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## Multilingual Learners in Rhode Island

*In Rhode Island, the number of Multilingual Learner/English Learner students nearly doubled from the 2009-2010 to 2020-2021 school year*

**Providence, RI (February 23, 2023):** Rhode Island KIDS COUNT will release its newest publication, *Multilingual Learners in Rhode Island*, on Monday, February 27, 2023, from 3:30 p.m. – 5:00 p.m. via Zoom. Featured speakers will include **Paige Clausius-Parks**, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT; **Angélica Infante-Green**, Commissioner of the Rhode Island Department of Education; **Delia Arellano-Weddleton**, Director of Engagement and Partnerships at Nellie Mae Education Foundation. **Jessica Vega**, Senior Policy Analyst at Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, will share findings from the *Issue Brief*. Reflections will be shared from the following panel: **Wujuudat Balogun**, Young Voices; **Rabia Hos**, University of Rhode Island; **Rebecca Klassen**, Providence Public Schools; **Erin Papa**, Rhode Island College and the Coalition for a Multilingual 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. Nationally, the majority (72%) of MLL/EL students ages five to 17 are born in the United States.

Perspectives about how to best serve MLL students are changing. For decades, families were discouraged from speaking their home language to their children, as it was believed it would confuse or delay a child’s development. For a long time, English-only teaching models were the norm, and students were held back until they became proficient. Now, it is understood that MLL/EL 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 identifies and experiences, and creates a culture where their multilingualism is viewed as a strength and educators expect success.

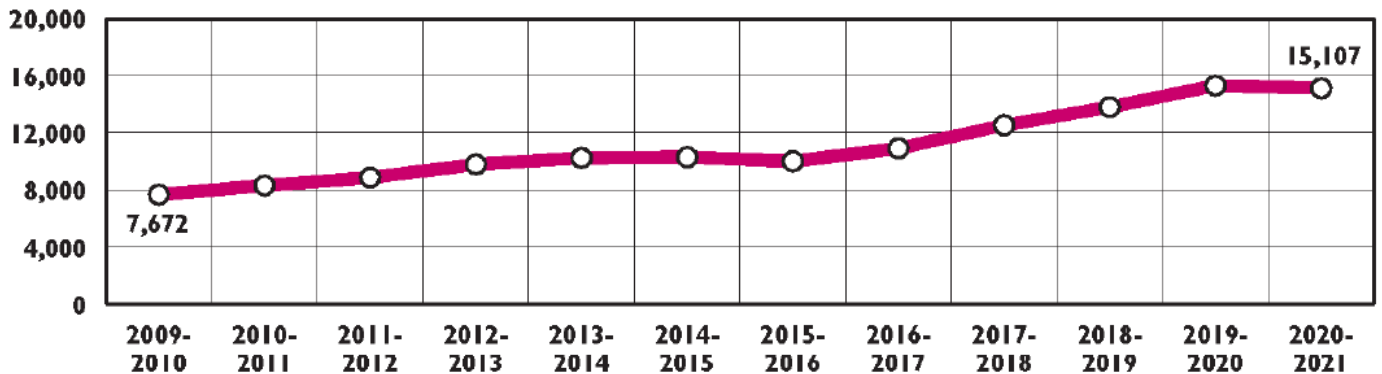
“It’s time we change the narrative on Multilingual Learners and their families who share their rich culture with our schools and communities,” said **Jessica Vega, Senior Policy Analyst at Rhode Island KIDS COUNT**. “We need an education system that celebrates their diversity through dual language programs and adequate funding that addresses their needs both in and outside the classroom walls. We all want a beautiful, thriving state, but we will not achieve this by leaving valuable talent behind.”

### Who are Rhode Island’s MLL/EL Students?

- During the 2020-2021 school year, there were 15,107 MLL/EL students in Rhode Island, representing 11% of all students in grades Pre-K through 12. In Rhode Island, the number of MLL/EL students nearly doubled

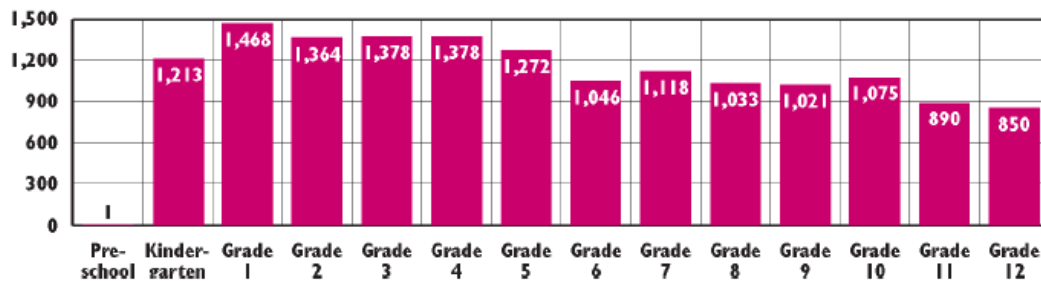
from the 2009-2010 to 2020-2021 school year.

