisting of seven (7) members: one of whom shall be the President of the Senate, or
11 designee; one of whom shall be the Speaker of the House of Representatives, or designee; one of
12 whom shall be the Governor of the State of Rhode Island, or designee; one of whom shall be the
13 Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education, or designee; one of whom shall be the
14 Mayor of the City of Central Falls, or designee; one of whom shall be a designee of the Rhode
15 Island Federation of Teachers and Health Professionals, to be appointed upon an agreement
16 reached between the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the President of the Senate, and the
17 Governor; and one of whom shall be the a financial leader, to be appointed upon an agreement
18 reached between the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the President of the Senate, and the
19 Governor.

1 The purpose of said commission shall be to prepare a final report to include:

2 • A sustainable financial pathway and timeline for the City of Central Falls to
3 contribute their local share of foundation education aid; and

4 • A comprehensive plan for the transfer of operational and fiscal responsibility
5 from the State to the City of Central Falls, with an effective implementation date of July 1, 2026.

6 The President of the Senate shall designate the chair of the commission, and at the call of
7 the chair, shall meet not later than August 31, 2025.

8 The commission shall meet regularly and may solicit input from stakeholders, including
9 community members, educators, and financial experts, and the Department of Education and
10 Secondary Education shall provide administrative and technical support, as needed; and be it
11 further

12 RESOLVED, That the commission shall submit a final report of its findings and
13 recommendations to the Governor, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and the
14 President of the Senate no later than March 3, 2026, and said commission shall expire on July 1,
15 2026, unless extended further by the General Assembly; and be it further

16 RESOLVED, That the required reports may be submitted electronically, and must be
17 posted on the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's website in a publicly
18 accessible place.

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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF
JOINT RESOLUTION
CREATING A SPECIAL JOINT LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION TO STUDY THE RETURN
OF CENTRAL FALLS SCHOOLS TO LOCAL GOVERNANCE

- 1 This resolution would create a seven (7) member joint legislative commission to study
- 2 and prepare a report on the return of Central Falls schools to local governance.

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Appendix 2
Commission Agendas

**SPECIAL JOINT LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION TO STUDY THE
RETURN OF CENTRAL FALLS SCHOOLS TO LOCAL GOVERNANCE**

NOTICE OF MEETING

DATE: Wednesday, December 3, 2025
TIME: 4:00 PM
PLACE: Room 313 – Rhode Island State House

AGENDA:

- I. Call Meeting to Order and Attendance
- II. Welcome & Introductions
- III. Discuss Enabling Resolution and Goals
- IV. Discuss Future Presentations
- V. Next Meeting Date
- VI. Adjournment

No Public Testimony will be accepted at this meeting.

COMMISSION INFORMATION

For information on commissions, [CLICK HERE](#).

If you have any questions, please contact Tom Kane in the Senate Policy Office (tkane@rilegislature.gov).

ACCOMMODATIONS

The General Assembly strives to make the legislative process accessible to all. Anyone needing an accommodation to attend or testify at a commission meeting, contact Stacy Custer at scuster@rilegislature.gov or 401-222-7904 at least 48 hours in advance of the scheduled meeting.

TELEVISION AND LIVESTREAM INFORMATION

The meeting may be televised by Capitol Television on Cox Communications, channels 15 and 61 for high definition; i3 Broadband (formerly Full Channel) on 15; and Verizon, on channel 34. Senate committee hearings may also air on Channel 75 for Cox Subscribers.

Livestreaming is available at <https://capitoltvri.cablecast.tv/>

POSTED: FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 28, 2025, 1:20 P.M.

**SPECIAL JOINT LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION TO STUDY THE RETURN OF
CENTRAL FALLS SCHOOLS TO LOCAL GOVERNANCE**

NOTICE OF MEETING

DATE: Wednesday, January 7, 2026

TIME: 4:00 PM

PLACE: Room 313 – Rhode Island State House

AGENDA:

- I. Call Meeting to Order and Attendance
- II. Presentation on the Rhode Island Funding Formula and foundation aid as it pertains to the City of Central Falls by **Jeremy Giller, Data, Finance and Policy Analyst, City of Central Falls**
- III. Presentation on the Transition from State to Local Governance of the School District at the City and Community Level by **Dr. Sarah Friedman, Chief of Education Strategy, City of Central Falls**
- IV. Discuss Future Presentations
- V. Next Meeting Date
- VI. Adjournment

No Public Testimony will be accepted at this meeting.

COMMISSION INFORMATION

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**SPECIAL JOINT LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION TO STUDY THE RETURN OF
CENTRAL FALLS SCHOOLS TO LOCAL GOVERNANCE**

NOTICE OF MEETING

DATE: Wednesday, January 14, 2026

TIME: 4:00 PM

PLACE: Room 313 – Rhode Island State House

AGENDA:

- I. Call Meeting to Order and Attendance
- II. Presentation on the City of Central Falls finances by **Mary Signer, Finance Director, City of Central Falls**
- III. Presentation on the City of Central Falls School District by **Dr. Stephanie Downey Toledo, Superintendent, City of Central Falls School District**
- IV. Discuss Future Presentations
- V. Next Meeting Date
- VI. Adjournment

No Public Testimony will be accepted at this meeting.

COMMISSION INFORMATION

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**SPECIAL JOINT LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION TO STUDY THE
RETURN OF CENTRAL FALLS SCHOOLS TO LOCAL GOVERNANCE**

NOTICE OF MEETING

DATE: Wednesday, January 21, 2026
TIME: 4:00 PM
PLACE: Room 313 – State House

AGENDA:

- I. Call Meeting to Order and Attendance
- II. Presentation on the City of Central Falls by **Stephen Owens, Ph.D., Director, Policy and Advocacy, Brown’s Promise**
- III. Discuss Future Presentations
- IV. Next Meeting Date
- V. Adjournment

No Public Testimony will be accepted at this meeting.

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Livestreaming is available at <https://capitolvri.cablecast.tv/>

POSTED: SATURDAY, JANUARY 17, 2026, 1:00 P.M.

**SPECIAL JOINT LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION TO STUDY THE RETURN OF
CENTRAL FALLS SCHOOLS TO LOCAL GOVERNANCE**

NOTICE OF MEETING

DATE: Wednesday, February 4, 2026

TIME: 4:00 PM

PLACE: Room 313 – Rhode Island State House

AGENDA:

- I. Call Meeting to Order and Attendance
- II. Presentation on the City of Central Falls by **Kim Rueben, Public Finance Economist Focused on Local Government Policy**
- III. Presentation on the City of Central Falls by **Professor Domingo Morel, Associate Professor at New York University's Robert F. Wagner School of Public Service**
- IV. Discuss Future Presentations
- V. Next Meeting Date
- VI. Adjournment

No Public Testimony will be accepted at this meeting.

COMMISSION INFORMATION

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**SPECIAL JOINT LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION TO STUDY THE
RETURN OF CENTRAL FALLS SCHOOLS TO LOCAL GOVERNANCE**

PLEASE NOTE: THIS IS A REVISED AGENDA

NOTICE OF MEETING

DATE: Wednesday, February 11, 2026
TIME: 4:30 PM
PLACE: Room 313 – State House

AGENDA:

- I. Call Meeting to Order and Attendance
- II. Presentation on the City of Central Falls by **Brandon Bohl, Director, Finance and Accounting, Rhode Island Department of Education. Kristen Cole, Senior Finance Officer for Resource Allocation and Management, Rhode Island Department of Education**
- III. Public Comment
- IV. Discuss Future Presentations
- V. Next Meeting Date
- VI. Adjournment

Public Testimony will be accepted at this meeting.

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POSTED: MONDAY, FEBRUARY 2, 2026, 12:00 P.M.
REVISED: FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 2026, 2:30P.M.

**SPECIAL JOINT LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION TO STUDY THE RETURN OF
CENTRAL FALLS SCHOOLS TO LOCAL GOVERNANCE**

NOTICE OF MEETING

DATE: Monday, March 16, 2026

TIME: 4:00 PM

PLACE: Room 313 – Rhode Island State House

AGENDA:

- I. Call Meeting to Order and Attendance
- II. Presentation on the City of Central Falls by **John Papay, Director of Annenberg Institute, Walter and Leonore Annenberg Associate Professor of Education Policy**
- III. Discussion on Commission Report
- IV. Next Meeting Date
- V. Adjournment

No Public Testimony will be accepted at this meeting.

COMMISSION INFORMATION

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**SPECIAL JOINT LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION TO STUDY THE
RETURN OF CENTRAL FALLS SCHOOLS TO LOCAL GOVERNANCE**

NOTICE OF MEETING

DATE: Wednesday, March 25, 2026
TIME: 2:00 PM
PLACE: Room 313 – State House

AGENDA:

- I. Call Meeting to Order and Attendance
- II. Discussion of Commission Report
- III. Next Meeting Date
- IV. Adjournment

No Public Testimony will be accepted at this meeting.

COMMISSION INFORMATION

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POSTED: FRIDAY, MARCH 20, 2026, 3:30 P.M.

**SPECIAL JOINT LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION TO STUDY THE
RETURN OF CENTRAL FALLS SCHOOLS TO LOCAL GOVERNANCE**

NOTICE OF MEETING

DATE: Monday, April 6, 2026
TIME: 2:00 PM
PLACE: Room 313 – State House

AGENDA:

- I. Call Meeting to Order and Attendance
- II. Discussion/consideration of Commission Report
- III. Adjournment

No Public Testimony will be accepted at this meeting.

COMMISSION INFORMATION

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POSTED: THURSDAY, APRIL 2, 2026, 5:02 P.M.

Appendix 3

Commission Meeting Presentations and Public Testimony

- 1. December 3, 2025**
- 2. January 7, 2026**
- 3. January 14, 2026**
- 4. January 21, 2026**
- 5. February 4, 2026**
- 6. February 11, 2026**
- 7. March 16, 2026**
- 8. March 25, 2026**
- 9. April 6, 2026**

**SPECIAL JOINT LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION TO STUDY THE
RETURN OF CENTRAL FALLS SCHOOLS TO LOCAL GOVERNANCE**

NOTICE OF MEETING

DATE: Wednesday, December 3, 2025
TIME: 4:00 PM
PLACE: Room 313 – Rhode Island State House

AGENDA:

- I. Call Meeting to Order and Attendance
- II. Welcome & Introductions
- III. Discuss Enabling Resolution and Goals
- IV. Discuss Future Presentations
- V. Next Meeting Date
- VI. Adjournment

No Public Testimony will be accepted at this meeting.

COMMISSION INFORMATION

For information on commissions, [CLICK HERE](#).

If you have any questions, please contact Tom Kane in the Senate Policy Office (tkane@rilegislature.gov).

ACCOMMODATIONS

The General Assembly strives to make the legislative process accessible to all. Anyone needing an accommodation to attend or testify at a commission meeting, contact Stacy Custer at scuster@rilegislature.gov or 401-222-7904 at least 48 hours in advance of the scheduled meeting.

TELEVISION AND LIVESTREAM INFORMATION

The meeting may be televised by Capitol Television on Cox Communications, channels 15 and 61 for high definition; i3 Broadband (formerly Full Channel) on 15; and Verizon, on channel 34. Senate committee hearings may also air on Channel 75 for Cox Subscribers.

Livestreaming is available at <https://capitoltvri.cablecast.tv/>

POSTED: FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 28, 2025, 1:20 P.M.

**SPECIAL JOINT LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION TO STUDY THE RETURN OF
CENTRAL FALLS SCHOOLS TO LOCAL GOVERNANCE**

NOTICE OF MEETING

DATE: Wednesday, January 7, 2026

TIME: 4:00 PM

PLACE: Room 313 – Rhode Island State House

AGENDA:

- I. Call Meeting to Order and Attendance
- II. Presentation on the Rhode Island Funding Formula and foundation aid as it pertains to the City of Central Falls by **Jeremy Giller, Data, Finance and Policy Analyst, City of Central Falls**
- III. Presentation on the Transition from State to Local Governance of the School District at the City and Community Level by **Dr. Sarah Friedman, Chief of Education Strategy, City of Central Falls**
- IV. Discuss Future Presentations
- V. Next Meeting Date
- VI. Adjournment

No Public Testimony will be accepted at this meeting.

COMMISSION INFORMATION

For information on commissions, [CLICK HERE](#). If you have any questions, please contact Tom Kane in the Senate Policy Office (tkane@rilegislature.gov).

Understanding the “Local Share of Foundation Education Aid”

Presented to
Special Joint Legislative Commission
to Study the Return of Central Falls Schools to Local Governance
January 2026

Jeremy Giller
Data, Finance & Policy Analyst
Office of Education Strategy, City of Central Falls

Purpose of Commission

- In June 2025, a joint resolution of the General Assembly ([S1156](#) / [H6255](#)) established the Special Legislative Commission to Study the Return of Central Falls Schools to Local Governance.
- The joint resolution charges the Commission with preparing a final report to include (emphasis added) “a sustainable financial pathway and timeline for the City of Central Falls to contribute their **local share of foundation education aid...**”

What Is the “Local Share of Foundation Education Aid”?

Rhode Island’s education funding formula determines how the State distributes funds to all school districts in Rhode Island.

The formula is based on:

- average spending per student of a *limited set* of education costs (the **core instructional amount**)
- each district’s **enrollment** and **student need**

The formula determines:

- the **Total Foundation** for each district ([RIGL 16-7.2-3](#)), and
- the portion of the Total Foundation that the State contributes (**State Share Ratio**) as **State Formula Aid** ([RIGL 16-7.2-4](#))

“Local share of foundation education aid”

=

the **difference between Total Foundation and State Formula Aid**

RI Education Funding Formula: Core Instructional Amount

R.I.'s **core instructional amount** is based on regional average spending *per student* (across Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Vermont) on the “core” areas listed to the right.

These areas are broadly categorized as:

- Instruction
- Instructional support
- Administration

The core instructional amount is adjusted annually. For FY26, RI’s core instructional amount is **\$13,322 per student**.

NOTE: There is no State Formula Aid for “non-core” expenses, such as transportation and building upkeep.

Core Instructional	
111-Instructional Teachers	
112-Substitutes	
113-Instructional Paraprofessionals	
121-Pupil-Use Technology and Software	
122-Instructional Materials, Trips, and Supplies	
211-Guidance and Counseling	
212-Library and Media	
213-Extracurricular	
214-Student Services - Instruction Related	
215-Academic Interventions	
216-Student Health Services - Non Instructional	
221-Curriculum Development	
222-In-Service, Staff Development, and Support	
223-Sabbaticals	
231-Program Management	
232-Therapists, Psychologists, Evaluators, Personal Attendants and Social Workers	
241-Academic Student Assessment	
331-Data Processing	
332-Business Operations	

(Source: [RIDE Core Instruction Supporting Detail](#))

RI Education Funding Formula: Average Daily Enrollment

The State funds each district based on **average daily enrollment through mid-March** (minus any planned charter school enrollment growth). For example, FY26 funding is based on March 2025 enrollment data.*

Core instructional amount x average daily enrollment

* For the past few years, in response to fluctuating enrollments resulting from the pandemic, the General Assembly has provided some additional funding (outside the formula) to districts experiencing an enrollment decline. In FY26, Central Falls School District is receiving \$390,458 from the Enrollment Decline Transition Fund (4.5% of the state total).

RI Education Funding Formula: Student Need

Because higher **student need** is associated with higher costs, the formula provides an extra weight, or bonus, for students with specific higher needs.

- **Economically disadvantaged students**
40% bonus (called the Student Success Factor) for every student qualifying as economically disadvantaged*

Core instructional amount x 40% x economically disadvantaged students

NOTE: Through FY24, qualification for the Student Success Factor was based on eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch. Since FY24, qualification has been based on eligibility for SNAP (multiplied by 1.6). *This change caused Central Falls School District's percentage of qualifying students to fall dramatically, from 97% in FY23 to 71% in FY24, 69% in FY25, and 63% in FY26—an effective loss of \$4.15 million for the district in FY26.*

- **Multilingual learners with low English proficiency**
20% bonus for every multilingual learner with low English proficiency. These funds can only be used to serve MLLs. (This bonus went into full effect in FY25.)

Core instructional amount x 20% x multilingual learners with low English proficiency

RI Education Funding Formula: Total Foundation

The **Total Foundation** is the amount of funding that each district needs to pay for “core” costs, based on their **enrollment** and adjusted for **student need**.

$$\begin{aligned} & \text{Core instructional amount} \times \text{average daily enrollment} \\ & + \\ & \text{Core instructional amount} \times 40\% \times \text{economically disadvantaged students} \\ & + \\ & \text{Core instructional amount} \times 20\% \times \text{multilingual learners with low English proficiency} \\ & = \\ & \text{Total Foundation} \end{aligned}$$

RI Education Funding Formula: State Share Ratio

The **State Share Ratio** determines the **State's portion of the Total Foundation**. The State Share Ratio is based on two factors*:

- **City or town relative revenue-generating capacity (community wealth)**—“**State Share Ratio Community**”: the gap between each community's capacity to generate property tax revenue per PK–12 student and the *average* R.I. community's capacity to do so
 - This calculation is based on the [R.I. Division of Municipal Finance's Adjusted Equalized Weighted Assessed Valuation \(AEWAV\)](#) for each community
 - $1 - 0.475 * (\text{Municipal AEWAV} / \text{Municipal PK-12 Enrollment}) / (\text{State AEWAV} / \text{State PK-12 Enrollment})$
 - The 0.475 factor, which is explicit in statute ([RIGL 16-7-20](#)), effectively sets the State's share statewide to 52.5% of the Total Foundation ([RIDE Presentation to Special Task Force to Study Rhode Island's Education Funding Formula, 2019](#))

- **Concentration of low-income students**: The proportion of the district's elementary school students who are economically disadvantaged

The State Share Ratio is adjusted annually.

Every district receives a State share. For FY26, the **State Share Ratio ranges from 5.0% (Jamestown) to 96.7% (Central Falls)**.

Source: [RIDE State Share Ratio Calculation](#)

* Beginning in FY24, for districts (including Central Falls) with a low-income concentration factor that is at least 50% but that is *lower* than revenue-generating capacity factor, the State Share Ratio *equals* the revenue-generating capacity factor. This change increased Central Falls's State Share Ratio slightly.

Central Falls School District: State Share Ratio

Here is the calculation of the **State Share Ratio** for Central Falls School District in FY26.

$$1 - 0.475 * (\text{Municipal AEWAV} / \text{Municipal Enrollment}) / (\text{State AEWAV} / \text{State Enrollment})$$



$$1 - 0.475 * (\$371,819,210 / 4,387) / (\$164,558,851,088 / 136,083)$$



$$1 - 0.475 * (\$84,755 / \$1,209,254)$$



$$1 - 0.475 * (0.07) = 1 - (0.033)$$



0.967

Central Falls School District: Local Share of Foundation Education Aid

Total Foundation	\$ 44,830,662
- State Formula Aid (96.7%)	\$ 43,351,250
Local Share of Foundation Education Aid (3.3%)	\$ 1,479,412

“Local share of foundation education aid”
=
the *difference* between Total Foundation and State Formula Aid

Glossary of Key Funding Formula Terms

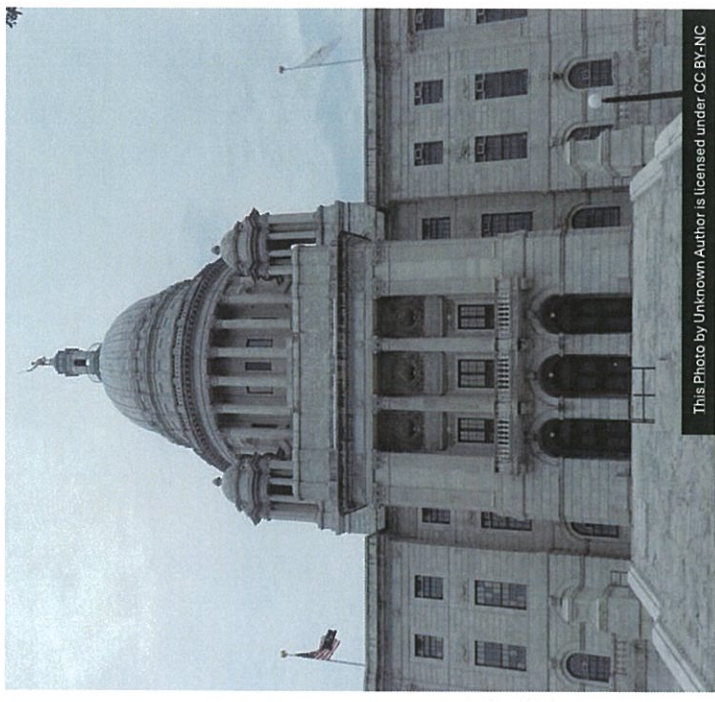
<u>Term</u>	<u>Definition</u>
Core instructional amount	Amount per pupil of a limited set of costs
Enrollment	District's average enrollment through mid-March
Student Need	+ 40% for economically disadvantaged + 20% for MLLs with low English proficiency
Total Foundation	Funding <i>needed</i> to pay for a district's "core" costs, based on enrollment and adjusted for student need
State Share Ratio	State % of Total Foundation
State Formula Aid	State contribution to Total Foundation (State Share Ratio x Total Foundation)
Local Share of Foundation Education Aid	Total Foundation minus State Formula Aid

Central Falls Governance Transition

January 2026

Dr. Sarah Friedman, Chief of Education Strategy, City of Central Falls

Central Falls School District has experienced 34 years of state intervention, the longest in US history.



We Collected Data & Empowered a Local Community Advisory Board

We collected and analyzed comprehensive data.

- 723 listening sessions: +178 educators, 202 families, 303 students, 40+ policy and non-profit leaders
- Gathered exhaustive city-level quantitative data
- Published report October 2024 [My Heart Is Here](#)

We engaged 20+ key stakeholders across CF education sector.

- Local officials – General Assembly, City Council, current Board of Trustees, current K-12 Education Council
- Education leaders – teachers and school leaders from CFSD schools, district leadership, representatives from charter schools, city education office, teachers' union (local and state)
- Families
- Youth
- Non-profit partners (Progreso Latino, Center for Justice)
- CF Alumnae Association



The CAB Designed a New Governance Model for CFSD

- Hybrid 9-member board
- 5 appointed, 4 elected
- Ensure a seat at the table for: former educator from CFSD, parent, current CFHS student, CFSD alumnae
- Ensure community-wide representation and conversation through elected seats
- 3-stage appointment process: nominating committee, mayor, city council.
- 1 3-year term for a K-12 Council appointee to support a smooth transition.



Implementation of CAB Governance Model

Spring 2025: effective date of **July 1, 2026**, in [Joint Study Commission Enabling Legislation](#) (page 2, line 5)

July 8, 2025: Citywide referendum passed (91% yes) to change city charter.

Summer -Fall 2025: Appointment and election process for school board successfully implemented, competitive field of candidates.

November 2025: School board appointments and elections held.

Present: New School Board has begun professional development.



Meet the New Central Falls School Board



Erika Vallejo, elected member	Lizsandra Paneto Gullon, elected member	Zuhanna Medina, elected member
Carla Hernandez, elected member	Crystal Marie De Jesus Lara, appointed CFHS student	Dorian Rave, appointed CFHS alumnae
Jordana Ruggeri, appointed former CFSD educator	Thomas Evan, prospectively appointed, pending child's matriculation	Awaiting K-12 Council appointed member
Board Dev.: Dr. Amanda Aiken, City Solicitor Matt Jerzyk and Attorney Charles Ruggerio, CAB members, CYCLE, and City Team		

Links to key documents

- Comprehensive Community Report: [My Heart Is Here](#)
- Community Advisory Board Information: [Community Advisory Board Summary and Membership](#)
- City Charter as Amended: [Central Falls City Charter. Amended 7.8.25](#)

questions



**SPECIAL JOINT LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION TO STUDY THE RETURN OF
CENTRAL FALLS SCHOOLS TO LOCAL GOVERNANCE**

NOTICE OF MEETING

DATE: Wednesday, January 14, 2026

TIME: 4:00 PM

PLACE: Room 313 – Rhode Island State House

AGENDA:

- I. Call Meeting to Order and Attendance
- II. Presentation on the City of Central Falls finances by **Mary Signer, Finance Director, City of Central Falls****
- III. Presentation on the City of Central Falls School District by **Dr. Stephanie Downey Toledo, Superintendent, City of Central Falls School District****
- IV. Discuss Future Presentations
- V. Next Meeting Date
- VI. Adjournment

No Public Testimony will be accepted at this meeting.

