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Testimony Re: Senate Bill 456 An Act Relating to Education -- The Education Equity and Property Tax Relief Act

Senate Finance Committee

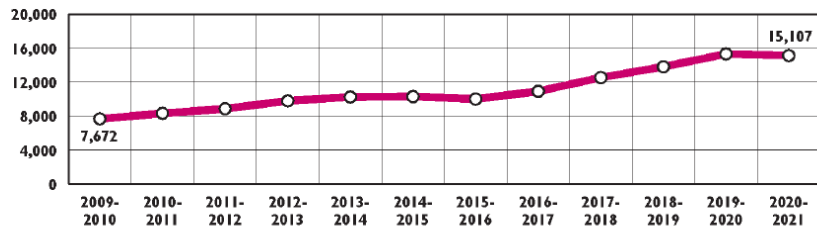
March 6, 2023

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 456 and thank Senator Pearson for sponsoring this bill and Senate President Ruggiero, Chairman DiPalma and Senators Cano and Gallo for co-sponsoring. This bill would expand the student success factor of the education funding formula to include students identified by the Rhode Island Department of Education as Multilingual Learners/English Learners (MLLs/ELs). We also thank the Governor for increasing the categorical funding by \$7.8 million to \$12.8 million dollars in his FY 24 budget proposal.

In recent years, Rhode Island has taken several steps to ensure that all children have access to the high-quality education they need to succeed in school, career, and life. These critical steps included instituting an education funding formula based on five fundamental principles – equity, adequacy, predictability, accountability, and efficiency and later improving this funding formula to provide additional funds to support the other needs of MLLs/ELs. However, more support is needed in this area.

Multilingual Learners/English Learners, Rhode Island,
2009-2010 Through 2020-2021 School Years



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 groups of students in large urban districts and many smaller cities and suburban districts. 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.

Multilingual students are an incredible asset to all of Rhode Island. However, research shows that we have much work to do to ensure that these

students have what they need to succeed. In our newest *Issue Brief, Multilingual Learners in Rhode Island*, we reported on the educational outcomes and disparities that exist within this subgroup of students. In 2022, 14% of third grade MLL/EL students met expectations in math and 10% met expectations in English language arts on the *Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS)*. The score decrease in the later grades to less than 5% of eighth grade MLL/EL students meeting expectations in math and English language arts. In addition, the overall four-year high school graduation rate for the Class of 2021 was 84%, while the rate for MLL/ELs was only 69%.

Nationally, states that have seen strong outcomes from their school funding reforms have implemented strategies that provide continuity and flexibility in funding so school districts can invest in high-quality evidence-based programs that deliver results. Weighted student formulas allow funding for high-need students to rise together with the foundation formula. **Thirty states, including Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, and Vermont, provide increased funding for Multilingual Learners/English Learners as a multiplier to the per-pupil core instruction amount.** The Fiscal Year 2023 budget included \$5.0 million in categorical funds to support the needs of MLL/EL students. Rhode Island spends approximately \$330 per MLL/EL student, compared to Connecticut which spent about \$1,728 per MLL/EL student in FY 2019.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT strongly supports increasing funding for MLLs/ELs using a student success factor. However, we would urge this committee to consider whether students who are low-income students **and** MLLs need additional support beyond the support needed by students who are low-income **or** MLL. Compared to their peers, MLL/EL students are more likely to live in low-income households and are more likely to attend high-poverty schools. In 2020-2021 school year, 79% of MLL/EL students were enrolled in free or reduced-price lunch programs. We also support efforts that increase transparency of and accountability for funds used to support the students and families of MLLs/ELs.

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 by providing a predictable funding source that will allow school districts to invest in necessary improvements to Multilingual education, including expanding high-quality dual language programs.

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

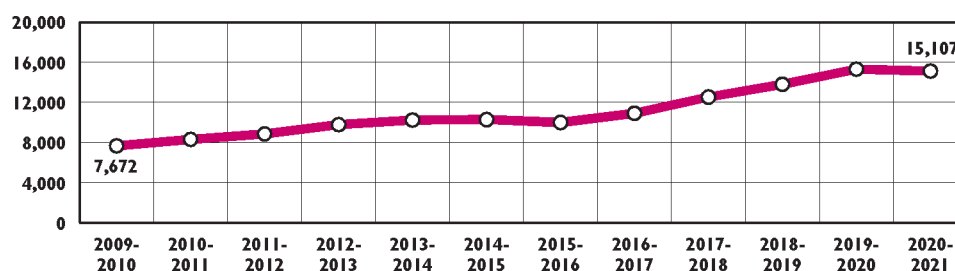


Issue Brief

Multilingual Learners in Rhode Island

Across the U.S., the population of Multilingual Learners (MLLs), also known as English Learners (ELs), are the fastest growing group of students, not only in large urban districts but also in many smaller cities and suburban districts. Historically, these students have been viewed through a deficit lens. The focus has been on immersing MLL/EL students in English-only environments rather than celebrating the cultural and language diversity these students bring to our classrooms and supporting their growth into multilingual adults positioned to succeed in our global society and economy.¹

