

2022 -- H 7614

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LC004375
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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2022

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A N A C T

RELATING TO EDUCATION - THE RHODE ISLAND URBAN EDUCATION ACT OF 1998

Introduced By: Representatives Williams, Amore, Hull, Morales, Biah, Cassar, Alzate,
Giraldo, Tobon, and Batista

Date Introduced: March 02, 2022

Referred To: House Finance

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. The title of Chapter 16-82 of the General Laws entitled "The Rhode Island
2 Urban Education Act of 1998" is hereby amended to read as follows:

3 ~~CHAPTER 16-82~~

4 ~~The Rhode Island Urban Education Act of 1998~~

5 CHAPTER 16-82

6 THE RHODE ISLAND URBAN EDUCATION AND STUDENT MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

7 ACT OF 2022

8 SECTION 2. Section 16-82-3 of the General Laws in Chapter 16-82 entitled "The Rhode
9 Island Urban Education Act of 1998" is hereby amended to read as follows:

10 **16-82-3. Definitions.**

11 For the purposes of this chapter, "urban communities" means those communities identified
12 to receive targeted aid in § 16-7.1-16. In addition, for purposes of the mentorship program
13 established pursuant to this chapter, the term "urban communities" shall at a minimum include the
14 cities of Providence, Pawtucket, Central Falls, Woonsocket, and Newport.

15 SECTION 3. Chapter 16-82 of the General Laws entitled "The Rhode Island Urban
16 Education Act of 1998" is hereby amended by adding thereto the following section:

17 **16-82-7. Urban education student mentorship program - Initial funding.**

18 (a) Findings.

19 (1) In 2016, and again in 2019, the United States Department of Education (the

1 “Department”) reported that education can only be a great equalizer and be a force that can
2 overcome differences in privilege and background, when students are in school every day and
3 receive the supports they need to learn and thrive.

4 (2) In the same report, the Department found many students experience tremendous
5 adversity in their lives, including poverty, health challenges, community violence, and difficult
6 family circumstances, that make it difficult for them to take advantage of the opportunity to learn
7 at school.

8 (3) The Department also found in that report that students who are chronically absent,
9 meaning they miss at least fifteen (15) days of school in a year, are at serious risk of falling behind
10 in school.

11 (4) The Department’s report also cited studies which suggest chronic absenteeism may
12 prevent children from reaching early learning milestones, that irregular attendance can be a better
13 predictor than test scores of whether a student will drop out before graduation, and that frequent
14 absences can shape adulthood.

15 (5) A study published in the 2019 Journal of Urban Education by Professor Michael A.
16 Gottfried found that chronic absenteeism in urban schools contributed to negative academic
17 outcomes in math and reading, not only for the chronically absent students but also for classmates
18 of those students who are not chronically absent. These effects include, but are not limited to,
19 negative spillover effects, such as:

20 (i) Chronically absent students often displayed behavioral disruptions upon their return to
21 the classroom, resulting in teachers devoting more time and resources to classroom management
22 than instruction; and

23 (ii) There can be congestion effects on a teacher’s time and resources to address what a
24 chronically absent student has missed or lost academically, and teacher time spent on this effort
25 may not benefit other students who are not chronically absent

26 (6) This same study noted that students in urban districts face an array of challenges
27 including lower financial resources, lower parental involvement, higher odds of high school
28 dropout, greater health challenges, and fewer academic and social support systems, which
29 contribute to high rates of chronic absenteeism in urban schools.

30 (7) The situation, though serious, is not irreparably broken. A study published in 2021 in
31 the Journal of Urban Learning Teaching and Research by educators Judy Jackson May, Diane
32 Conway, and Andrea Guice suggests that spending money alone is not as important and impactful
33 on student success and reducing chronic absenteeism as other interventions.

34 (8) The 2021 study suggested that a genuine difference maker for student success and

1 reducing chronic absenteeism in high poverty urban schools is the use of mentors, not only with
2 teachers but also with persons outside the school building. Some of the reasons for the success of
3 mentorship programs is that that mentors bring communal bonds, shared culture, and a commitment
4 to student success.

5 (9) This research suggest that mentoring is a practical, sustainable, and relatively low-cost
6 intervention to reduce chronic student absenteeism.

7 (b) The department of elementary and secondary education (the “department”) shall
8 commence to plan and implement the urban student mentorship program. The focus of this program
9 shall be to provide students in urban communities with mentors and tutors to assist them in their
10 academic work, and also to help create learning environments where students want to attend and
11 learn in school. In developing the program, the department shall conduct a review of best practices
12 for the selection and use of mentors and tutors in the program. The department shall utilize those
13 practices as guides in formulating and implementing the program.

14 (b) The department may promulgate rules and regulations to implement the provisions of
15 the program.

16 (c) The general assembly shall, out of any monies not already appropriated, appropriate the
17 sum of ten million dollars (\$10,000,000) for the 2022-2023 school year to initially fund the
18 program.

19 SECTION 4. 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 RHODE ISLAND URBAN EDUCATION ACT OF 1998

1 This act would establish the urban student mentorship program for the purposes of reducing
2 chronic absenteeism and promoting better academic outcomes for student in urban communities.
3 The act would authorize an appropriation of ten million dollars (\$10,000,000) to initially fund the
4 program.

5 This act would take effect upon passage.

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