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## Testimony Re: Senate Bill 756 Regarding Strategic Plan to Improve Student Performance in Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math

Senate Education Committee

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Madam Chair and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to voice its support for Senate Bill 756. This bill would require the board of education to develop and implement a five-year strategic plan to improve student performance in science, technology, engineering, arts, and math (STEAM) and increase the number of postsecondary degrees awarded in STEAM fields on or before February 1, 2020.

Improving education in the STEAM disciplines can spur innovation and competitiveness and ensure that Rhode Island has qualified workers for the growing STEAM industries. State, national, and international assessments show that U.S. students fare well with straight-forward computational procedures but tend to have a limited understanding of basic mathematical concepts, resulting in recent federal actions to increase the level of rigor, depth, and coherency of the mathematics content taught nationwide.

In Rhode Island in 2018, 35% of third graders and 23% of eighth graders met expectations on the *Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS)*.

### Third- & Eighth- Grade Students Meeting Expectations on the RICAS Math Assessment, Rhode Island, 2018

SUBGROUP	THIRD GRADE	EIGHTH GRADE
Male Students	37%	22%
Female Students	34%	24%
*English Learners	13%	<5%
Non-English Learners	39%	25%
*Students With Disabilities	9%	<5%
Students Without Disabilities	40%	26%
Low-Income Students	22%	9%
Higher-Income Students	50%	35%
White Students	45%	31%
Asian Students	49%	35%
Black Students	21%	8%
Hispanic Students	22%	8%
Native American Students	15%	7%
<b>ALL STUDENTS</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>23%</b>

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Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, *Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS)*, 2018. Low-income status is determined by eligibility for the free or reduced-price lunch program. \*Data is reported as <5% when more than 95% of students did not meet expectations.

Disparities in math achievement related to race and family income persist in Rhode Island. Twenty-two percent of low-income third graders met expectations in math, compared with 50% of higher-income third graders. 49% of Asian and 45% of White third graders meeting expectations, compared with 21% of Black, 22% of Hispanic, and 15% of Native American students. This large achievement gap is also seen in eighth-grade results, with 35% of Asian and 31% of White eighth graders meeting expectations, compared with 8% of Black and Hispanic students, and 7% of Native American students.

Achieving math proficiency for all students requires that improvements be made in curriculum, instructional materials, assessments, classroom practice, teacher preparation, and professional development. These are particularly important as Rhode Island continues to implement new, more rigorous math standards. Teachers should expose all students to challenging math concepts and provide additional support to struggling students.

We appreciate this bill recognizes the increasing need for high-quality STEAM education and STEAM postsecondary degree attainment. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.