**Multilingual Learners/English Learners, Rhode Island,
2009-2010 Through 2020-2021 School Years**



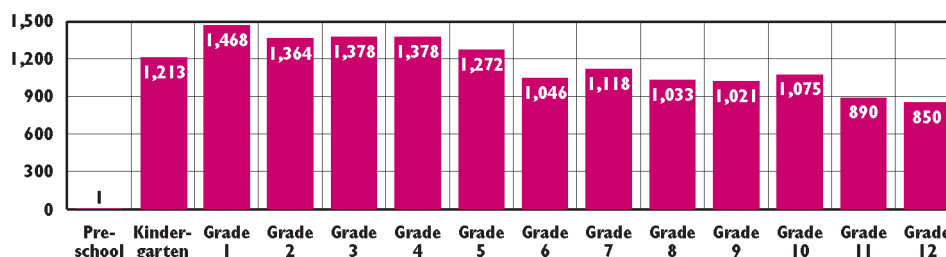
Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2009-2010 through 2020-2021 school years.

- ◆ 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. **In Rhode Island, the number of MLL/EL students nearly doubled from the 2009-2010 to 2020-2021 school year.**²
- ◆ During the 2020-2021 school year, 70% of MLL/EL students in Rhode Island attended school in the four core cities. In Central Falls 45% of students were MLL/EL students, in Providence 33% were MLL/EL students, in Pawtucket 16% of students were MLL/EL students, and in Woonsocket 11% of students were MLL/EL students. Charter schools also have a high percentage (17%) of MLL/EL students.³
- ◆ While only one in five (18%) MLL/EL students attended schools in the remainder of the state, some of these districts have seen substantial growth in their MLL/EL population. For example, from the 2009-2010 school year to the 2020-2021 school year, the percentage of Newport students who were MLL/EL students grew from 3% to 16%.⁴
- ◆ MLL students are best taught through an asset-based approach that supports their linguistic capabilities, celebrates the rich culture they bring to the classroom through materials that reflect their identities and experiences, and creates a culture where their multilingualism is viewed as a strength and educators expect success.⁵

Who are Rhode Island's MLL/EL Students?

- ◆ Compared to their peers, MLL/EL students are more likely to live in low-income households and are more likely to attend high-poverty schools.⁶ During the 2020-2021 school year, 79% of Rhode Island's MLL/EL students were enrolled in free or reduced-price lunch programs.⁷
- ◆ During the 2020-2021 school year, 13% of Rhode Island students receiving special education services were MLL/EL students.⁸

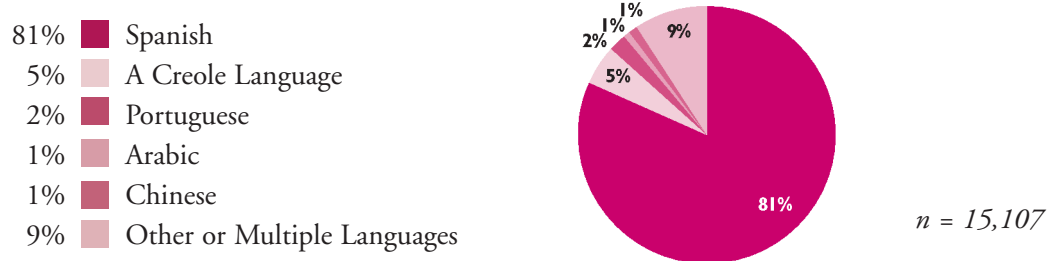
Multilingual Learners/English Learners by Grade Level, Rhode Island, 2020-2021 School Year



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2020-2021.

- ◆ In Rhode Island, students in the elementary grades (kindergarten through grade 5) are more likely to be Multilingual Learners/English Learners (MLLs/ELs) than older students.⁹
- ◆ During the 2020-2021 school year, there were 8,073 MLL/EL students in elementary school (grades K-5), 3,197 in middle school (grades 6 to 8), and 3,836 in high school (grades 9 to 12).¹⁰
- ◆ Only one child in a public school preschool classroom in Rhode Island was identified as an MLL/EL.¹¹

Languages Spoken by Multilingual Learners/English Learners, Rhode Island, 2020-2021 School Year



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2020-2021.