COMMISSION INFORMATION

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CENTRAL FALLS

CENTRAL FALLS LOCAL FUNDING AGENDA



Brief History of Central Falls Finances



Review of Central Falls Financials FY21 – FY25

Summary and Discussion
Detail



Significant Financial Factors When Considering Funding

Tax Levy
Non-Tax Revenue
Labor and Pension Costs



Central Falls Forecast (without local funding)

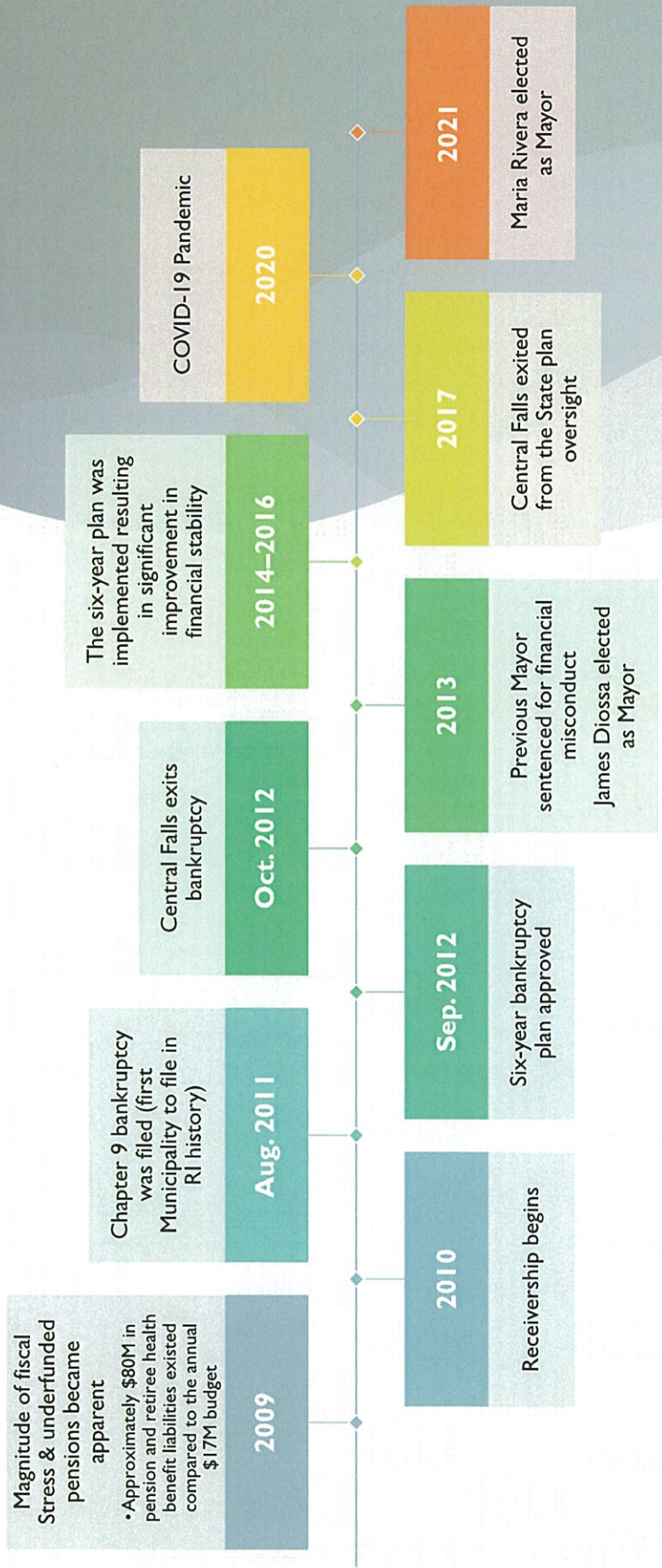


Proposed Contribution



Questions / Discussion

TIMELINE OF SIGNIFICANT EVENTS



IMPACT OF BANKRUPTCY TO CENTRAL FALLS

Implemented a supplemental 10%
property tax levy increase

Temporarily paused pension
funding while conducting a
comprehensive analysis

Reduced medical benefits for both
active employees and retirees

Implemented pay rate reductions

Reduced staffing levels and
eliminated positions

Reduced union stipends

Implemented pension benefit
reductions of up to 55%

City services were eliminated/cut
Library
Community Center
Recreational Programs

Increase property foreclosures and
abandoned / boarded up
properties

Central Falls was forced to repay
the state \$3.6M for cost of
receivership

	Actuals FY08	Actuals FY09	Actuals FY10	Actuals FY11	Actuals FY12	Actuals FY13	Actuals FY14	Actuals FY15	Actuals FY16	Actuals FY17	Actuals FY18	Actuals FY19	Actuals FY20
Total General Fund Revenue	17,134,245	17,600,827	15,842,979	15,543,961	16,358,730	17,755,244	17,397,570	19,049,943	19,411,144	19,351,467	20,955,839	20,576,775	21,216,412
Total General Fund Appropriations	19,110,471	18,210,446	18,434,597	16,305,345	16,669,408	16,558,668	16,281,563	17,167,598	17,642,775	17,724,720	19,383,425	19,984,399	19,615,884
Transfers In/(Out)	378,185	0	249,023	2,325,441	2,194,332	(1,363,114)	(1,813,060)	(1,993,248)	(1,601,274)	(1,544,844)	(57,313)	(614,577)	(2,808,086)
Total Surplus (Deficit)	(1,598,041)	(609,619)	(2,342,595)	1,564,057	1,883,654	(166,538)	(697,053)	(110,903)	167,095	81,903	1,515,101	(22,201)	(1,207,558)
General Fund Balance	840,429	230,810	(2,111,785)	(485,015)	1,368,639	1,202,101	505,048	419,145	586,240	668,143	2,183,244	2,161,043	953,485
GFOA Reserve Recommendation (16.7% of fund expenditures/other financing uses)	3,092,862	2,920,223	2,969,300	2,797,152	2,750,833	2,761,940	2,785,960	2,888,554	3,034,019	3,007,821	3,078,448	3,110,369	3,218,997
(Below)/ Above Recommendation	(2,252,433)	(2,689,413)	(5,081,085)	(3,282,167)	(1,382,194)	(1,559,839)	(2,280,912)	(2,469,409)	(2,447,779)	(2,339,678)	(895,204)	(949,326)	(2,265,512)

FINANCIAL SNAPSHOT FROM FY08-FY20

FY21 - FY25 ACTUALS

	FY 21	FY 22	FY 23	FY 24	FY 25
General Fund Revenues	20,136,938	19,814,633	20,306,958	21,537,758	22,327,347
Change from Prior Year		-2%	2%	6%	4%
General Fund Expenses	19,701,666	19,155,378	19,957,991	20,297,832	21,105,140
Change from Prior Year		-3%	4%	2%	4%
(Surplus) / Deficit	(435,272)	(659,255)	(348,967)	(1,239,926)	(1,222,207)
General Fund Balance	1,285,245	1,877,812	2,237,319	3,842,815	5,103,762
Change from Prior Year		46%	19%	72%	33%
Tax Levy	14,609,258	14,603,371	15,183,661	15,787,991	16,173,097
Levy Change %		-0.04%	3.97%	3.98%	2.44%
Levy change \$		(5,887)	580,290	604,330	385,106

Central Falls Has Steadied Its Financial Ship

- Budgets have been balanced with no operating deficits
- Debt, pension, and OPEB contributions have been fully met
- The general fund balance continues to grow
- Financial statements have been issued in a timely manner

Recent Budgets Have Included Tax Levy Increases

- The tax levy has increased in each of the past four years

Budget Surpluses Driven Largely by Growth in Nontax Revenues

- Traffic cameras
- Real estate conveyance tax
- Building permits
- Code enforcement violations
- Cannabis revenue.

Strengthening of the General Fund

- The general fund balance has increased steadily
- The City is now meeting recommended fund balance levels established by GFOA

Keep Central Falls Moving in the Right Direction

- It is imperative that all decisions continue to support Central Falls' financial stability
- **We must avoid returning to the conditions that led to bankruptcy and receivership**

	Actuals FY 21	Actuals FY 22	Actuals FY 23	Actuals FY 24	Actuals FY 25
Total General Fund Revenue	20,096,688	19,886,499	20,453,615	21,931,506	22,631,535
Total General Fund Appropriations	19,706,744	19,606,588	20,055,189	20,397,838	21,355,895
Transfers In/(Out)	(58,184)	312,656	(38,919)	71,828	(14,693)
Total Surplus (Deficit)	331,760	592,567	359,507	1,605,496	1,260,947
General Fund Fund Balance	1,285,245	1,877,812	2,237,319	3,842,815	5,103,762
GFOA Reserve Recommendation (16.7% of fund expenditures/other financing uses)	3,176,419	3,224,625	3,241,887	3,415,134	3,535,164
(Below)/ Above Recommendation	(1,891,174)	(1,346,813)	(1,004,568)	427,681	1,568,598

FINANCIAL SNAPSHOT FROM FY21 - FY25

CENTRAL FALLS AUDITED FINANCIALS FY21 – FY25

General Fund Revenues	Actuals FY 21	Actuals FY 22	Actuals FY 23	Actuals FY 24	Actuals FY 25
Tax Revenue	15,787,474	15,479,685	15,423,165	16,217,813	16,514,779
Emergency Reserve Fund	-	-	-	0	0
Fees / Non-Tax Revenue	2,798,676	1,472,010	1,723,320	2,016,552	2,123,644
State Revenue	1,512,633	2,204,887	2,970,317	3,168,068	3,590,739
Other Revenue	38,154	658,052	190,156	135,324	98,186
Total General Fund Revenues	20,136,938	19,814,633	20,306,958	21,537,758	22,327,347
General Fund Expenses					
City Executive Management	314,115	351,293	361,988	400,310	440,456
City Council	41,860	41,160	41,160	41,160	38,220
City Boards	8,981	9,575	9,700	14,275	13,400
City Clerk	392,759	354,329	365,924	340,119	332,871
Board of Canvassers	43,917	10,174	26,558	25,262	42,170
Personnel	175,357	204,046	249,595	274,982	259,321
Legal	350,879	327,809	418,322	300,761	284,745
Tax Assessor	133,487	259,244	121,300	122,229	180,341
Finance	826,087	723,894	700,059	711,631	855,665
City Property	1,088,647	1,154,711	1,222,739	1,286,394	1,401,857
Recreation	270,285	315,551	325,813	385,562	393,204
Planning	388,518	317,684	322,796	339,753	367,681
Office of Constituent Serv & Health	111,732	100,945	100,838	103,892	111,081
Other City Government	3,925,051	2,917,114	3,510,501	3,017,121	2,811,129
Police	3,883,674	4,040,390	4,152,188	4,403,920	4,710,203
Animal Control	58,595	61,482	62,712	73,517	78,856
Judiciary	119,677	124,873	121,004	130,927	132,594
Fire	3,730,378	3,916,327	3,742,650	4,023,038	4,305,296
Dispatch & Emergency Mgmt.	550,800	572,468	621,191	594,837	628,946
Highway / Code	1,127,707	1,171,087	1,248,959	1,355,524	1,293,314
Public Works	998,866	1,018,249	1,061,413	1,125,835	1,204,219
City Debt Service	1,010,085	1,011,879	1,015,111	1,073,041	1,063,452
Library	150,209	151,095	155,470	155,742	156,121
Total General Fund Expenses	19,701,666	19,155,378	19,957,991	20,297,832	21,105,140
Total General Fund Revenue	20,136,938	19,814,633	20,306,958	21,537,758	22,327,347
Total General Fund Appropriations	19,701,666	19,155,378	19,957,991	20,297,832	21,105,140
Total Surplus (Deficit)	435,271	659,255	348,967	1,239,926	1,222,207

CENTRAL FALLS LEVY DISCUSSION

- Increased real estate values do not result in increased tax revenue
- Increased tax revenue for motor vehicles and tangible property is no longer possible
- Increased nonowner-occupied rates are passed on to tenants

Fiscal Year	Tax Levy Increase (%)	Tax Levy Increase (\$)	Total Tax Levy	Median Value of Owner-Occupied Real Estate	Percent Change in Value FY22-FY26
FY21			14,609,258		
FY22	0%	-5,887	14,603,371	177,500	
FY23	4%	580,290	15,183,661	281,300	58%
FY24	4%	604,330	15,787,991	242,400	-13.8%
FY25	2.5%	385,106	16,173,097	284,100	17.2%
FY26	3.5%	562,721	16,735,818	420,000	47.8%
					137%

FY2026 RHODE ISLAND TAX RATES BY CLASS OF PROPERTY
 ASSESSMENT DATE DECEMBER 31, 2024 (MOST RECENT)
 REAL ESTATE

TAX ROLL YEAR 2025

MUNICIPALITY	MEDIAN VALUE IN CF	RRE	TAX AMOUNT	PER CAPITA INCOME	MUNICIPALITY	MEDIAN VALUE IN CF	RRE	TAX AMOUNT	PER CAPITA INCOME
BARRINGTON	430,000	15.34	6,596.20	69,917	NEW SHOREHAM	430,000	5.76	2,476.80	37,067
BRISTOL	430,000	10.61	4,562.30	42,658	NEWPORT	430,000	8.69	3,736.70	48,803
BURRILLVILLE	430,000	11.90	5,117.00	39,470	NORTH KINGSTOWN	430,000	11.04	4,747.20	52,035
CENTRAL FALLS	430,000	13.21	5,680.30	17,962	NORTH PROVIDENCE	430,000	17.58	7,559.40	35,843
CHARLESTOWN	430,000	5.93	2,549.90	50,086	NORTH SMITHFIELD	430,000	11.50	4,945.00	43,850
COVENTRY	430,000	16.09	6,918.70	41,409	PAWTUCKET	430,000	13.15	5,654.50	30,246
CRANSTON	430,000	13.88	5,968.40	38,269	PORTSMOUTH	430,000	13.28	5,710.40	54,981
CUMBERLAND	430,000	12.27	5,276.10	46,179	PROVIDENCE	430,000	8.40	3,612.00	31,757
EAST GREENWICH	430,000	15.57	6,695.10	71,096	RICHMOND	430,000	14.67	6,308.10	44,904
EAST PROVIDENCE	430,000	13.07	5,620.10	38,714	SCITUATE	430,000	13.91	5,981.30	50,027
EXETER	430,000	11.75	5,052.50	41,058	SMITHFIELD	430,000	12.39	5,327.70	40,495
FOSTER	430,000	21.52	9,253.60	37,382	SOUTH KINGSTOWN	430,000	8.94	3,844.20	42,080
GLOCESTER	430,000	14.26	6,131.80	39,743	TIVERTON	430,000	11.33	4,871.90	44,202
HOPKINTON	430,000	15.29	6,574.70	42,672	WARREN	430,000	14.89	6,402.70	42,683
JAMESTOWN	430,000	5.64	2,425.20	74,159	WARWICK	430,000	12.70	5,461.00	41,476
JOHNSTON	430,000	15.62	6,716.60	36,251	WEST GREENWICH	430,000	16.00	6,880.00	44,457
LINCOLN	430,000	13.52	5,813.60	44,135	WEST WARWICK	430,000	14.29	6,144.70	36,148
LITTLE COMPTON	430,000	4.79	2,059.70	81,912	WESTERLY	430,000	7.11	3,057.30	46,913
MIDDLETOWN	430,000	9.06	3,895.80	47,714	WOONSOCKET	430,000	11.23	4,828.90	26,561
NARRAGANSETT	430,000	6.79	2,919.70	44,414					

FY2026 RHODE ISLAND TAX RATES BY CLASS OF PROPERTY
 ASSESSMENT DATE DECEMBER 31, 2024 (MOST RECENT)
 COMMERCIAL

TAX ROLL YEAR 2025

MUNICIPALITY	MEDIAN VALUE IN CF	COMM	TAX AMOUNT	PER CAPITA INCOME	MUNICIPALITY	MEDIAN VALUE IN CF	COMM	TAX AMOUNT	PER CAPITA INCOME
BARRINGTON	392000	15.34	6,013.28	69,917	NEW SHOREHAM	392000	5.76	2,257.92	37,067
BRISTOL	392000	10.61	4,159.12	42,658	NEWPORT	392000	10.77	4,221.84	48,803
BURRILLVILLE	392000	11.90	4,664.80	39,470	NORTH KINGSTOWN	392000	14.79	5,797.68	52,035
CENTRAL FALLS	392000	21.75	8,526.00	17,962	NORTH PROVIDENCE	392000	24.32	9,533.44	35,843
CHARLESTOWN	392000	5.93	2,324.56	50,086	NORTH SMITHFIELD	392000	16.94	6,640.48	43,850
COVENTRY	392000	22.61	8,863.12	41,409	PAWTUCKET	392000	23.01	9,019.92	30,246
CRANSTON	392000	20.82	8,161.44	38,269	PORTSMOUTH	392000	13.28	5,205.76	54,981
CUMBERLAND	392000	12.27	4,809.84	46,179	PROVIDENCE	392000	29.20	11,446.40	31,757
EAST GREENWICH	392000	27.00	10,584.00	71,096	RICHMOND	392000	14.67	5,750.64	44,904
EAST PROVIDENCE	392000	20.63	8,086.96	38,714	SCITUATE	392000	20.79	8,149.68	50,027
EXETER	392000	11.75	4,606.00	41,058	SMITHFIELD	392000	18.58	7,283.36	40,495
FOSTER	392000	21.52	8,435.84	37,382	SOUTH KINGSTOWN	392000	8.94	3,504.48	42,080
GLOCESTER	392000	17.11	6,707.12	39,743	TIVERTON	392000	11.33	4,441.36	44,202
HOPKINTON	392000	15.29	5,993.68	42,672	WARREN	392000	14.89	5,836.88	42,683
JAMESTOWN	392000	5.64	2,210.88	74,159	WARWICK	392000	23.99	9,404.08	41,476
JOHNSTON	392000	27.98	10,968.16	36,251	WEST GREENWICH	392000	23.75	9,310.00	44,457
LINCOLN	392000	23.99	9,404.08	44,135	WEST WARWICK	392000	22.62	8,867.04	36,148
LITTLE COMPTON	392000	4.79	1,877.68	81,912	WESTERLY	392000	7.11	2,787.12	46,913
MIDDLETOWN	392000	13.59	5,327.28	47,714	WOONSOCKET	392000	21.30	8,349.60	25,561
NARRAGANSETT	392000	9.17	3,594.64	44,414					

CENTRAL FALLS COMPARISON TO OTHER MUNICIPALITIES

Property Type	Comparison	Rate per \$1000
RE Tax Rate	Highest Rate	21.52
	Lowest Rate	4.79
	Median Rate	12.70
	Average Rate	12.13
	Central Falls Rate (17 th highest)	13.21
Commercial RE Tax Rate	Highest Rate	29.20
	Lowest Rate	4.79
	Median Rate	15.34
	Average Rate	16.56
	Central Falls Rate (11 th highest)	21.75
Tangible Property Tax Rate	Highest Rate	64.65
	Lowest Rate	5.74
	Median Rate	20.65
	Average Rate	27.82
	Central Falls Rate (11 th highest)	38.33

Comparison	Per Capita Income
Highest Rate	81,912
Lowest Rate	17,962
Median Rate	42,672
Average Rate	44,608
Central Falls Rate (lowest)	17,962

RI City & Town Income
American Community Survey 5 YR Estimates
2017-2021

NON-TAX REVENUE OPTIONS

Physical size of our municipality limits are revenue generating options

- Central Falls is 1.2 square miles
- Continuing to look for new sources

Non-tax revenue that is dependent on a strong economy has resulted in recent surpluses. Continued growth, however, is likely unattainable.

- Building, plumbing and electrical permits
- Real estate conveyance tax

Traffic cameras

- Revenue has peaked

OPERATING EXPENSES

- Central Falls public safety salaries are generally the lowest in the state (see next slide)
- Central Falls pension is significantly underfunded (bankruptcy). Required contribution continues to rise. (see next slide)
- Central Falls recently added additional debt for its contribution to the high school construction.

Expense Description	Percentage of Budget
Police Salary (union)	15.9%
Fire Salary (union)	15.05%
DPW/Clerks/Dispatchers (union)	6.26%
Administration	7.85%
Fringe Benefits	10.17%
Pension	13.36%
Debt	4.78%
Other (utilities/supplies/services)	26.63%

SALARY & PENSION PRESSURES

Most Dangerous Cities in RI (May 30, 2022) <https://www.onlyinyourstate.com/state-articles/rhode-island/10-most-dangerous-cities-for-2020-ri>

Salary Analysis (as of 6/30/25)

Municipality	Patrol Class III	Patrol Class II	Patrol Class I	Detective	Sergeant	Lieutenant	Captain	Major
Johnston	60,341	69,806	73,304	78,456	79,548	83,608	88,761	92,399
West Warwick	N/A	N/A	72,894	75,169	80,250	87,013	89,210	98,172
Warren	50,927	57,897	64,869	68,350	71,093	75,283	N/A	80,554
North Smithfield	61,057	63,856	71,135	76,565	79,302	83,599	89,568	N/A
Cranston	61,632	66,281	80,344	N/A	87,605	96,342	115,872	N/A
Central Falls	N/A	49,287	64,810	69,347	74,201	79,396	83,365	87,534
Newport	67,810	72,900	78,365	83,062	87,075	96,887	107,943	N/A
Pawtucket	N/A	62,340	73,101	76,447	81,172	89,242	97,313	105,384
Woonsocket	48,638	66,520	67,850	71,242	74,805	82,473	90,926	N/A
Providence	72,251	73,908	78,568	87,997	90,131	98,399	105,927	N/A

Average	60,379	64,755	72,524	76,293	80,518	87,224	96,543	92,808
Difference CF to average		15,468	7,714	6,946	6,317	7,828	13,178	5,274

Fiscal Year	Required Pension Employer Rate
FY22	59.30
FY23	61.52
FY24	57.75
FY25	59.67
FY26	61.00

FY26 – FY30 FORECAST

Forecast assumes the maximum levy increase of 4%

Forecast assumes state revenue stays flat?!

Forecast assumes non-tax revenue stays relatively flat. Forecast reflects unidentified revenue requirement in the outer years

Expenses assumptions – Union Salaries & Fringe 3% Non-Union Salaries & Fringe 2% All other inflation 3%

Forecast does not yet reflect school funding contribution

Description	FY26 (Budget)	FY27	FY28	FY29	FY30
Tax Revenue	16,665,725	17,406,269	18,041,235	18,701,599	19,388,378
State Revenue	3,500,099	3,500,099	3,500,099	3,500,099	3,500,099
Non-Tax Revenue	1,855,700	1,798,937	1,792,588	1,785,984	1,779,116
Revenue Challenge				107,937	373,192
Total Revenues	21,860,867	22,705,305	23,333,922	24,095,619	25,040,785
Operating Expenses	21,860,867	22,705,305	23,333,922	24,095,619	25,040,785
(Surplus) / Deficit	0	0	0	0	0
Tax Levy	16,738,818	17,405,251	18,101,461	18,825,519	19,578,540
Levy Change %	3.5%	4.0%	4.0%	4.0%	4.0%
Levy Change \$	562,721	669,433	696,210	724,058	753,021

Fiscal YR	PY Levy	1/2% Local Funding	Cumulative Local Funding
FY27	16,738,818	83,679	83,679
FY28	17,405,251	87,026	170,705
FY29	18,101,461	90,507	261,213
FY30	18,825,519	94,128	355,340
FY31	19,578,540	97,893	453,233
For Discussion Purposes Only			
FY32	20,361,682	101,808	555,041
FY33	21,176,149	105,881	660,922
FY34	22,023,195	110,116	771,038
FY35	22,904,123	114,521	885,559
FY36	23,820,287	119,101	1,004,660
YEAR 13	27,866,367	139,332	1,530,650

CENTRAL FALLS LOCAL FUNDING PROPOSAL

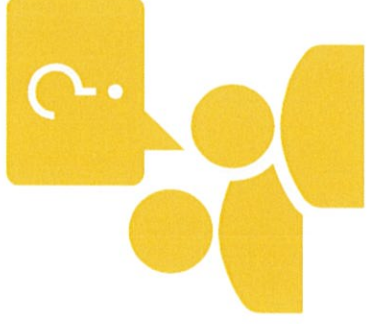
Local funding each year would be 1/2% of the previous years total levy.

Commitment would be reevaluated after 5 years

Local funding not included in previous forecast

Obvious Risks

- Constituents managing annual 4% levy increase
- Downturn in the economy resulting in decrease non-tax revenue
- Union labor rates dictated by arbitration
- Significant city infrastructure spending requirements (sewer)
- Significant city capital requirements
- Higher than forecast inflation



QUESTIONS & DISCUSSION

Momentum in Central Falls School District

Presentation to the

SPECIAL JOINT LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION TO STUDY THE RETURN OF

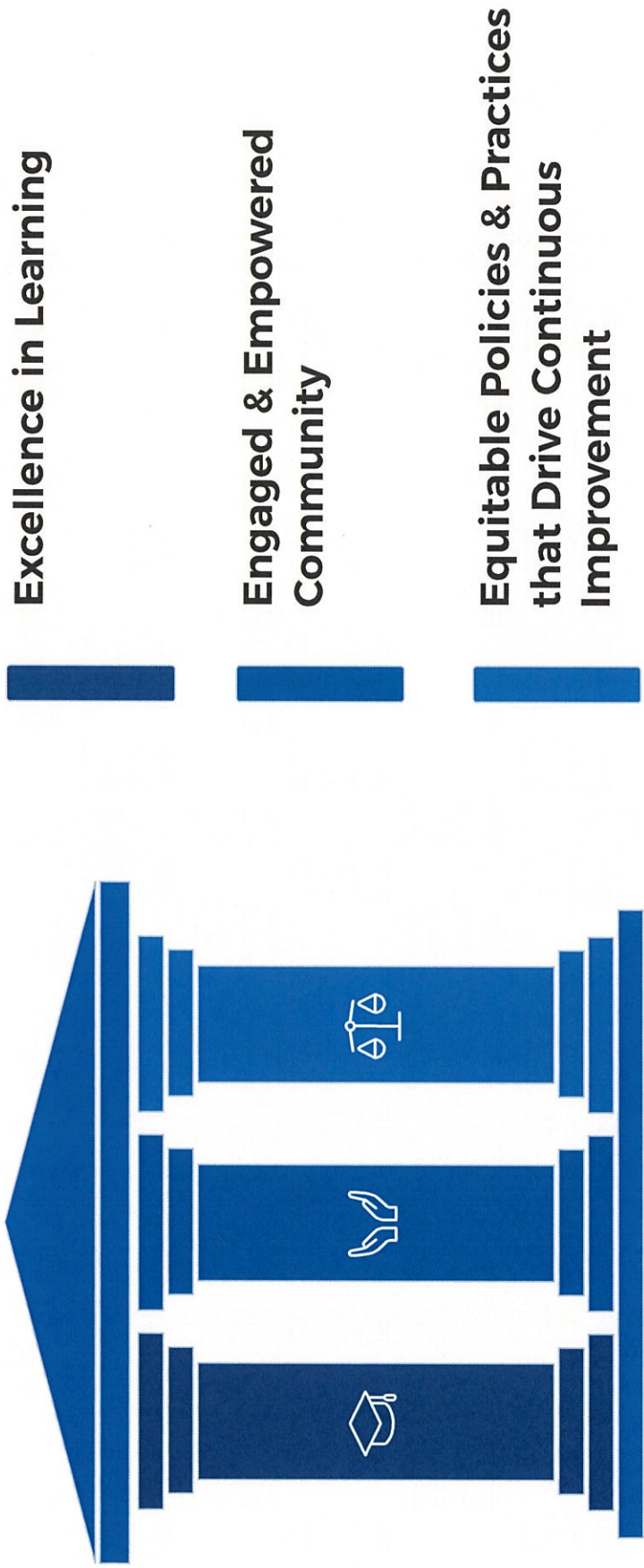
CENTRAL FALLS SCHOOLS TO LOCAL GOVERNANCE

Superintendent Dr. Stephanie Downey Toledo

January 14, 2026



CFSD's Strategic Plan has 3 Pillars Aligned with our 3 Core Values



EXCELLENCE IN LEARNING

Elevating Instructional Quality Across All Schools

Universal ESOL Certification

All CFTU staff are now educators of multilingual learners, with contractual requirements for ESOL certification ensuring every teacher is equipped to support our diverse student population.

