

Cranston Public Schools

Building Cranston's Future One Child at a Time

845 Park Avenue
Cranston, Rhode Island 02910-2790

JEANNINE NOTA-MASSE
SUPERINTENDENT

To: Honorable Chair DiPalma, and Members of the Senate Finance Committee

From: Jeannine Nota-Masse, President, Rhode Island School Superintendents' Association (RISSA);
Superintendent, Cranston Public Schools

Date: May 21, 2026

Subject: **TESTIMONY IN STRONG SUPPORT OF** Senate Bill 3015, The Rhode Island Education Funding
And Accountability Act

Dear Chair DiPalma and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of this bill. I am writing to you today in my dual capacity as the President of the Rhode Island School Superintendents' Association (RISSA) and as the Superintendent of Cranston Public Schools.

As a member of the RI Foundation's Blue Ribbon Commission, I am proud to speak in support of this legislation, which is the culmination of work with the RI Foundation, the Annenberg Institute, and a diverse group of stakeholders. My motivation for participating in this Commission is that public school districts around the state are facing enormous fiscal pressures, with seemingly no end in sight. Our current formula, while well-intentioned when created over a decade ago, no longer keeps pace with the modern realities of running a school district or the complex needs of the students we serve today. From my perspective, the system falls short because it ignores the rising, non-instructional costs that erode our ability to keep teachers in classrooms. These are real concerns that our state's Superintendents work on daily related to public school funding, or lack thereof. **The shift toward accounting for the full cost of education is particularly significant for my district in Cranston. Due to limited allocations, Cranston Public Schools are facing catastrophic budget cuts that will compromise the safety and service that we owe to students and their families.**

While developing a new formula is neither easy nor popular, it's critically important to the *survival* of our public education system in RI.

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Title II & Title IX Coordinator of Employment
Michael F. Crudale
Chief Human Resources Officer

504 Coordinator
Norma Cole
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Rhode Island's current school funding system does not adequately or equitably support our students and communities, our cities and towns. It is also NOT sustainable. **Our municipal school districts are not the enemies of community budgets, but we are often portrayed that way.** Cities and towns have been able to rely on the state for much of their school funding, and these recommendations help to level the costs. It acknowledges that a child cannot learn if they cannot safely get to school or if their learning environment is physically compromised. By modernizing how we account for these "foundational" costs, we finally allow the instructional "core" of the formula to do what it was meant to do: fund teaching and learning.

This legislation offers a path forward. It is built on a comprehensive set of recommendations that focus on four interconnected shifts:

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

As superintendents, the budget instability in RI causes a great deal of stress on districts trying to adequately plan for staffing and programming. Specifically, costs not captured in the current formula, such as skyrocketing transportation expenses and the essential maintenance of our aging school buildings, often force us into an impossible choice between fixing a boiler and funding an advanced placement course. Furthermore, the lack of budget predictability makes long-term strategic planning nearly impossible for our municipality, leading to year-to-year instability for our families.

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It is vital to recognize that these recommendations were produced through a collaborative process. The diverse group of stakeholders would never have been together (peacefully) to discuss these complex issues without the guidance of Mr. Cicilline and the Annenberg representatives. The Commission provided a unique and necessary forum for us to gather and constructively address these issues.

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

This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reshape how Rhode Island funds its public schools. Our students and communities cannot afford to wait. In my district, we have already seen the impact of delayed investment, where programs that support our most vulnerable learners are constantly at risk due to budget constraints.

I respectfully urge the members of this committee to move this legislation forward and take this important step toward building a school funding system that is fair, transparent, and effective for every child in Rhode Island. We have done a lot of the hard work; please continue this effort.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony and for your consideration.

Respectfully,



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