- ◆ MLL students are racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse.¹² Nationally, the majority (72%) of MLL/EL students ages five to 17 are born in the United States.¹³
- ◆ During the 2020-2021 school year, Multilingual Learner/English Learner students in Rhode Island spoke 92 different languages. The largest group (81%) spoke Spanish, 5% spoke a creole language, 2% spoke Portuguese, 1% spoke Arabic, 1% spoke Chinese, and 9% spoke other or multiple languages.¹⁴

Multilingual/English Learner Students, Rhode Island

SCHOOL DISTRICT	2009-2010 SCHOOL YEAR			2020-2021 SCHOOL YEAR		
	TOTAL # OF STUDENTS	TOTAL # OF MLL/EL STUDENTS	% OF TOTAL DISTRICT	TOTAL # OF STUDENTS	TOTAL # OF MLL/EL STUDENTS	% OF TOTAL DISTRICT
Barrington	3,336	23	1%	3,361	69	2%
Bristol Warren	3,452	95	3%	3,041	65	2%
Burrillville	2,487	*	<1%	2,088	*	<1%
Central Falls	2,634	595	23%	2,751	1,248	45%
Chariho	3,428	21	1%	3,100	12	<1%
Coventry	5,176	*	<1%	4,321	22	1%
Cranston	10,394	533	5%	10,288	787	8%
Cumberland	4,721	86	2%	4,590	130	3%
East Greenwich	2,303	21	1%	2,514	33	1%
East Providence	5,633	209	4%	4,883	215	4%
Exeter-West Greenwich	1,839	13	1%	1,548	*	1%
Foster	237	0	0%	210	0	0%
Foster-Glocester	1,340	0	0%	1,375	0	0%
Glocester	553	0	0%	516	0	0%
Jamestown	467	*	<1%	462	*	<1%
Johnston	3,010	93	3%	3,032	209	7%
Lincoln	3,226	37	1%	3,194	55	2%
Little Compton	310	0	0%	212	0	0%
Middletown	2,530	82	3%	2,005	98	5%
Narragansett	1,448	10	1%	1,215	*	<1%
New Shoreham	124	*	5%	147	13	9%
Newport	2,080	60	3%	1,976	313	16%
North Kingstown	4,309	49	1%	3,853	63	2%
North Providence	3,212	69	2%	3,513	227	6%
North Smithfield	1,803	15	1%	1,614	21	1%
Pawtucket	8,721	1,021	12%	8,441	1,356	16%
Portsmouth	2,763	*	<1%	2,292	17	1%
Providence	23,620	3,682	16%	22,516	7,355	33%
Scituate	1,606	0	0%	1,196	*	<1%
Smithfield	2,414	*	<1%	2,358	24	1%
South Kingstown	3,483	15	<1%	2,704	40	1%
Tiverton	1,887	*	<1%	1,656	*	1%
Warwick	10,104	97	1%	8,081	157	2%
West Warwick	3,513	50	1%	3,517	88	3%
Westerly	3,088	73	2%	2,411	59	2%
Woonsocket	6,003	359	6%	5,711	637	11%
Charter Schools	2,320	319	14%	9,681	1,632	17%
State-Operated Schools	1,601	*	<1%	1,810	111	6%
UCAP	134	0	0%	124	21	17%
Four Core Cities	40,978	5,657	14%	39,419	10,596	27%
Remainder of State	96,275	1,688	2%	87,268	2,747	3%
Rhode Island	141,309	7,672	5%	138,303	15,107	11%

Rhode Island Department Education, 2009-2010 and 2020-2021 school years. Total number of Multilingual Learner/English Learner students is the number of students in each district who were actively enrolled in English Learner programs during the school year. Students who are not yet fully English proficient but have exited ESOL or bilingual education programs to regular education are not included in these numbers.

* Fewer than 10 students are in this category. Actual numbers are not shown to protect student confidentiality. These students are still counted in district totals and in the four core cities, remainder of the state, and state totals.

The “% of Total District” is based on the total number of Multilingual Learners/English Learners divided by the “Total # of Students,” which is the average daily membership in the districts of instruction.

In 2009-2010, charter schools include: Beacon Charter High School for the Arts, Blackstone Academy, Blackstone Valley Prep Mayoral Academy, The Compass School, Paul Cuffee Charter School, The Greene School, Highlander Charter School, International Charter School, Kingston Hill Academy, The Learning Community, Segue Institute for Learning, and Trinity Academy for the Performing Art. In 2020-2021, charter schools include: Achievement First Rhode Island, Beacon Charter High School for the Arts, Blackstone Academy, Blackstone Valley Prep Mayoral Academy, Charette Charter School, The Compass School, Paul Cuffee Charter School, The Greene School, Highlander Charter School, Hope Academy, International Charter School, Kingston Hill Academy, The Learning Community, Rhode Island Nurses Institute Middle College Charter School, RISE Prep Mayoral Academy, Segue Institute for Learning, Sheila C. “Skip” Nowell Leadership Academy, SouthSide Charter School, Trinity Academy for the Performing Arts, and The Village Green Virtual Public Charter School.

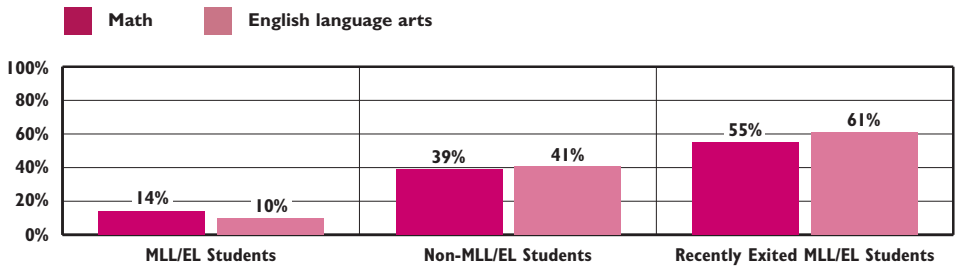
State-operated schools include: William M. Davies Jr. Career & Technical High School, DCYF Schools, Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center, and Rhode Island School for the Deaf. UCAP is the Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program.