High-Quality Curriculum

Rigorous, research-based ELA and Math curriculum implemented across all grades PK-12, providing consistent standards and learning experiences throughout the district.

Embedded Professional Development

Regular district-led instructional walks, targeted coaching sessions, job-embedded professional development, and collaborative data dives at all seven schools.



Educator Excellence: Investing in Coaching and Celebrating their Recognition

4X

Coaching Expansion

Quadrupled our instructional coaches from 2 to 8 over the past three years, ensuring ongoing, personalized support for every educator in the district.

6

Statewide Awards

Multiple Rhode Island Educator of the Year recognitions across diverse categories demonstrating excellence district-wide.

Award Winners Include:

- STEAM Educator of the Year
- Art Educator of the Year
- Math Educator of the Year
- RITELL Educator of the Year
- Assistant Principal of the Year (Calcutt)
- Principal of the Year (CFHS)

Exceptional Growth, Especially in English Language Development



RIDE Report Card Results
All our elementary schools earned 3, 4, or 5 stars on the RIDE report card for English Language Development—a testament to our commitment to multilingual learners.

Exited CSI Status
Previously 50% of our schools were flagged on the RIDE list of schools in the lowest bracket statewide. Through incredible growth and achievement, all CFSD schools have exited this status.

Raices Dual Language Academy - Accountability Overview

View Individual Measures	Points Possible	Points Earned	Max. School Rating*
English Language Proficiency	1 - 3 Points	3	5 Stars ★★★★★

Growth, continued

1

RICAS Improvement

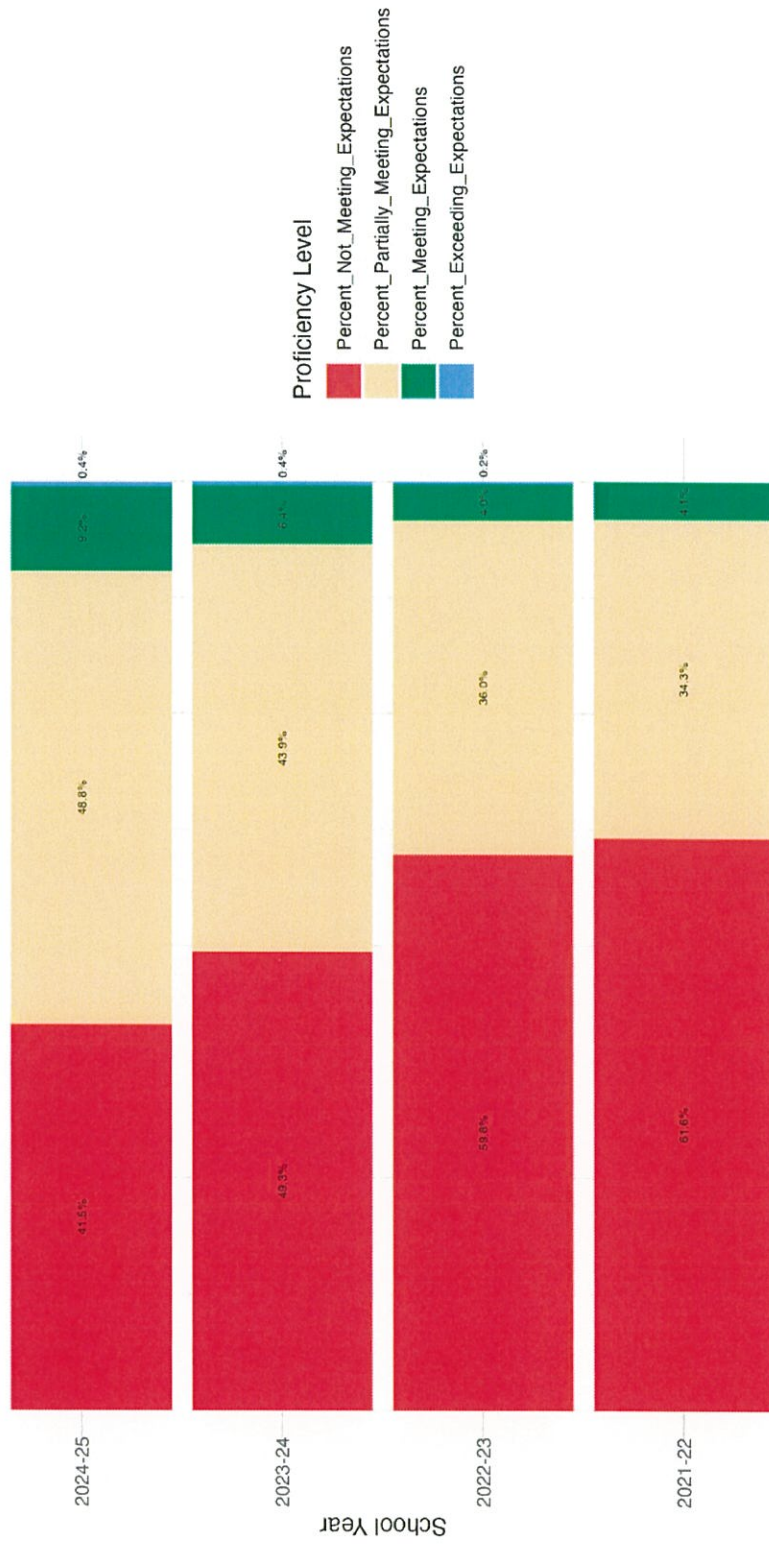
While more students are meeting expectations, we also are celebrating students who reduced "Not Meets" performance levels by an impressive 20 percentage points on RICAS assessments, reflecting meaningful academic progress across the district.

2

#SlopesOverPoints

Districtwide we have a focus on growth over achievement, which we call #SlopesOverPoints to keep our focus on each individual student improving.

CFSD Math Proficiency - All Schools



Transforming Our Learning Environments



\$100M State-of-the-Art High School

Currently constructing a new, cutting-edge high school facility while strategically investing in improvements and upgrades across all other district buildings.



Building a 2nd New School: PK-8th Dual Language on site on current HS



SMART Clinics Expansion

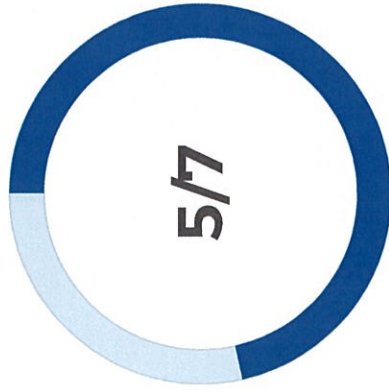
Successfully opened three SMART Clinics at Calcutt, Veterans, and Ella Risk, providing essential healthcare access directly in our schools. Our SMART Clinics partner with Brown University Medical School and have rotations right in our schools.



\$13M from RIDE through the Facility Equity Initiative (FEI, FOI)

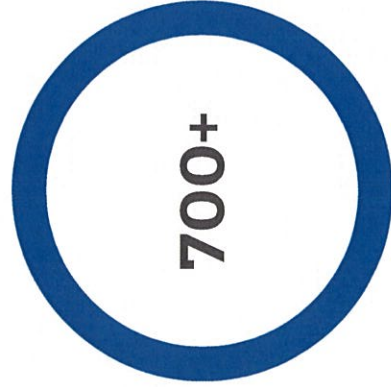
Through the incredible investment from the State of RI, we have been awarded funds in each of the 3 rounds of FEI/FOI so far which have enhanced science labs, media center, new cafeteria, and so much more!

Remarkable Progress in Student Attendance



Schools Already Meeting Target

Five of our seven CFSD schools have already reduced chronic absenteeism below our 15% strategic plan goal set for SY27.



Students Re-engaged

Reduced chronically absent students by over 700 from SY21-22 to January 2026.



This extraordinary improvement demonstrates our comprehensive approach to student engagement, family support, and removing barriers to consistent school attendance.



EQUITABLE POLICIES & PRACTICES

Building a Representative, Bilingual Workforce



Bilingual Staff Growth

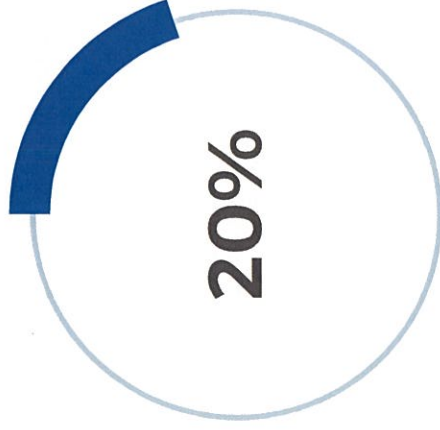
Dramatically increased bilingual certified staff from just 8% to 21%, ensuring our educators reflect and can effectively communicate with our student population.



Paraprofessional Pipeline

Expanded paraprofessionals enrolled in the Teaching Assistant to Bachelor's degree program from 3 to 11 in a single school year, creating clear pathways to teaching careers.

Creating a Workforce That Reflects Our Community



BIPOC Certified Staff

The percentage of BIPOC certified staff has reached 20% district-wide, reflecting our commitment to diversity and representation.



BIPOC Administrators

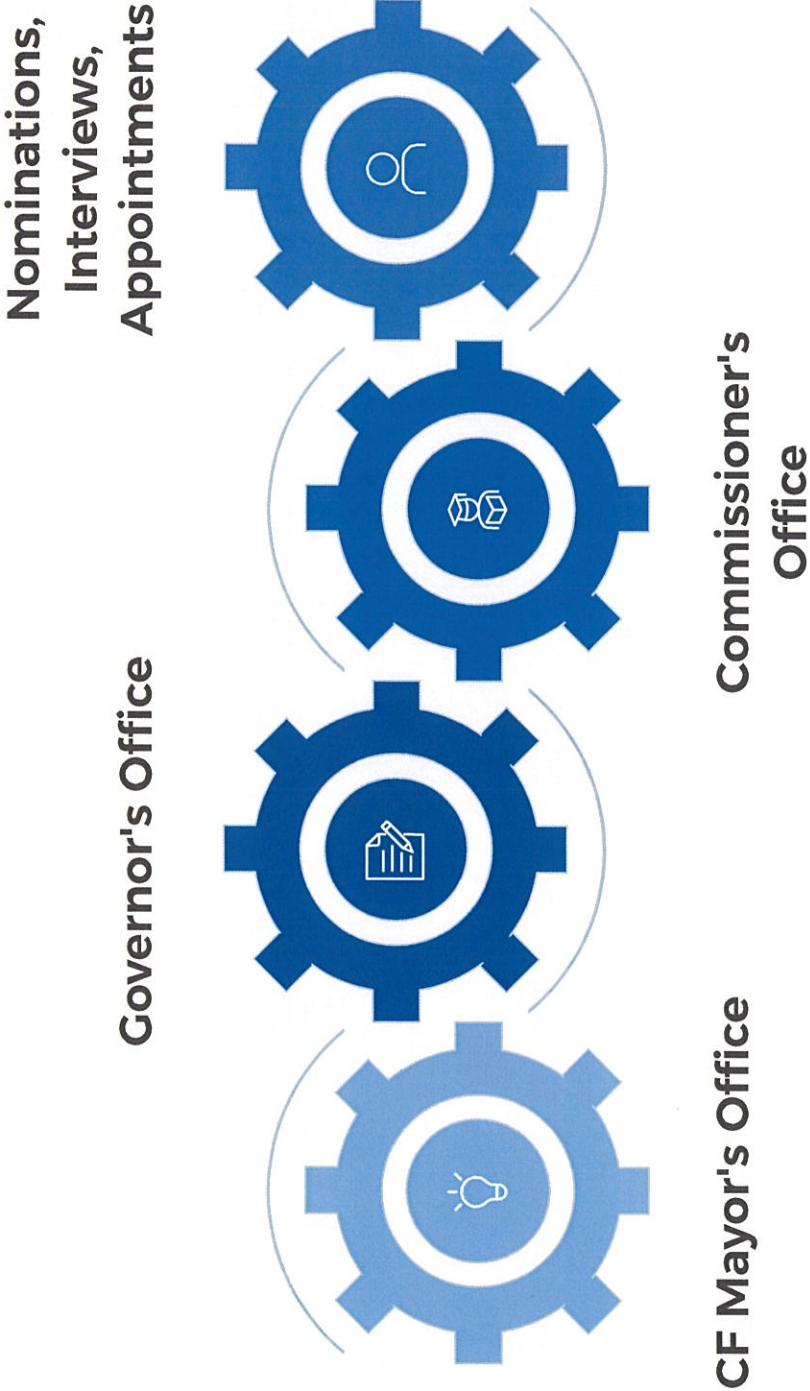
An impressive 48% of our certified administrators identify as BIPOC, ensuring diverse leadership perspectives at every level.

Our Momentum Continues

Central Falls School District has demonstrated extraordinary progress across all strategic priorities. Through targeted investments in instruction, infrastructure, and human capital, we are building an educational system that serves every student with excellence and equity. This is just the beginning of our transformative journey.

The Central Falls School District Budget Process

Process of How Current CFSD Board Members Were Selected



Board of Trustees Responsibilities

Fiduciary Duty

Our CFSD Board members serve as stewards of public funds, ensuring resources align with our CFSD educational mission and community expectations.

Strategic Oversight

The CFSD Board sets priorities, approves major expenditures, and monitors spending against approved allocations throughout the fiscal year.

Public Accountability

Members represent taxpayer interests, asking tough questions and demanding transparency in all financial decisions.

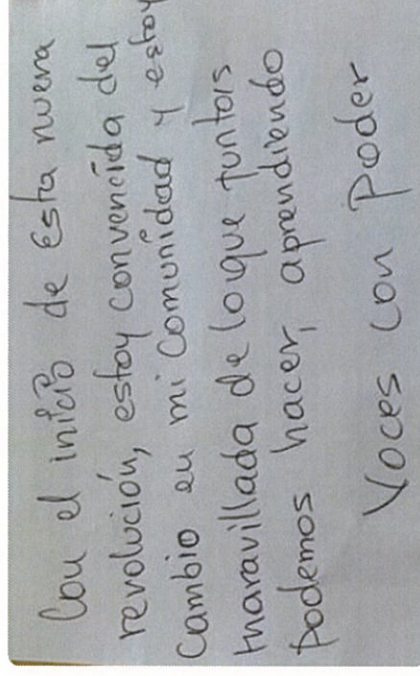
The Budget Development Timeline

Creating our CFSD budget is a year-long process requiring collaboration across departments, community input, and strategic alignment with educational goals.

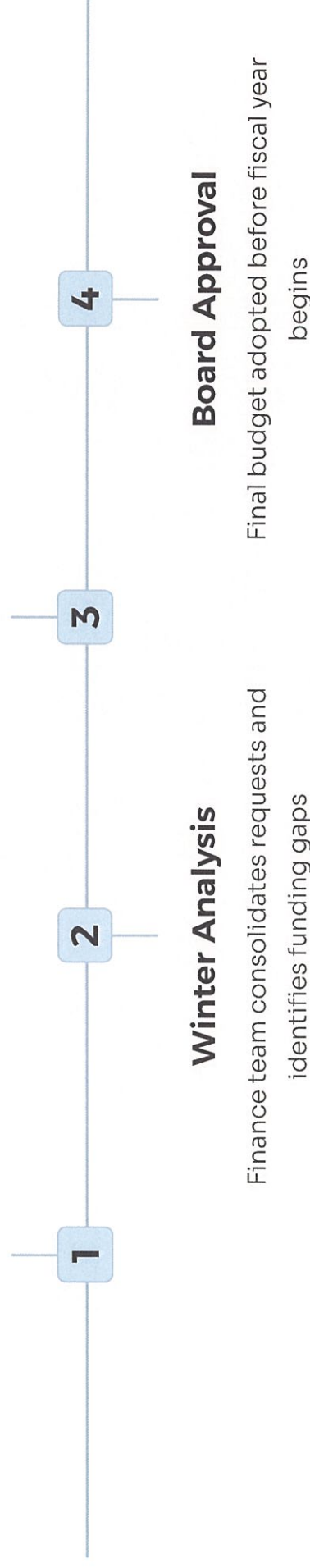
Fall Planning

Departments submit initial requests and enrollment projections begin

Spring Community Input

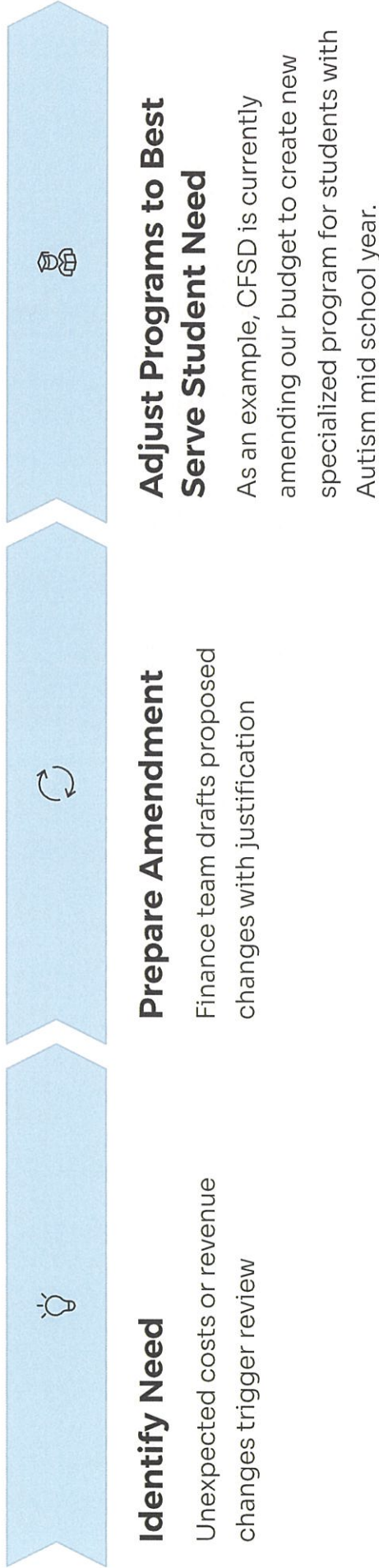


Through each School Improvement Team (SIT) there is an opportunity for gathering community input on priorities



Post-Approval Budget Revisions

Once approved, the budget isn't set in stone. CFSD must respond to changing circumstances while maintaining fiscal responsibility.





RIDE's Role in the Budget Process

The Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) provides critical oversight, guidance, and compliance monitoring throughout the budget cycle.



Regulatory Compliance

Ensures budgets meet state mandates



Funding Allocation

Distributes state aid formulas



Reporting Standards

Sets uniform financial reporting requirements

Long-Term Contracts & Commitments

Understanding contract durations helps boards plan for future budget obligations and negotiate strategically.

2-3 yrs



Collective Bargaining

CFTU - 2 year ending Summer '27

Council 94 - 3 year ending Summer '28

18m



Transportation + Custodial

Our contracts with First Student and UG2 both end Summer '27

6m



Food Service

Our current Chartwells contract ends June 2026. CFSD opts to partner with the Food Service Provider who has been awarded the State Contract.


10+ yrs




Facilities

Bond obligations and major construction

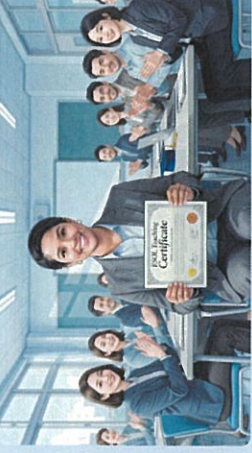
OPPORTUNITY: Short Term Investments for Long Term Gains (ESSER Funds)



High quality curricular resources in 100% of CFSD classrooms



Extended the learning day for multilingual learners



Invested in ESOL certification for all CFTU educators



Flexible, 21st c. furniture in K-5



Technology upgrades

Due to other grant funding, sunseting ESSER did not significantly impact the daily experience of students and teachers. The elimination or reorganization of ESSER funded positions was often related to allowability and sustainability within the scope of new funding sources.

CHALLENGE: Enrollment

- ▼ Prior to 2025, CFSD would enroll students on at least 170 of the 180 school days — constantly welcoming new students.
- ▼ Within a typical SY, we may fluctuate by 250+ students (10%)
- ▼ Since January 2025 enrollment, especially of Newcomers has significantly reduced.
- ▼ Projections completed in July 2020 in preparation for building our new CFHS

School District: Central Falls, RI

7/1/2020

Enrollment Projections By Grade*																			
Birth Year	Births	School Year	PK	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	UNGR	K-12	PK-12
2014	322	2019-20	223	217	214	216	217	184	199	218	203	171	229	209	182	196	0	2655	2878
2015	304	2020-21	224	192	234	217	222	215	166	171	218	213	184	266	209	195	0	2702	2926
2016	335	2021-22	225	211	207	238	223	220	194	143	171	229	229	213	266	224	0	2768	2993
2017	325	2022-23	226	205	228	210	244	221	198	167	143	180	246	266	213	285	0	2806	3032
2018	307	2023-24	227	193	221	231	216	242	199	170	167	150	193	285	266	228	0	2761	2988
2019	297	2024-25 (prov.)	228	187	208	224	237	214	218	171	170	175	161	224	285	285	0	2759	2987
2020	314	2025-26 (est.)	229	198	202	211	230	235	193	187	171	179	188	187	224	305	0	2710	2939
2021	316	2026-27 (est.)	230	199	214	205	217	228	212	166	187	180	192	218	187	240	0	2645	2875
2022	312	2027-28 (est.)	231	196	215	217	210	215	205	182	166	196	193	223	218	200	0	2636	2867
2023	309	2028-29 (est.)	232	195	212	218	223	208	194	176	182	174	210	224	223	233	0	2672	2904
2024	309	2029-30 (est.)	233	195	211	215	224	221	187	167	176	191	187	244	224	239	0	2681	2914

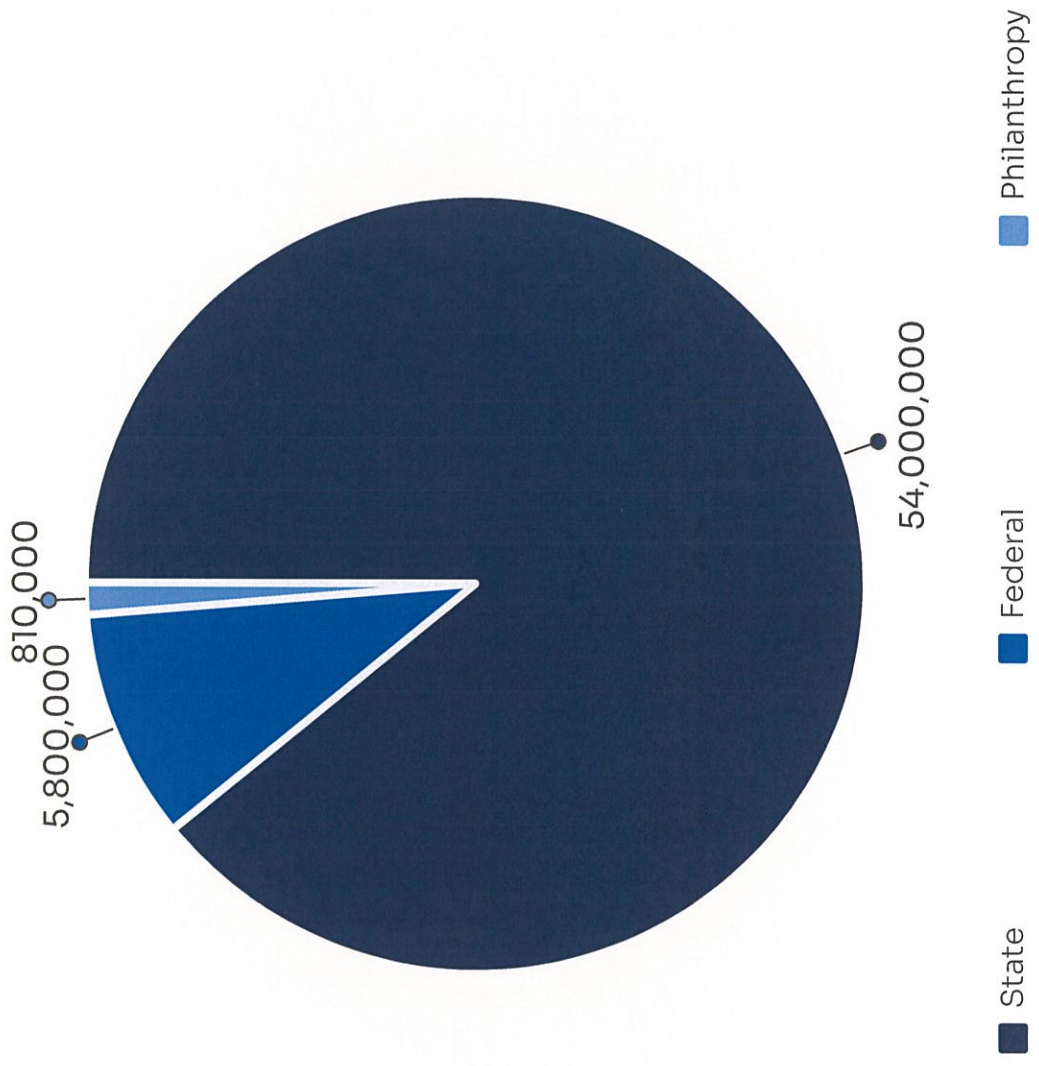
Note: Ungraded students (UNGR) often are high school students whose anticipated years of graduation are unknown, or students with special needs - UNGR not included in Grade Combinations for 7-12, 9-12, etc.

