

2026 -- S 2651

LC005834

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2026

A N A C T

RELATING TO EDUCATION -- STUDENT CULTURAL EXCHANGE PROGRAM

Introduced By: Senators Zurier, McKenney, and DiMario

Date Introduced: February 27, 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 chapter:

3 CHAPTER 117

4 STUDENT CULTURAL EXCHANGE PROGRAM

5 **16-117-1. Program oversight.**

6 (a) There is hereby established within the department of elementary and secondary
7 education a student cultural exchange program. The department of elementary and secondary
8 education ("department") may provide oversight of a two (2) year pilot program ("program")
9 commencing with the 2027-2028 school year. This program may be operated under a contract
10 between the department and a public or private entity that coordinates a national cultural exchange
11 program for students of this state.

12 (b) The program provided for by this section shall enable students in grade twelve (12) to
13 register to travel to a location in another state to stay with a host family in that state for a week of
14 experiences that allow students to explore similarities and differences in the political,
15 socioeconomic and cultural features of their place of residence and the location of the exchange.

16 (c) The department shall ensure that, to the greatest extent practicable, students
17 representing a diversity of schools from a diversity of school districts participate in the program.

18 (d) The department may award grants to encourage students to participate in the program
19 and to assist students who are participating in the program.

1 **16-117-2. Participation.**

2 (a) The department of elementary and secondary education shall ensure participation by
3 students to the greatest extent practicable, by July 1, 2029. The first year of the program shall
4 commence August 1, 2027, and the second year of the program shall commence August 1, 2028.
5 The targeted goal of participation shall be at least five (5) schools within the first year of the
6 program, and up to ten (10) schools in the second year. The further targeted goal is to establish the
7 program such that is able to continue beyond the two (2) year pilot period and become a
8 continuously and permanently funded program, if so extended by the general assembly pursuant to
9 § 16-117-7.

10 (b) No later than September 1, 2029, the department shall submit an initial report to the
11 education committees of the house and senate on the number of students, school districts and
12 schools that participated in the program. The report may recommend to the general assembly
13 legislative changes related to the program.

14 **16-117-3. Cultural exchange program fund.**

15 (a) The cultural exchange program fund (hereinafter sometimes referred to as the “fund”)
16 shall be established by the state treasurer, separate and distinct from the general fund. Interest
17 earned on the cultural exchange program fund shall be credited to the fund.

18 (b) Monies in the cultural exchange program fund shall be continuously allocated to the
19 department of elementary and secondary education on a rolling basis for the purpose of providing
20 funding for the program described in this chapter, including the awarding of grants.

21 (c) The department, on behalf of the state, may solicit and accept gifts, grants and donations
22 from public and private sources including, but not limited to, charitable foundations and
23 grantmaking foundations, for the purpose of the program described in this chapter. Monies received
24 under this subsection shall be deposited into the cultural exchange program fund.

25 (d) The cultural exchange program fund shall consist of monies transferred from the
26 categorized education aid, other monies appropriated or transferred to the fund by the general
27 assembly, monies deposited as provided by this section, and any other monies deposited into the
28 fund from any source, including private entities.

29 **16-117-4. Use of cultural exchange program funds.**

30 The department of elementary and secondary education shall use monies in the statewide
31 cultural exchange program fund account only to provide funding for the national cultural exchange
32 program described in this chapter, and to fund costs incurred by the department in implementing
33 the provisions of this chapter.

34 **16-117-5. Regulations.**

1 The council on elementary and secondary education shall adopt rules necessary for the
2 distribution of monies pursuant to the provisions of this chapter.

3 **16-117-6. Initial funding.**

4 For the years 2026 through 2029, the department of elementary and secondary education
5 shall transfer a sum sufficient from the categorical education aid to the cultural exchange program
6 fund established under this chapter to implement the provisions of this chapter. The fund shall be
7 eligible to receive funds starting in 2026.

8 **16-117-7. Sunset.**

9 The provisions of this chapter shall sunset and expire August 1, 2029, unless extended by
10 the general assembly.

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

=====
LC005834
=====

EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF
A N A C T
RELATING TO EDUCATION -- STUDENT CULTURAL EXCHANGE PROGRAM

1 This act would direct the department of elementary and secondary education to provide a
2 two-year pilot program that coordinates a national cultural exchange program for students of this
3 state. This act would also prescribe the requirements of the program and establish a cultural
4 exchange program fund to support the program.

5 This act would take effect upon passage.

=====
LC005834
=====