Core cities are Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket.

Educational Outcomes for Multilingual Learners/English Learners

- ◆ The accountability movement (e.g., the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*) emphasizes annual testing through English-only standardized tests.¹⁵
- ◆ In Rhode Island, MLL/EL students who have not attended U.S. schools for at least 12 months are exempt from the English language arts assessment, but not from the math assessment, and are required to take both assessments in future years, regardless of their level of English proficiency.¹⁶
- ◆ Research shows that bilingual students score as well as non-MLL students on assessments in their home language.¹⁷

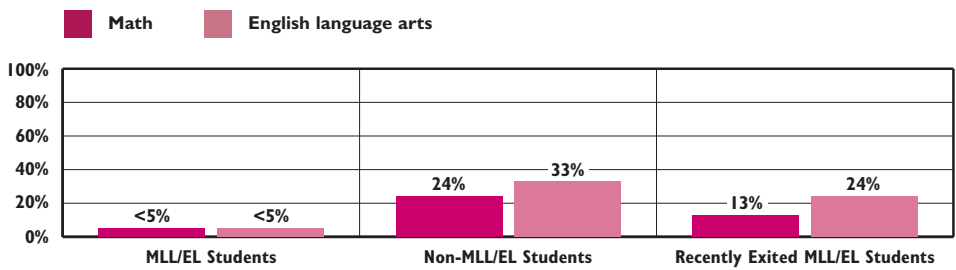
Third-Grade Multilingual Learners/English Learners Meeting Expectations in Math and English Language Arts, Rhode Island, 2022



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.

- ◆ In 2022, 14% of third-grade MLL/EL students met expectations in math and 10% met expectations in English language arts. In both math and English language arts, recently exited MLL/EL students outperformed both current MLL/EL students and non-MLL/EL students.¹⁸

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.

- ◆ In 2022, less than 5% of eighth-grade MLL/EL students met expectations in math and English language arts. In both math and English language arts, non-MLL/EL students outperformed both recently exited MLL/EL students and current MLL/EL students.¹⁹
- ◆ Educators use the *ACCESS for ELLs* test to better understand a student's level of proficiency in English in academic contexts and to support their language development. The *ACCESS* test assesses proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Students receive scores from 1 - Entering through 6 - Reaching English proficiency.²⁰
- ◆ During the 2021-2022 school year, 24% of the 15,943 MLL/EL students who took the *ACCESS* test received a score of 1 - Entering, 23% a 2 - Emerging, 34% a 3 - Developing, 16% a 4 - Expanding, 3% a 5 - Bridging, and less than 1% a 5 - Reaching.²¹

Rhode Island Four-Year High School Graduation and Dropout Rates, by Student Subgroup, Class of 2021

YEAR	COHORT SIZE	DROPOUT RATE	% COMPLETED GED	% OF STUDENTS STILL IN SCHOOL	FOUR-YEAR GRADUATION RATE
Female Students	5,448	6%	1%	6%	87%
Male Students	5,749	9%	1%	9%	80%
Multilingual Learners/ English Learners	1,175	18%	<1%	12%	69%
Students Receiving Special Education Services	1,817	12%	1%	23%	65%
Students Not Receiving Special Education Services	9,384	7%	1%	5%	87%
Low-Income Students	5,990	11%	1%	11%	76%
Higher-Income Students	5,211	4%	1%	3%	92%
Students in Foster Care	63	17%	2%	32%	49%
Homeless Students	210	18%	2%	19%	61%
Asian Students ⁺	315	6%	1%	5%	88%
Black Students	1,006	8%	<1%	10%	82%
Hispanic Students	3,047	12%	1%	10%	77%
Native American	72	13%	0%	11%	76%
White Students	6,346	5%	1%	6%	88%
ALL STUDENTS	11,201	8%	1%	8%	84%

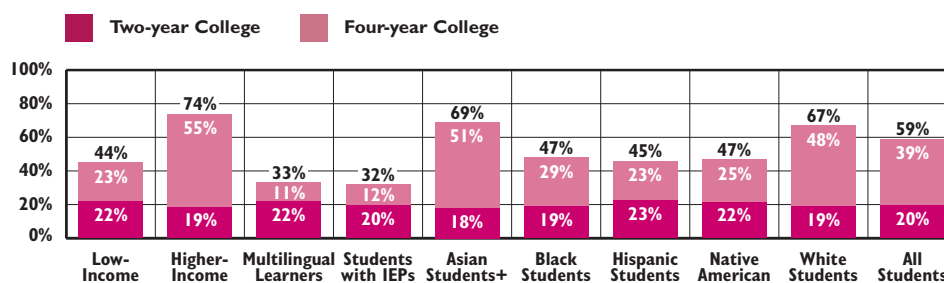
Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, Class of 2021. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding. ⁺Data for Asian students is not disaggregated by ethnic group. National research shows large academic disparities across Asian ethnic groups.