Based on an estimate of births

Based on children already born

Based on students already enrolled

Funding Sources FY25



**SPECIAL JOINT LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION TO STUDY THE
RETURN OF CENTRAL FALLS SCHOOLS TO LOCAL GOVERNANCE**

NOTICE OF MEETING

DATE: Wednesday, January 21, 2026

TIME: 4:00 PM

PLACE: Room 313 – State House

AGENDA:

- I. Call Meeting to Order and Attendance
- II. Presentation on the City of Central Falls by **Stephen Owens, Ph.D., Director, Policy and Advocacy, Brown’s Promise**
- III. Discuss Future Presentations
- IV. Next Meeting Date
- V. Adjournment

No Public Testimony will be accepted at this meeting.

COMMISSION INFORMATION

For information on commissions, [CLICK HERE](#). If you have any questions, please contact Tom Kane in the Senate Policy Office (tkane@rilegislature.gov).

ACCOMMODATIONS

The General Assembly strives to make the legislative process accessible to all. Anyone needing an accommodation to attend or testify at a commission meeting, contact Stacy Custer at scuster@rilegislature.gov or 401-222-7904 at least 48 hours in advance of the scheduled meeting.

TELEVISION AND LIVESTREAM INFORMATION

The meeting may be televised by Capitol Television on Cox Communications, channels 15 and 61 for high definition; i3 Broadband (formerly Full Channel) on 15; and Verizon, on channel 34. Senate committee hearings may also air on Channel 75 for Cox Subscribers.

Livestreaming is available at <https://capitolvri.cablecast.tv/>

POSTED: SATURDAY, JANUARY 17, 2026, 1:00 P.M.

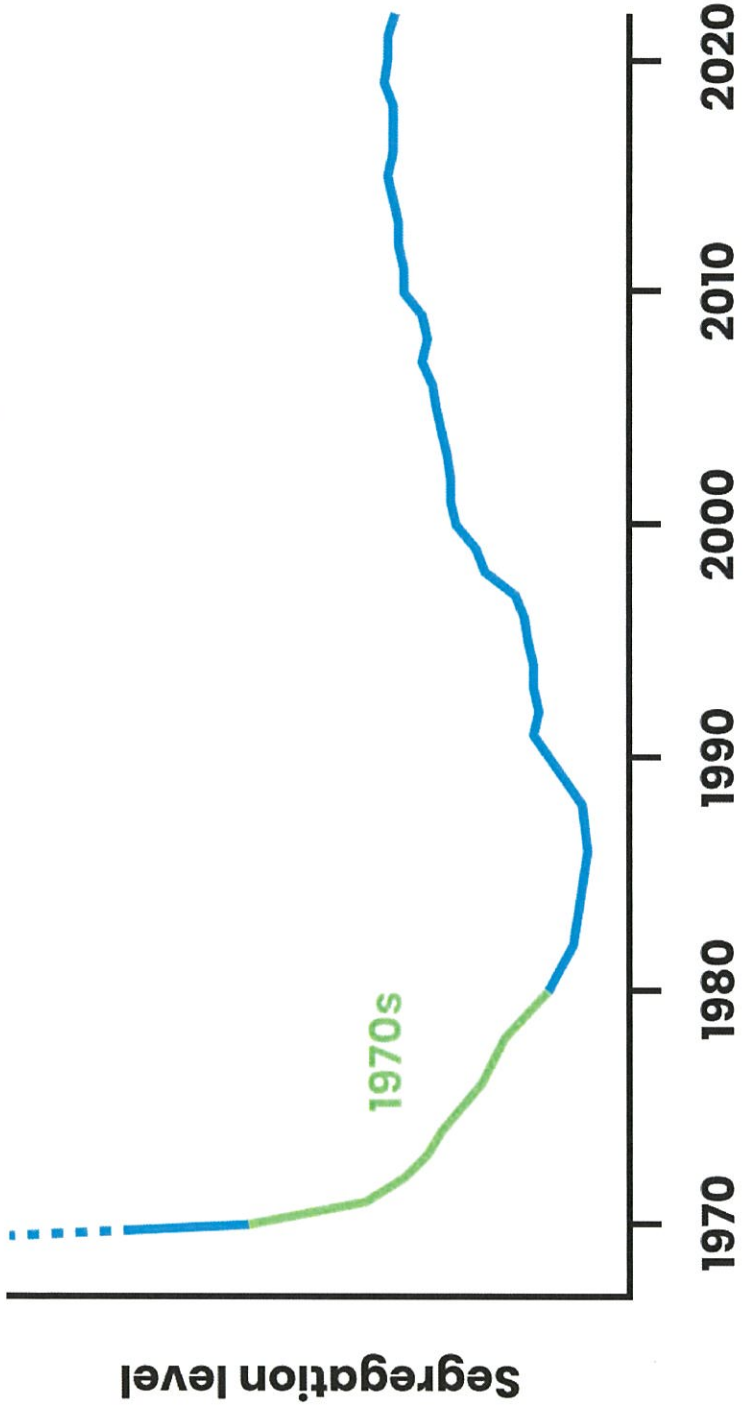
Brown's Promise 

Fulfilling Brown's Promise

**Joint Legislative Commission to Study the Return of
Central Falls Schools to Local Governance
1/21/25**

Average White-Black Segregation

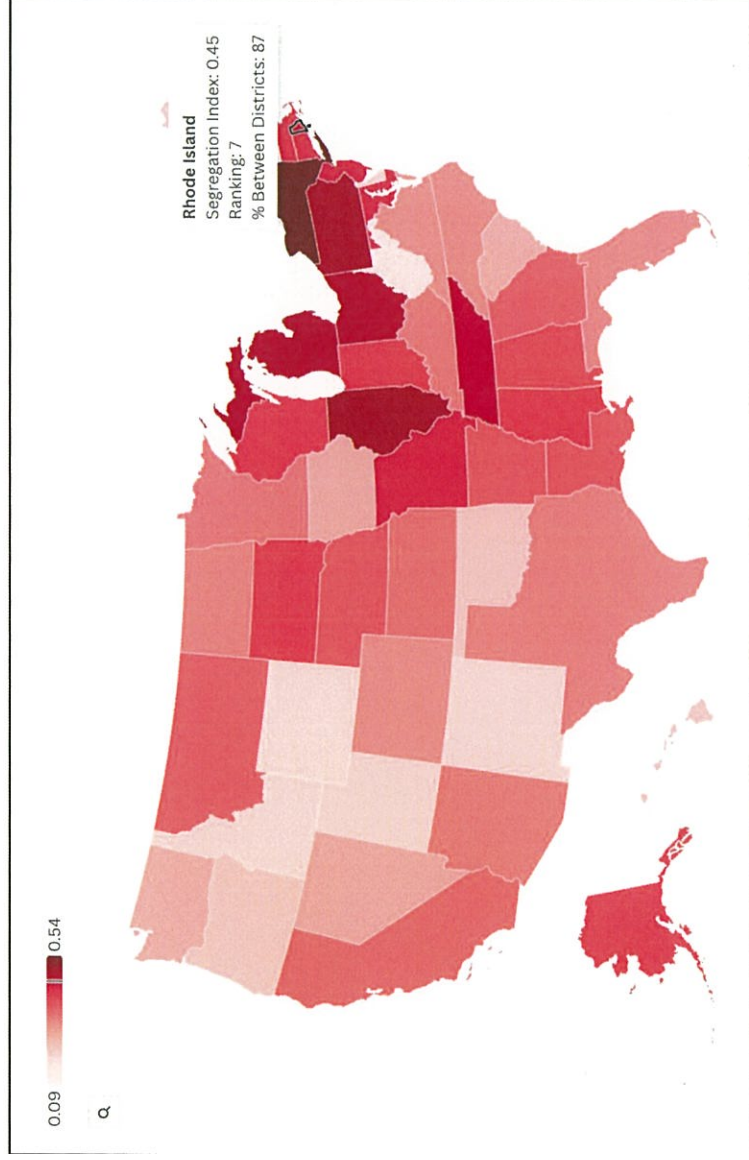
All 541 US districts with at least 2500 Black students



Source: Owens and Reardon, "The state of segregation: 70 years after Brown," 2024 presentation at Stanford University.

Why It Matters

State Rankings by Racial Segregation



Rhode Island
7th worst racial
segregation
(87% between districts)

13th worst income
segregation
(77% between districts)

Concentrated Poverty is a Unique Hurdle to Excellence

↑ **Neighborhood harms**

Greater exposure to air/water pollution, reduced access to healthcare, etc.



↓ **Less teacher experience**

Higher teacher and leader turnover



↓ **Less rigorous coursework**

Fewer AP/IB courses, etc.

Lower in- and out-of-school

outcomes

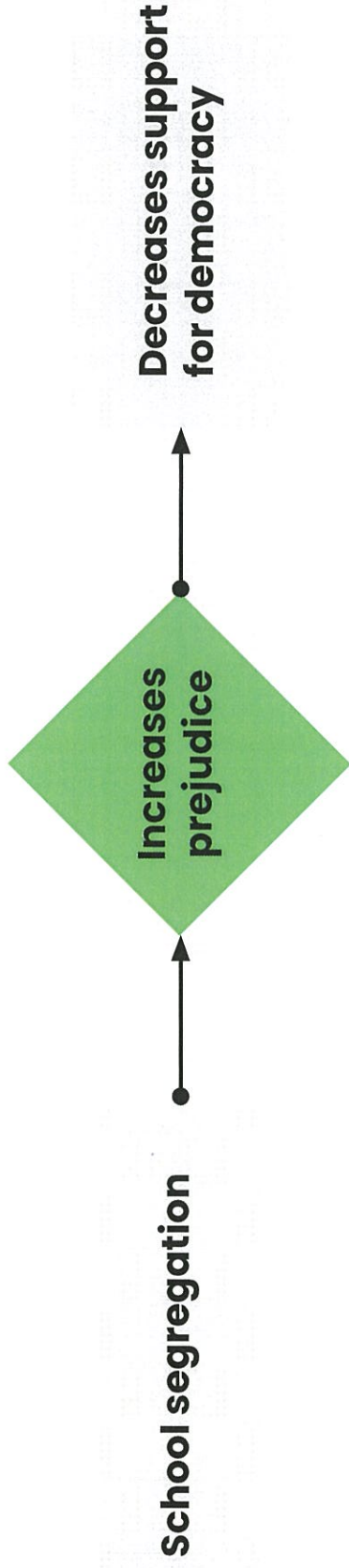
Academic performance, college attainment and future wages suffer

Diverse classrooms prepare students for the real world

Research shows integration ...

- Helps prepare children to succeed in higher education and the workplace
- Improves critical thinking and problem solving skills
- Increases the chances of finding a well-paying job
- Builds confidence and leadership skills
- Teaches students to work with people from different backgrounds

School Segregation Threatens Democracy



Today: Schools are more racially segregated than they were in the 1970s, and we are backsliding.

Research Shows: School segregation — even more than housing segregation — increases “general ethnic prejudice.”

Research Shows: Prejudice is linked to support for strongman rule and rule by army, and decreased support for democracy.

Segregation Impedes Resource Equity

Segregation

Increases Overall Cost

Adequately funding schools with concentrated poverty is very expensive; increasing total costs.

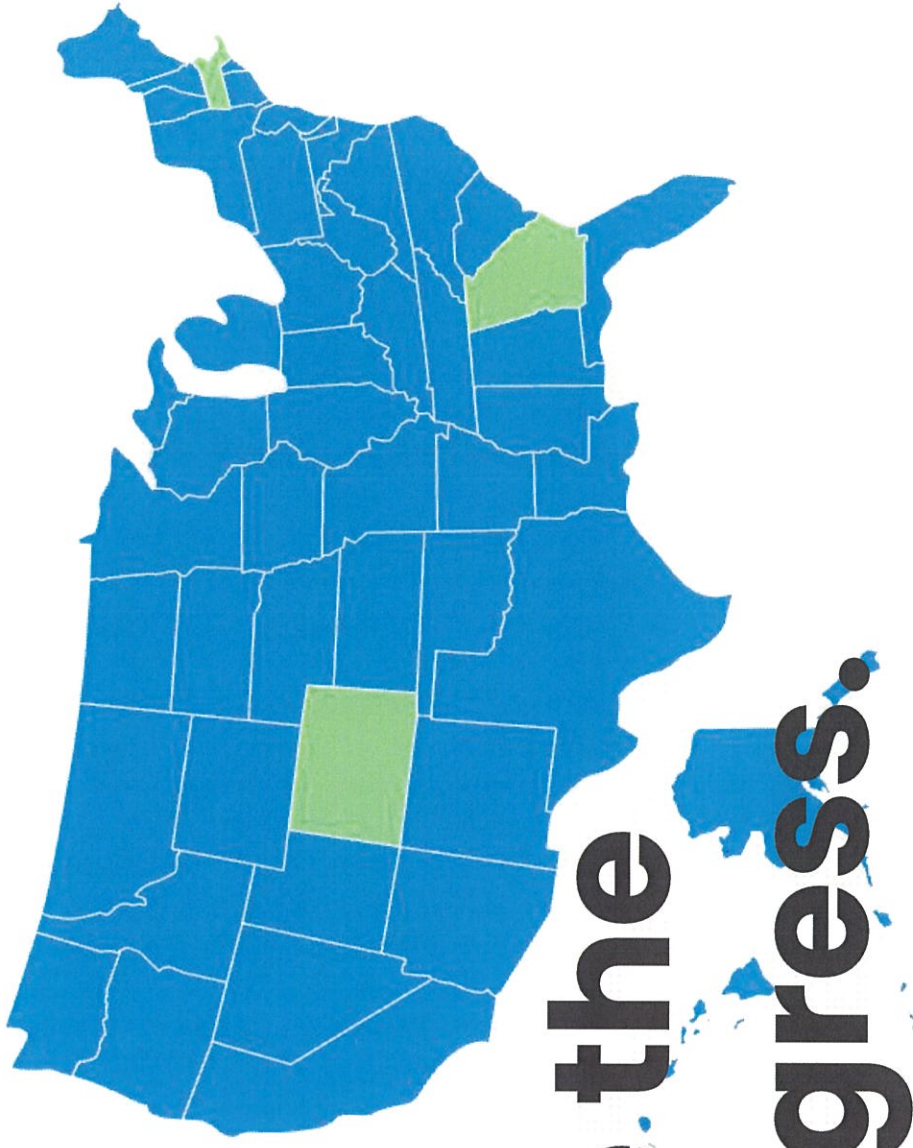
Segregation

Increases Need for Redistribution

Redistribution is politically unpopular. State policy doesn't adequately address inter-district tax inequities.

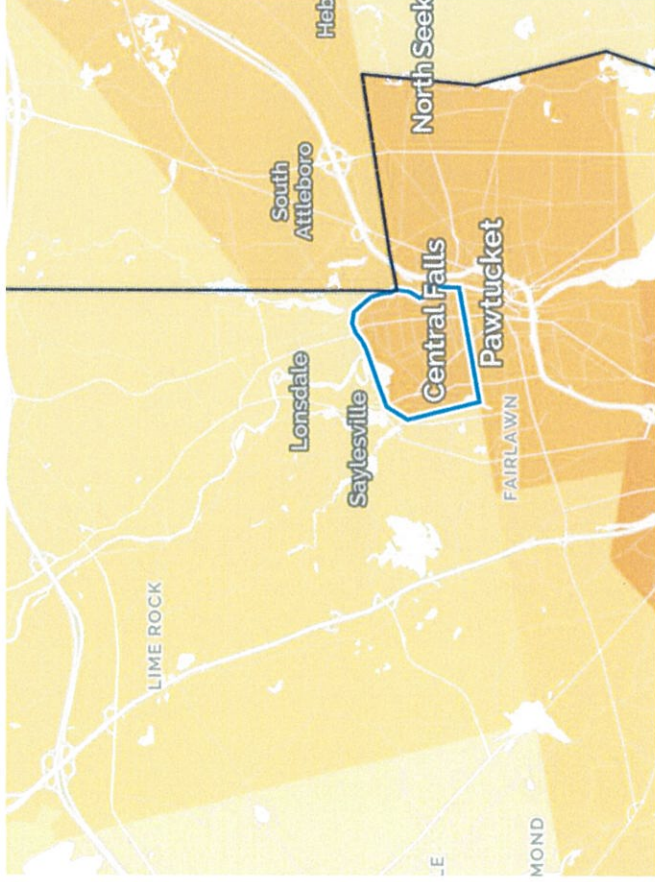
Segregation Ensures Funding Equity is Not Resource Equity

Teacher churn, insufficient rigorous course-work, and overreliance on exclusionary discipline remain.



States are the key to progress.

Central Falls



Currently:

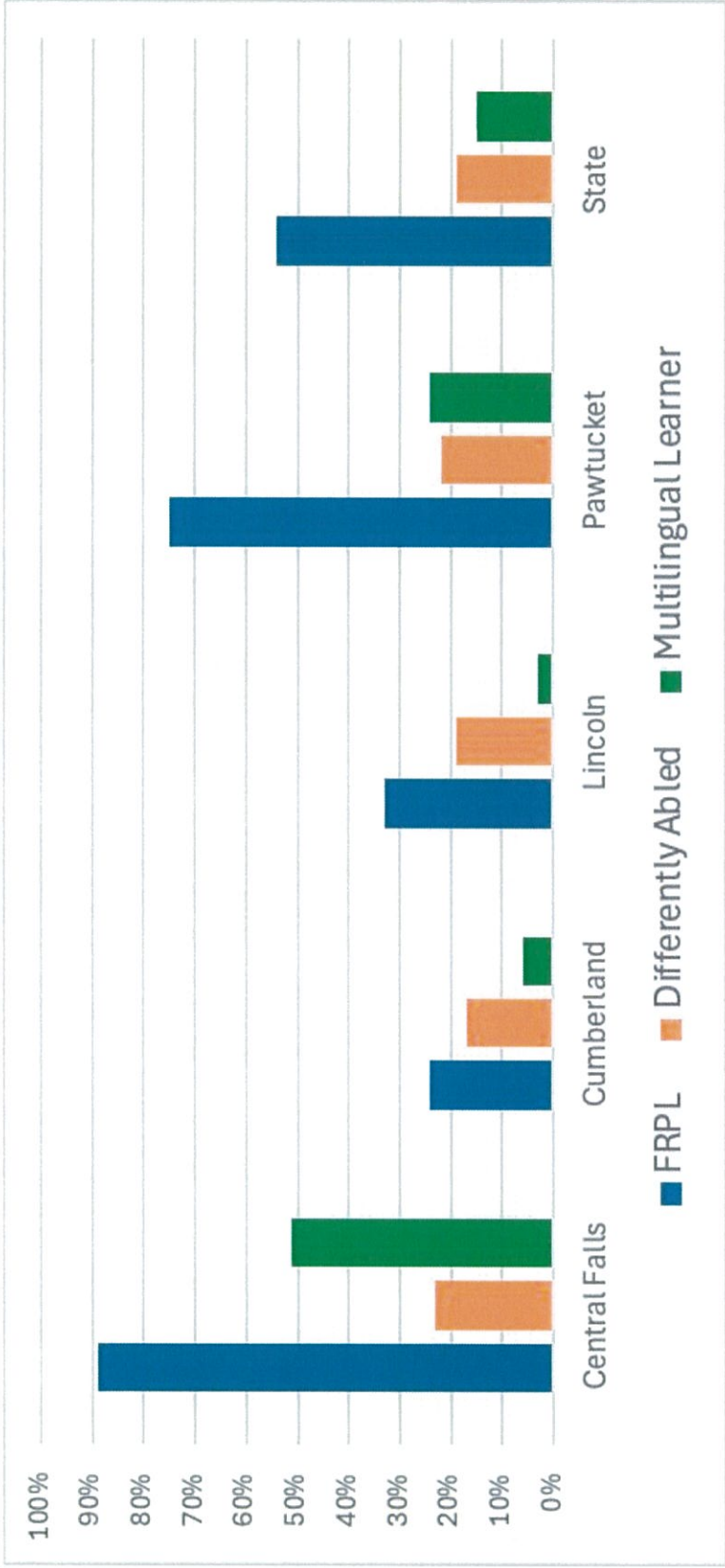
- ▶ 93 percent of students in economically disadvantaged
- ▶ 81 percent students of color
- ▶ 1 percent property tax would yield \$2,326 per pupil which is 66 percent less than what a statewide 1 percent property tax would generate

Central Falls Neighboring Districts

	Central Falls	Cumberland	Lincoln	Pawtucket	State
American Indian or Alaska Native	6%	0%	0%	1%	1%
Asian	0%	8%	5%	1%	3%
Black	17%	4%	7%	31%	9%
Hispanic	55%	16%	13%	39%	32%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Two or More Races	4%	5%	4%	6%	5%
White	18%	67%	72%	22%	49%

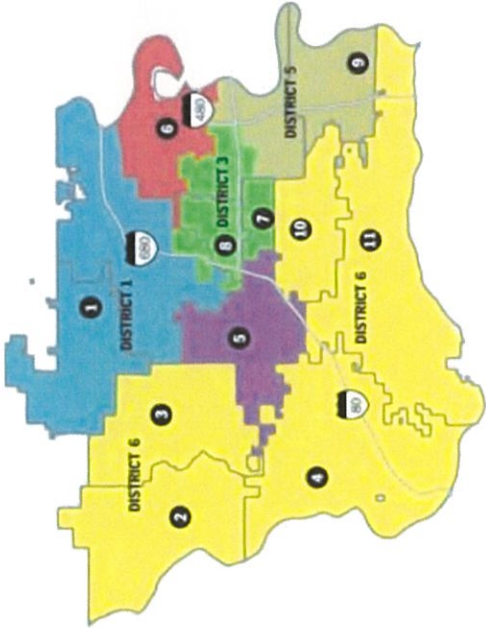
Separate and Unequal

Central Falls Neighboring Districts



Education as a Regional Responsibility

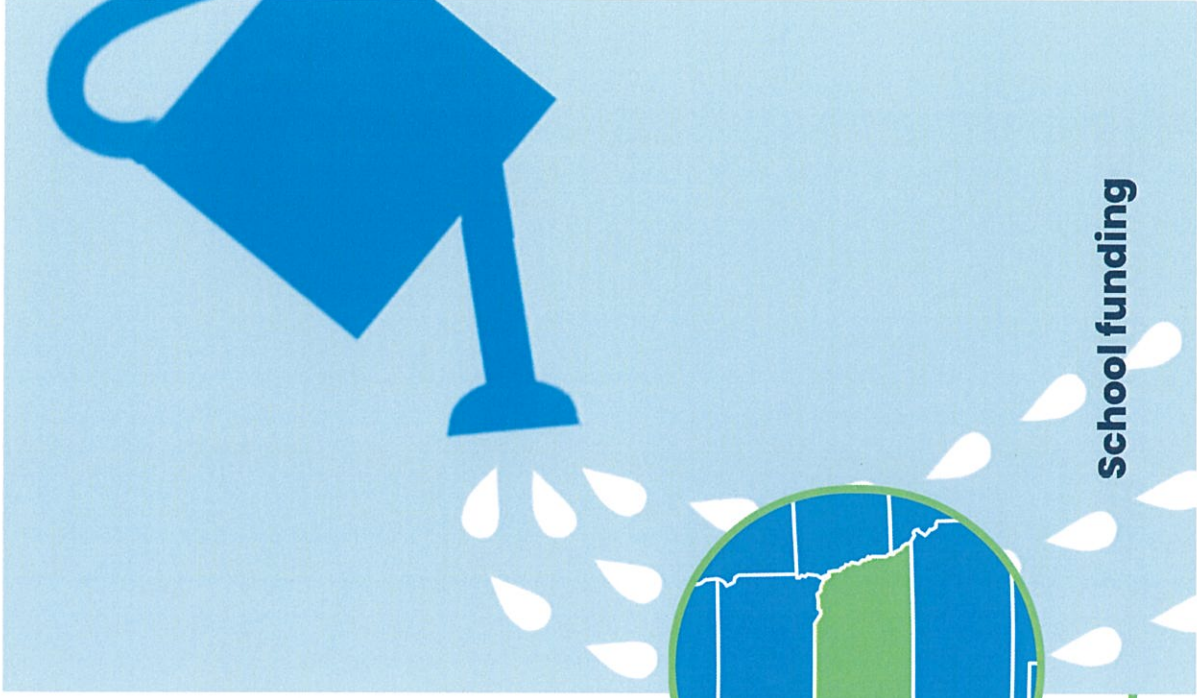
Example: Omaha, NE



11

School districts across 2 counties

- Shared funding
- Diversity-driven interdistrict transfer
- Early childhood and afterschool opportunities for low-income students



Rethinking District Lines

Example: Florida and West Virginia

Florida and West Virginia have **true countywide districts**, and the **lowest levels of income segregation** between districts in the country



Central Falls – What’s Possible

Current	District Merger	County Districts	Statewide District
\$2,326 per pupil (1% property tax)	\$7,696 per pupil +\$5,370	\$7,509 per pupil +\$5,183	\$6,927 per pupil +\$4,601
26% in poverty	15% in poverty -11%	17.2% in poverty -8.8%	10.9% in poverty -15%



Source: New America (2025). Redrawing the Lines: How Purposeful School System Redistricting Can Increase Funding Fairness and Decrease Segregation



When Enrollment Drops

**A magnet school strategy for districts committed
to excellence, equity, and diversity**



Brown's Promise 

Fulfilling Brown's Promise

**Joint Legislative Commission to Study the Return of
Central Falls Schools to Local Governance
1/21/25**

- Slide 2: Owens and Reardon, “The state of segregation: 70 years after Brown,” 2024 presentation at Stanford University.
- Slide 3: Owens and Reardon (2025). Segregation Index.
- Slide 4: See [Concentrated Poverty](#)
- Slide 5: Children of the Dream: Why School Integration Works, Rucker C. Johnson (2019)
- Slide 6: Vervaeet, R., D’hondt, F., Van Houtte, M., & Stevens, P. A. J. (2016). The ethnic prejudice of Flemish teachers: The role of ethnic school composition and of teachability. *Cultural Diversity & Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 22(4), 552–562.
- Slide 7: Children of the Dream: Why School Integration Works, Rucker C. Johnson (2019)
- Slide 10: RIDE Report (2025).