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



- During the 2020-2021 school year, 70% of MLL/EL students in Rhode Island attended school in the four core cities of Central Falls (45%) Providence (33%), Pawtucket (16%), and Woonsocket (11%). Charter schools also have a high percentage (17%) of MLL/EL students.
- 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%.

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



- In Rhode Island, students in the elementary grades (kindergarten through grade 5) are more likely to be Multilingual Learners/English Learners than older 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. During the 2020-2021 school year, 79% of Rhode Island’s MLL/EL students were enrolled in free or reduced-price lunch programs.
- 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.

## Multilingual/English Learner Students, Rhode Island

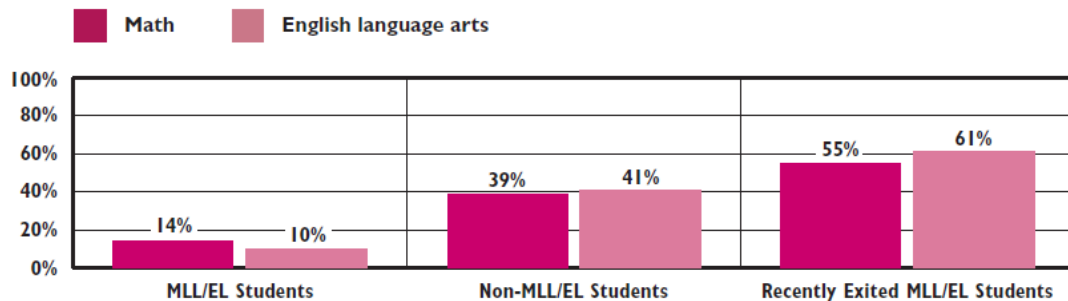
SCHOOL DISTRICT	2009-2010 SCHOOL YEAR			2020-2021 SCHOOL YEAR		
	TOTAL # OF STUDENTS	TOTAL # OF MLL/EL STUDENTS	% OF TOTAL DISTRICT	TOTAL # OF STUDENTS	TOTAL # OF MLL/EL STUDENTS	% OF TOTAL DISTRICT
Barrington	3,336	23	1%	3,361	69	2%
Bristol Warren	3,452	95	3%	3,041	65	2%
Burrillville	2,487	*	0%	2,088	*	<1%
Central Falls	2,634	595	23%	2,751	1,248	45%
Chariho	3,428	21	1%	3,100	12	<1%
Coventry	5,176	*	0%	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	*	0%	2,358	24	1%
South Kingstown	3,483	15	0%	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%
<b>Charter Schools</b>	<b>2,320</b>	<b>319</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>9,681</b>	<b>1,632</b>	<b>17%</b>
<b>State-Operated Schools</b>	<b>1,601</b>	<b>*</b>	<b>&lt;1%</b>	<b>1,810</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>6%</b>
<b>UCAP</b>	<b>142</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>17%</b>
<b>Four Core Cities</b>	<b>40,978</b>	<b>5,657</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>39,419</b>	<b>10,596</b>	<b>27%</b>
<b>Remainder of State</b>	<b>96,275</b>	<b>1,688</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>87,268</b>	<b>2,747</b>	<b>3%</b>
<b>Rhode Island</b>	<b>141,175</b>	<b>7,672</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>138,303</b>	<b>15,107</b>	<b>11%</b>

## Educational Outcomes for MLL/EL Students

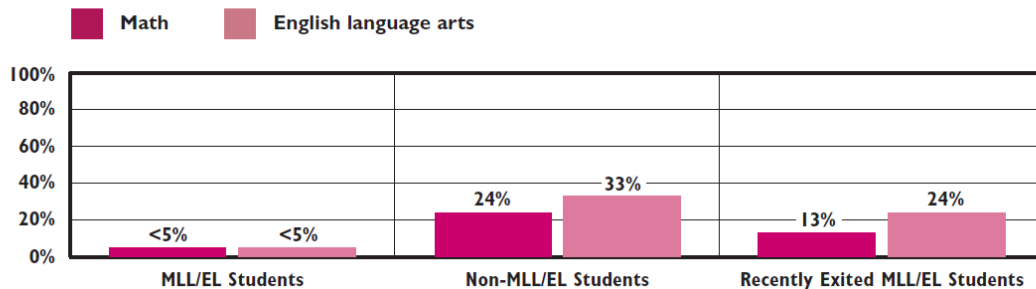
- Research shows that bilingual students score as well as non-MLL students on assessments in their home language.
- In Rhode Island, MLL/EL students who have been in the U.S. for less than one year are exempt from the English language arts assessment, but not from the math assessment, and are required to take both assessments in future years, regardless of their level of English proficiency.
- Below, we have provided snapshots of several indicators of educational outcomes for MLL/EL students.