- ◆ The Rhode Island four-year graduation rate for the Class of 2021 was 84% while the rate for MLL/ELs was only 69%. Other student subgroups with low graduation rates included students receiving special education services, students in foster care, students experiencing homelessness, low-income students, and Hispanic and Native American students.²²
- ◆ Rhode Island calculates five- and six-year graduation rates to recognize that graduation is an accomplishment regardless of the time it takes. Of the 11,255 Rhode Island students who enrolled in ninth grade in 2015, 9,451 (84%) graduated in four years in 2019, 243 (2%) graduated in five years in 2020, and 41 (<1%) graduated in six years in 2021. Of the 243 students who graduated in five years in 2020, 55 (23%) were Multilingual Learners. Of the 41 students who graduated in six years in 2021, 9 (22%) were Multilingual Learners.²³
- ◆ Chronic absence (missing 18 or more school days) increases the likelihood of dropping out of high school.²⁴ During the 2020-2021 school year, MLL students had the highest rate of chronic absence (44%) of any student subgroup.²⁵ Dropout rates also were highest among this population, with 18% of MLL/EL students dropping out, compared to 8% of all students.²⁶ Student mobility, including transferring schools or districts, also increases the dropout risk among MLL students.²⁷

The Seal of Biliteracy

- ◆ In 2016, the General Assembly passed legislation granting the Seal of Biliteracy to students who have demonstrated skills in the English language and one or more other world languages. Skills are demonstrated through the Commissioner's Seal or English proficiency standards and nationally-recognized world language standards.²⁸
- ◆ The graduating class of 2021 was the first class that was eligible to receive the Seal of Biliteracy on their transcripts. **The opportunity to earn a Seal of Biliteracy recognizes multilingualism as an asset, encourages more students to study different languages, gives students an advantage during the college application process, and prepares students for the changing global economy.**²⁹

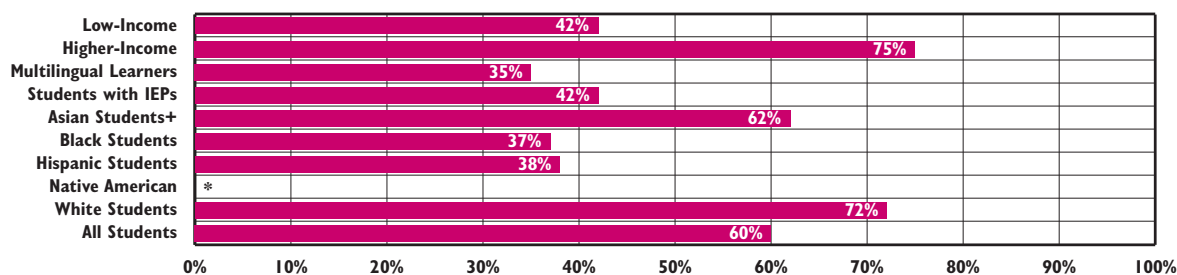
Immediate College Enrollment by Family Income, Race, Ethnicity, and Type of College, Class of 2021, Rhode Island



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, Class of 2021. Percentages may not sum exactly due to rounding. +Data for Asian students is not disaggregated by ethnic group. National research shows large academic disparities across Asian ethnic groups.

- ◆ The overall immediate college enrollment rate for the Class of 2021 was 59%, but only 33% of MLL/EL students immediately enrolled in college. Among MLL/EL students who immediately enrolled in college twice as many enrolled in a two-year college than a four-year college.³⁰

Six-Year College Completion by Student Subgroup, Rhode Island, 2014 Cohort



Source: New England Secondary School Consortium. (2021). *Common Data Project: 2021 annual report, school year 2019-2020*. Retrieved April 12, 2022, from www.newenglandssc.org. +Data for Asian students not disaggregated by ethnic group. * <12 students in this category. Data not reported to protect student confidentiality.

- ◆ In Rhode Island, only about one-third (35%) of Multilingual Learner/English Learner students completed a college degree within six years, the lowest rate of any student subgroup reported.³¹

Blueprint for Multilingual Learner Success

- ◆ In December 2020, the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) released a draft *Blueprint for Multilingual Learner Success*. This plan was developed with input from a workgroup comprised of community stakeholders and staff from RIDE and the Providence Public Schools and later refined to reflect important feedback from multilingual families and students and the educators that support them.
- ◆ The final version of the Blueprint was released in September 2021 along with a Strategic Plan for MLL Success that provides a roadmap for how RIDE will work to ensure that MLLs receive **“high-quality instructional opportunities, including multilingual education, that leverage their cultural and linguistic assets, promote college and career readiness, and prepare them to thrive socially, politically, and economically, both in our state and globally.”**
- ◆ According to the Strategic Plan, RIDE will spend 2021-2023 on engagement, aligning policies and revising regulations, generating guidance documents, expanding bilingual/dual-language programs, and strengthening parent and community partnership, and then move to the full implementation of the policies in 2023-2026.