Slide 11: Ibid.

Slide 13: Children of the Dream: Why School Integration Works,
Rucker C. Johnson (2019)

Slide 14: Student Enrollment. New America (2025). Redrawing the
Lines: How Purposeful School System Redistricting Can
Increase Funding Fairness and Decrease Segregation

Slide 15: Brown's Promise and The Century Foundation (2025).
When Enrollment Drops: A Magnet School Strategy for
Districts Committed to Excellence, Equity, and Diversity

**SPECIAL JOINT LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION TO STUDY THE RETURN OF
CENTRAL FALLS SCHOOLS TO LOCAL GOVERNANCE**

NOTICE OF MEETING

DATE: Wednesday, February 4, 2026

TIME: 4:00 PM

PLACE: Room 313 – Rhode Island State House

AGENDA:

- I. Call Meeting to Order and Attendance
- II. Presentation on the City of Central Falls by **Kim Rueben, Public Finance Economist Focused on Local Government Policy**
- III. Presentation on the City of Central Falls by **Professor Domingo Morel, Associate Professor at New York University's Robert F. Wagner School of Public Service**
- IV. Discuss Future Presentations
- V. Next Meeting Date
- VI. Adjournment

No Public Testimony will be accepted at this meeting.

COMMISSION INFORMATION

For information on commissions, [CLICK HERE](#). If you have any questions, please contact Tom Kane in the Senate Policy Office (tkane@rilegislature.gov).

Education Finance: Understanding the Trade-Offs in How We Fund Our Schools?

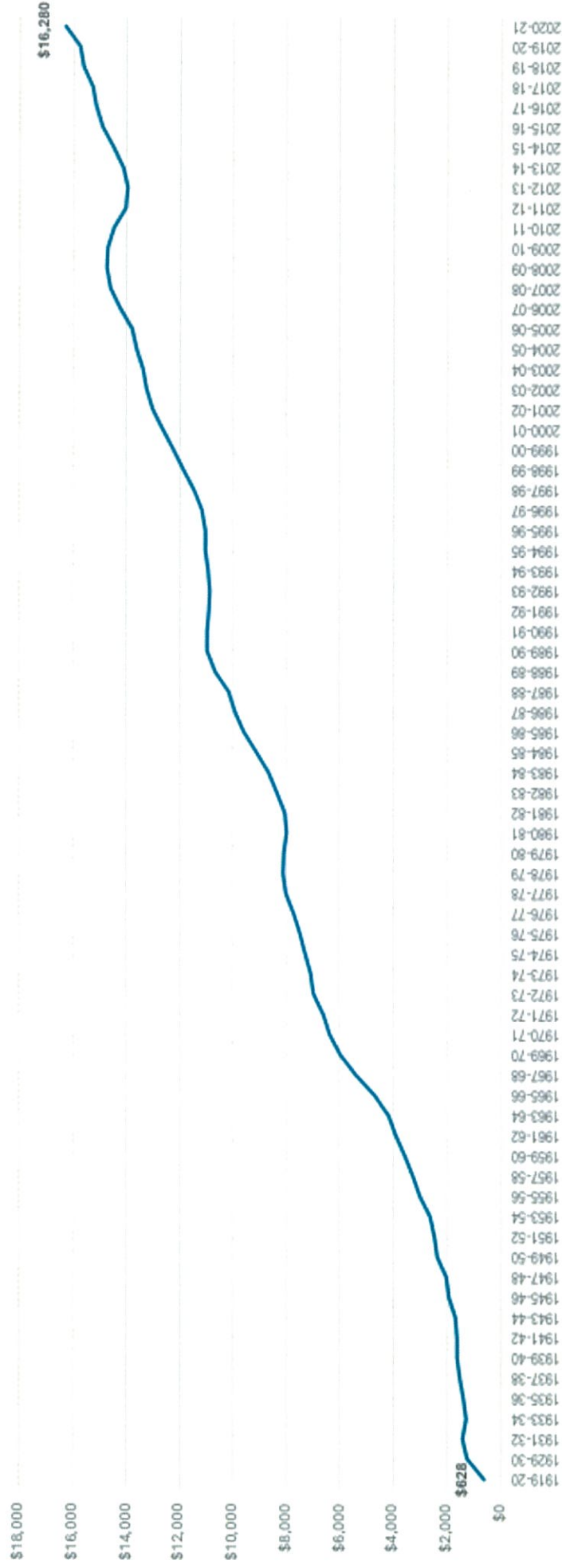
Kim Rueben, public finance economist

kimmer@gmail.com

Outline

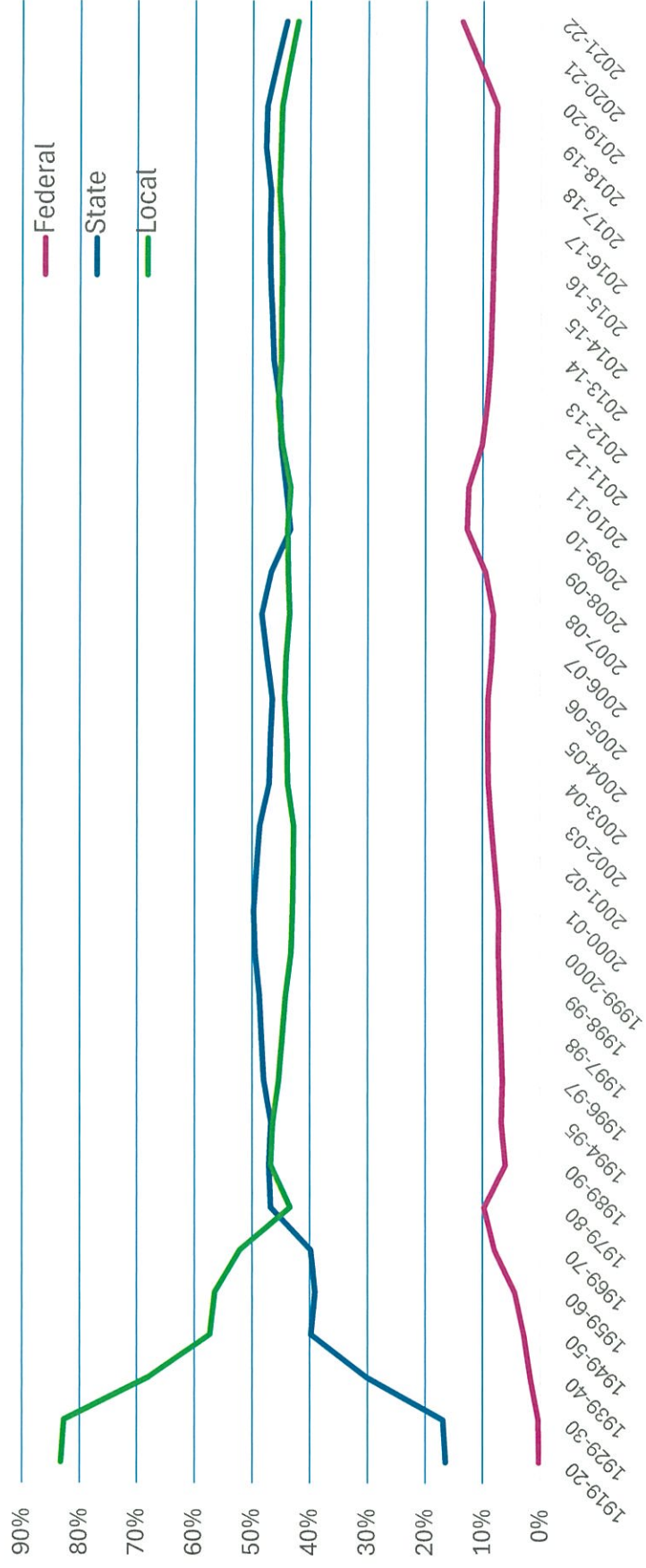
- School Finance
- What we know about state takeovers of school districts
- Shifting control back to local governments
- Need for skin in the game
 - In places with local decision-making and state funding often see unsustainable increasing levels of spending
- Options moving forward
 - Need state and local cooperation
 - May need to find other options
 - Consolidation
 - Changing revenue/patterns for other local areas

Current Expenditures Per Pupil (Enrollment) in Public Elementary & Secondary School, Selected Years 1920-2021, Constant 2022-23 Dollars

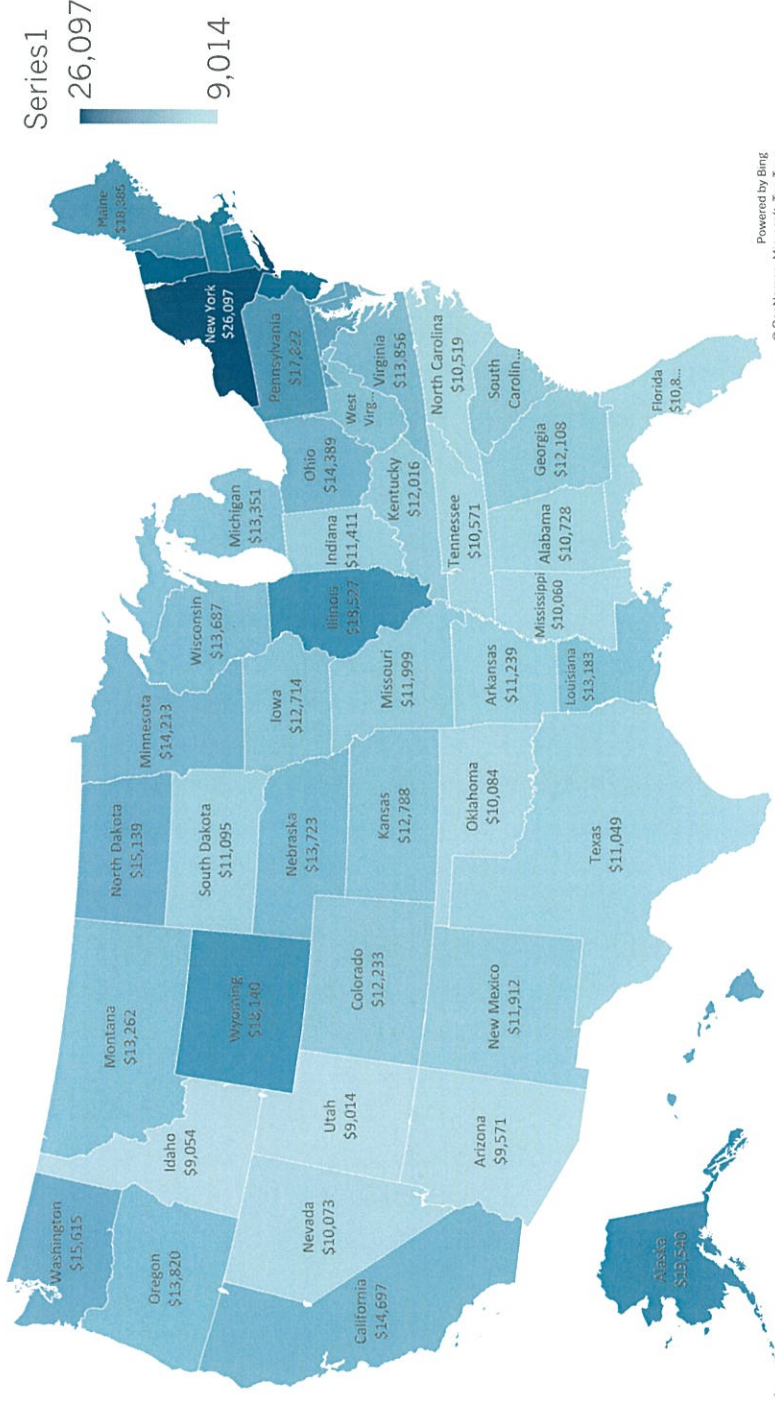


Source: National Center for Education Statistics

K-12 Public Education Revenue by Level of Government, 1919-1920 to 2021-2022

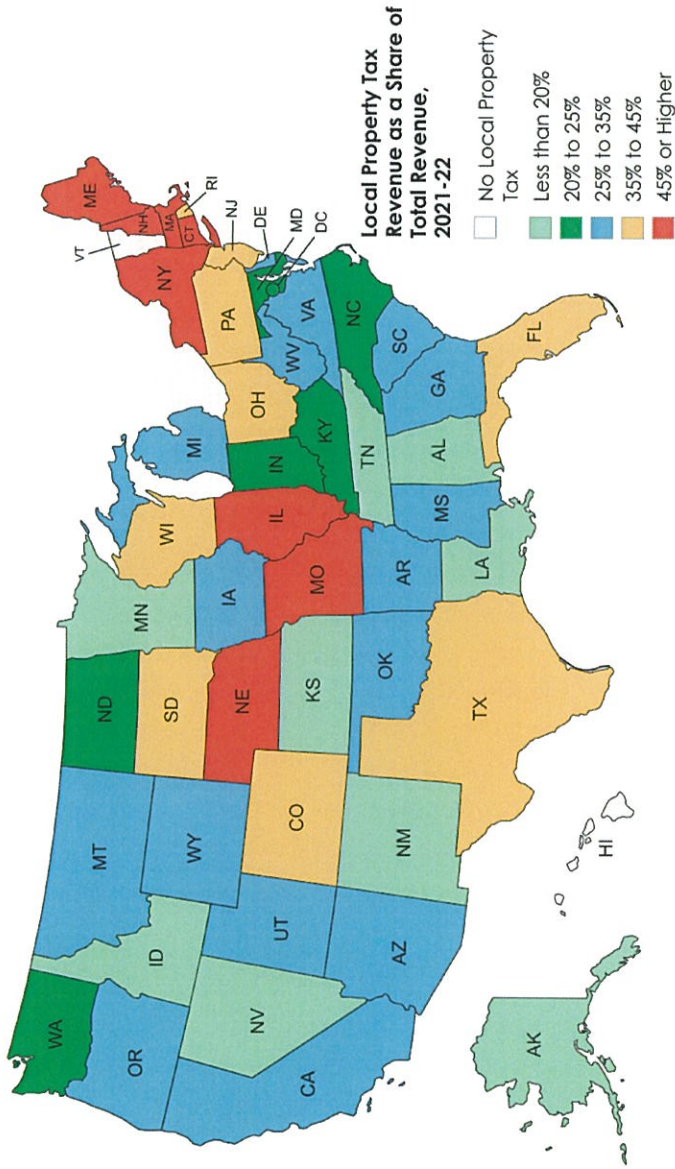


Current Expenditures Per Pupil by State, 2020-2021



Source: National Center for Education Statistics

Local Property Tax Revenue as a Share of Public Education Revenue, 2021-2022



Created with mapchart.net

Source: National Center for Education Statistics

How Should Schools Be Funded?

Virtues of the Property Tax

- Local Control
- Efficiency
- Transparency
- Stability
- Immobile Base

Value of State Funding

- Fairness across place
 - Spending per pupil does not depend on location
- Broaden responsibility
- Diversify funding sources

Ideally use both property tax and state aid – to get advantage of both



From: How State Takeovers of School Districts Affect Education Finance, 1990 to 2019

Education Finance and Policy, 2025;20(3):379-407. doi:10.1162/edfp_a_00436

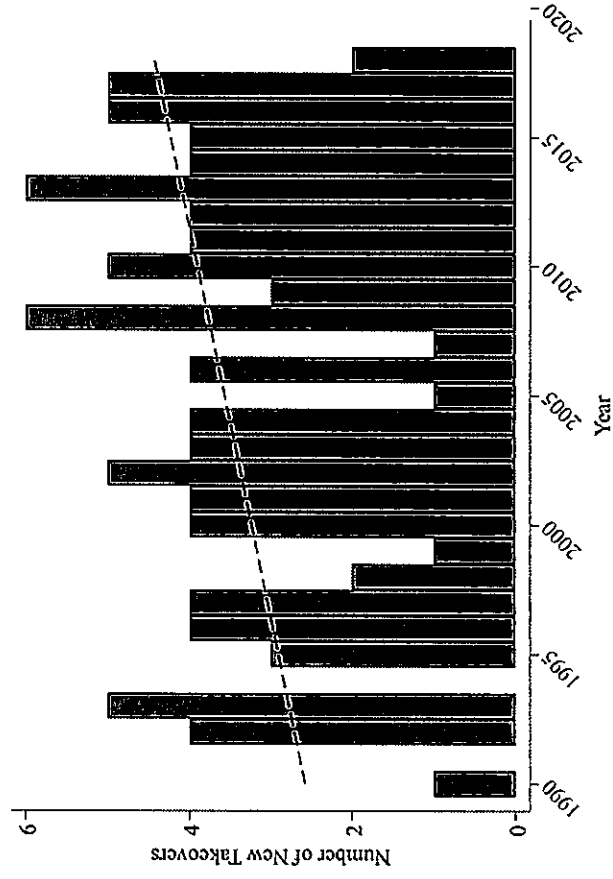


Figure Legend:

Number of New Takeovers over Time

Notes: During the period of study, we observe state takeovers from 1990 to 2019.

Lyon, Blieberg, Schueler, 2025 EFP

State Takeovers of Schools

- State takeovers often lead to more spending per pupil (\$2,000)
 - But often to cover legacy costs
 - Results vary based on reason for takeover
 - Less in districts with higher percentage black student body
- Questions about returning control and if improvements continue
 - Need to figure out how to maintain spending or shift back
 - Understanding why fiscal issues arose in the first place

Who gets to decide on spending levels?

- In understanding decision-making:
 - Want local control as best know and can decide what is right for their students
 - However, if not responsible for revenue generation can see unsustainable growth
 - Will costs and issues not be addressed if not paying for it?
 - Example, Vermont per pupil spending growth accelerating in part spending set and then revenues raised to meet largely from out-of-district funds
 - Currently spending second highest amount and rapid growth
 - Solution – consolidation of school districts?
 - Increased local funding if have control
 - New Jersey funding – state spending on Abbott districts tied to highest spending districts that were unconstrained
 - Need to adjust state funding formula
 - Highlights the importance that decisionmaking needs to come with fiscal responsibility

What does this mean for Central Falls

- Acknowledge the tough fiscal space the city was in and has made progress
 - And that state and local spending translates into people employed
 - Education funding needs to be considered with other priorities as city moves forward.
- It's important to be contributing to local school funding if want to have control
 - If not at the average rate of other districts, at least commensurate with other similar cities/towns
 - Is there a way to get local property taxes paying for some of instructional cost if making decisions?
 - Increase property taxes to hit 4% revenue growth limit – earmark to schools
- Are there services that can consolidate with other communities?
 - Consolidation of school districts?
 - Other city services?

Budget Outlook: Managing Expectations In A Tighter Environment

- State and local general fund revenues projected to see slower growth in fiscal 2026, with little to no surplus expected.
- Revenue impacts from OBBBA tax provisions will further reduce growth, substantially in some states
- Growth in spending demands is already outpacing revenue growth.
- Pressures include medical inflation, school choice, housing, disasters, and declining federal funds.
- Declining federal funds include the end of pandemic-era federal funding and cancellation of federal grant funding, BEFORE OBBBA impacts hit budgets.
- This means throughout the country state and local governments will need to make tougher choices going forward.

Conclusion and final points

- Research has found state control has typically led to more funding per pupil
 - Typically to pay for legacy costs
 - Mixed findings on student results
- Important to have some local control but needs to come with some financial responsibility
 - Understanding there is a cost to spending is important to internalize
- When thinking about responsibilities and budgeting education priorities should be part of mix of local services government is responsible for
 - Increased revenue
 - Consolidation
 - Funding cuts



February 4, 2026

Special Joint Legislative Commission to Study the Return of Central Falls Schools to Local Governance
Rhode Island General Assembly
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Chairman Parisi and members of the Special Joint Legislative Commission:

I appreciate the opportunity to testify before this Commission. I am an Associate Professor of Political Science and Public Service at New York University. I have been studying state takeovers of local school districts for over a decade.

Although I am in New York, I have deep roots here in Rhode Island and still consider it part of my community. I am a graduate of Central High School, here in Providence, and was involved in various community organizations for many years that did important education, political, and civic work in Rhode Island, including Central Falls. Through that work, I came to know people like Rep. Giraldo, Sen. Acosta, and more recently, Dr. Friedman.

In my brief remarks, I will provide an overview of my research findings on state takeovers of local school districts. Then, I will offer some thoughts on what I have been observing in Central Falls over the past three years. I would be happy to answer your questions.

Local governments and local communities are the foundation of American democracy. The public schools, in particular, provide the most accessible institution for Americans to participate in local democracy. However, over the past three decades, the residents of the city of Central Falls have not had the same rights as citizens in other cities and towns who are able to participate in the governance of their own schools. Since the early 1990s, the Central Falls public school system has been under state control. Throughout this time, the citizens of Central Falls have been disenfranchised and generations of students have not been afforded the same education opportunities as other communities in Rhode Island.

Over the past decade, I have been researching the history and consequences of state takeovers of local school districts throughout the United States, including the city of Central Falls. My research findings, based on historical analysis, hundreds of interviews of local and state leaders across the U.S., and data analysis of over 100 cities that have experienced state takeovers of their local government, show that:

- I. Takeovers are disproportionately experienced by communities of color
- II. Takeovers disenfranchise and disempower communities of color
- III. Takeovers do not meet the stated goals of state officials
- IV. Takeovers are anti-democratic and inconsistent with the American cherished principle of local democracy
- V. Takeovers are often justified on a belief that communities of color are incapable of governance

I. Takeovers are disproportionately experienced by communities of color

Since the 1980s, state governments have increasingly taken over local school districts. The majority of these takeovers have occurred in cities where the majority of the population are majority African American and Latino, like Central Falls.

II. Takeovers disenfranchise and disempower communities of color

When states take over local school districts, there are various approaches to how they deal with school boards. In some instances, the locally elected school board remains intact. In other cases, the locally elected school board is abolished and replaced with a state-appointed board or not replaced at all. My research shows the abolishment of locally elected school boards is disproportionately experienced by communities of color. As a result, Black and Latino citizens in communities that experience takeovers lose their ability to elect the school board members and policymakers that make decisions that directly affect them.

III. Takeovers do not meet the stated goals of state officials

In each case of a state takeover, state officials and proponents of state takeovers have argued that the takeover will lead to improved outcomes. However, while state administrations promise that takeovers will lead to improvement, we have over 30 years of evidence that state takeovers do not meet the state's promised expectations. For instance, a 2021 study of state takeovers across the U.S. found that takeovers did not improve test scores, and in fact, might be associated with decreasing test scores.¹ While researchers have not been able to link state takeover of school districts to clear and consistent academic gains over time, the political and economic devastation for communities of color is clear.

IV. Takeovers are anti-democratic and inconsistent with the American cherished principle of local democracy

In the U.S., we have a representative democracy, where citizens elect the individuals that will represent them in governmental bodies ranging from the local school board all the way to the White House. A basic assumption in our democratic system is that elected officials must be, to some degree, responsive to the citizens they represent or else they face the prospect of losing their seat. In other words, the threat of losing an election serves as a mechanism to ensure some level of accountability on the part of elected officials. However, what happens when elected officials are not accountable to the citizens they represent? The absence of an accountability mechanism for elected officials that implement and impose policies on communities is anti-democratic.

¹ Schueler, B. and Bleiberg, J. F. 2021. "Evaluating Education Governance: Does State Takeover of School Districts Affect Student Achievement?" *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*.

V. Takeovers are often justified on a belief that communities of color are incapable of governance

Finally, my research has shown that in many instances, state officials build a case to justify a takeover on the grounds that local leaders were “were incapable” of governance. Questioning the merits and capacity of political leaders in communities of color has deep roots in American history, and has often been employed to undermine the legitimacy of people of color without merit.