**Please see the publication for a full explanation of the data.**

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

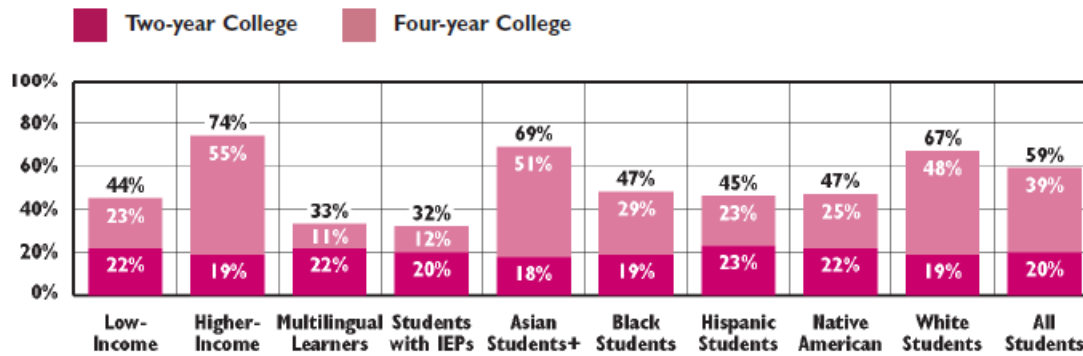


### Eighth-Grade Multilingual Learners/English Learners Meeting Expectations in Math and English Language Arts, Rhode Island, 2022

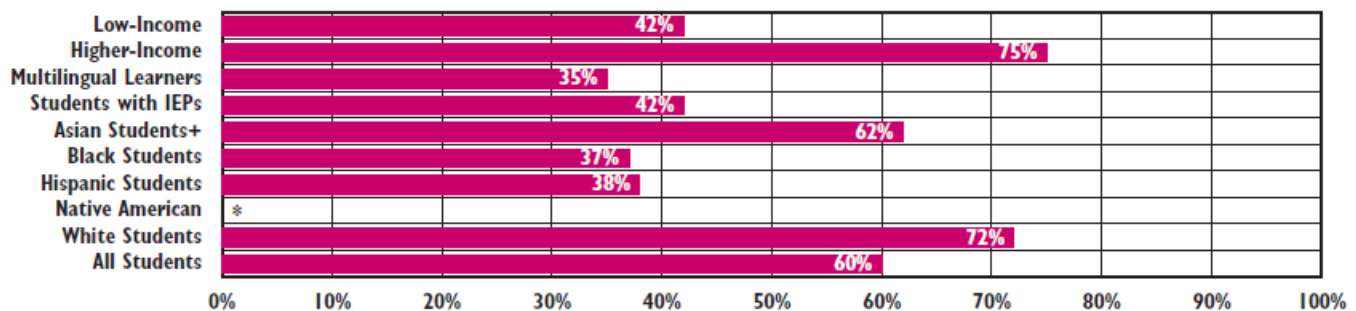


- The Rhode Island four-year graduation rate for the Class of 2021 was 84%. The lowest graduation rates were among Multilingual Learners (69%), students receiving special education services (65%), students in foster care (49%), students experiencing homelessness (61%), low-income students (76%), and Hispanic (77%) and Native American (76%) students.

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



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



### Promising Policies and Practices

- In 2019 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. 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.
- In September 2021, the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) released a **Blueprint for Multilingual Learner Success**. According to the Strategic Plan, RIDE will spend 2021-2022 on engagement and adoption of policies, including pilot programs and professional development, and then move to the full implementation of the policies in 2023-2026.
- **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.
  - However, only eight schools in the state offer these programs. These programs are located in Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, and the Rhode Island School for the Deaf and International Charter School but are only offered in Spanish and Portuguese.
- In 2020 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. **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 candidates interested in graduate certificates or degrees, and recipients would receive funding for two years.

- Studies show that **improving communication between immigrant families and schools** increases attendance and homework completion rates among MLL/EL students. 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.
- **Supporting the Youngest MLL Students:** 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.
  - Exposing children to multiple languages through dual language early childhood education programs and building strong relationships with parents improves children's cultural competence, social emotional development, and English language skills.
- **Supports for New Arrivals and Undocumented Students:** Some MLL/EL students are considered Newcomers because they have been in the country for less than twelve months. Others may be undocumented students who face discrimination, fear, and adult responsibilities.
  - 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.

### 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.
- 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 ESL certifications, and other needs.

### Education Funding for Multilingual Learners/English Learners

- 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. 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.
- 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.

“Our Multilingual Learners and families are an incredible asset to all of Rhode Island, however, the data in this publication shows that we have much work to do to ensure these students have what they need to succeed,” said **Paige Clausius-Parks, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT**. “Being

multilingual is associated with increased economic and social opportunities. Investment in our multilingual students is good for kids and for the economic prosperity of our state. We have no time to waste- let's make changes and investments now."

## 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 & 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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*Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is a statewide children's policy organization that works to improve the health, economic well-being, safety, education, and development of Rhode Island children with a core focus on equity.*