Sources: Rhode Island Department of Education. (2021). *RIDE releases final version of Blueprint for Multilingual Learners' success* [Press release]. Retrieved from www.ride.ri.gov/ride-releases-final-version-of-blueprint-for-multilingual-learners-success.aspx. Rhode Island Department of Education. (2020). *Rhode Island's strategic plan for Multilingual Learner success: A plan to implement the blueprint for Multilingual Learner success*. Retrieved from www.ride.ri.gov

Dual Language Programs

- ◆ Dual language programs can improve English reading proficiency, decrease dropout rates, increase the likelihood of going to college, and improve economic outcomes for MLL/EL students.³²
- ◆ Dual language programs involve students engaging in the material in two different languages (e.g., students spend half the day learning in English and half learning in another language).³³ In contrast, traditional English language education focuses on English-only material. As the local population, economy, and workforce continue to change, there has been a shift in how cities and towns across the nation view dual language programs. What makes dual language programs successful is how they embrace the culture of MLL/EL students and promote social integration and cohesion by fostering relationship-building among students.³⁴
- ◆ Dual language programs do not cost school districts extra because the same teacher teaches in both languages.³⁵ However, more funding is needed if the state wants to offer more opportunities for students to enroll.
- ◆ In 2021, there were over 3,600 dual-language programs in the U.S. (80% in Spanish and 9% in Chinese).³⁶ 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.^{37,38}

Investing in Multilingual Educators

- ◆ In 2020-2021, only 5% (510) of Rhode Island public school teachers and instructional coordinators held an active Bilingual, Dual Language, or English to Speakers of Other Languages certification.³⁹
- ◆ ***The Multilingual Educator Investment Act*** would increase the pipeline of multilingual educators in urban school districts by annually appropriating \$2 million in scholarships. Rhode Island College and the University of Rhode Island would administer the scholarship for state residents seeking teacher certification and enrolled in a teacher preparation program, and recipients would receive funding for up to two years.⁴⁰

Providence Public Schools and Multilingual Learners

- ◆ In 2018, the U.S. Department of Justice investigation of Providence Public Schools identified 12 violations of the *Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974* which requires school districts to provide appropriate educational instruction and support to MLL/EL students. These violations included placement of hundreds of MLL/EL students in schools with no specialized programs without first obtaining waivers of service from parents, use of educationally unsound English-as-a-second-language programs, failure to staff programs with qualified teachers; unnecessary segregation of MLL/EL students, failure to promptly identify MLL/EL students, and failure to communicate with MLL/EL parents in their home language. The report found that 756 MLL/EL students did not obtain English proficiency even though they were enrolled in district English-language programs for six to 13 years.
- ◆ The district's settlement agreement includes 43 specific requirements related to the identification of MLL/EL students and delivery of appropriate MLL/EL services within the first 20 days of the school year without requiring any students to change schools and ensuring that MLL/EL instruction is in addition to core subject instruction. The agreement requires the district to employ a sufficient number of certified teachers to provide MLL/EL services and to ensure parents receive notices in their home language.

Sources: List, M. & Borg, L. (2019, September 17). U.S. outlines Providence's failures in English-language programs. *Providence Journal*. www.providencejournal.com. U.S. Department of Justice. (2018). *Providence Public Schools - Settlement Agreement Between The United States and Providence Public Schools*. Retrieved February 21, 2023, from www.justice.gov

Family Engagement

- ◆ Studies show that improving communication between immigrant families and schools increases attendance and homework completion rates among MLL/EL students.⁴¹ Educators and staff must ensure that families' rights are respected by providing all forms of communication in their language of choice; otherwise, parental involvement is devalued in their child's school, as they have to depend on their children for information.^{42,43}
- ◆ Creating opportunities for parents to interact with the school, like hosting monthly family and staff meet-ups and cookouts at local parks, can help build relationships with families.⁴⁴
- ◆ MLL/EL students and their families tend to live in communities with high poverty levels. Many low-income jobs offer little flexibility, making it difficult for parents to get involved with their children's schools. Providing translators, offering child care, and asking parents about other barriers can improve parent involvement among parents of MLL students.⁴⁵

Supporting the Youngest MLL Students

- ◆ For decades, families were discouraged from speaking their home language to their young children. It was widely believed that this would confuse and delay a child's development.⁴⁶ Instead, speaking your home language to young children helps develop a foundation for reading and writing, preparing children to be biliterate and successful in school.⁴⁷
- ◆ Studies show that language development starts in the last trimester of pregnancy. Infants as young as seven months who are taught more than one language display a greater ability for executive function than their monolingual peers.⁴⁸
- ◆ Exposing children to multiple languages through dual language early care and education programs and building strong relationships with parents improves children's cultural competence, social emotional development, and English language skills.⁴⁹
- ◆ In 2020-2021, 5,423 children in grades K-3 were MLL/ELs. Only one child in a public-school preschool classroom in Rhode Island was identified as an MLL/ELL.⁵⁰

