

*RI ELL Advisory Council  
c/o Julie A. Motta, Chair  
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December 1, 2015  
Dr. Kenneth Wagner, Commissioner of Education  
Rhode Island Department of Education  
255 Westminster Street  
Providence, RI 02901

Dear Commissioner Wagner,

We are writing to you on behalf of the Rhode Island ELL Advisory Council to express our grave concern over the fact that Rhode Island is only one of four states across the U.S. that does not fund programming for English Learners.

In the June 2015 publication, *District Administration*, Alison DeNisco wrote:

“English language learners (ELLs) perform better academically and achieve greater language proficiency when they have high quality English language instruction, according to a 2014 study in the American Educational Research Journal. These extra programs require additional funding above the average per-student amount. The federal government provides grant funding to states through Title III to help ELLs with language acquisition and with meeting content standards. However, a 2012 survey found that Title III officials and district administrators said the funds were helpful, but were inefficient for ELL services. To meet the needs of students, 46 states provide additional funding dedicated to ELL education, says a March report for the Education Commission of the States. Some 34 states fund ELL programs through their state’s primary funding formula. Of the states that use student weights in their formula, weights range from 9.6 (in Kentucky) to 99 percent (in Maryland). Nine states fund ELL programs through a line in the budget that exists outside the state’s primary funding formula, and three states reimburse districts upon submission of the costs of educating ELL students. **Four states do not provide any funding for ELL services the report found.** “

Delaware, Mississippi, Montana and **Rhode Island** are these four states. With the growing population of ELs in Rhode Island and performance gaps growing among this group and their native English-speaking peers, this lack of funding is unacceptable. We must prepare these students with the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills that they will need for higher educational opportunities, and for the Rhode Island job force that needs to grow economically.

Given the contents of the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Civil Rights *Dear Colleagues Letter (Ensuring English Learner Students Can Participate Meaningfully and*

*Equally in Educational Programs*), distributed in January of this year, we feel that it is a crucial time to address this extreme need for ELs across Rhode Island. Given that there is currently a great deal of discussion about the funding formula taking place, we strongly urge those involved in these conversations, to consider the equity gaps that exist for these learners who make up over one quarter of the students in our schools. To educate these students, districts receive no funding other than what is allocated to them from Title III. This lack of funding is contributing to the widening gaps that exist for them.

Attached you will find an additional article published by the Education Commission of the States that addresses ELL funding. We look forward to speaking with you, at your earliest convenience, regarding this important issue and request that you keep the council apprised of the decisions that are made on the various committees who will submit findings to the RI General Assembly.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Sincerely,

*Julie A. Motta*, Chair

*Laurie Grupp*, Co-Chair

*Richard Kucal*, Co-Chair

*Elizabeth Alexander*, Recording Secretary

*Catherine Fox*, Membership Secretary