

Fair Funding for Rhode Island's Schools: What It Means, Why It Matters, and What You Can Do

A guide for parents, educators, and community stakeholders.

Rhode Island's school funding formula hasn't been fundamentally updated in 15 years. How much is invested in a child's education depends too heavily on where they live, not what they need to succeed.

Costs like transportation, building upkeep, and early childhood screening fall entirely on municipalities, regardless of their ability to pay.

Students who need extra support, including English language learners and students with disabilities, often don't receive adequate resources.

School administrators must make major budget decisions without knowing what funding they will receive from the state until the last minute, making long-term planning nearly impossible.

The Solution: Four Reforms, One Clear Consensus

The Blue Ribbon Commission, 18 Rhode Island leaders including educators, parents, municipal officials, union representatives, charter school supporters, and community advocates — spent a year studying Rhode Island's school funding and reached full consensus on four reforms:



Fund the Full Cost of Education

Costs like transportation, building upkeep, and early childhood screening currently fall entirely on municipalities. The state should share these costs fairly so that local budgets aren't strained by expenses that benefit all students statewide.



Require Local Contributions from All Municipalities

Every community should invest in its schools based on its actual financial capacity, not an outdated, overly complex formula that doesn't account for the full cost of education.



Fund Students Based on Their Actual Needs

Students who are economically disadvantaged, are English language learners, or have disabilities require more support to succeed. The funding formula should reflect that reality by directing more resources to those who need them most.



Require Transparency and Accountability

Every education dollar should be tied to student outcomes. This means requiring public reporting and independent oversight so families, educators, and taxpayers can see how funds are being used and whether they're making a difference.

Common Questions

Can Rhode Island afford these reforms?

The Commission's recommendations are designed to be implemented in a phased, fiscally responsible way. Some elements — such as the state assuming legacy teacher pension liabilities — actually reduce long-term costs. Fairer funding also means smarter spending, with stronger accountability built in.

Isn't the current system good enough?

The formula hasn't been meaningfully updated in 15 years. Leaders from across the political spectrum — including union leaders, charter school advocates, municipal officials, and parent organizers — all agree it needs reform. That kind of broad consensus is rare and significant.

What legislation should I ask my lawmaker to support?

Ask your State Representative and State Senator to support **House Bill 8351** and **Senate Bill 3015** enacting the Blue Ribbon Commission's recommendations.

The full report is available at RIFoundation.org/FairFunding.

What You Can Do

Email Your legislators



Send a message urging your State Representative and Senator to support school funding reform.

Email templates are available in the full Advocacy Toolkit at RIFoundation.org/FairFunding.

Call Their Offices



A two-minute phone call makes a real impact.

Scripts are available in the Advocacy Toolkit.

Spread the Word



Share this flyer with neighbors, parent groups, school staff, students, and community organizations. The more Rhode Islanders who speak up, the greater the impact will be.

Find Your Legislators:

Vote.SOS.RI.gov

Then click "Find Your Elected Officials"

Learn More:

RIFoundation.org/FairFunding