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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2011

A N A C T

RELATING TO EDUCATION - FAMILY ENGAGEMENT ADVISORY COUNCIL

Introduced By: Senators DeVall, Tassoni, Gallo, and Picard

Date Introduced: March 23, 2011

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  
2 by adding thereto the following chapter:

3 CHAPTER 93

4 THE RHODE ISLAND FAMILY ENGAGEMENT ADVISORY COUNCIL

5 **16-93-1. Short title.** - This chapter shall be known and may be cited as the "Rhode  
6 Island family Engagement Advisory Council Act of 2011."

7 **16-93-2. Definitions.** - The following words and phrases when used in this chapter shall  
8 have the following meaning given to them unless the context clearly indicates otherwise:

9 (1) "Board of regents" means the board of regents for elementary and secondary  
10 education.

11 (2) "Department" means the Rhode Island department of elementary and secondary  
12 education.

13 (3) "Public schools" means all public schools of any city or town in the state. The term  
14 also includes all public charter and/or vocational schools.

15 (4) "School district" means any public school district, school unit, area-vocational-  
16 technical school, or charter school that composes a school district; the term also encompasses a  
17 single high school or multiple high schools within a school district where applicable.

18 **16-93-3. Findings of fact.** - (a) Research supports a positive correlation between family  
19 engagement with a student's school or school district and the performance of the student, school,

1 and district. Students whose parents are involved in their education have better school attendance,  
2 earn higher grades and higher test scores, are subject to fewer disciplinary problems, and have a  
3 greater long-term success following graduation from high school.

4 (b) The benefits of greater family engagement also extend to families and teachers.  
5 Parents develop more confidence in the school and in themselves as parents. Teachers experience  
6 improved morale and receive more support from families.

7 (c) It is often difficult to obtain a comprehensive amount of feedback from all  
8 stakeholders across the educational spectrum when making educational policy. Well-intentioned  
9 education-related initiatives which are introduced or produced without sufficient feedback or  
10 input from families/guardians of students involved often produces negative feedback from these  
11 families/guardians, which results in potentially effective initiatives being interrupted or  
12 abandoned altogether.

13 (d) The creation of a state-wide family engagement advisory council would help to  
14 streamline this process and promote the implementation of strong, positive educational initiatives.

15 **16-93-4. Family engagement advisory council established.** - (a) Creation. There is  
16 hereby established a state-wide family engagement advisory council. The purpose of the council  
17 shall be to serve as an advisory body to the governor, the department of education, the board of  
18 regents, and to school districts. The council shall consist of twenty-one (21) members to be  
19 appointed by the governor, to be selected as follows: five (5) of whom shall be representatives  
20 from agencies and associations with experience and expertise in family engagement, including at  
21 least one member from the Rhode Island parents information network or successor organization;  
22 four (4) of whom shall be current educators from within "Rhode Island school districts, which  
23 shall include a district level administrator, a principal, a teacher, and a school committee member;  
24 one of whom shall be a representative from the department of education; and eleven (11) of  
25 whom shall be parents and/or guardians of children currently enrolled in a Rhode Island public  
26 school. School districts, agencies, and associations with expertise in family engagement shall be  
27 solicited for proposed nominations and recommendations for the parent/guardian members.

28 (b) Terms. All the members shall serve for a term of three (3) years and/or until their  
29 successors are appointed and qualified. A member shall be eligible to succeed himself or herself.  
30 A vacancy other than by expiration shall be filled in the same manner as an original appointment  
31 but only for the unexpired portion of the term.

32 (c) Officers. The officers of the council shall be a chairperson, who shall be a  
33 representative of the family/guardian members, and vice chairperson and a secretary, who shall  
34 be elected from the membership. Officers shall be elected annually by a majority vote of the

1 council members; a majority of the appointed members shall constitute a quorum; the council is  
2 authorized to obtain or to contract for any services that may be necessary to enable it to carry out  
3 its duties. A majority vote of those present shall be required for action.

4 (d) Expenses of members. The members of the council shall serve without compensation,  
5 but shall be reimbursed for their expenses necessarily incurred in the performance of their duties  
6 in accordance with state law, regulations, and practices.

7 (e) Gifts, grants, or donations. The council is authorized to receive any gifts, grants, or  
8 donations made for any of the purposes of its program, and to disburse and administer the gifts,  
9 grants, or donations in accordance with the terms of it.

10 **16-93-5. Duties of the council.** - (a) The duties of the family engagement advisory  
11 council shall include the following:

12 (1) The council shall research and generate a series of recommendations on how to  
13 develop family engagement policies and practices that meet the following principles and  
14 standards for family-school partnerships:

15 (i) Welcome all families to be active participants in the life of the school, so that they feel  
16 valued, connected to each other, to school staff, and to what students are learning in class;

17 (ii) Communicate effectively by ensuring regular two-way, meaningful communication  
18 between family members and local educational agency and school staff in a manner, language,  
19 and mode of technology that family members can understand and access;

20 (iii) Support student success by fostering continuous collaboration between family  
21 members and local educational agency and school staff to support student learning and healthy  
22 development at school and at home;

23 (iv) Speak up for every child and empower family members to be advocates for all  
24 students within the school;

25 (v) Share power and assure that family members, local educational agencies, and school  
26 staff are equal partners in family engagement decision making;

27 (vi) Collaborate with community and partner with community organizations and groups  
28 to turn the school into a hub of community life;

29 (vii) Create a continuum of family engagement in student learning and development from  
30 cradle to career;

31 (viii) Train and support superintendents, principals, and teachers to fully engage families  
32 in the education of their children;

33 (ix) Participate in evaluating the effectiveness of family engagement strategies and  
34 policies; and

1           (x) Participate in developing recommendations for creating a positive school climate and  
2 safe and healthy schools.

3           All such recommendations shall be forwarded to the board of regents, governor's office,  
4 department of education, and local school districts.

5           (2) Provide assistance and advice to the board of regents, governor's office, department of  
6 education, and local school districts on family engagement in Rhode Island public schools and the  
7 impact on student achievement, communication, partnerships with community and other groups,  
8 and school family engagement practices and strategies.

9           (3) To identify best practices in family engagement in Rhode Island public schools as  
10 well as in other states, and to develop recommendations on how to incorporate, implement, or  
11 adopt such practices in Rhode Island public schools.

12           (4) Make recommendations to the board of regents, governor's office, department of  
13 education, and local school districts, on state resources and materials which could promote and  
14 improve family engagement in Rhode Island public schools.

15           (b) The council shall submit an annual report to the board of regents, the governor, the  
16 department of education, and local school districts summarizing the council's activities during the  
17 year.

18           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 - FAMILY ENGAGEMENT ADVISORY COUNCIL

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- 1           This act would amend Title 16 by adding a new chapter 93 to create the Rhode Island
- 2 Family Engagement Advisory Council. The purpose of the council would be to promote family
- 3 engagement with education practice in Rhode Island.
- 4           This act would take effect upon passage.

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