



RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT

ONE UNION STATION
PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND 02903
401/351-9400 • 401/351-1758 (FAX)

**Testimony Re: H-5162 An Act Relating to Education - Education
Accountability Act**

House Education Committee

February 6, 2025

Kelsey Bala, Senior Policy Associate

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to voice its strong support for House Bill 5162 and thank Chairman McNamara for his leadership on this issue and Representatives Cotter, Solomon, Potter, Carson, and Ackerman for co-sponsoring. This bill would incorporate SurveyWorks, and/or other future systems to measure school climate into the performance evaluation of school districts and individual public schools.

School climate is the character and quality of life within a school building and is defined by several indicators, including the relationships among students, teachers, families, and the broader community; safety; facilities; the availability of school-based health supports; discipline policies; and academic outcomes. A positive school climate is an essential component of an effective learning environment and can improve student and teacher attendance, student motivation to learn, academic achievement, and graduation rates.

In December 2020, the Rhode Island Department of Education announced the new district accountability system, established by the *Rhode Island Education Accountability Act* of 2019. The system uses six indicators, including School Quality and Student Success (SQSS) which measures some elements of school climate like student and teacher absenteeism and student suspensions. However, this new accountability system does not yet include important school climate indicators, such as **student and family engagement, student sense of belonging, family support, teacher-student relationships, safety, and facilities**.

School climate surveys collect critical information about family, student, faculty, and staff perceptions and are an easy way to understand what is happening in a school. Using student surveys as part of an accountability system is not new. Several states, including Illinois, Kentucky, Maryland, Montana, New Mexico, North Dakota, South Carolina, among others, have included the results of school climate or engagement surveys in their state accountability plans under the federal *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)*. Using school climate surveys in accountability systems creates a fuller picture of school performance and incentivizes district and school staff to enact policies and practices that support a positive school climate.

Our 2020 report, [*Policies and Practices Supporting Student-Centered Learning in Rhode Island: School Climate*](#), report uses an equity lens to look at policies, practices, and measures of school climate, including student mental and behavioral health, and suggests actions Rhode Island can take to ensure that all students, particularly Students of Color, low-income students, students receiving special education services, and Multilingual Learners, are in schools that prioritize strong relationships between students and educators and promote excellent, equitable learning while also ensuring student safety and emotional well-being.

School climate surveys offer an essential opportunity to incorporate the experiences and voices of students, families, and educators into the accountability system and make changes in relevant and meaningful areas to the school community.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for sponsoring this important legislation. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT urges this Committee to pass H-5162. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today.