

The

SMITH HILL REPORT



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President Flynn Testifies on Support of Community Schools Initiative

RIFTHP President Frank Flynn testified on Wednesday, April 28th in the Senate Education Committee in support of legislation that would enshrine the community schools into state law. The bill, [S0825](#) by Senator Sandra Cano, Chairperson of the Education Committee, would provide funding to hire community school coordinators to expand the program to four additional schools.

The Pawtucket Teachers Alliance and the Pawtucket School Department have worked with the RIFTHP with financial support from the AFT to initiate a community schools project. There are now three community schools in Pawtucket as a result of the effort. Community schools are an initiative to engage in discussion with the school community on services and programs that could be offered at the school.

RIFTHP President Frank Flynn spoke in support of the bill. In his testimony, he outlined what has happened in Pawtucket community schools. He said that, working with the numerous community organizations they have provided:

- Academic Support- by creating Family Book Clubs, Story Hour in both English and Spanish, Performance Arts, STEAM Education programs.
- Social Emotional Support - Mentoring, Conflict Resolution, Anti-Bullying programs.
- Family Engagement - Homework Dinners, Volunteer and Leadership opportunities, Adult Education workshops, Food Drives, and other community service projects.
- Improved Attendance – Walking School Bus, (great results, A school attendance team as well as quarterly Incentive programs.
- Health and Wellness Programs - Nutrition and Cooking programs, Swim, Karate, Yoga, Bike Safety, Before School Fitness, Dental and Vision Screenings and Health Resource Fairs.

Emily Mallozzi, the Community Schools Coordinator who works at Agnes Little Elementary School also testified in support of the bill. She noted the benefits of community schools to student learning and parent engagement. She cited specific data from indicating better student attendance, parent ratings of school

climate, and student achievement in reading and math once the community schools project began. The Senate Education Committee voted to hold the bill for further study.

RI Hope Scholarship Act Bill Considered

When former Governor Raimondo first offered the RI Promise program, it was designed as a student scholarship for two years at CCRI or the third and fourth year at RIC and URI. Ultimately, the Assembly approved the program only at CCRI. This session, Senator Ryan Pearson proposed legislation [S0636](#) to create a Rhode Island Hope Scholarship, for third and fourth year RIC students who have obtained at least a 2.5 GPA. Senator Pearson's bill was heard in the Senate Education Committee on April 28th. RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi offered testimony in support of the bill.

In his testimony, Parisi urged the committee to support the bill from the perspective of the benefit it would provide students who have earned a scholarship after having taken at least 60 credits and maintained a 2.5 GPA. He testified that the additional state support would lessen the student debt burden of RIC graduates. Parisi also stated that the program would encourage college completion. He also said the program would benefit Rhode Island College, which has been historically underfunded by the state. Also testifying for the bill was RIC AFT President Erik Christiansen, RIC President Frank Sanchez, and RIC Professors Mikaila Arthur and Wendy Becker. Kids Count and the RI Disabilities Council also weighed in on the bill.

RIFTHP Offers Support to Education Bills

The RIFTHP offered verbal testimony in support of a bill by Senator Cano that would provide state funding to hire reading specialists and math specialists. The bill, [S0756](#) was considered in the Senate Education Committee on April 28th. The bill would provide 50% of the cost of the hiring of additional math specialists and reading specialists for three years. RIFTHP lobbyist James Parisi lauded the bill as a financial incentive to provide additional staff and services to students. He also supported the staffing ratios incorporated in the bill.

The RIFTHP offered written support ([click here](#)) of another bill by Senator Cano that would provide universal no cost lunch to all students. Senator Cano described the bill as one that would end lunch shaming. The RIFTHP supported the bill as it would provide better nutrition to students, which would support better learning outcomes. The bill, [S0824](#), was also being considered in the Senate Education Committee on April 28th.

The RIFTHP also offered support of legislation by Representative Marcia Ranglin-Vassell, [H5933](#), that would provide for school districts to offer alternative education programs to students who would otherwise be suspended. The bill was being considered in the House Education Committee on April 28th.

Enacted

Two years ago, the House of Representatives established a House study commission to examine the issue of encouraging more persons of color to enter the teaching profession. RIFTHP President Frank Flynn serves on the study commission. Due to the pandemic, the commission never finished its work. On April 13th, the House passed a bill by Rep. Karen Alzate, [H5828](#), to continue the study commission and establish a date for the Commission to issue its findings by April 2022.

In late March, the Senate passed a bill, [S0281](#) by Senator Hanna Gallo related to student loan borrowers. The resolution directs the postsecondary commissioner of education to establish a working group that would offer recommendations on how Rhode Island protects student loan borrowers. The bill requires the recommendations to be issued by January 14, 2022.

BILL INTRODUCTIONS

State Support for Reading Specialist and Math Specialists

[\(S0756\)](#) *Cano, Senate Education*

This bill would provide local education agencies (LEAs) hiring site-based specialists for reading and math to receive state reimbursement based on enrollment and specific guidelines.

State Support for School Mental Health Workers

[\(S0757\)](#) *Cano, Senate Education*

This bill would create minimum qualifications for school psychologists and establish the scope of their practice within schools. This bill would also establish state support for school-based mental health services.

School Health Clinic Regulations

[\(S0791\)](#) *Goodwin, Senate Education*

This bill would require the Department of Health to promulgate rules and regulations by January 1, 2022 for the licensing and operation of health care facilities operating in elementary and secondary schools. The act further provides that health care facilities in elementary and secondary schools employ a certified nurse-teacher.

Dating Violence in Schools Data Collection

[\(S0796\)](#) *Gallo, Senate Judiciary*

This bill would amend the definition of dating violence to include abusive and coercive behaviors used to exert control and power over current or former dating partners and would provide that dating violence can include online, in person, and technological means and provides that abuse may be physical, verbal, emotional, sexual, financial, or psychological and includes threats, isolation, and intimidation.

Gold/Silver Biliteracy Seal

([S0814](#) *Quezada, Senate Education*)

([H5837](#) *Morales, House Education*)

These bills would allow high school students who receive the state Silver or Gold Seal of Biliteracy to earn two (2) to four (4) semesters of world language coursework credit toward a minor or major in the language at each state public university and public community college if requested within three (3) academic years after graduating high school.

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