

2021 -- H 5699

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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2021

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A N A C T

RELATING TO EDUCATION

Introduced By: Representatives Williams, Alzate, Barros, Hull, Amore, Henries, Biah,
Batista, Abney, and Morales

Date Introduced: February 24, 2021

Referred To: House Education

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Findings of fact.

2 The general assembly makes the following findings of fact:

3 (1) The demographic divide between teachers and students is of growing public concern.

4 (2) Currently, students of color are the demographic majority of students attending public
5 schools in the United States and comprise the large majority of urban school students (U.S.
6 Department of Education, 2013). In contrast, less than twenty percent (20%) of teachers are
7 teachers of color.

8 (3) A common explanation of why the demographic divide is so concerning is that students
9 of color have more favorable perceptions of teachers of color.

10 (4) More favorable student perceptions of teachers in turn can translate into better academic
11 outcomes such as motivation, interest, and grades.

12 (5) Teachers of color represent excellent role models and provide a continuous source of
13 inspiration for not only students of color, but all students.

14 (6) Racial and ethnic separation and isolation can be countered through significantly
15 increasing the number of teachers of color.

16 (7) Students learn important societal lessons through the example of cooperative interracial
17 and interethnic relationships among teachers.

18 (8) It is in the best interest of the state, its residents, and its students to develop and support
19 a multi-faceted approach to increase the number of teachers of color in public schools.

1 (9) Support for increased preparation and training of teachers of color can successfully be
2 leveraged by providing direct financial support to a nonprofit organization working to increase
3 opportunities for teachers of color.

4 (10) The Rhode Island School for Progressive Education is a domestic nonprofit
5 corporation working to increase opportunities for teachers of color, and is the state's first residency-
6 style graduate school of education.

7 SECTION 2. Title 16 of the General Laws entitled "EDUCATION" is hereby amended by
8 adding thereto the following chapter:

9 CHAPTER 110

10 INCREASING OPPORTUNITIES FOR TEACHERS OF COLOR ACT

11 **16-110-1. Short title.**

12 This chapter shall be known and maybe cited as the "Increasing Opportunities for Teachers
13 of Color Act".

14 **16-110-2. Definitions.**

15 When used in this chapter, the following words and phrases shall have the following
16 meanings:

17 (1) "FAFSA" means the Free Application for Federal Student Aid form;

18 (2) "Mandatory fees and tuition" means the costs that every student is required to pay in
19 order to enroll in classes, and does not include room and board, textbooks, program fees that may
20 exist in some majors, course fees that may exist for some specific courses, meal plans, or travel;

21 (3) "Person of color" means a resident of the state who is:

22 (i) Black (a person having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa);

23 (ii) Hispanic (a person of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American, or
24 other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race);

25 (iii) Portuguese (a person of Portuguese, Brazilian, or other Portuguese culture or origin,
26 regardless of race);

27 (iv) Asian American (a person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East,
28 Southeast Asia, the Indian subcontinent, or the Pacific Islands); or

29 (v) American Indian and Alaskan Native (a person having origins in any of the original
30 peoples of North America.

31 (4) "Recipient" or "recipient student" means a student attending Rhode Island College who
32 qualifies and is awarded a scholarship pursuant to the provisions of § 16-110-4.

33 (5) "Scholarship" or "scholarship program" means the scholarship program that is
34 established pursuant to § 16-110-4 to promote and increase the quality of teachers in urban and

1 urban ring public schools.

2 (6) "State" means the state of Rhode Island.

3 (7) "Student of color" means a person of color attending a public school as a student.

4 (8) "Teacher of color" means a person of color certified and employed in a public school
5 as a teacher.

6 (9) "Urban" means the municipalities of Providence, Pawtucket, Central Falls, Woonsocket
7 and Newport.

8 (10) "Urban ring" means the municipalities of Cranston, Warwick, West Warwick, North
9 Providence and East Providence.

10 **16-110-3. Program to improve education quality in urban and urban ring schools.**

11 The board of education is hereby empowered to establish and provide as part of the
12 operation of the office of postsecondary commissioner, in consultation with the council on post-
13 secondary education for the administration, coordination and oversight of a program to improve
14 the quality of education in urban and urban ring schools by increasing opportunities for teachers of
15 color and other teachers committed to improving the quality of education in urban and urban ring
16 schools. The program shall include, but not be limited to:

17 (1) Providing, in conjunction with the community college of Rhode Island as a component
18 of the RI Promise Program, to create a "teaching" foundations pathway at CCRI that allows students
19 to earn program credits aligned with teacher preparation programs at Rhode Island college and the
20 university of Rhode Island. This pathway should be focused on promoting an increased number of
21 educators of color serving in Rhode Island public schools;

22 (2) Providing, in conjunction with the community college of Rhode Island and Rhode
23 Island college partnership program established with Rhode Island's urban and urban ring school
24 districts, assistance to those high schools to create "teacher pathway" programs to recruit and retain
25 students interested in pursuing a career in teaching;

26 (3) Providing, in conjunction with Rhode Island college, a program created to support
27 increased opportunities to develop teachers of color and other teachers committed to improving the
28 quality of education in urban and urban ring schools, to include, but not be limited to, utilization of
29 the scholarship program established pursuant to § 16-110-4;

30 (4) Coordinating with the Rhode Island School for Progressive Education for the
31 dissemination of information encouraging the identification, development and support of aspiring
32 teachers of color, and others committed to improving the quality of education in urban and urban
33 ring schools; and

34 (5) Providing, in conjunction with the department of education, to prioritize and expand

1 the issuance of emergency teaching certificates to promote and increase the number of teachers of
2 color in urban and urban ring schools.