And now, I would like to offer some comments of my observations of Central Falls’ work on local governance over the past couple of years.

Three years ago, Dr. Friedman and her team reached out to me learn about my work and seek insights on how other communities have experienced takeovers.

Since that time, I have seen how the city brought together residents, educators, local leaders and other stakeholders, to learn about their vision for the city of Central Falls and its schools. I’ve seen how they relied on all the tool in a researcher’s tool box – interviews, focus groups, surveys – to learn about what the city wants for its schools. Their findings, which were published in a 2024 report, made it clear that the residents wanted the ability to determine their own future.

I have also seen the process that the city has put together to ensure an adequate transition from state to local control of school governance. I have been able to sit in some of the meetings with the newly elected and appointed board members and it has been a joy to see their excitement, their eagerness to learn, and the great care they take to carry out their duties and responsibilities as representatives of their community. Frankly, as a scholar of American politics, their approach to governance and commitment to a democratic process should serve as a model for all types of governing bodies - city councils, state legislatures, Congress, and yes, the Presidency.

But to be clear, the great care that these board members have demonstrated, should not be viewed as a test for their fitness to govern. They are Americans, living in an American city, with the right to govern like every other American.

Which brings me to my final point on funding. I know that an important point of discussion for this Commission involves the funding of the Central Falls schools and how state funding relates to local governance. My research has shown that as local school districts increasingly rely on state funding, the likelihood of a state taking over that school district increases as well. This has certainly the case with Central Falls.

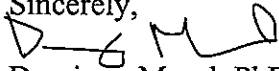
However, it doesn’t have to be this way. In our federal system, less resourced states rely on support from wealthier states to deliver healthcare, transportation, and other important public services. It would be unacceptable for the wealthier states in our nation like New York or California to demand that poorer states like Mississippi or Montana lose their ability to govern their own states as the price of getting support to provide healthcare and other important services.

The same should apply to education and I would like to highlight the example of one city that I have studied, Union City, New Jersey. Union City shares demographic and economic similarities with Central Falls. It is a majority Latino immigrant community with high levels of poverty. At the same time that Rhode Island took over the Central Falls school district, the state of New Jersey was poised to take over the Union City school district as well. However, it did not take over the schools. And instead, because of historic litigation in the state (*Abbott v. Burke*), Union City was able to get a drastic increase in school funding from the state without losing control of its schools. Over time, the district improved in many measures and became the topic of a book by David Kirp, titled *Improbable Scholars*. Today, 95% of Union City's school budget comes from state and federal sources (mostly state).

What this shows us is that when the government invest in its people, we should not expect those people to have to relinquish their democratic rights and their right to govern.

The time is now for Central Falls. Central Falls is ready to lead and the state of Rhode Island should be equally ready to support the city as it works to realize the aspirations of its people.

Sincerely,



Domingo Morel, PhD

Associate Professor of Political Science and Public Service

Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service

New York University

**SPECIAL JOINT LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION TO STUDY THE
RETURN OF CENTRAL FALLS SCHOOLS TO LOCAL GOVERNANCE**

PLEASE NOTE: THIS IS A REVISED AGENDA

NOTICE OF MEETING

DATE: Wednesday, February 11, 2026

TIME: 4:30 PM

PLACE: Room 313 – State House

AGENDA:

- I. Call Meeting to Order and Attendance
- II. Presentation on the City of Central Falls by **Brandon Bohl, Director, Finance and Accounting, Rhode Island Department of Education. Kristen Cole, Senior Finance Officer for Resource Allocation and Management, Rhode Island Department of Education**
- III. Public Comment
- IV. Discuss Future Presentations
- V. Next Meeting Date
- VI. Adjournment

Public Testimony will be accepted at this meeting.

COMMISSION INFORMATION

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ACCOMMODATIONS

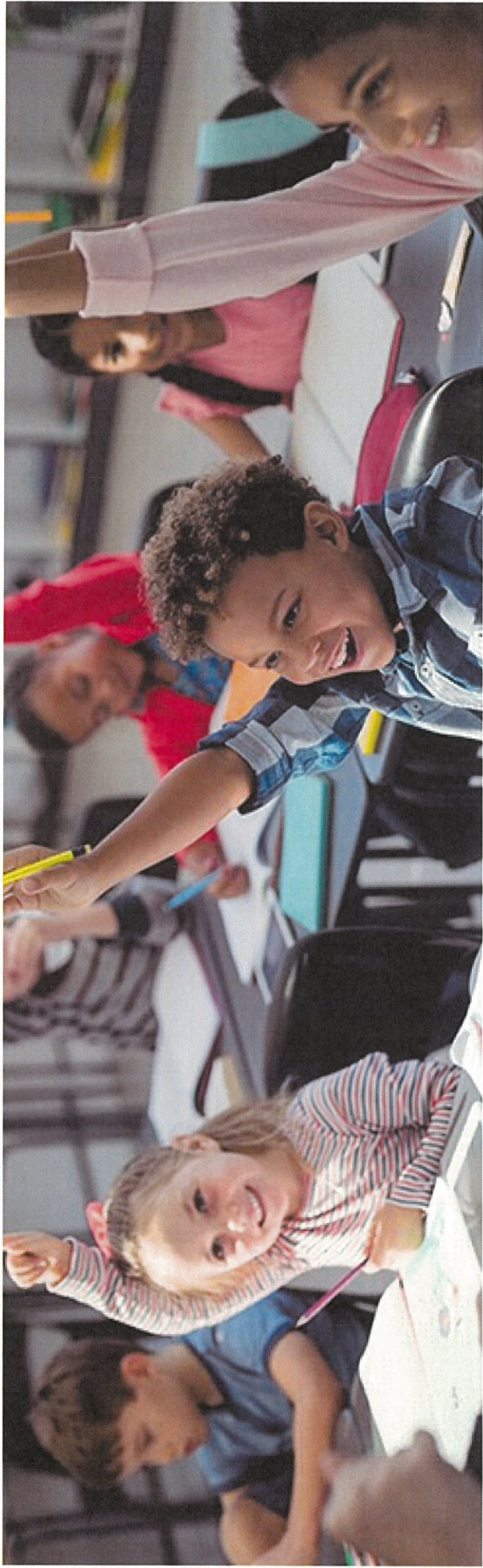
The General Assembly strives to make the legislative process accessible to all. Anyone needing an accommodation to attend or testify at a commission meeting, contact Stacy Custer at scuster@rilegislature.gov or 401-222-7904 at least 48 hours in advance of the scheduled meeting.

TELEVISION AND LIVESTREAM INFORMATION

The meeting may be televised by Capitol Television on Cox Communications, channels 15 and 61 for high definition; i3 Broadband (formerly Full Channel) on 15; and Verizon, on channel 34. Senate committee hearings may also air on Channel 75 for Cox Subscribers.

Livestreaming is available at <https://capitoltvri.cablecast.tv/>

POSTED: MONDAY, FEBRUARY 2, 2026, 12:00 P.M.
REVISED: FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 6, 2026, 2:30P.M.



**RHODE
ISLAND**

**Presentation to the Special Joint Legislative Commission to
Study the Return of Central Falls Schools to Local Governance**

Rhode Island Department of Education
February 11, 2026

RIDE Financial Analysis to Presentations

After watching Commission presentations namely the City's policy and finance presentation, there are four points we want to offer the Commission for consideration:

1. While the City's calculation of its required local contribution to the core is roughly correct, the long-term analysis of the City's local funding proposal presented at the Commission does not yet plan for escalating costs of the core.
2. The City's analysis of its required local contribution presented to the Commission only plans for core costs and does not yet include significant non-core costs (e.g., transportation, out of district costs).
3. It is imperative that we have a transparent and honest discussion of the total actual costs that most municipalities are responsible to carry so the City can do appropriate long-range financial planning.
4. We pose a series of questions at the intersection of governance and finances that will be critical for the Commission to consider (these are not limited to some of the following):
 - What will happen when, or if, the district runs a deficit? Which party is responsible for that deficit?
 - How, if at all, will the Board under local control be responsible for the size and scope of non-core costs?
 - To what degree can consolidated services be considered between City and schools and between City and other cities?



Calculation of Local Contribution

A prior presentation included a calculation of the local contribution that included enrollment transition funding (\$390K). Those are state funds. This presentation considers \$1.08M as the proposed local contribution in FY26.

Prior Presentation Calculation	RIDE Calculation
Foundation Aid (A)	Foundation Aid (A)
44,830,662	44,830,662
State Share Ratio (B)	State Share Ratio (B)
96.70%	96.70%
State Formula Aid (A x B) = (C)	State Formula Aid (A x B) = (C)
43,351,250	43,351,250
Local Contribution (A - C) = D	Local Contribution (A - C) = D
1,479,412	1,479,412
	Enrollment Transition Funding (E)
	390,458
	Revised Local Contribution
	1,088,954

Projected Core Expenditures

Growth in the Core Instructional Amount (CIA) is driven by expenditures/inflation in a basket of New England states.

- If we use lagging inflation data to project the growth in CIA through FY2031, the average growth rate from FY2027 – FY2031 is 2.92%. Using these estimates, the CIA is projected to be \$15,382 by FY2031.
- Given the above growth assumptions, the local contribution to core costs by FY2031 will be \$1.6M.
- Assuming continued growth of 3% per year post-FY2031, the local contribution for core expenditures is projected to be ~\$2.0M by FY2037.



Central Falls Local Funding Proposal

According to the City's funding proposal, the City plans to meet its core obligation, as the City defined it for FY 26, in ~ year 13 (for discussion purposes).

This proposal, however, did not yet plan for escalated costs for the core over the time.

Fiscal YR	PY Levy	1/2% Local Funding	Cumulative Local Funding
FY27	16,738,818	83,679	83,679
FY28	17,405,251	87,026	170,705
FY29	18,101,461	90,507	261,213
FY30	18,825,519	94,128	355,340
FY31	19,578,540	97,893	453,233
For Discussion Purposes Only			
FY32	20,361,682	101,808	555,041
FY33	21,176,149	105,881	660,922
FY34	22,023,195	110,116	771,038
FY35	22,904,123	114,521	885,559
FY36	23,820,287	119,101	1,004,660
YEAR 13	27,866,367	139,332	1,530,650

Projected Core Expenditures

Fiscal Year	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029	FY 2030	FY 2031	FY 2032	FY 2033	FY 2034	FY 2035	FY 2036	FY 2037
Foundation Aid	44,830,662	41,758,054	42,623,024	43,614,238	44,506,772	45,397,453	46,759,377	48,162,158	49,607,023	51,095,234	52,628,091	54,206,933
State Share Ratio	96.7%	96.4%	96.4%	96.4%	96.4%	96.4%	96.4%	96.4%	96.4%	96.4%	96.4%	96.4%
State Formula Aid Enrollment	43,351,250	40,254,764	41,088,595	42,044,126	42,904,528	43,763,145	45,076,039	46,428,320	47,821,170	49,255,805	50,733,479	52,255,484
Transition Aid	390,458	1,736,787	1,056,654	235,109	167,923	43,309	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total Formula Aid	43,741,708	41,991,551	42,145,248	42,279,235	43,072,451	43,806,454	45,076,039	46,428,320	47,821,170	49,255,805	50,733,479	52,255,484
Local Share of Formula Aid	1,088,954	-	477,775	1,335,004	1,434,321	1,591,000	1,683,338	1,733,838	1,785,853	1,839,428	1,894,611	1,951,450
Stabilization Funds (Non-Formula Aid/Support)	10,826,174	11,691,949	11,750,409	11,809,161	11,868,207	11,927,548	11,987,185	12,047,121	12,107,357	12,167,894	12,228,733	12,289,877
Local Share of Education Aid	11,915,128	11,691,949	12,228,184	13,144,164	13,302,527	13,518,547	13,670,523	13,780,959	13,893,210	14,007,322	14,123,344	14,241,326
	536,235	915,981	158,363	216,020	158,363	216,020	151,976	110,436	112,251	114,112	116,022	117,982
	4.59%	7.49%	1.20%	1.62%	1.20%	1.62%	1.12%	0.81%	0.81%	0.82%	0.83%	0.84%

Why is important that we consider non-core costs?

The Commission's purpose is predicated on sound financial planning.

This Commission has a charge to prepare a final report that includes:

- A **sustainable** financial pathway and timeline for the City of Central Falls to contribute their local share of foundation education aid
- A comprehensive plan for the transfer of operational and fiscal responsibility from the State to the City of Central Falls, with an effective implementation date of July 1, 2026.



Why is important that we consider non-core costs?

The plain language of the law suggests this discussion is necessary.

R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-7.2-6(d): "Central Falls, Davies, and the Met Center Stabilization Fund is established to ensure that appropriate funding is available to support their students. Additional support for Central Falls is needed due to concerns regarding the city's capacity to meet the local share of education costs. **This fund requires that education aid calculated pursuant to § 16-7.2-3 and funding for costs outside the permanent foundation education-aid formula, including, but not limited to, transportation, facility maintenance, and retiree health benefits shall be shared between the state and the city of Central Falls.** The fund shall be annually reviewed to determine the amount of the state and city appropriation. The state's share of this fund may be supported through a reallocation of current state appropriations to the Central Falls school district. At the end of the transition period defined in § 16-7.2-7, the municipality will continue its contribution pursuant to § 16-7-24. Additional support for the Davies and the Met Center is needed due to the costs associated with running a stand-alone high school offering both academic and career and technical coursework. The department shall recommend criteria for the purpose of allocating any and all stabilization funds as may be determined by the general assembly"

Current Non-Core Expenditures

Non-Core expenditures include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Transportation, Safety, Building Maintenance, Data Processing, Business Operations, Out of District Tuitions, Retiree Benefits
- In FY24, Central Falls Non-Core Expenditures totaled \$13.2M

Year		Out of District tuition and transportation	Building Upkeep, Utilities, and Maintenance	Other	Transportation	Business Operations & Data Processing	Grand Total
2019-20	\$	\$7,612,122	\$2,059,550	\$260,133	\$405,474	\$992,456	\$11,329,735
	% of Non Core	67.2%	18.2%	2.3%	3.6%	8.8%	100.0%
2020-21	\$	\$8,474,776	\$2,471,384	\$269,238	\$233,025	\$943,915	\$12,392,337
	% of Non Core	68.4%	19.9%	2.2%	1.9%	7.6%	100.0%
2021-22	\$	\$7,086,472	\$2,320,715	\$694,492	\$627,807	\$1,098,016	\$11,827,502
	% of Non Core	59.9%	19.6%	5.9%	5.3%	9.3%	100.0%
2022-23	\$	\$8,030,567	\$2,082,258	\$410,388	\$695,019	\$1,050,535	\$12,268,768
	% of Non Core	65.5%	17.0%	3.3%	5.7%	8.6%	100.0%
2023-24	\$	\$7,235,988	\$2,851,124	\$756,895	\$529,789	\$1,807,570	\$13,181,366
	% of Non Core	54.9%	21.6%	5.7%	4.0%	13.7%	100.0%

Central Falls Municipal Financials

The City of Central Falls revenues have increased at an average rate of 1.4%, or \$270K/year, over the past five years. As of the FY24 audit, there is a fund balance of \$3.8M. Despite modest annual revenue growth, it is unclear how the City of would contribute to increases to the Core Instructional Amount and assume large portions of the non-core expenses.

Central Falls

Historical General Fund Revenues & Expenses

	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24
Revenues	20,576,775	21,216,412	20,096,688	19,886,499	20,453,615	21,931,506
Expenditures	(19,984,399)	(21,991,871)	(19,706,744)	(19,606,588)	(20,055,189)	(20,397,838)
Other Financing Sources	1,517,644	30	5,073	313,221	2,820	148,348
Other Financing Uses	(2,132,221)	(432,129)	(63,257)	(565)	(41,739)	(76,520)
Operating Surplus/(Deficit)	(22,201)	(1,207,556)	331,760	592,567	359,507	1,605,496
Beginning of Year Fund Balance	2,183,244	2,161,043	953,485	1,285,245	1,877,812	2,237,319
End of Year Fund Balance	2,161,043	953,485	1,285,245	1,877,812	2,237,319	3,842,815

	5 Year Average	
Revenue % Increase/ (Decrease)	3.11%	-5.28%
Expense % Increase/ (Decrease)	10.05%	-10.39%
Revenue \$ Increase/ (Decrease)	639,637	(1,119,724)
Expense \$ Increase/ (Decrease)	2,007,472	(2,285,127)
Revenue % Increase/ (Decrease)	-1.05%	2.85%
Expense % Increase/ (Decrease)	-0.51%	2.29%
Revenue \$ Increase/ (Decrease)	(210,189)	567,116
Expense \$ Increase/ (Decrease)	(100,156)	448,601
Revenue % Increase/ (Decrease)	1.37%	7.23%
Expense % Increase/ (Decrease)	0.63%	1.71%
Revenue \$ Increase/ (Decrease)	270,946	1,477,891
Expense \$ Increase/ (Decrease)	82,688	342,649

Governance & Budget: Important Considerations for City and Commission

Deficit Accountability

- Traditional LEAs create five-year plans to address deficit spending with their municipality. In the event of deficit spending, will the City of Central Falls be able to address/ plan for over-spending.

Contracts

- School Board ultimately approves contracts. State funds will be used to pay for contracts, based on projected local contributions. How will the school board address this type of moral hazard?

Shared Services

- In order to reduce reliance on state funding, has Central Falls considered consolidating services between the City and the School Department, or between Central Falls and other LEAs?



RHODE ISLAND SENATE

SPECIAL LEGISLATIVE COMMISSIONS – CENTRAL FALLS SCHOOL

SIGN-UP TO DELIVER TESTIMONY TO THE COMMISSION

Date: 2/11/2026

Time of Meeting:

4:30 PM

Meeting Location:

Room 313

NAME

ORGANIZATION REPRESENTING

x Chris CAMARILE

1st Lt Prov. Spanish Wkg Group

x Cindy Montoya

Progreso Latino

x Erica Hammond

RI AFL-CIO

x Dorian Rave

CF Local School Board

x Jordana Ruggieri

CF School Board

~~MARIA RIVERA~~

~~City of Central Falls~~

x Kevin Kazarian

City of Central Falls

x Catarina Lorente

AMOR

THOMAS LAZIEH

FORMER MAYOR C. F.

x MARIA RIVERA

MAYOR, Central Falls

x Tatiana Basna

City Councilor, City of CF

x Jeremy Giller

City of Central Falls

x Erika Vallejo

NEW CENTRAL FALLS SCHOOL BOARD

x Matt Jerzyk

City of Central Falls

NO TESTIMONY WAS GIVEN ON THIS ITEM AT THIS MEETING

PAGE ___ of ___

TO: Members of the Commission

FR: Marta V. Martínez

RE: In Support of Local Control of Central Falls Schools

DT: February 11, 2026

As a member of the Central Falls Community Advisory Board, I write in support of returning local control of the school district to the City of Central Falls.

Over the past two years, I have seen how deeply families, educators, and community members care about their schools and how thoughtfully they have engaged in shaping a path forward. Local control matters because schools are not abstract systems—they are lived institutions, shaped every day by the people who show up for students in real and tangible ways.

State oversight can be necessary at moments of crisis, but it should not replace local voice indefinitely. Communities learn how to govern by governing. Returning local control affirms trust in the people most connected to students' lives and futures, while still allowing for partnership and accountability.

Central Falls has done the work to prepare for this moment. Supporting local governance now honors that effort and strengthens the civic foundation that schools depend on to thrive.



Center for Youth & Community Leadership in Education (CYCLE)

at Roger Williams University

1 Empire Street, Providence, RI 02903 • (401) 276-4897 • cycle@rwu.edu

www.cycle-rwu.org

February 11, 2025

Dear Honorable Members of the Special Joint Legislative Commission to Study the Return of Central Falls Schools to Local Governance,

The Center for Youth and Community Leadership in Education (CYCLE) strongly supports the return of Central Falls Schools to local governance. For the past four years, CYCLE has worked with youth, parents, and school district staff in Central Falls to implement the Schools and Communities Organizing for Racial Equity (SCORE) project, through which a team of 8 youth and parent leaders conducted original research, identified community-driven education equity priorities, and developed a set of measures to better understand how the school system is performing in these areas. The Central Falls SCOREcard (<https://www.scoreindicators.org/centralfallshome>) resulted from this work.

The Central Falls School District (CFSD) has been a true partner in our SCORE work, and throughout these engagements we have witnessed the transformative power that the district's engagement of youth and parents has had in guiding district decision-making. Not only has CFSD been open to community engagement, but they have also actively supported it. Students and families who reside in Central Falls know what their community needs, and their experiences and expertise led our SCORE work. A return to local control will honor this community expertise and allow stakeholders directly impacted by the education system, namely students, families, educators, and residents, to shape what the district will look like in the future.

CYCLE believes that local control is an important component of the democratic values that our public schools should seek to embody, instill, and uphold. Democracy in public education means that communities must have the right to govern themselves. We urge the Special Joint Legislative Commission to help advance a funding plan for Central Falls schools that is fair and sustainable as a necessary step toward the return to local control.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Keith Catone". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Keith Catone, Ed.D.

Executive Director, CYCLE



194 Smith Street, Providence, Rhode Island 02908-4914
Telephone: (401) 751-7100 Fax: (401) 331-8533
www.RhodeIslandAFLCIO.org • info@RIAFLCIO.com

Rhode Island Works Best When We Say **UNION YES.**

February 11, 2026

The Honorable James Parisi
Chair, Joint Special Legislative Commission
Rhode Island State House
Providence, RI 02903

RE: Public Comment RE Special Joint Legislative Commission to Study the Return of Central Falls Schools to Local Governance

Dear Parisi and members of the commission,

On behalf of the Rhode Island AFL-CIO, representing more than 80,000 union members and their families across the state, I submit this letter in support of the return of Central Falls schools to local governance.

The Rhode Island AFL-CIO has over a thousand union members who live, work, and raise families in Central Falls. Many are deeply connected to the public education system, as educators, school staff, construction workers, healthcare providers, and parents of public school students. After more than three decades of state control, we believe the time has come to restore decision-making authority to the community itself.

Local control is fundamentally about democracy. State takeovers remove governing power from the people most directly affected, students, families, and educators. Our schools should be accountable to the community they serve. No community should lose its right to govern itself indefinitely.

Central Falls families care deeply about their schools. Parents, caregivers, educators, and students know their community and understand its needs. Having fewer financial resources as a municipality does not make a city incapable of leadership or governance. The voices, lived experiences, and expertise within Central Falls matter and must be reflected in the governance of its schools. The City has spent more than a year negotiating with the State on a sustainable funding framework, sharing transparent budget data and proposing a responsible local contribution that protects students while avoiding a return to financial instability.

Over the past three years, the community has demonstrated that it is ready. Residents were actively engaged in designing a new governance model and path forward. City voters approved a charter amendment to establish a new school board. That board, composed of elected and appointed members with meaningful experience and deep commitment, has been selected, sworn in, and stands ready to serve.

Fiscal accountability is important, and Central Falls understands that responsibility firsthand. Families in the city have lived through municipal bankruptcy and its lasting consequences. However, fiscal oversight should not require the permanent loss of governing rights. Financial safeguards and responsible oversight mechanisms can exist without stripping a community of democratic control.

The framework developed through community engagement, including a hybrid school board structure and a stabilization funding mechanism, reflects a thoughtful, collaborative approach to ensuring both

Patrick Crowley [President](#) • Karen Hazard [Secretary-Treasurer](#)
Cheryl Masciarelli [Office Manager](#) • Autumn Guillotte [Political Director](#) • Erica Hammond [Legislative Director](#)



educational equity and financial sustainability. It is a responsible path forward that respects local voters while maintaining transparency and accountability.

We respectfully urge the Commission to support the return of local governance to Central Falls. Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony, and thank you for your time and consideration of this important matter. Please do not hesitate to contact me at 401-751-7100 if you have any questions.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Erica A. Hammond', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Erica A. Hammond
Legislative Director, Rhode Island AFL-CIO

**SPECIAL JOINT LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION TO STUDY THE RETURN OF
CENTRAL FALLS SCHOOLS TO LOCAL GOVERNANCE**

NOTICE OF MEETING

DATE: Monday, March 16, 2026

TIME: 4:00 PM

PLACE: Room 313 – Rhode Island State House

AGENDA:

- I. Call Meeting to Order and Attendance
- II. Presentation on the City of Central Falls by **John Papay, Director of Annenberg Institute, Walter and Leonore Annenberg Associate Professor of Education Policy**
- III. Discussion on Commission Report
- IV. Next Meeting Date
- V. Adjournment

No Public Testimony will be accepted at this meeting.

COMMISSION INFORMATION

For information on commissions, [CLICK HERE](#). If you have any questions, please contact Tom Kane in the Senate Policy Office (tkane@rilegislature.gov).

Confidential Draft – DO NOT CITE OR QUOTE

Blue Ribbon Commission Recommendations for School Funding in Rhode Island

Our Work

The Blue Ribbon Commission brought together diverse leading voices across the state with national experts for a **consensus vision**. Drawing on national evidence and best practice, we propose a plan to fund the state's schools.

The Commission is comprised of local education leaders and community partners.



Our Process

- Expert testimony (12 presentations from national experts)
- Youth Working Group (14 students from 8 districts)
- Accountability Working Group
- 45 interviews with local stakeholders and national experts

The Commission built a proposal around a shared vision and guiding principles.

