



RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT

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Testimony Re: Senate Bill 2174 Regarding Multilingual Learner/English Learner Education Funding
Senate Education Committee

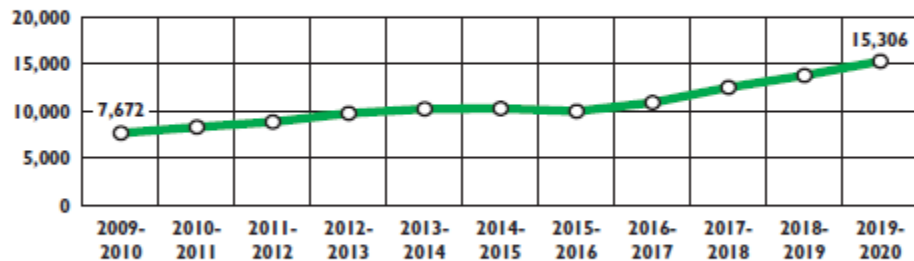
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Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to voice its support for Senate Bill 2174 and thank Senator Cano for sponsoring this bill and Senators Quezada, Lawson, Pearson, Anderson, Seveney, DiMario, Kallman, Burke, and Murray 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).

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


**Multilingual Learners/English Learners,
Rhode Island, 2009-2010 Through 2019-2020 School Years**



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2009-2010 through 2019-2020 school years.

The demographics of students in Rhode Island public schools has become increasingly diverse since the adoption of the education funding formula in 2010. In the 2019-2020 school year in Rhode Island, MLLs/ELs were 11% (15,306) of total students, a two-fold increase from the 2009-2010 school year when there were 7,642 MLLs/ELs.

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. Reports, including a 2013 report by the Latino Policy Institute, have noted that Rhode Island's

Multilingual Learners 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. The 2017 *Race for Results* report also shows Rhode Island's Latino children having the lowest opportunity index in the Nation. In 2020, Brandeis University's Child Opportunity Index 2.0 listed Providence as having one of the widest opportunity gaps between white and Hispanic children.

Disparities in academic outcomes by language status are well known by this committee. In Rhode Island in 2021, less than 5% of MLLs/ELs in grades 3 through 8 met expectations in reading compared to 37% of Non-Multilingual Learners and less than 5% of MLLs/ELs in grades 3 through 8 met expectations in math compared to 23% of Non-Multilingual Learners on the *Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS)*. Multilingual Learners need additional supports in order to achieve proficiency in reading and math.

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.**

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. In 2019-2020 school year, 85% of all MLLs/ELs 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 alongside dedicated students, parents, educators, and community stakeholders convened by the Rhode Island Department of Education to identify, implement, and sustain more effective policies and practices for MLL students in Rhode Island. This bill is aligned 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 comment today.