Supports for New Arrivals and Undocumented Students

- ◆ Some MLL/EL students are considered Newcomers because they have been enrolled in U.S. schools for less than twelve months. Others may be undocumented students who face discrimination, fear, and adult responsibilities.^{51,52}
- ◆ These students may be working multiple jobs or working third shifts while also going to school full-time, living with distant relatives or alone, or lacking basic necessities. Forty percent of undocumented youth drop out of high school, compared to 8% of documented students. Federal law dictates that public schools enroll and educate all children regardless of immigration status. Districts do not track or identify undocumented students and may not know students' status and be able to offer preventative services and support, but when students feel safe and comfortable with a caring adult or MLL/EL counselor, the student may disclose their immigration status.^{53,54}
- ◆ Many undocumented students have experienced trauma or experienced or witnessed violence in their country of origin and often resettle in communities with high poverty rates. Refugee students experience similar experiences to migrant students. Refugees are those who flee and cannot return to their country of origin.^{55,56}

The Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic

- ◆ Nationally, Multilingual Learner (MLL) students were among the student groups most impacted by the instructional disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Distance learning was especially challenging for multilingual families. Many Multilingual Learners and their families had increased caregiving and financial responsibilities which impacted their ability to participate in distance learning.^{57,58}
- ◆ In February 2021, the Rhode Island Department of Education convened the **Learning, Equity, and Accelerated Pathways (LEAP) Task Force** with the goal of identifying ways for Rhode Island students to recover from the learning challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic and widened by systemic inequities. The LEAP Task Force recommended collaborative and coordinated planning between school districts and community-based organizations to meet the needs of Multilingual Learners, including intentional grouping of Multilingual Learners, providing professional development for educators and enrichment opportunities for Multilingual Learners, expanding dual language programs, and honoring and elevating the assets of Multilingual Learners.⁵⁹

How School Districts Are Using ESSER III Funds to Support MLLs/ELs

- ◆ In 2022, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT conducted an analysis of how school districts planned to use federal *American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief* funds, also known as ESSER III funds. Fifteen school districts (42%) allocated a total of \$19.7 million to explicitly support Multilingual Learners, using this funding for multilingual paraprofessionals, translators, stipends for educator ESOL certifications, and other needs.
- ◆ **Central Falls Public Schools** has allocated \$200,000 in **tuition assistance** for its TA to BA program that will help Central Falls teacher assistants earn a degree or become certified in Special Education or English as a Second Language. The program aims to help retain and grow current members of the Central Falls staff while also diversifying the educator pipeline. Central Falls has also allocated \$39,000 to the **Newcomer MLL program** which assists recent immigrants at the secondary school level who have little or no English proficiency and limited or no formal education in their home countries.
- ◆ **Newport Public Schools** has allocated \$33,000 to partner with **Conexión Latina** to provide educational supports to Multilingual Learners including hosting after-school programs, support for tutoring and mentoring, and helping MLLs get involved in team sports, arts, music and other enrichment programs. Conexión Latina will work with the **College Planning and Counseling Center of Rhode Island** to facilitate college applications, FAFSA, SAT prep, and other college readiness opportunities. Through the support of an Education Navigator, Conexión Latina will serve as a link between the school department and families and will help support MLL families including helping with school registration, obtaining school supplies, enrolling in Out-of-School Time opportunities, and overcoming barriers that prevent MLL students from attending school. Newport Public Schools is also investing in **long-term coaching** that supports Multilingual Learners and culturally-responsive instructional practices.
- ◆ **Woonsocket Public Schools** allocated \$2,500,000 for high-quality ELA and Math instructional material adoption and implementation in **dual language Pre-K and kindergarten classrooms**.

Source: Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. (2022). *COVID-19 impact and recovery: An equity analysis of Rhode Island school districts' planned use of ESSER III funds*. Retrieved February 21, 2023, from www.rikidscount.org

A History of Racism and English-Only Policies

- ◆ **Language cannot be discussed without the influence of race, ethnicity, white supremacy ideologies, and economic opportunities.** Between the 1890s and 1920, xenophobia and Americanization attitudes were high with “new immigrants” from southern and eastern European countries like Italy, Russia, and Poland seen as less skilled, less educated, and undesirable and viewed as racially and religiously suspect by earlier immigrants. Chinese immigrants were also subjugated, which led to the *Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882* banning them from coming to the country altogether. Eventually, southern, and eastern European immigrants were able to assimilate. In the present day, the new wave of immigrants who predominantly migrate from Latin America is experiencing the same racist rhetoric and scapegoating as the previous generation of immigrants.^{60,61}
- ◆ Immigration and language have had policy implications in the U.S. education system. For example, between 1920 and 1960, English-only teaching models were the norm in many states. MLL/EL students were simply held back until they became proficient. Even our neighboring state of Massachusetts had a strict English immersion law that passed in 2002 and was only repealed in 2017 after the state could no longer ignore the demand from 90,000 Multilingual Learner/English Learner students.^{62,63,64}