- **Sufficient:** Funding should fully support public education needs for all students
- **Student-centered:** Dollars should follow students
- **Comprehensive:** System should include a broader range of district costs
- **Predictable yet flexible:** Funding should be stable yet responsive to districts' unforeseeable needs
- **Transparent and timely:** Districts should know their level of state funding with plenty of time to plan
- **Equitable fiscal burden:** Local contributions should align with local fiscal capacity
- **Accountable:** Schools should use funds efficiently to deliver results for all students

The Commission's proposal includes four core shifts in how RI's education funding system works.

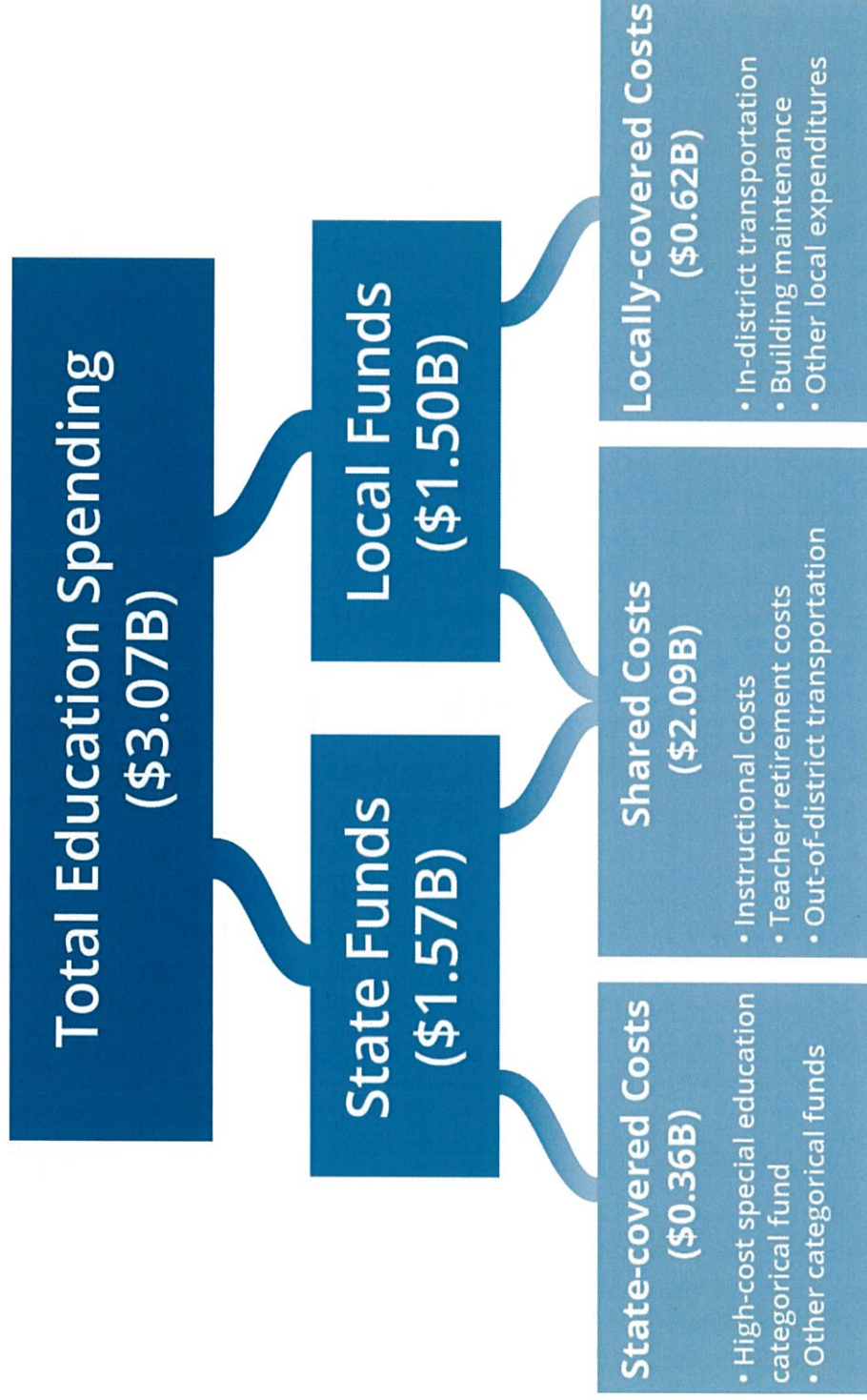
- 1.** Account for the full cost of education in the funding system, and share those costs more equitably
- 2.** Tailor instructional costs to student needs more directly
- 3.** Ensure greater predictability for municipalities with a required local share
- 4.** Require transparency and strategic management that ties spending to educational outcomes

The recommendations in this proposal...

- represent a **consensus vision** from the Commission
- are **interconnected**
- aim to **clarify and redistribute** the costs of education

**Account for the full cost of educating students
in the funding system, and share those costs
more equitably**

Current Education Spending



The Youth Working Group was shocked that in-district transportation is not a shared cost.

50%

of RI school district budgets was spent on in-district transportation in FY 2024

“Even the best educational resources mean little if students can’t reliably get to school. Funding busing will alleviate a burden that all schools have to pay. Busing is essential... It is a universal burden that this Commission can lift, thus improving the lives of every student in Rhode Island.”

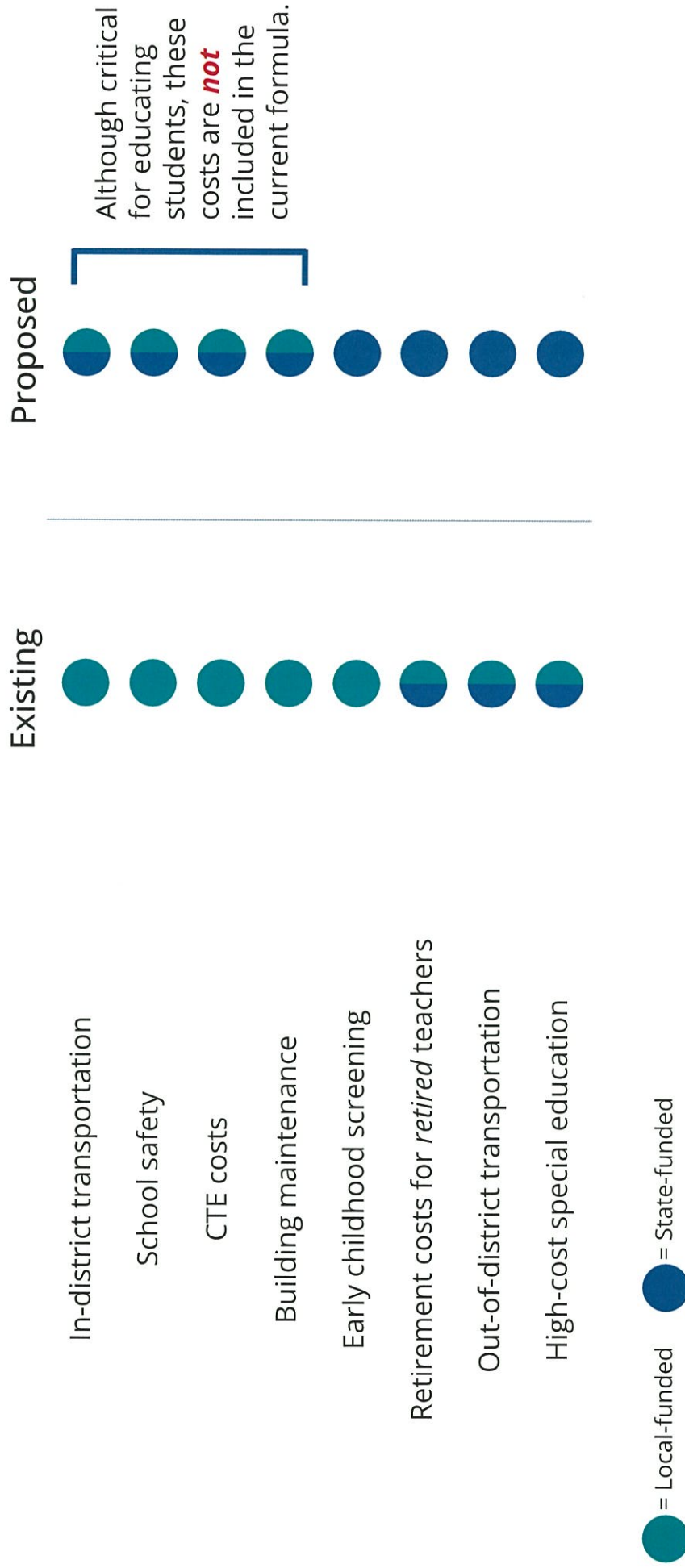
YWG to the Blue Ribbon Commission

Note: We use the term “school districts” to refer to all local education agencies: traditional public school districts, charter schools, and state-operated schools.

Ensure more costs are shared, and shift the responsibility of specific costs to the state.

- Expand the *Core Instructional Amount* to a *Core Education Amount* that includes more costs
- Have the state take responsibility for specific costs:
 - High-cost special education
 - *Legacy* teacher pension debt
 - Out-of-district transportation
 - Early childhood screening

This proposal makes clear the costs of educating students, and how these costs are shared.

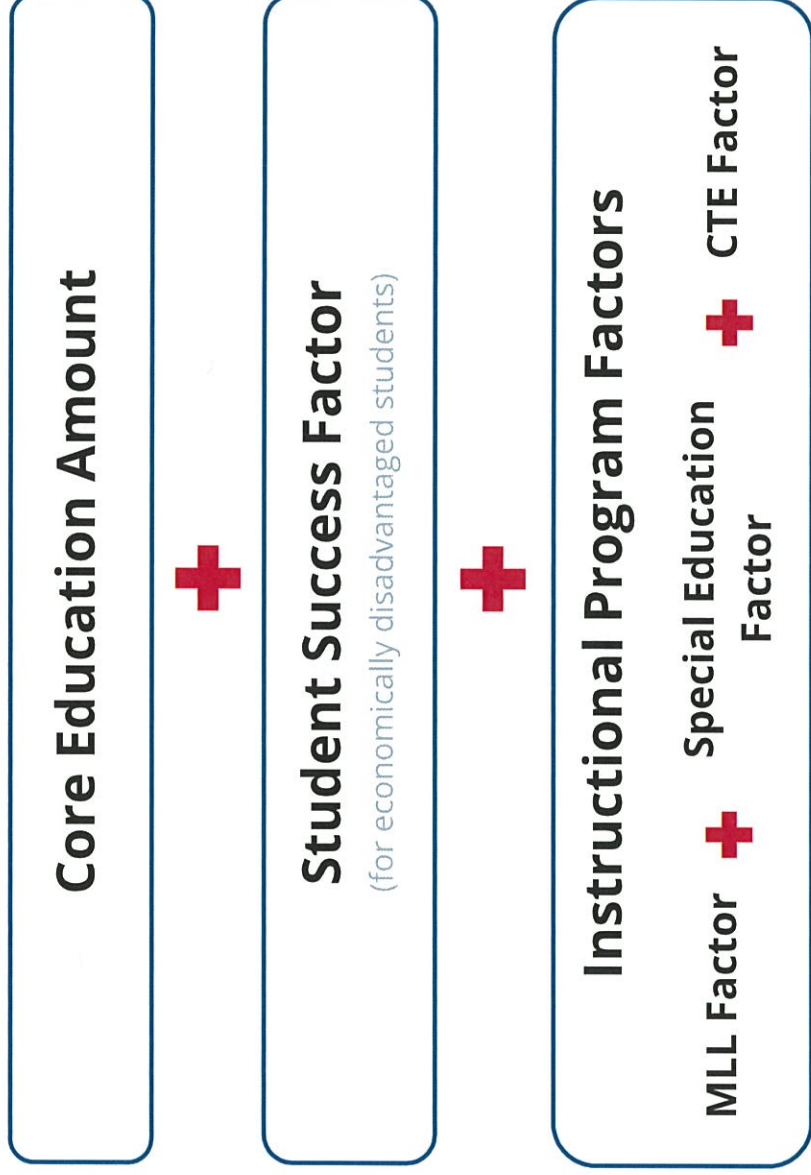


**Tailor instructional costs more directly to
student needs**

The Commission's proposal accounts for the differential costs of educating all students.

- Improve per-pupil weights to account for the costs of educating high-need students:
 - Greater weight for **economically disadvantaged** students
 - Tiered weights for **multilingual learners** (MLLs)
 - Tiered weights for **students with disabilities**
 - Weights for students in high-cost **career and technical education** (CTE) programs

Targeted Funding for Special Student Populations



Provide equitable funding for *all* students in *all* schools.

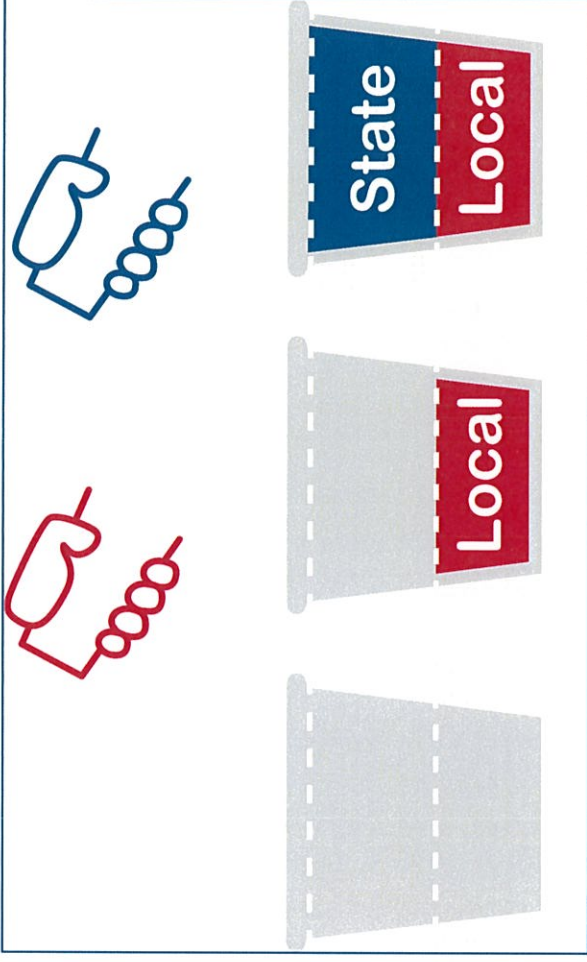
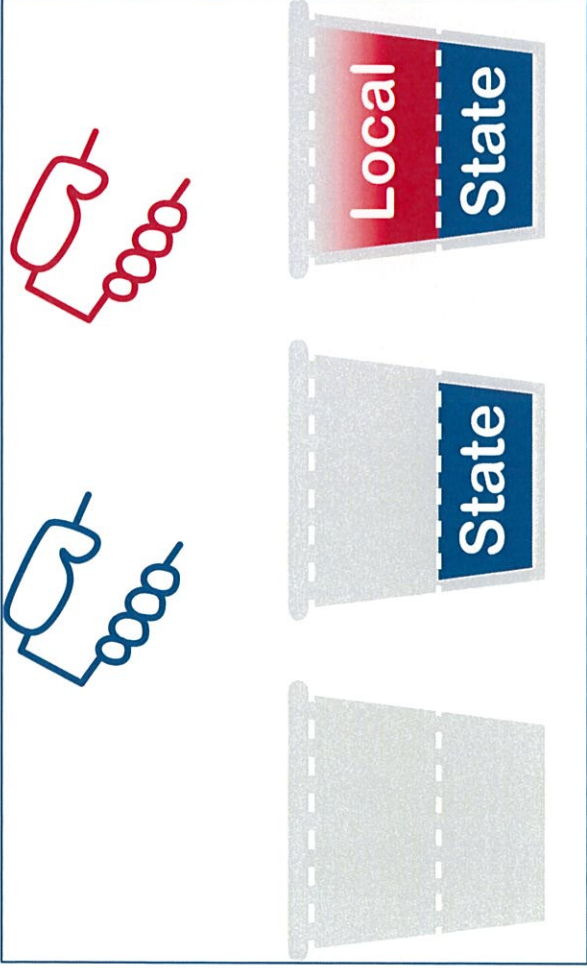
- Given other shifts in the funding system, the Commission recommends an end to charter school holdbacks.
- Charter schools should have equal access to housing aid (with a proportional increase in aid).
- Municipalities should pay charter schools directly.

Legislate charter schools elsewhere and **have money follow students.**

**Ensure greater predictability for municipalities
with a required local share**

Moving from this...

To this...



Local municipalities will pay a predictably defined local share to fund their schools.

- While most municipalities meet their local share, any failure to fund local students' education impacts RI's students.
- RI is an anomaly in determining local ability to pay using the quadratic mean of child poverty and property wealth.

Each municipality will **pay a required local share based on assessed value of residential and commercial property.**

**Require transparency and strategic
management that ties spending to
educational outcomes**

District budgets are complex, opaque, and sometimes not well managed.

- To overcome these challenges, the Commission proposes that districts:
 - Receive more support in budgeting and financial planning from RIDE
 - Use the Uniform Chart of Accounts (UCOA) in a detailed and consistent manner
 - Continue to undergo periodic audits

The system rarely connects spending decisions directly to student outcomes.

- Districts receive state aid, regardless of past spending, student outcomes, or financial transparency.
- Districts should clearly connect spending to outcomes and publicly report progress to stakeholders.

Districts will give **annual public presentations linking spending to student outcomes** and engage in strategic management efforts to reallocate resources.

Districts need support *before* intensive state intervention happens.

- Districts should receive ongoing support from RIDE.
- Most districts will face no consequences; those that are not meeting goals should go through a system of collaborative planning, oversight, and state control (if necessary).

Establish a Fiscal Responsibility Board to provide tiered fiscal and strategic support for struggling districts.

In summary, the Commission recommends a funding system that:

- 1.** Account for the full cost of education in the funding system, and share those costs more equitably
- 2.** Tailor instructional costs to student needs more directly
- 3.** Ensure greater predictability for municipalities with a required local share
- 4.** Require transparency and strategic management that ties spending to educational outcomes

What does the proposed funding system mean for the state in practice?

The following slides provide a state-level overview of the proposed system. and illustrate how different scenarios vary based on the legislature's desired level of investment in education.

Putting It All Together: What the Proposed Funding System Means in Practice

	Current	
Total Foundation Cost	\$2.09B	State formula aid makes up 58% of the total foundation cost.
State Formula Aid	\$1.22B	
State Costs	\$0.36B	However, because the Core Instructional Amount is limited, municipalities must cover many costs beyond the total foundation cost.
Total State Education Budget	\$1.57B	
Total Municipal Education Budget	\$1.50B	
Total Education Spending (State + Municipal)	\$3.07B	

Putting It All Together: What the Proposed Funding System Means in Practice

	Current	Scenario 1: 58% State Share
Total Foundation Cost	\$2.09B	\$2.91B
State Formula Aid	\$1.22B	\$1.69B
State Costs	\$0.36B	\$0.48B
Total State Education Budget	\$1.57B	\$2.16B
Total Municipal Education Budget	\$1.50B	\$1.22B
Total Education Spending (State + Municipal)	\$3.07B	\$3.38B

In Scenario 1, the state invests more by maintaining its 58% share of the total foundation cost using the expanded Core Education Amount.

The total foundation cost increases because we move from a Core Instruction Amount to a Core Education Amount.

Putting It All Together: What the Proposed Funding System Means in Practice

	Current	Scenario 1: 58% State Share
Total Foundation Cost	\$2.09B	\$2.91B
State Formula Aid	\$1.22B	\$1.69B
State Costs	\$0.36B	\$0.48B
Total State Education Budget	\$1.57B	\$2.16B
Total Municipal Education Budget	\$1.50B	\$1.22B
Total Education Spending (State + Municipal)	\$3.07B	\$3.38B

Other state-covered costs increase (largely because the state is assuming legacy pension costs).

Putting It All Together: What the Proposed Funding System Means in Practice

	Current	Scenario 1: 58% State Share
Total Foundation Cost	\$2.09B	\$2.91B
State Formula Aid	\$1.22B	\$1.69B
State Costs	\$0.36B	\$0.48B
Total State Education Budget	\$1.57B	\$2.16B
Total Municipal Education Budget	\$1.50B	\$1.22B
Total Education Spending (State + Municipal)	\$3.07B	\$3.38B

In this scenario, the state education budget increases, while municipal budgets decrease.

Putting It All Together: What the Proposed Funding System Means in Practice

	Current	Scenario 1: 58% State Share	Scenario 2: 38% State Share
Total Foundation Cost	\$2.09B	\$2.91B	\$2.91B
State Formula Aid	\$1.22B	\$1.69B	\$1.09B
State Costs	\$0.36B	\$0.48B	\$0.48B
Total State Education Budget	\$1.57B	\$2.16B	\$1.57B
Total Municipal Education Budget	\$1.50B	\$1.22B	\$1.81B
Total Education Spending (State + Municipal)	\$3.07B	\$3.38B	\$3.38B

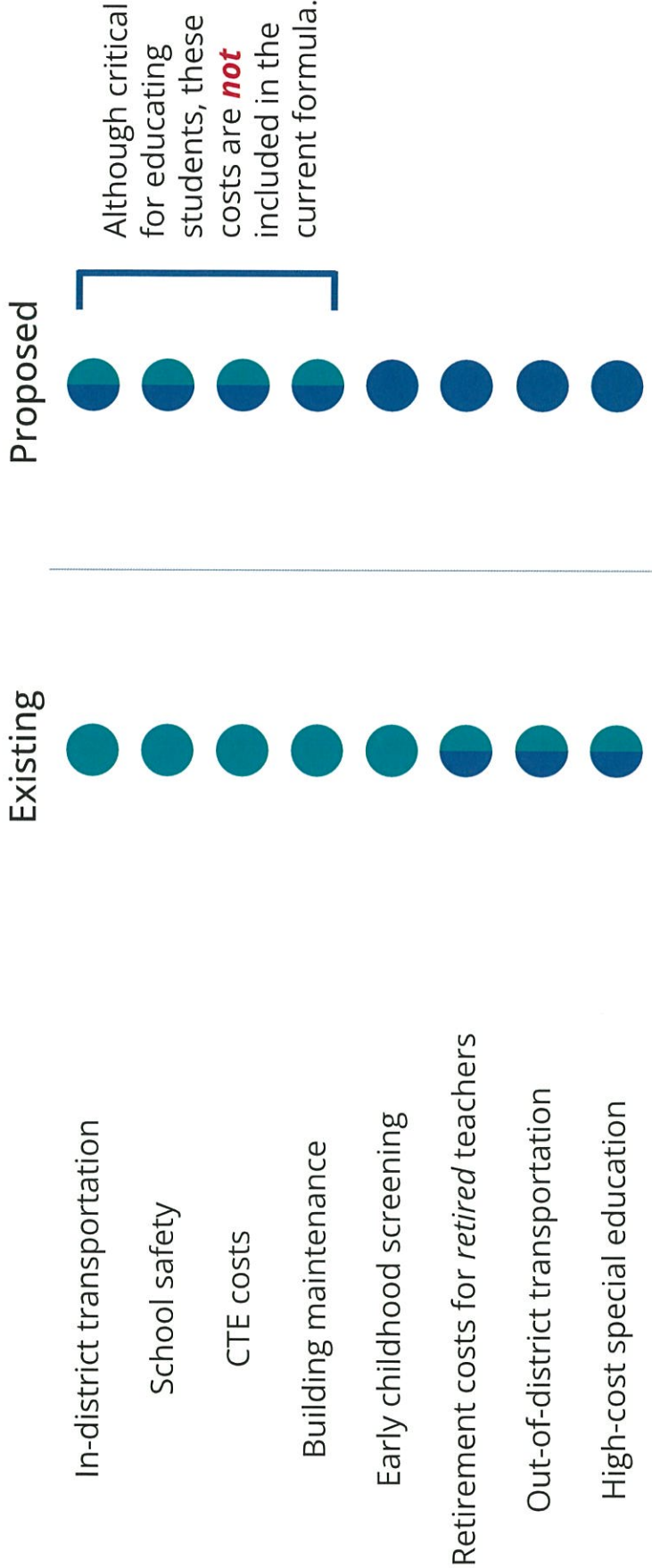
Scenario 2 holds constant the current total state education budget.

As a result, municipal budgets increase.

What does the proposed funding system mean for individual municipalities?

The following slides present municipality-level case studies illustrating how the proposed system would work in practice, assuming the state maintains its 58% share of the total foundation cost.

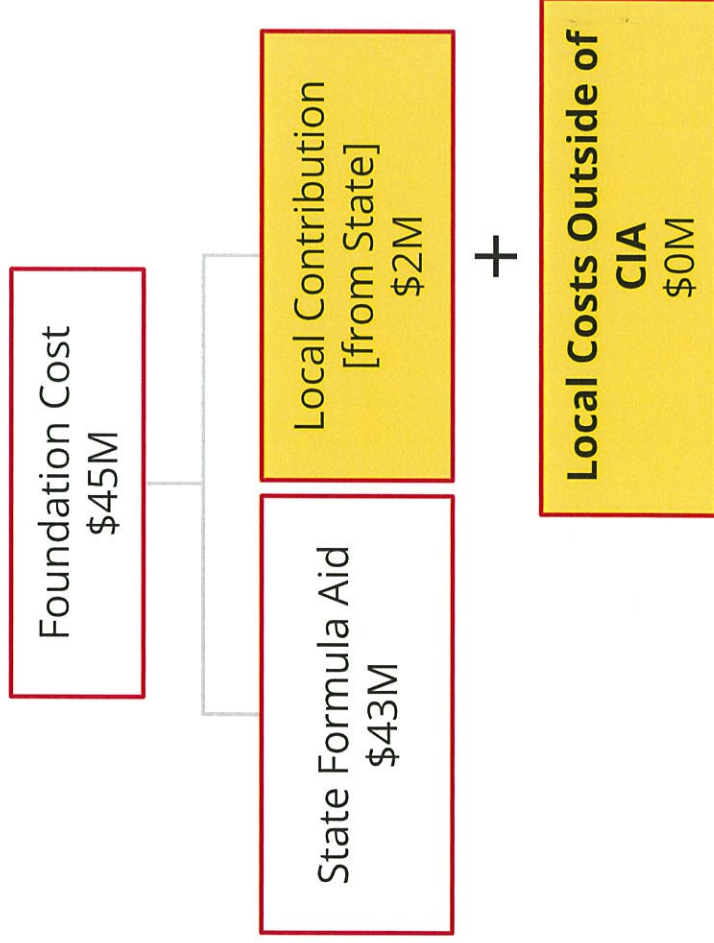
As a reminder, the Commission proposes greater cost sharing between the state and municipalities.