3 **16-110-4. Scholarship program.**

4 (a) Beginning July 1, 2021, there is hereby established a scholarship program to promote
5 and increase the quality of education in urban and urban ring public schools. The general assembly
6 shall annually appropriate, starting in fiscal year 2022, the sum of two million dollars (\$2,000,000)
7 to implement the scholarship purposes of this chapter. Additional funds beyond the scholarships
8 may be appropriated to support and advance the scholarship program established pursuant to the
9 provisions of this section. In addition to appropriation by the general assembly, charitable donations
10 may be accepted into the scholarship program.

11 (b) The financial aid office, in conjunction with the office of enrollment management or
12 their respective equivalent offices, at Rhode Island college, shall administer the scholarship
13 program for state residents seeking bachelor degrees who meet the eligibility requirements in
14 subsection (c) of this section.

15 (c) To be eligible for receipt of the scholarship, a student:

16 (1) Must be pursuing a pre-kindergarten through grade twelve (Pre-K-12) teacher
17 certification as part of the teacher preparation program in the Feinstein school of education and
18 human development (FSEHD) at Rhode Island college;

19 (2) Must commit to work full-time as a teacher within one year of graduation at a public
20 urban or urban ring school. The commitment to work full-time shall extend to one year of teaching
21 for each year the recipient received and accepted an award of scholarship pursuant to the provisions
22 of this chapter;

23 (3) Must qualify for in-state tuition and fees pursuant to the residency policy adopted by
24 the council on postsecondary education, as amended, supplemented, restated, or otherwise modified
25 from time to time ("residency policy");

26 (4) Must be admitted to, and must enroll and attend Rhode Island College on a full-time
27 basis;

28 (5) Must complete the FAFSA and any required FAFSA verification by the deadline
29 prescribed by Rhode Island college for each year in which the student seeks to receive funding
30 under the scholarship program;

31 (6) Must continue to be enrolled on a full-time basis;

32 (7) Must maintain an average annual cumulative grade point average (GPA) of 2.5 or
33 greater, as determined by Rhode Island college;

34 (8) Must remain on track to graduate on time as determined by Rhode Island college; and

1 (9) Must commit to repayment of all funds received by the scholarship program if the
2 recipient student fails to complete or comply with all requirements and provisions of this chapter.

3 (d) Rhode Island college shall develop a policy and procedure to secure the commitments
4 from recipient students.

5 (e) Every scholarship awarded pursuant to the provisions of this section shall be calculated
6 annually. Each applicant and/or recipient shall complete the FAFSA and any required FAFSA
7 verification by the deadline prescribed by Rhode Island college for each year of attendance. The
8 scholarship award shall cover the annual cost of mandatory fees and tuition, less federal and all
9 other financial aid monies available to the recipient student. Once awarded, the scholarship may
10 continue for a period of up to four (4) years conditioned on the recipient student's compliance with
11 the provisions of this section.

12 (f) All scholarships awarded pursuant to the provisions of this section are subject to
13 appropriation, and no applicant shall have a right to receive any scholarship pursuant to the
14 provisions of this section until awarded.

15 **16-110-5. Scholarship award preference.**

16 In selecting students as recipients of the scholarship established pursuant to § 16-110-4,
17 preference shall be given to the following applicants:

18 (1) Students of color;

19 (2) Students having attended and graduated from an urban or urban ring school located
20 within this state; and

21 (3) Students who have participated in a "teacher pathway" program established pursuant to
22 the provisions of § 16-110-3(2).

23 **16-110-6. Promulgation of rules and procedure.**

24 The council on postsecondary education is hereby authorized to promulgate rules to
25 effectuate the purpose of this chapter and Rhode Island college shall establish appeal procedures
26 for the award, denial or revocation of a scholarship award pursuant to the provisions of § 16-110-
27 4. The rules shall be promulgated in accordance with § 16-59-4.

28 **16-110-7. Appropriations to support nonprofit activity.**

29 (a) The general assembly for fiscal year 2022, and annually thereafter as approved by the
30 general assembly, shall appropriate two hundred thousand dollars (\$200,000) as a grant to support
31 the work of the Rhode Island School for Progressive Education.

32 (b) On or before January 1, 2022, to qualify for continued appropriations, the Rhode Island
33 School for Progressive Education shall submit a report to the commissioner of postsecondary
34 education, the speaker of the house, the president of the senate and the governor, disclosing how

1 [the funds were utilized in the form of a performance progress report which shall include expense-](#)
2 [related data and qualitative information about the impact of the grant.](#)

3 [\(c\) The commissioner of postsecondary education may specify the format or context to be](#)
4 [provided in the report submitted pursuant to the provisions of subsection \(b\) of this section.](#)

5 SECTION 3. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF
A N A C T
RELATING TO EDUCATION

1 This act would establish the "Increasing Opportunities for Teachers of Color Act". The act
2 would provide for a multifaceted approach to increase the quality of education in public urban and
3 urban ring schools by promoting the development, utilization and opportunities for teachers of
4 color. This act would further provide for a two million dollar (\$2,000,000) annual appropriation for
5 a scholarship fund to develop teachers for employment in urban and urban ring schools. Preference
6 for scholarship awards would be given to students of color. Scholarship recipients would commit
7 to work in an urban or urban ring school for one year for each year a scholarship award was
8 accepted. Additionally, this act would provide for a two hundred thousand dollar (\$200,000) grant
9 to the nonprofit Rhode Island School for Progressive Education. This grant would be awarded
10 annually as approved by the general assembly.

11 This act would take effect upon passage.

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