Education Funding for Multilingual Learners/English Learners

- ◆ According to the Education Commission of the States, as of February 2020, 48 states and the District of Columbia provided funding specifically for Multilingual Learners/English Learners. Funding for MLL/EL students looks different in every state, but states generally use one of three funding models.⁶⁵
 - 1 **Formula Funded:** Funding for MLL/EL students is included in the state’s core funding formula. For example, in the **District of Columbia**, MLL/EL students receive a weight of 0.49 in the funding formula.
 - 2 **Categorical Funding:** States allocate funding through a separate mechanism that is outside of the core funding formula. For example, in **Utah**, lawmakers distribute additional per pupil funding for MLL/EL students through a block grant program outside of the funding formula.
 - 3 **Reimbursement:** School districts submit expenditures to the state, and the state reimburses districts for all or a portion of their spending. In **Illinois**, for example, policymakers set aside funding in the budget for districts that offer instructional programs for MLL/EL students, and districts must apply for reimbursement for these programs.
- ◆ Most states fund MLL/EL students through the state’s core funding formula or a categorical program. About half of states provide a flat weight, either an additional percentage or flat dollar amount, for each identified student, regardless of their level of language proficiency or the types of services offered. The second most common approach is a multiple weight system, which allocates funding based on the amount of time that students have been classified as MLL/EL students, based on proficiency levels, or based on the concentration of MLL/EL students in a district.⁶⁶
- ◆ **Until 2016, Rhode Island was one of only four states with an education funding formula that did not include designated funding for MLL/EL students.**⁶⁷ In 2016, the Rhode Island General Assembly established a pilot categorical program to provide additional support for the costs associated with educating MLL/EL students.⁶⁸ In 2017, the Rhode Island General Assembly made this categorical fund permanent. This fund is designed to support high-quality, research-based services.⁶⁹ The Fiscal Year 2023 budget included \$5.0 million in categorical funds to support the needs of MLL/EL students. Rhode Island spends approximately \$330 per MLL/EL student, compared to Connecticut which spent about \$1,728 in FY 2019.^{70,71,72}

Recommendations

- ◆ Nationally, states that have seen strong outcomes from their school funding reforms have implemented strategies that **provide continuity and flexibility in funding so school districts can invest in high-quality evidence-based programs that deliver results**. Weighted student formulas allow funding for high-need students to rise together with the foundation formula. Thirty states, including Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, and Vermont, provide increased funding for Multilingual Learners/English Learners as a multiplier to the per-pupil core instruction amount.
- ◆ **Remove the stigma of being a Multilingual Learner/English Learner** by creating culturally responsive schools that celebrate and respect the rich racial and ethnic diversity that makes up this community.
- ◆ **Enhance partnership between parents and schools** by creating opportunities for parents to get involved in various school activities, ensuring that all communication is in a language they feel comfortable with, and offering flexible meeting schedules for parents who do not work traditional work hours.
- ◆ **Improve data collection to appropriately identify MLL students** before enrollment so they can be matched to the correct program.
- ◆ **Ensure young MLLs/ELs with developmental delays and disabilities receive high-quality early childhood services required under the *Individual with Disabilities Education Act***. Build a workforce pipeline to help bilingual people and People of Color earn degrees, credentials, and professional licenses needed to deliver special education services to infants, toddlers, and young children.
- ◆ **Develop high-quality dual language early care and education programs** that start in infancy and build on the existing early childhood infrastructure, including child care, Early Head Start, Head Start, and RI Pre-K.
- ◆ **Train all district administrators on the MLL programs available** to ensure parents know about them and can access them.
- ◆ Proactively **respond to the challenges that Newcomers in high school face** by offering flexible school schedules for those who need to work to support themselves and their families.
- ◆ Enhance assessment tools to **maximize educational opportunities and pathways for Newcomers**, including advanced coursework for those who qualify, paid apprenticeship and vocational programs, and transitional programs for postsecondary placements.
- ◆ **Use annual standardized assessments, regular classroom assessments, portfolios, and other assessment tools** to identify MLLs' assets, areas of growth, and how to best support continued growth in both English language proficiency and content areas, such as math and science.
- ◆ **Train all educators and administrators to identify and support students who have experienced trauma**, especially Newcomers and refugees.
- ◆ **Expand the number of high-quality dual language programs throughout the state**, particularly in low-income communities, to strengthen MLL students' literacy skills in their home language and support English proficiency.
- ◆ **Increase the pipeline of dual language and world language educators** by providing financial support through the *Multilingual Educator Investment Act*, which would create a \$2 million scholarship fund for potential candidates.
- ◆ **Invest in Grow Your Own programs**, including teacher assistant to bachelor's degree programs to attract and retain educators from MLL communities.
- ◆ **Create district and statewide collaborative learning circle opportunities** so dual language teachers can share best practices.
- ◆ **Provide wraparound and mentoring support for MLL students entering postsecondary education.**

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