

Considerations for the Fair-Funding Formula Working Group

Meeting 3 of 6 November 24, 2015

by Janet F Carroll

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Children who are English Language Learners

Children with Special Educational Needs and Accommodations

Good Afternoon Thank you Ms. Bryant and Mr. Sweitzer and members of the working group for the opportunity to speak before you. I would also like to share my gratitude for this opportunity with the Commissioner and his staff who have made this process run so smoothly.

My name is Janet Carroll and I speak to you this afternoon on behalf of the children in our schools who struggle to meet the high performance standards set for them.

I speak on behalf of children who are being raised in households at or below the poverty level, on behalf of children in homes where working adults are struggling to pay the rent and put food on the table, and on behalf of children from poor households who move often during the school year .

As a parent, grandparent, aunt, uncle, neighbor, think for a minute about what it is like

for a child to leave for school each day from a 2 person home in which the annual income

is \$20,709--the eligibility amount for a **free** lunch in the cafeteria. That child may be sitting

next to the **reduced**-price lunch recipient who comes from a 2 person household income

of \$29, 471. So, I ask you to think about these children--both of whom come from a single

parent household. Children from poor families and children from neighborhoods with high

concentrations of poverty too often struggle to achieve proficiency and are often those

with high mobility rates, low academic performance rates, and high drop-out rates. . Do these children become the next generation of adults living in poverty?

While education alone cannot break the poverty cycle, the funding formula should address the added costs for schools to diminish the student struggle. I support the current

weight and would ask you to discuss the re-instatement of the Literacy and Dropout Prevention Act (in Chapter 16) and consider re-investing state education aid via a set-aside for compensatory education for struggling students. Title I of ESEA provides federal funds for such purposes but not to all RI schools.

The children with special educational challenges cover a wide range of needs and costs--both of which should receive close review by the Work Group. The current statute does not expressly provide for a weight for such children, although the enacted 2015-2016 state aid allocation table includes \$5 million for "excess" costs for special education students. I find no written rationale and explanation of student eligibility for this cost and recommend that the work group inquire about this because it may have a partial connection to my recommendation for the formula. That recommendation is to weight the high-cost/high-need students differently from the low-cost/low-need students in keeping with the tenets of equity and adequacy. I suggest this with some caution, however. Researchers suggest that this factor may produce incentives for cities and towns to over-identify such children. The RIDE student and financial data set and the associated staff would be able to flag such practice if it were to

occur, however.

What your leadership promise should not become is akin to the promise from the Congress in its advocacy for special education students without meeting its commitment of 40% funding. Simply put, weights in the formula for these children should result in an equitable and adequate distribution of state funds for the education of special needs students.

I speak on behalf of English language learners--a growing student population in our urban and urban ring communities. Again, I ask that you picture you and young members of your own families arriving in , let's say, the Dominican Republic with English as your only language. The children sit in those foreign classrooms struggling to feel comfortable, struggling to follow the lead, struggling to understand what is going on. And then, of course, is their struggle to understand the lesson and engage in the work like the others in the class are doing.

Our state education aid formula must give weight to these children. From reviews of other state formulas I have done, you might look at counts ranging from 115% (.15) up to 140% (.40). As with any other data-driven decision making, RIDE data for the distribution of very few and inadequate federal Title III funds, shows the range of numbers across our school districts. Do we know the level of language proficiency across this student population in

the associated districts? Again, consider differentiated weighting through the adequacy and equity lens.

In closing, I would like to leave you with some thoughts about the terms you use as a foundation for the state aid formula-- equitable, equal and adequate-- and as the important

attributes of an equal opportunity for a high quality free public education for all children in

Rhode Island public schools. There are many past and emerging definitions and characteristics associated with these terms which I encourage you to re-visit and include

as the written definitions which are the foundation to the Fair-Funding Formula.

