

December 8, 2015

Dear Members of the Education Funding Formula Commission:

As education leaders of Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket we strongly urge the Education Funding Formula Review Commission to incorporate an English Language Learner (ELL) weight in the funding formula. Given the needs of this unique student population, the percentage of ELL students in Rhode Island's urban core, and their low performance statewide, the absence of a weight for the ELL population threatens to reinforce inequities and broaden the opportunity gaps that exist for these children.

The practice of including funding for ELL services is not a radical one. Almost every other state in the nation understands the unique needs of this population. According to a 2015 report from the Education Commission of the States, 46 states provide additional funding dedicated to ELL education (34 through their state's primary funding formula). Even though it has a higher percentage of foreign-born Latino children than the national average, and Latino students make up approximately 77% of all ELL students in the state, Rhode Island is one of only four states in the country - along with Mississippi, Montana, and Delaware - that does not provide direct funding for ELL services.

ELL students in Rhode Island are among some of the lowest performing in the nation. According to the Latino Policy Institute at Roger Williams University, Rhode Island ranked 43 out of 47 reporting states and jurisdictions on ELL 4th grade mathematics achievement, and last in ELL 8th grade mathematics achievement. Regionally in 8th grade mathematics, ELL students in RI were on average two grade levels behind their counterparts in Massachusetts, and approximately one grade level behind their peers in Connecticut and New York. The recent statewide performance on PARCC only reinforced the fact that these students' needs are not being met.

Rhode Island's urban core districts serve the majority of the State's ELL population. In the 2014-15 schoolyear, 75% of Rhode Island's ELL students were enrolled in Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence and Woonsocket. And this population is growing rapidly in these districts. In these core cities, there has been a 36.5% increase in ELL student enrollment over five years (since the 2009-10 schoolyear).

Without state designated ELL funding in Rhode Island, and with limited support from the federal government, the resources to serve this struggling and growing population in the state are inadequate. The current funding formula contains a "student success factor" that provides extra resources based on each district's population of children in poverty. RIDE has suggested that this factor helps support ELL programs because the population of children in poverty overlaps with the population of children needing ELL programs. However, learning English is a distinct challenge and serving this population requires specific resources targeted to English acquisition.

As representatives of the four districts that educate the majority of these students in Rhode Island, we are united in our request to urge the Commission to incorporate an adequate weight for English Language Learners into the funding formula.

Sincerely,

Central Falls

Victor Capellan, Superintendent
Ana Cano Morales, School Committee Chair
Jane Sessums, President of Central Falls Teachers Union

Providence

Maribeth Calabro, President, Providence Teachers Union
Christopher Maher, Superintendent
Keith Oliveira, President, Providence School Board

Pawtucket

Michael Araujo, Chair, Pawtucket School Committee
Ron Beaupre, President, Pawtucket Teacher Association
Patti DiCenso, Superintendent

Woonsocket

Pat McGee, Superintendent
Jeff Partington, President, Woonsocket Teachers Guild