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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2025

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A N A C T

RELATING TO EDUCATION -- THE EDUCATION EQUITY AND PROPERTY TAX
RELIEF ACT

Introduced By: Senators Murray, Thompson, Acosta, Bell, Urso, Lauria, Zurier, and Gu

Date Introduced: February 13, 2025

Referred To: Senate Finance

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Section 16-7.2-6 of the General Laws in Chapter 16-7.2 entitled "The
2 Education Equity and Property Tax Relief Act" is hereby amended to read as follows:

3 **16-7.2-6. Categorical programs, state funded expenses.**

4 In addition to the foundation education aid provided pursuant to § 16-7.2-3, the permanent
5 foundation education-aid program shall provide direct state funding for:

6 (a) Excess costs associated with special education students. Excess costs are defined when
7 an individual special education student's cost shall be deemed to be "extraordinary." Extraordinary
8 costs are those educational costs that exceed the state-approved threshold based on an amount
9 above four times the core foundation amount (total of core instruction amount plus student success
10 amount). The department of elementary and secondary education shall prorate the funds available
11 for distribution among those eligible school districts if the total approved costs for which school
12 districts are seeking reimbursement exceed the amount of funding appropriated in any fiscal year;
13 and the department of elementary and secondary education shall also collect data on those
14 educational costs that exceed the state-approved threshold based on an amount above two (2), three
15 (3), and five (5) times the core foundation amount;

16 (b) Career and technical education costs to help meet initial investment requirements
17 needed to transform existing, or create new, comprehensive, career and technical education
18 programs and career pathways in critical and emerging industries and to help offset the higher-

1 than-average costs associated with facilities, equipment maintenance and repair, and supplies
2 necessary for maintaining the quality of highly specialized programs that are a priority for the state.
3 The department shall develop criteria for the purpose of allocating any and all career and technical
4 education funds as may be determined by the general assembly on an annual basis. The department
5 of elementary and secondary education shall prorate the funds available for distribution among
6 those eligible school districts if the total approved costs for which school districts are seeking
7 reimbursement exceed the amount of funding available in any fiscal year;

8 (c) Programs to increase access to voluntary, free, high-quality pre-kindergarten programs.
9 The department shall recommend criteria for the purpose of allocating any and all early childhood
10 program funds as may be determined by the general assembly;

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

25 (e) Excess costs associated with transporting students to out-of-district non-public schools.
26 This fund will provide state funding for the costs associated with transporting students to out-of-
27 district non-public schools, pursuant to chapter 21.1 of this title. The state will assume the costs of
28 non-public out-of-district transportation for those districts participating in the statewide system.
29 The department of elementary and secondary education shall prorate the funds available for
30 distribution among those eligible school districts if the total approved costs for which school
31 districts are seeking reimbursement exceed the amount of funding available in any fiscal year;

32 (f) Excess costs associated with transporting students within regional school districts. This
33 fund will provide direct state funding for the excess costs associated with transporting students
34 within regional school districts, established pursuant to chapter 3 of this title. This fund requires

1 that the state and regional school district share equally the student transportation costs net any
2 federal sources of revenue for these expenditures. The department of elementary and secondary
3 education shall prorate the funds available for distribution among those eligible school districts if
4 the total approved costs for which school districts are seeking reimbursement exceed the amount
5 of funding available in any fiscal year;

6 (g) Public school districts that are regionalized shall be eligible for a regionalization bonus
7 as set forth below:

8 (1) As used herein, the term “regionalized” shall be deemed to refer to a regional school
9 district established under the provisions of chapter 3 of this title, including the Chariho Regional
10 School district;

11 (2) For those districts that are regionalized as of July 1, 2010, the regionalization bonus
12 shall commence in FY 2012. For those districts that regionalize after July 1, 2010, the
13 regionalization bonus shall commence in the first fiscal year following the establishment of a
14 regionalized school district as set forth in chapter 3 of this title, including the Chariho Regional
15 School District;

16 (3) The regionalization bonus in the first fiscal year shall be two percent (2.0%) of the
17 state’s share of the foundation education aid for the regionalized district as calculated pursuant to
18 §§ 16-7.2-3 and 16-7.2-4 in that fiscal year;

19 (4) The regionalization bonus in the second fiscal year shall be one percent (1.0%) of the
20 state’s share of the foundation education aid for the regionalized district as calculated pursuant to
21 §§ 16-7.2-3 and 16-7.2-4 in that fiscal year;

22 (5) The regionalization bonus shall cease in the third fiscal year;

23 (6) The regionalization bonus for the Chariho regional school district shall be applied to
24 the state share of the permanent foundation education aid for the member towns; and

25 (7) The department of elementary and secondary education shall prorate the funds available
26 for distribution among those eligible regionalized school districts if the total, approved costs for
27 which regionalized school districts are seeking a regionalization bonus exceed the amount of
28 funding appropriated in any fiscal year;

29 (h) [Deleted by P.L. 2024, ch. 117, art. 8, § 1.]

