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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2022

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A N A C T

RELATING TO EDUCATION -- THE CLIMATE LITERACY ACT

Introduced By: Senators Lawson, Euer, DiMario, Valverde, Cano, Kallman, Gallo,  
Burke, Miller, and Sosnowski

Date Introduced: January 25, 2022

Referred To: Senate Education

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Title 16 of the General Laws entitled "EDUCATION" is hereby amended by  
2 adding thereto the following chapter:

3 CHAPTER 112

4 THE CLIMATE LITERACY ACT

5 **16-112-1. Short title.**

6 This chapter shall be known and may be cited as the "Climate Literacy Act."

7 **16-112-2. Legislative findings.**

8 The legislature finds and declares that:

9 (1) The evidence for human-induced climate change is overwhelming and undeniable, and  
10 the heaviest burden of climate change impacts will fall on the next generation.

11 (2) Nearly ten thousand (10,000) students graduate from Rhode Island high schools each  
12 year, armed with skills and knowledge about the climate that inform their actions, and the effects  
13 on the climate, positive or negative, of each of those ten thousand (10,000) students lasts beyond a  
14 lifetime.

15 (3) Those students need to be prepared to implement changes in professional and personal  
16 practices, to support and help develop new technology and policy, and to address the coming social  
17 and economic challenges and opportunities arising from a changing climate.

18 (4) It is thus essential that each of these graduates are climate literate and understand key  
19 environmental, climate, and sustainability principles;

1           (5) A study published in Nature demonstrated that children who take a climate education  
2 curriculum foster climate change concern among their parents;

3           (6) According to the Yale Program on Climate Change Communications, over seventy-six  
4 percent (76%) of the people of Rhode Island support teaching students about the causes,  
5 consequences, and potential solutions to climate change;

6           (7) According to a recent national public radio poll, eighty-six percent (86%) of teachers  
7 in the United States feel that climate change should be taught in schools;

8           (8) A survey conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation found that sixty-one percent  
9 (61%) of American teenagers say the issue of climate change is very or extremely important to  
10 them personally;

11           (9) A survey by the University of Bath and the Stanford Center for Innovation in Global  
12 Health showed that nearly two-thirds (2/3) of young people (ages sixteen to twenty-five (16-25))  
13 are extremely worried about climate change, and more than half (1/2) feel "sad, anxious, angry,  
14 powerless, helpless, and guilty." Sixty-eight percent (68%) of youth in the United States said that  
15 the "future was frightening" and nearly half (1/2) believe they will have "less opportunity than  
16 [their] parents." More than a third (1/3) of young people in the United States are "hesitant to have  
17 children" because of climate change and more than half (1/2) feel that the government is "failing  
18 young people" and "betraying me/future generations." A 2020 study by Wu et al. notes that stress  
19 and anxiety related to climate change may negatively impact the overall and long-term mental  
20 health of young people who are at particular risk during a crucial physical and psychological  
21 developmental period;

22           (10) The National Science Teaching Association, the National Association of Geoscience  
23 Teachers, and the National Association of Biology Teachers, as well as other professional education  
24 organizations, have all called for greater support for science educators in teaching climate science  
25 and climate change. In a recent paper in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences,  
26 scientists picked climate education as one of six (6) key societal transformations needed to address  
27 the climate crisis;

28           (11) The Resilient Rhody Report recommends that kindergarten through grade twelve (K-  
29 12) education be expanded to include education on environmental literacy, including climate-  
30 related emergency preparedness, by developing resources for school use and identifying how these  
31 concepts can be incorporated into existing state standards; and

32           (12) The United States Congress is considering an active bill in the House of  
33 Representatives and the Senate called the Climate Change Education Act which would, if passed,  
34 provide competitive grants totaling twenty million dollars (\$20,000,000) annually to state

1 departments of education which have a climate education plan in place.

2 **16-112-3. Purpose.**

3 The purpose and intent of this chapter is to ensure that all students attending public schools,  
4 or other schools managed and controlled by the state, become environmentally and climate literate  
5 by the time they graduate from twelfth grade.

6 **16-112-4. Implementation.**

7 The Rhode Island department of education shall:

8 (1) In consultation with a wide representation from the environmental and climate  
9 education community as well as practicing teachers, principals, and superintendents, develop a set  
10 of key environmental, climate, and sustainability principles and concepts to be integrated into all  
11 science, civics and social studies courses throughout kindergarten through grade twelve (K-12) no  
12 later than August 31, 2023;

13 (2) In consultation with a wide representation from the environmental and climate  
14 education community as well as practicing teachers, principals, and superintendents, identify and  
15 disseminate lessons, activities, and materials related to the environment, including potential career  
16 paths and "green jobs", which are based on these key environmental, climate, and sustainability  
17 principles and concepts while meeting the learning standards and grade span expectations to all  
18 Rhode Island schools no later than August 31, 2024;

19 (3) Produce and disseminate models and examples of how to incorporate climate change  
20 into math, career and technical education, and English language arts to teachers and schools no  
21 later than August 31, 2024;

22 (4) Review and highlight these key environmental, climate, and sustainability principles  
23 and concepts where they exist in the current learning standards in science and the kindergarten  
24 through grade twelve (K-12) Rhode Island grade span expectations for social studies where  
25 appropriate no later than August 31, 2025;

26 (5) Ensure that all RIDE teacher professional development in science, civics, and social  
27 studies includes these key principles and concepts no later than August 31, 2026; and

28 (6) Establish a "Climate Smart" award program to recognize high performing schools based  
29 on the metrics of the US Department of Education Green Ribbon Schools program and a "Green  
30 Apple" award program to recognize kindergarten through grade twelve (K-12) teachers who  
31 develop and implement high-quality instruction that addresses these key environmental, climate,  
32 and sustainability principles and concepts no later than August 31, 2023.

1 SECTION 2. 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 -- THE CLIMATE LITERACY ACT

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1           This act would require that the Rhode Island department of education (RIDE) implement a  
2   plan to ensure that all students enrolled in public schools or other schools managed and controlled  
3   by the state in grades kindergarten through grade twelve (K-12) become environmentally and  
4   climate literate by the time they graduate from high school.

5           This act would take effect upon passage.

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