



RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT

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Testimony Re: Senate Bill 2528 Relating to Education Funding for English Language Learners
Senate Finance Committee
May 17, 2016
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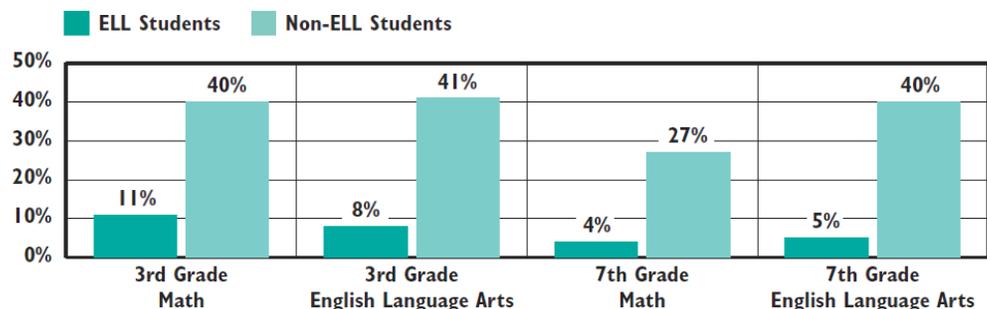
Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT strongly supports Senate Bill 2528 which would increase funding to support our state's English Language Learners (ELLs) by creating a categorical fund equal to 10% of the core instructional amount that would be distributed to districts based on the number of ELLs they serve and used exclusively to provide "high-quality, research-based services" to ELL students. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT strongly supports this funding strategy because it would ensure that districts with high proportions of ELL students receive the additional resources they need and that the funds are targeted to address ELL students' needs.

During the 2014-2015 school year, 7% of Rhode Island public school students were English Language Learners, but there is great variation among school districts. For example, in both Central Falls (22%) and Providence (24%) more than one in five students is an English Language Learner. Many of these students (87%) are from low-income families, and face the challenges that many low-income students face; however, they must also learn English while learning to read, do math, and learn history and science along with their peers.

Nationally and in Rhode Island, there are large achievement gaps between ELL and non-ELL students, with ELL students having lower rates of math and reading achievement than non-ELL students. For example, in 2015, only 8% of third-grade ELL students met or exceeded expectations on the *Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC)* English language arts assessment, compared to 41% of non-ELL students.



Current English Language Learners Meeting Expectations in Math and English Language Arts, Rhode Island, 2015



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, *Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC)*, October 2015.

This bill is consistent with the findings from the Funding Formula Working Group which recommended that Rhode Island:

- (1) Consider providing additional financial support for English Language Learners
- (2) Calculate funding to support ELLs based on the number of ELLs in a district
- (3) Include reasonable restrictions to ensure that funding is used to benefit ELLs

The bill is also consistent with the language in Article 11 of the Governor's proposed budget for FY 2017.

Recent reports, including a 2013 report by the Latino Policy Institute, have noted that Rhode Island's ELL students are among the lowest performing students in the nation as measured by the *National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)*, also known as the Nation's Report Card. And currently, Rhode Island is one of only four states (others are Delaware, Mississippi, and Montana) with an education funding formula that does not include designated ELL funding.

We must do better. We need to invest in our young English Language Learners and provide them with the additional support they need to succeed. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT strongly supports this bill because it would ensure that districts with high proportions of ELL students receive the additional resources they need and that the funds are targeted to address ELL students' needs.

Thank you for your commitment to a predictable and equitable funding formula and for the opportunity to comment today.