30 (i) State support for school resource officers. For purposes of this subsection, a school
31 resource officer (SRO) shall be defined as a career law enforcement officer with sworn authority
32 who is deployed by an employing police department or agency in a community-oriented policing
33 assignment to work in collaboration with one or more schools. School resource officers should have
34 completed at least forty (40) hours of specialized training in school policing, administered by an

1 accredited agency, before being assigned. Beginning in FY 2019, for a period of three (3) years,
2 school districts or municipalities that choose to employ school resource officers shall receive direct
3 state support for costs associated with employing such officers at public middle and high schools.
4 Districts or municipalities shall be reimbursed an amount equal to one-half (½) of the cost of
5 salaries and benefits for the qualifying positions. Funding will be provided for school resource
6 officer positions established on or after July 1, 2018, provided that:

7 (1) Each school resource officer shall be assigned to one school:

8 (i) Schools with enrollments below one thousand two hundred (1,200) students shall
9 require one school resource officer;

10 (ii) Schools with enrollments of one thousand two hundred (1,200) or more students shall
11 require two school resource officers;

12 (2) School resource officers hired in excess of the requirement noted above shall not be
13 eligible for reimbursement; and

14 (3) Schools that eliminate existing school resource officer positions and create new
15 positions under this provision shall not be eligible for reimbursement; ~~and~~

16 (j) Additional state support for districts to provide for the mental and behavioral health of
17 students. The total additional amount to support the mental and behavioral health of students shall
18 be equal to two percent (2%) of the district's total expenditures. All categorical funds distributed
19 pursuant to this subsection shall be used to hire and retain staff to provide high-quality, research-
20 based services to students to support their mental and behavioral health. Such staff shall include
21 school social workers, school counselors, school psychologists, paraprofessionals, behavioral
22 specialists, and registered behavior techs (RBTs). To be eligible for such funding, districts must:

23 (1) Be below the industry-recommended ratios of one school social worker per two hundred
24 fifty (250) students, one school counselor per two hundred fifty (250) students, one school
25 psychologist per five hundred (500) students, and/or have elementary classrooms without a full-
26 time paraprofessional, behavior specialist, or RBT;

27 (2) Comply with all provisions of § 16-53.1-2; and

28 (3) Maintain policies, based on best practice, to ensure students removed from the
29 classroom with escalated behavior receive de-escalation support before returning to the classroom.
30 The department of elementary and secondary education shall collect performance reports from
31 districts and approve the use of funds prior to expenditure. The department of elementary and
32 secondary education shall ensure the funds are aligned to activities that are innovative and
33 expansive and not utilized for activities the district is currently funding. The department of
34 elementary and secondary education shall prorate the funds available for distribution among

1 eligible recipients if the total calculated costs exceed the amount of funding available in any fiscal
2 year; and

3 ~~(j)~~(k) Categorical programs defined in subsections (a) through (g) shall be funded pursuant
4 to the transition plan in § 16-7.2-7.

5 SECTION 2. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF
A N A C T
RELATING TO EDUCATION -- THE EDUCATION EQUITY AND PROPERTY TAX
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1 This act would amend the current law to mandate additional state education categorical
2 funding for the mental and behavioral health of students equal to two percent (2%) of the district's
3 total expenditures, and would further mandate that those funds be used to hire and retain staff such
4 as school social workers, school counselors, school psychologists, paraprofessionals, behavioral
5 specialists, and registered behavior techs (RBTs). This act would also require that in order to be
6 eligible for such funding, districts must: (1) be below the industry-recommended ratios of student
7 population to school social worker, school counselor or school psychologist and/or have elementary
8 classrooms without a full-time behavior specialist; (2) comply with all provisions of the school
9 improvement team law; and (3) maintain policies to ensure students removed from the classroom
10 with escalated behavior receive de-escalation support before returning to the classroom. The act
11 would further require the department of elementary and secondary education to collect performance
12 reports from districts, approve the use of funds before expending, and ensure the funds are not
13 utilized for activities the district is currently funding.

14 This act would take effect upon passage.

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