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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2025

A N A C T

RELATING TO EDUCATION -- TRANSPORTATION OF SCHOOL PUPILS BEYOND CITY
AND TOWN LIMITS

Introduced By: Senators Ujifusa, Zurier, de la Cruz, DiPalma, Gallo, Valverde, Murray,
Pearson, DiMario, and Bell

Date Introduced: April 16, 2025

Referred To: Senate Education

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Section 16-21.1-2 of the General Laws in Chapter 16-21.1 entitled
2 "Transportation of School Pupils Beyond City and Town Limits [See Title 16 Chapter 97 — The
3 Rhode Island Board of Education Act]" is hereby amended to read as follows:

4 **16-21.1-2. School bus districts established.**

5 (a) There are hereby established school bus districts within the state to provide bus
6 transportation in the interest of public safety, health, and welfare for pupils in grades kindergarten
7 through twelve (12), or in special education programs, who attend public schools, including
8 vocational schools and special education programs provided in accord with regulations of the board
9 of regents for elementary and secondary education, consolidated schools, regional schools
10 established under the provisions of § 16-3-1 et seq., or who participate in cooperative programs as
11 provided by § 16-3.1-1 et seq., and nonpublic nonprofit schools which are consolidated,
12 regionalized, or otherwise established to serve residents of a specific area within the state which
13 schools satisfy the requirements of law for any of the grades of school, kindergarten through twelve
14 (12), as follows:

15 (1) Region I: The towns of Burrillville, North Smithfield, and Cumberland, and the city of
16 Woonsocket;

17 (2) Region II: The ~~county of Kent, except the town of West Greenwich and the towns of~~
18 ~~Foster, Gloucester, and Scituate~~ towns of East Greenwich and West Warwick, and the city of

1 [Warwick](#);

2 (3) Region III: The ~~towns~~ [town](#) of ~~Lincoln, Smithfield,~~ Johnston, ~~North Providence,~~

3 ~~Barrington, Warren, and Bristol,~~ and the cities of Cranston, ~~Central Falls, East Providence,~~

4 ~~Pawtucket,~~ and Providence;

5 (4) Region IV: The ~~county of Washington and the towns of Jamestown and West~~

6 ~~Greenwich~~ [towns of Exeter, Jamestown, Narragansett, North Kingstown, South Kingstown, and](#)

7 [West Greenwich](#);

8 (5) Region V: The towns of Little Compton, Middletown, Portsmouth, and Tiverton, and

9 the city of Newport.

10 [\(6\) Region VI: The towns of Barrington, Bristol, and Warren, and the city of East](#)

11 [Providence](#);

12 [\(7\) Region VII: The towns of Lincoln, Smithfield, and North Providence, and the cities of](#)

13 [Central Falls and Pawtucket](#);

14 [\(8\) Region VIII: The towns of Glocester, Foster, Scituate, and Coventry](#);

15 [\(9\) Region IX: The towns of Charlestown, Hopkinton, Richmond, and Westerly](#).

16 (b) A pupil attending a school, including a public school, vocational school, special

17 education program provided in accord with regulations of the board of regents for elementary and

18 secondary education, a regional school established under the provisions of § 16-3-1 et seq., as

19 authorized by § 16-3.1-1 et seq., or a nonpublic nonprofit school for grades kindergarten through

20 twelve (12), consolidated, regionalized, or otherwise established to serve residents of a specific

21 area within the state for any of the grades of schools, kindergarten through twelve (12), in the

22 interest of public safety, health, and welfare, shall be provided with bus transportation to the school

23 or facility which the pupil attends, within the region in which the pupil resides, by the school

24 committee of the city or town within which the pupil resides. The cost of transporting a pupil

25 attending a charter school, the William M. Davies, Jr. Career and Technical High School

26 (“Davies”), or the Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center (“the Met Center”) within

27 the established region shall be charged to the receiving school at the same grade level transportation

28 per pupil cost of the resident district. Districts may offer transportation to charter schools, Davies,

29 or the Met Center outside the established region in order to facilitate efficiency provided there is

30 not additional cost to the resident district.

31 [\(c\) Any pupil receiving transportation prior to December 30, 2025 under the regions](#)

32 [established in 1977, shall not be impacted by the new regions until July 1, 2029.](#)

33 SECTION 2. Section 16-7.2-6 of the General Laws in Chapter 16-7.2 entitled "The

34 Education Equity and Property Tax Relief Act" is hereby amended to read as follows:

1 **16-7.2-6. Categorical programs, state funded expenses.**

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

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

14 (b) Career and technical education costs to help meet initial investment requirements
15 needed to transform existing, or create new, comprehensive, career and technical education
16 programs and career pathways in critical and emerging industries and to help offset the higher-
17 than-average costs associated with facilities, equipment maintenance and repair, and supplies
18 necessary for maintaining the quality of highly specialized programs that are a priority for the state.
19 The department shall develop criteria for the purpose of allocating any and all career and technical
20 education funds as may be determined by the general assembly on an annual basis. The department
21 of elementary and secondary education shall prorate the funds available for distribution among
22 those eligible school districts if the total approved costs for which school districts are seeking
23 reimbursement exceed the amount of funding available in any fiscal year;

