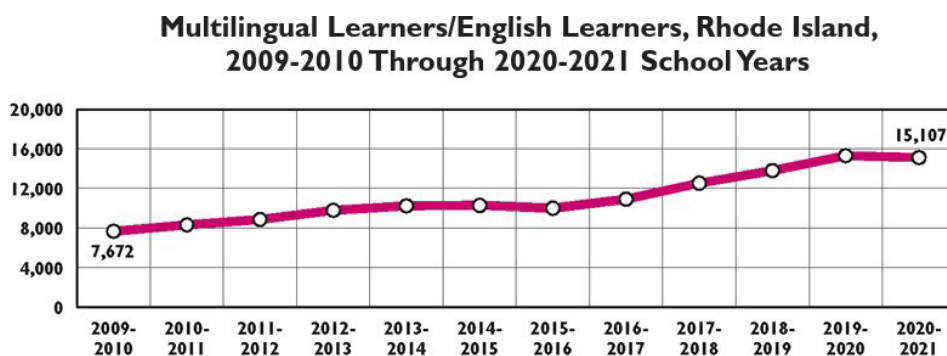




Testimony Re: Senate Bill 0549-An Act Relating to Education-Support and Access to Bilingual Education Act
Senate Committee on Finance,
May 9, 2023
Jessica Vega, Senior Policy Analyst

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 Senate Bill 0549 and thank Senator Cano for sponsoring this bill and Senators Quezada, Acosta, Euer, DiMario, Murray, Mack, Zurier, Gallo, and Burke for co- sponsoring. This bill would support the needs of Multilingual Learner/English Learner (MLL/EL) students by expanding the number of high-quality dual-language programs in Rhode Island.

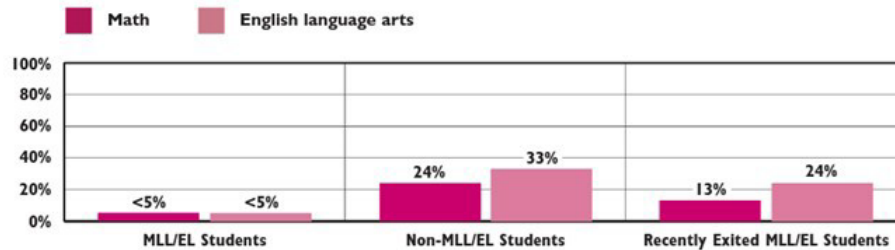
In recent years, Rhode Island has taken several steps to ensure that all children have access to high-quality education and to recognize multilingualism as an asset. These critical steps included instituting categorical funds to support MLLs/ELs and passing the Seal of Biliteracy which will allow high school students who receive the Silver or Gold Seal of Biliteracy to earn college credit toward a minor or major degree in a world language at the state's public higher education institutions. However, more support is needed in this area.



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2009-2010 through 2020-2021 school years.

During the 2020-2021 school year, there were 15,107 MLL/EL students in Rhode Island, representing 11% of all students enrolled in public school from preschool through grade 12. MLLs/ELs are the fastest-growing group of students in large urban districts and many smaller cities and suburban communities. For example, from the 2009-2010 school year to the 2020-2021 school year, the percentage of Newport MLL/EL students grew from 3% to 16%. **In Rhode Island, the number of MLL/EL students has nearly doubled from the 2009-2010 to 2020-2021 school year.**

Eighth-Grade Multilingual Learners/English Learners Meeting Expectations in Math and English Language Arts, Rhode Island, 2022



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, *Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS)*, October 2022. Note: Recently exited students refers to students who have exited ESOL or bilingual education programs in the past 3 years but are not yet fully English proficient.

Multilingual students are an incredible asset to all of Rhode Island. However, research shows that we have much work to do to ensure these students have what they need to succeed. In our newest [Issue Brief, *Multilingual Learners in Rhode Island*](#), we reported on the educational outcomes for these students. For example, in 2022, 14% of third grade MLL/EL students met expectations in math, compared to 39% of non-MLL students, and 10% met expectations in English language arts on the *Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS)*, compared to 41% of non-MLL students. In addition, the overall four-year high school graduation rate for the Class of 2021 was 84%, while the rate for MLLs/ELs was only 69%.

For decades, the education system had discouraged using programs other than traditional English language education, focusing on English-only material. However, in recent years, we have seen an increase in dual language programs. In 2021, there were over 3,600 dual-language programs in the U.S. (80% in Spanish and 9% in Chinese). In Rhode Island during the 2020-2021 school year, dual language programs were offered in the Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, and South Kingstown school districts and at the Rhode Island School for the Deaf and International Charter School.

Exposing children in multiple languages through dual language early care and education programs helps support children's **cultural competence, social emotional development**, and English language skills in the early years. Continuing to offer dual language programs in grades K-12 can **improve English reading proficiency, decrease dropout rates, increase the likelihood of going to college, and improve economic outcomes** for MLL/EL students.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT was pleased to serve on the *Blueprint for Multilingual Learner (MLL) Success Team* convened by the Rhode Island Department of Education alongside dedicated students, parents, educators, and community stakeholders to identify, implement, and sustain more effective policies and practices for MLL students in Rhode Island. **This bill aligns with the Blueprint's strategic plan for providing MLL/EL students with high-quality bilingual and bicultural programs.**

We urge this committee to pass this bill and provide more high-quality dual language programs in Rhode Island. These programs will support not just our MLL/EL students, but all our students. Thank you for your support for Rhode Island students and for the opportunity to testify today.