

## History of Rhode Island State Education Aid Part II

Submitted by Mickie Bonneau

According to the RI House Fiscal Advisory Staff in its annual publication, *Rhode Island Education Aid*, dated October 2009, the most recent history of state aid to education in Rhode Island can be summarized as follows, with LWVRI highlighting:

### 2004:

“The 2004 Assembly adopted the Education and Property Tax Relief Act which . . . ‘recognizes the need of an equitable distribution of resources among the states’ school districts, property relief and a predictable method of distributing education aid.’”

1. “This decision by the RI General Assembly “established a joint legislative committee to establish a permanent education foundation aid formula for Rhode Island.
2. “It [also] provided a framework for the deliberations and directed the appointment of technical advisory groups to assist the committee in reaching its finding and issuing recommendations by October 1, 2005.

### 2005:

“The 2005 Assembly extended the reporting deadline to March 15, 2006 and provided \$150,000 for contracted support for committee efforts.

### 2006:

[No actions reported.]

### 2007:

“The 2007 Assembly extended the reporting deadline to May 15, 2007. The committee met regularly, took testimony from a variety of stake-holders and relied on the expertise of R.C. Wood and Associates in its charge to develop a new system for funding public education.

“In May of 2007, the Foundation Aid Technical Advisory Group to the joint committee made several recommendations for the establishment of a permanent foundation aid formula to the joint committee.

- a. “The recommendations include establishing a **statewide per pupil expenditure with weighting** for special education, English language learners, eligibility for free or reduced school lunch, and vocational education.
- b. “The group recommended that regardless of the outcomes of a new funding formula, communities be **held harmless to current levels** of state aid and that all communities receive **at least 25.0 percent of school funding from the state**.
- c. “The recommendations also included **shifting certain costs** such as certain special education costs, out-of-district transportation, non public school textbooks and group homes **to the state**.

“The recommendations of the committee were introduced as proposed legislation in House Bill 6539 and Senate Bill 1112 at the end of the 2007 session. The House and the Senate took no actions.

### 2008:

“Similar legislation was introduced during the 2008 session as House Bill 7957. This legislation did not include the minimum state share provision that the previous year’s legislation did. The House Finance Committee heard the

bill and took testimony in May, 2008. Witnesses spoke both in favor of and in opposition to the legislation. The Committee held the bill for further study. The companion Senate Bill, 2650, was introduced during the 2008 Session and referred to the Senate Finance Committee, but never heard.

**2009:**

“The same legislation was introduced during the 2009 session as House Bill 5978. The House Finance Committee heard the bill and took testimony in June 2009. Witnesses spoke both in favor of and in opposition to the legislation. The Committee **held the bill for further study.**

“The Senate passed similar legislation in Senate Bill 921 on June 26 and referred it to the House Finance Committee. The Senate Bill prescribed that the new formula **would take effect only after two consecutive fall Revenue Estimating Conferences in which there are increases in revenues over the previous fall conference.** This [delay] is because reallocating existing resources through a new formula would produce winners and losers and no new resources were available. **The House Finance Committee did not hear the bill.**

**2010:**

**June 10, 2010 the General Assembly passed an educational funding formula that will begin in the 2012 fiscal year.**

**Sources**

Gardiner, Ryan. Budget Analyst I. Re: Outline of the State Budget Process for Education. Email to the author. 30 Sept. 2010

House Fiscal Advisory Staff, *Rhode Island Education Aid*, October 2009, pp. 5-6.