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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2026

AN ACT

RELATING TO EDUCATION -- FAILING SCHOOL CHOICE ACT

Introduced By: Senators Paolino, Rogers, de la Cruz, and E Morgan

Date Introduced: February 06, 2026

Referred To: Senate Education

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Title 16 of the General Laws entitled "EDUCATION" is hereby amended by
2 adding thereto the following chapters:

CHAPTER 117

FAILING SCHOOL CHOICE ACT

16-117-1. Short title.

6 This chapter shall be known and may be cited as the "Failing School Choice Act".

16-117-2. Purpose.

8 Any student who is assigned to a failing school, as defined by the department of education
9 as the bottom fifteen percent (15%) of public schools in Rhode Island as defined in § 16-117-5,
10 shall be eligible to utilize the provisions of this chapter to petition any public school with available
11 capacity to enroll in that school. A receiving school, of the parent's choice, may enroll any
12 nonresident students.

16-117-3. Funding.

14 Receiving schools shall be eligible for the state aid portion of the per-pupil aid from the
15 sending local education agency (LEA) in accordance with the state aid education funding formula
16 for reimbursement. The sending LEA shall pay and reimburse the receiving LEA for the full tuition
17 costs being paid for the student by the sending LEA with respect to any student with special needs
18 or an individual education plan.

16-117-4. Eligibility.

1 (a) Students currently enrolled in failing schools shall be eligible for school choice pursuant
2 to § 16-117-2.

3 (b) A receiving school may expel any student who has been suspended two (2) times or
4 more in a single school year. Any student who is expelled during the current school year is only
5 eligible for enrollment in their home district for that school year. The suspended student shall be
6 eligible for school choice for the next school year; provided, that if the student is again expelled,
7 the student shall be ineligible for school choice for four (4) consecutive years.

16-117-5. Reporting requirements.

9 (a) Every five (5) years, the department of education shall reclassify schools based upon
10 their performance, except for students participating in the school choice program as set forth in §
11 16-117-4. Students attending a school that falls into the bottom fifteen percent (15%), shall be
12 eligible for school choice. At no time shall any student who has been granted school choice lose
13 that status, except as set forth in § 16-117-4(b).

14 (b) Every five (5) years, the department of education shall determine the functional
15 capacity of each school, in every school district, to determine the number of school choice students
16 available for enrollment.

17 (c) Any student who has enrolled in a receiving school under § 16-117-4 shall be entitled
18 to attend the receiving school through the highest grade level offered by the failing school.

16-117-6. Transportation.

20 (a) Parents participating in school choice may utilize state school transportation only within
21 the same transportation region as defined in § 16-21.1-2.

22 (b) Parents participating in school choice may utilize private school transportation to send
23 the student to any school district.

24 (c) School transportation shall be provided at the sending school district's expense or from
25 the Rhode Island education revitalization fund (RIERF), as provided in chapter 118 of title 16, as
26 long as the receiving school is in the same transportation region as the student's sending school
27 subject to regulations promulgated by the Rhode Island department of education.

28 (d) Funding for transportation inside transportation regions shall be pursuant to § 16-21.1-
29 2.

16-117-7. Rules and regulations.

31 The department of education shall promulgate rules and regulations to implement the
32 provisions of this chapter.

1 **16-118-1. Short title.**

2 This chapter shall be known and may be cited as the "Rhode Island Education
3 Revitalization Fund Act".

4 **16-118-2. Purpose.**

5 The State of Rhode Island shall establish the Rhode Island education revitalization fund
6 (RIERF) to provide funds for any school choice program pursuant to chapter 117 of title 16.

7 **16-118-3. Funding.**

8 (a) There shall be created a statewide property tax on all real property of any private college
9 or university, nonprofit college or university, or any other post-secondary school.

10 (b) The amount of the tax in subsection (a) of this section shall be based upon the
11 endowment of the private college or university, nonprofit college or university, or any other post-
12 secondary school.

13 (c) The amount to be collected to fund this chapter shall be included in the annual state
14 budget approved by the general assembly each fiscal year.

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

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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF
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RELATING TO EDUCATION -- FAILING SCHOOL CHOICE ACT

- 1 This act would permit students at failing schools to enroll in any public school. This act
- 2 would also establish the Rhode Island education revitalization fund to provide funding to the school
- 3 choice program.
- 4 This act would take effect upon passage.

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