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

27 (d) Central Falls, Davies, and the Met Center Stabilization Fund is established to ensure
28 that appropriate funding is available to support their students. Additional support for Central Falls
29 is needed due to concerns regarding the city's capacity to meet the local share of education costs.
30 This fund requires that education aid calculated pursuant to § 16-7.2-3 and funding for costs outside
31 the permanent foundation education-aid formula, including, but not limited to, transportation,
32 facility maintenance, and retiree health benefits shall be shared between the state and the city of
33 Central Falls. The fund shall be annually reviewed to determine the amount of the state and city
34 appropriation. The state's share of this fund may be supported through a reallocation of current

1 state appropriations to the Central Falls school district. At the end of the transition period defined
2 in § 16-7.2-7, the municipality will continue its contribution pursuant to § 16-7-24. Additional
3 support for the Davies and the Met Center is needed due to the costs associated with running a
4 stand-alone high school offering both academic and career and technical coursework. The
5 department shall recommend criteria for the purpose of allocating any and all stabilization funds as
6 may be determined by the general assembly;

7 (e) Excess costs associated with transporting students to out-of-district non-public schools.
8 This fund will provide state funding for the costs associated with transporting students to out-of-
9 district non-public schools, pursuant to chapter 21.1 of this title. Funding shall not be less than the
10 amount that was provided in fiscal year 2026 or fiscal year 2027, whichever year's amount is higher
11 or the greater of the two (2) fiscal years. The state will assume the costs of non-public out-of-district
12 transportation for those districts participating in the statewide system. Any unused portion of the
13 fund shall be used for the purpose of creating a student transportation subsidy for students who are
14 homeless, students in foster care, and students receiving high special needs services. The
15 department of elementary and secondary education shall prorate the funds available for distribution
16 among those eligible school districts if the total approved costs for which school districts are
17 seeking reimbursement exceed the amount of funding available in any fiscal year;

18 (f) Excess costs associated with transporting students within regional school districts. This
19 fund will provide direct state funding for the excess costs associated with transporting students
20 within regional school districts, established pursuant to chapter 3 of this title. This fund requires
21 that the state and regional school district share equally the student transportation costs net any
22 federal sources of revenue for these expenditures. The department of elementary and secondary
23 education shall prorate the funds available for distribution among those eligible school districts if
24 the total approved costs for which school districts are seeking reimbursement exceed the amount
25 of funding available in any fiscal year;

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

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

31 (2) For those districts that are regionalized as of July 1, 2010, the regionalization bonus
32 shall commence in FY 2012. For those districts that regionalize after July 1, 2010, the
33 regionalization bonus shall commence in the first fiscal year following the establishment of a
34 regionalized school district as set forth in chapter 3 of this title, including the Chariho Regional

1 School District;

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

5 (4) The regionalization bonus in the second fiscal year shall be one percent (1.0%) of the
6 state's share of the foundation education aid for the regionalized district as calculated pursuant to
7 §§ 16-7.2-3 and 16-7.2-4 in that fiscal year;

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

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

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

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

16 (i) State support for school resource officers. For purposes of this subsection, a school
17 resource officer (SRO) shall be defined as a career law enforcement officer with sworn authority
18 who is deployed by an employing police department or agency in a community-oriented policing
19 assignment to work in collaboration with one or more schools. School resource officers should have
20 completed at least forty (40) hours of specialized training in school policing, administered by an
21 accredited agency, before being assigned. Beginning in FY 2019, for a period of three (3) years,
22 school districts or municipalities that choose to employ school resource officers shall receive direct
23 state support for costs associated with employing such officers at public middle and high schools.
24 Districts or municipalities shall be reimbursed an amount equal to one-half (½) of the cost of
25 salaries and benefits for the qualifying positions. Funding will be provided for school resource
26 officer positions established on or after July 1, 2018, provided that:

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

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

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

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

34 (3) Schools that eliminate existing school resource officer positions and create new

1 positions under this provision shall not be eligible for reimbursement; and
2 (j) Categorical programs defined in subsections (a) through (g) shall be funded pursuant to
3 the transition plan in § 16-7.2-7.
4 SECTION 3. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF
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RELATING TO EDUCATION -- TRANSPORTATION OF SCHOOL PUPILS BEYOND CITY
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1 This act would amend the composition of school bus districts within the state to provide
2 transportation to students in grades kindergarten through 12. This act would change the total
3 number of districts from five (5) to nine (9) districts, to promote greater efficiency, cost savings,
4 and for many students, reducing the amount of time spent on a school bus. Students receiving
5 transportation prior to December 30, 2025, under regions established in 1977, would be
6 grandfathered into their old districts until July 1, 2029. This act would also provide that the
7 categorical aid for excess costs associated with transporting students to out-of-district non-public
8 schools would not be less than the higher of what was provided in fiscal years 2026 or 2027, and
9 that any unused portions of this expense would be used to create a student transportation subsidy
10 for students who are homeless, in foster care, or high special needs students.

11 This act would take effect upon passage.

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