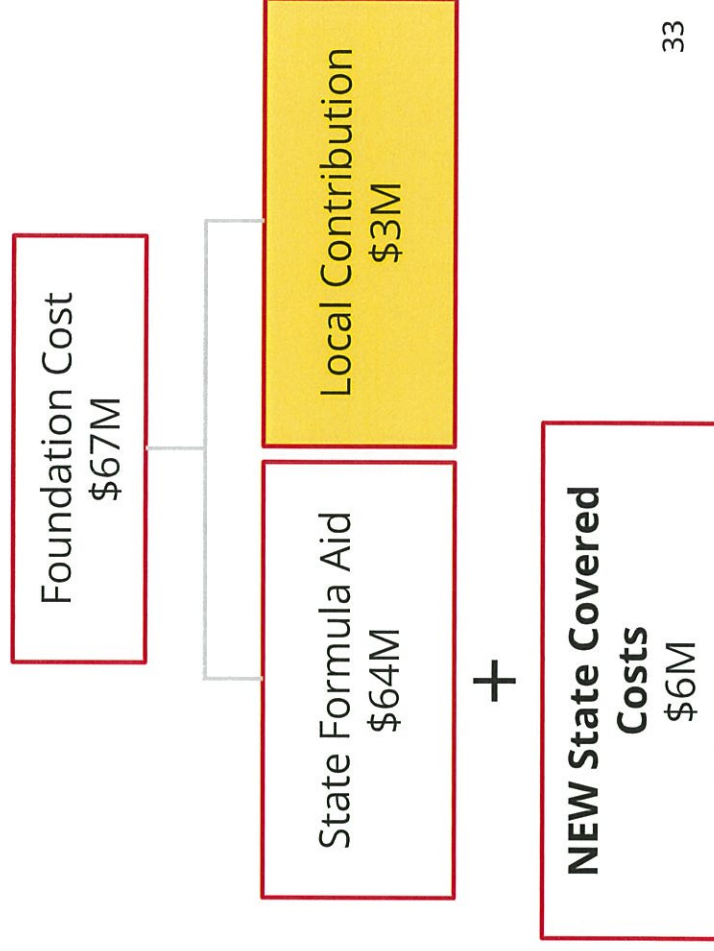
● = Local-funded ● = State-funded

In Central Falls, local costs would go from \$2M to \$3M.

Current System



Proposed System 58% State Share



How it looks in Central Falls explained

- The **foundation cost** using the current formula is \$45M. Because the new system uses an expanded CEA and new adjustments for economically disadvantaged students and high cost programs, the proposed foundation cost is \$67M.
- Both the **state formula aid and the local contribution** go up, since more of the costs of educating Central Falls students are included in this shared amount.
- **New state-covered costs** (e.g., high-cost special education, legacy pensions) in the amount of \$6M shift certain costs out of local responsibility.
- Central Falls stands to receive \$27M more in total state aid than in the current formula.

**SPECIAL JOINT LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION TO STUDY THE
RETURN OF CENTRAL FALLS SCHOOLS TO LOCAL GOVERNANCE**

NOTICE OF MEETING

DATE: Wednesday, March 25, 2026
TIME: 2:00 PM
PLACE: Room 313 – State House

AGENDA:

- I. Call Meeting to Order and Attendance
- II. Discussion of Commission Report
- III. Next Meeting Date
- IV. Adjournment

No Public Testimony will be accepted at this meeting.

COMMISSION INFORMATION

For information on commissions, [CLICK HERE](#). If you have any questions, please contact Tom Kane in the Senate Policy Office (tkane@rilegislature.gov).

ACCOMMODATIONS

The General Assembly strives to make the legislative process accessible to all. Anyone needing an accommodation to attend or testify at a commission meeting, contact Stacy Custer at scuster@rilegislature.gov or 401-222-7904 at least 48 hours in advance of the scheduled meeting.

TELEVISION AND LIVESTREAM INFORMATION

The meeting may be televised by Capitol Television on Cox Communications, channels 15 and 61 for high definition; i3 Broadband (formerly Full Channel) on 15; and Verizon, on channel 34. Senate committee hearings may also air on Channel 75 for Cox Subscribers.

Livestreaming is available at <https://capitolvri.cablecast.tv/>

POSTED: FRIDAY, MARCH 20, 2026, 3:30 P.M.

Thomas Kane

From: Echelson, Drew <Drew.Echelson@ride.ri.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, March 24, 2026 11:52 AM
To: James Parisi; Thomas Kane
Cc: Redden, Krystafer; Christine O'Connor
Subject: Response to Request for Advanced Thoughts

Thank you, Chair and colleagues, for the opportunity to weigh in as we transition from testimony to report development. A few ideas that come to mind as we start the process of honing in on some key concepts and start to think about drafting (I'm happy to flesh these out further if useful):

1. I would recommend that the report center a set of key principles agreed upon by the Commissioners that serve as drivers for return. This could include something like (as an example), "The level of governance provided under any return/transition plan should be commensurate with the level of the City's investment."
2. I think it is critical that the City and the state come to an agreement about how the stabilization fund will be leveraged and managed into the future. Specifically, until the City is prepared to take on significant non-core costs, there should be a limit to how much non-core costs can increase. There should be a process for special consideration beyond that cap and that process should include review and approval by Commissioner or Commissioner designee.
3. I think we should have a discussion about any current fund balance and how any current fund balance could be leveraged to increase the City's contribution. To be clear, this is not a sustainable funding source but could be used to facilitate a larger one-time (or several smaller) contribution toward the City's share.
4. If the Commissioner agrees that the Mayor's offer of an additional 1% per year is likely the best the City can do, which I happen to believe given the testimony of the CFO and the Mayor's presentation during public comment which I credit, I recommend that we consider a phased governance model.

Drew Echelson, Ed.D. | he, him, his

Deputy Commissioner for Systems Transformation

Findings & Recommendations of the Special Joint Legislative Commission to Study the Return of Central Falls Schools to Local Governance

In June 2025, a joint resolution of the General Assembly ([S1156](#) / [H6255](#)) established the Special Legislative Commission to Study the Return of Central Falls Schools to Local Governance. The Commission was charged with preparing a final report to include:

- a sustainable financial pathway and timeline for the City of Central Falls to contribute their local share of foundation education aid; and
- a comprehensive plan for the transfer of operational and fiscal responsibility from the State to the City of Central Falls, with an effective implementation date of July 1, 2026.

Findings

1. **The City of Central Falls engaged in a community-driven, collaborative process to develop and implement a local governance model**, in preparation for assuming full local control effective July 1, 2026. By citywide referendum, the city's charter was amended on July 8, 2025, to adopt a hybrid elected/appointed school board model. In January 2026, seven members of the new School Board, four elected and three appointed, were sworn in. In March 2026, an eighth appointed member will be sworn in, upon turning eighteen years old. The ninth seat, to be filled by an appointee of the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education, remains vacant.
2. **The City of Central Falls has developed and begun implementation of a state-of-the-art training model for the new School Board.** The City has engaged the nationally renowned education systems leader Dr. Amanda Aiken to help lead the process, as well as community leaders. Monthly sessions include:
 - Education law
 - Budget approval and oversight
 - Strategic planning
 - Ethics and open meetings requirements
 - Cultivating a collective vision, mission, and strategic direction
 - Hiring, support, and evaluation of the Superintendent
 - Establishing policies and guardrails
 - Ensuring accountability for student outcomes
 - Engaging the community and representing the public
 - Maintaining effective governance and board operations

Additionally, School Board Members will engage in listening sessions and focus groups between formal training sessions. With collaboration from the district, they will also visit schools and classrooms.

3. **The City of Central Falls**, including the City Solicitor, Director of Finance, Mayor, Mayor's Chief of Staff, and Office of Education, in collaboration with national experts Dr. Amanda Aiken, Dr. Domingo Morel, and Dr. Kenneth Wong, **has developed a full operational transition plan**, including a phased timeline from December 2025 through July 1, 2026, to ensure full readiness for operational and fiscal control of the Central Falls School District. An outline of that plan is [here](#).
4. **For every municipality, the "local share of foundation education aid" is equal to the difference between the "foundation education aid" for the school district, as defined in [RIGL 16-7.2-3](#),**

and “the state’s share of the foundation education aid,” as defined in [RIGL 16-7.2-4](#). In Central Falls, the local share of foundation education aid for FY2026 is \$1,479,412 minus the Enrollment Transition Fund (\$390,458). In recognition of Central Falls’s uniquely limited fiscal capacity, the Central Falls Stabilization Fund, as defined in [RIGL 16-7.2-6\(d\)](#), was established to cover the local share of foundation education aid for Central Falls (“education aid calculated pursuant to § 16-7.2-3”), and the Central Falls School District’s “non-core” expenses (“costs outside the permanent foundation education-aid formula”). One measure of the City’s limited capacity to fund the local share of foundation aid and “non-core” costs is that the maximum tax levy increase permissible by State law (4%) would generate only \$669,433 in additional revenue for the City in FY2027, or nearly \$420,000 less than the local share of foundation education aid under the current formula (and more than \$10 million less the amount allocated to the Central Falls Stabilization Fund in FY2026).

5. **The City of Central Falls’s operating budget for FY2026 is \$21.9 million, including \$16.7 million in local tax revenues.** The City has explored and tapped a variety of non-tax revenue options over the past several years but projects that non-tax revenue has peaked. The City’s municipal employees, including public safety employees, are among the lowest-compensated across a range of Rhode Island communities. The City Finance Director provided the Commission with detailed financials, from the time of the city’s bankruptcy to the past five years, when the City has become financially stable and achieved an annual general fund balance that meets the national Government Finance Officers Association’s (GFOA) recommendation — an amount sufficient to cover at least two months of regular City general fund expenditures.
6. **The City of Central Falls projects that it will face a revenue challenge beginning in FY2029,** even if the City’s total tax levy increases by 4% annually (the maximum tax levy increase permissible by [RIGL 44-5-2\(b\)](#)) and if State revenue and non-tax revenue are constant. The projected revenue challenge is primarily due to salary increases, a rise in state-mandated pension payments, and inflation.
7. **The annual allocation to the Central Falls Stabilization Fund has been insufficient to meet the Fund’s statutory purpose:** to fund the local share of foundation education aid (“education aid calculated pursuant to § 16-7.2-3”) and the Central Falls School District’s “non-core” expenses (“costs outside the permanent foundation education-aid formula”), the majority of which are pass-through funds to other schools and districts (42% to charter schools, 13% to high cost special education placements, and 11% to CTE placements). The Central Falls School District spends less per pupil on “non-core” expenses such as transportation and facilities upkeep/maintenance than almost every other traditional school district in Rhode Island. Dr. Stephen Owens, Director of Policy and Advocacy for Brown’s Promise, a national education advocacy organization, testified to the Commission that the cost to educate children in a community of concentrated poverty, such as Central Falls, is two to three times the cost to educate students in non-economically disadvantaged communities. Furthermore, public finance economist Kim Ruebens testified that “state takeovers lead to more spending per pupil.”
8. **Because every municipality, regardless of its State Share Ratio, is responsible for 100% of “non-core” expenses, the “non-core” has a profoundly regressive effect, impacting municipalities with the least revenue-generating capacity.** In its January 2026 report *Equalizing Opportunity*, the Rhode Island Foundation’s Blue Ribbon Commission underscored this point: “Districts bear many costs that are not included in the current CIA [Core Instruction Amount] (e.g., building maintenance, food service, transportation), meaning the state does not help cover them. Consequently, these costs disproportionately affect municipalities with limited ability to pay”(emphasis added).

Recommendations

1. The Commission recommends the repeal of [R.I.G.L. § 16-2-34 \(Central Falls School District board of trustees\)](#) in the 2026 General Assembly session in order to effectuate a return to local control of the Central Falls School District by the July 1, 2026, effective date specified in the Commission's enabling legislation.

Rationale

- The City of Central Falls has demonstrated the necessary governing capacity to assume control of their school district after 35 years of state control. Specifically, the City has:
 - Engaged community stakeholders to design a governance model that matches the strengths, needs and capacity of the city;
 - Passed a citywide referendum to amend their city charter on July 8, 2025 to update their school committee charter language to reflect the new governance model;
 - Appointed and elected eight new members to the Central Falls School Board;
 - Engaged new board members in extensive and ongoing professional development (Commission members and expert witnesses have recognized the governance model and board training as exemplary and note that it far exceeds the required 6 hours of annual training for school board members).
 - Achieved an annual general fund balance (since FY2024) that meets the national Government Finance Officers Association's (GFOA) recommendation — an amount sufficient to cover at least two months of regular City general fund expenditures.
 - Engaged with the Rhode Island Department of Education to ensure a Board seat for the first three years of local control for an appointee of the Council of K-12 Education to facilitate a smooth transition.
 - Local control will hold the Central Falls School District accountable to the people most impacted by the education system — families and youth — in order to benefit the children of Central Falls.
 - Local control will enable the Central Falls School District to engage in regional, cross-sector, state and local partnerships to improve outcomes for children and to stand on an equal footing with the state, as well as other LEAs, in designing and negotiating partnerships in the best interest of Central Falls children.
 - The City of Central Falls has planned an operational and fiscal transition that is reasonable and grounded in national research. The implementation of the transition plan is aligned with the July 1, 2026, hand-over date.
 - The new local governing board will benefit from the stabilizing influence of:
 - A current contract with the Central Falls Teachers Union for the first two years of local control;
 - A current contract with the Central Falls Superintendent of Schools for the first two years of local control;
 - An appointee to the Central Falls School Board by the Council of K-12 Education for the first three years of local control;
 - Mayoral stability for the first two years of local control;
 - An Office of Education at the City of Central Falls to support the initial year of local control.
2. The Commission recommends that [R.I.G.L. 16-7.2-6\(d\) \(Central Falls Stabilization Fund\)](#) be amended to (a) codify the City of Central Falls's contribution to the local share of education aid and (b) bring formulaic predictability to the total Stabilization Fund allocation. (For the full text of the recommended amendment, see Attachment 1.) Specifically, the Commission recommends that:

- **the total amount allocated to the Central Falls Stabilization Fund shall be determined formulaically**, as the sum of (1) the difference between Central Falls School District's foundation education aid and the state's share of Central Falls School District's foundation education aid and (2) funding for all costs outside the permanent foundation education-aid formula, calculated according to the most recently published UCOA expenditures data for Central Falls School District;
- beginning in FY2027, the City of Central Falls shall allocate to the Central Falls Stabilization Fund an amount equal to the sum of (1) one percent (1%) of the City's prior year total tax levy and (2) the City's prior year contribution to the Central Falls School District. 75% of the allocation will be dedicated to the *local share of the foundation aid* and 25% to "*non-core*" expenses, unless the City or State deems it necessary to modify distribution of this allocation (all of which is funded through the Central Falls Stabilization Fund);
- **the State shall allocate the balance of the Central Falls Stabilization Fund;**
- **the City shall annually assume responsibility for any deficit incurred by the Central Falls School District;**
- before the FY2032 budgeting cycle, **this funding arrangement shall be reviewed and, if deemed necessary by the state and/or the city, amended.**

Rationale

- Determining the annual allocation to the Central Falls Stabilization Fund formulaically, based on the actual local share of foundation education aid and actual prior expenditures on "non-core" expenses, will ensure, for the first time, that the fund is adequately resourced to cover both the local share of foundation education aid and the "non-core" costs borne by the district (the large majority of which are pass-through funds to other schools and districts).
- Allocating 1% of the City's prior year tax levy annually to the Stabilization Fund (on top of the the City's prior year contribution to the Fund) will (a) ensure a sustainable financial pathway and timeline for the City of Central Falls to contribute their local share of foundation education aid and (b) ensure that the City begins contributing, over time, to the "non-core."
- Holding the City responsible for any deficit incurred by the Central Falls School District addresses the State's "moral hazard" concerns as they pertain to the oversight by the Central Falls School Board— i.e., that the District (and City) would be perversely incentivized to "overspend" on the District's small portion of "non-core," non-pass-through expenses.
- Formally establishing a "check-in" point will allow the City and State to mutually review this funding arrangement in light of the first five years and to make any changes, if necessary.

Additional information on the City of Central Falls' Fiscal Capacity

The City of Central Falls has proven to be fiscally stable in recent years and believes it can maintain stability with its most recent proposal for local funding of the school district.

City Budget

- All City budgets have been balanced with operating deficits and approved by Council.

City Financial Results

- City Operating Fund has seen a surplus in the five years.
- All required debt, pension, and OPEB contributions have been fully met.
- Non-tax revenue has been steadily increasing.
- Financials have been issued in a timely manner.

City Debt

- Hilltop Securities is the City's financial advisor and is heavily engaged in all debt-related activities.

- The City's credit rating has been upgraded seven times since 2012. In 2018, the S&P affirmed the investment grade rating of "BBB". There has been no official rating since 2018.
- In May of 2025, Hilltop Securities calculated a projected credit position for the city. The analysis indicated that the city achieves a rating in the "A" category with an "A-" rating, which would be an improvement of the last 2018 rating.
- In November 2024, City voters approved \$26 million in General Obligation bonds for school construction.
- The City issued new debt for its required portion of the \$144 million state bond for Central Falls school construction. All related debt service payments are included in the operating budget.

The City's Fund Balance has been steadily improving since FY2021.

- The City is now meeting the recommended fund balance levels established by the GFOA.
- On June 30, 2025, the City's General Fund had a positive fund balance of \$5,103,762 (of which \$3,391,953 is unassigned).
- Total Governmental Funds had a positive fund balance of \$8,320,791 on June 30, 2025.
- Testimony from Commissioner Brian Daniels, February 11, 2026: "I appreciate your focus on responsibility, Mayor, and I want to commend you and Mayor Diossa before you...Financial responsibility has been something that I know matters a great deal to you. I just want to make sure everybody recognizes that the City's fund balance at the end of fiscal year was...about 18.6% of the annual expenditures. The Government Finance Officers Association' recommendation for fund balance is about two months, or about 17%, so Central Falls has gotten back up to that. And I think that's really important for people to recognize – that Central Falls really has tightened its belt, tried to make difficult decisions, not been able to do everything it wants to do. And we don't want to endanger that, and I think that's really important, that we've seen this progress. It takes a long time to get there but an 18% fund balance is something to be proud of....We don't want to jeopardize that."

Other Significant Projects in Central Falls

- New high school was completed on time and on budget. The city's finance department has managed all debt activities, coordinated all vendor payments and required state approvals, and all reporting requirements. The city's purchasing department has managed all required procurement activities and vendor management. In March of 2026, it was opened for students.
- Construction of the city's new Community Center is underway. The city has been very resourceful in securing funding for this project. Our funding sources include a state grant, CDBG grant, USDA grants, and private funders. It is scheduled to open in the fall of 2026 and is on budget as well.
- The city is in the midst of a total revitalization of Jenks Park. These activities began in 2022 and are ongoing today. The projects include a new playground, restoration of the historic Cogswell Tower and a state-of-the-art amphitheater. Again, aggressive fund raising has resulted in funding from CDBG grants, RIDEM grants, RI Historic Society grants.
- The city has acquired a parcel of the former Osram site for future housing in the city utilizing a \$2.6M HUD grant.

**SPECIAL JOINT LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION TO STUDY THE
RETURN OF CENTRAL FALLS SCHOOLS TO LOCAL GOVERNANCE**

NOTICE OF MEETING

DATE: Monday, April 6, 2026
TIME: 2:00 PM
PLACE: Room 313 – State House

AGENDA:

- I. Call Meeting to Order and Attendance
- II. Discussion/consideration of Commission Report
- III. Adjournment

No Public Testimony will be accepted at this meeting.

COMMISSION INFORMATION

For information on commissions, [CLICK HERE](#). If you have any questions, please contact Tom Kane in the Senate Policy Office (tkane@rilegislature.gov).

ACCOMMODATIONS

The General Assembly strives to make the legislative process accessible to all. Anyone needing an accommodation to attend or testify at a commission meeting, contact Stacy Custer at scuster@rilegislature.gov or 401-222-7904 at least 48 hours in advance of the scheduled meeting.

TELEVISION AND LIVESTREAM INFORMATION

The meeting may be televised by Capitol Television on Cox Communications, channels 15 and 61 for high definition; i3 Broadband (formerly Full Channel) on 15; and Verizon, on channel 34. Senate committee hearings may also air on Channel 75 for Cox Subscribers.

Livestreaming is available at <https://capitolvri.cablecast.tv/>

POSTED: THURSDAY, APRIL 2, 2026, 5:02 P.M.

SPECIAL JOINT LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION TO STUDY THE RETURN OF CENTRAL FALLS SCHOOLS TO LOCAL GOVERNANCE

COMMISSION QUORUM ROLL CALL

Meeting Date: April 6, 2026

Commission called to order at: 2:09 PM .

Meeting Time: 2:00 PM

Commission adjourned/recessed at: 2:35 PM .

COMMISSION MEMBER	Party	PRESENT	ABSENT
JIM PARISI <i>CHAIRPERSON</i>	N/A	X	_____
SENATOR JONATHON ACOSTA	<i>Democrat</i>	X	_____
REPRESENTATIVE JOSHUA J. GIRALDO	<i>Democrat</i>	X	_____
BRIAN DANIELS	N/A	X	_____
DREW ECHELSON	N/A	X	_____
SARAH FRIEDMAN	N/A	X	_____
RANDY ROSSI	N/A	X	_____

*Minimum Number of
Members Present to
Constitute a Quorum*

5

ATTENDANCE TOTALS

7

PRESENT

0

ABSENT

SPECIAL JOINT LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION TO STUDY THE RETURN OF CENTRAL FALLS SCHOOLS TO LOCAL GOVERNANCE

COMMISSION ACTION ROLL CALL

Meeting Date: 4/6/2026

FINAL REPORT

Sponsor: N/A

CENTRAL FALLS COMMISSION REPORT DRAFT 4

MOTION / ACTION TAKEN ON REPORT

Motion made by ROSSI, seconded by Senator(s) REP. GIRALDO for:

- Passage
 Passage in Concurrence
 Passage as Amended
 Passage as Sub _____
 Continue
 Hold for Further Study
 Committee Heard
 Indefinitely Postpone

VOTE OF THE COMMISSION

COMMISSION MEMBER	Party	YEA	NAY	ABSENT	ABSTAIN
JIM PARISI <i>CHAIRPERSON</i>	N/A	<u>X</u>	_____	_____	_____
SENATOR JONATHON ACOSTA	DEMOCRAT	<u>X</u>	_____	_____	_____
REPRESENTATIVE JOSHUA J. GIRALDO	DEMOCRAT	<u>X</u>	_____	_____	_____
BRIAN DANIELS	N/A	<u>X</u>	_____	_____	_____
DREW ECHELSON	N/A	<u>X</u>	_____	_____	_____
SARAH FRIEDMAN	N/A	<u>X</u>	_____	_____	_____
RANDY ROSSI	N/A	<u>X</u>	_____	_____	_____

VOTE RESULTS

<u>7</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>
YEA	NAY	ABSENT	ABSTAIN

Appendix 4

Central Falls School District – Budget Summary and 2022 – 2024 Audited Financial Statement

**Due to the length of the audit financial statements, they can be found digitally on the commission webpage on the General Assembly Website linked below.*

<https://www.rilegislature.gov/commissions/RCFSLG/Pages/hmaterials.aspx>

CENTRAL FALLS SCHOOL DISTRICT
(A Component Unit of the State of Rhode Island)

	<u>FY23 Budget</u>	<u>FY24 Budget</u>	<u>FY25 Budget</u>
Revenues:			
Federal and state grants and aid	\$ 47,702,746	\$ 48,759,490	\$ 54,365,494
Medicaid	855,000	-	-
Other revenue	6,000	41,000	-
Total City Revenues	<u>48,563,746</u>	<u>48,800,490</u>	<u>54,365,494</u>
Expenditures:			
Salaries	25,648,357	24,451,413	26,145,940
Employee benefits	10,381,088	9,868,071	13,177,300
Professional services	964,906	1,098,619	2,256,269
Purchased property services	1,453,512	1,530,833	2,067,698
Other purchased services	8,817,208	8,502,357	8,988,396
Supplies and materials	1,102,733	1,135,902	1,295,962
Capital Outlay	155,654	278,771	119,910
Other objects	40,288	449,414	314,019
Total City Expenditures	<u>48,563,746</u>	<u>47,315,380</u>	<u>54,365,494</u>
Excess (deficiency) of expenditures over revenues, budgetary	-	1,485,110	-
Other financing sources (uses):			
Transfer out	-	(1,485,110)	-
Total other financing sources (uses)	<u>-</u>	<u>(1,485,110)</u>	<u>-</u>
Excess of revenue and other financing sources over expenditures and other financing uses, budgetary basis	<u>\$ -</u>	<u>\$ -</u>	<u>\$ -</u>