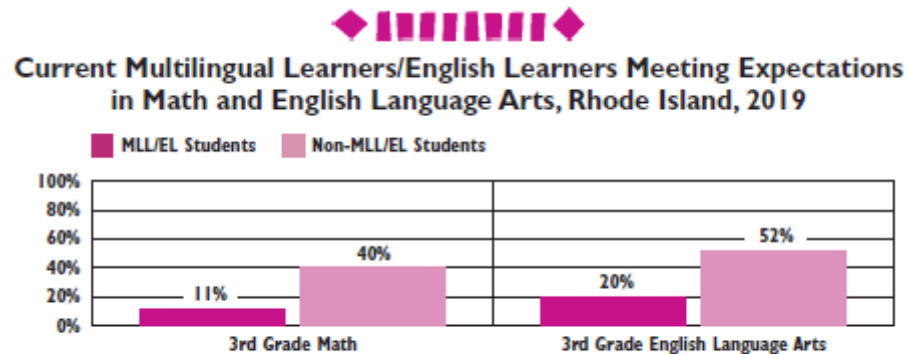


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Testimony Re: House Bill 5239 The World Language and Dual Language Immersion Act
House Finance Committee
March 23, 2021
Paige Clausius-Parks, Senior Policy Analyst

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 House Bill 5239, The World Language and Dual Language Immersion Act**. This bill would provide \$200,000 in funding to the Rhode Island Department of Education to establish a dual language program fund and hire a specialist in world language and dual language instruction.

Reading proficiency in third grade is a key predictor of school success and high school graduation. Research shows that children who are not proficient readers by the end of third grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school than proficient readers. In 2019, only 48% of third graders in Rhode Island are meeting expectations for reading.

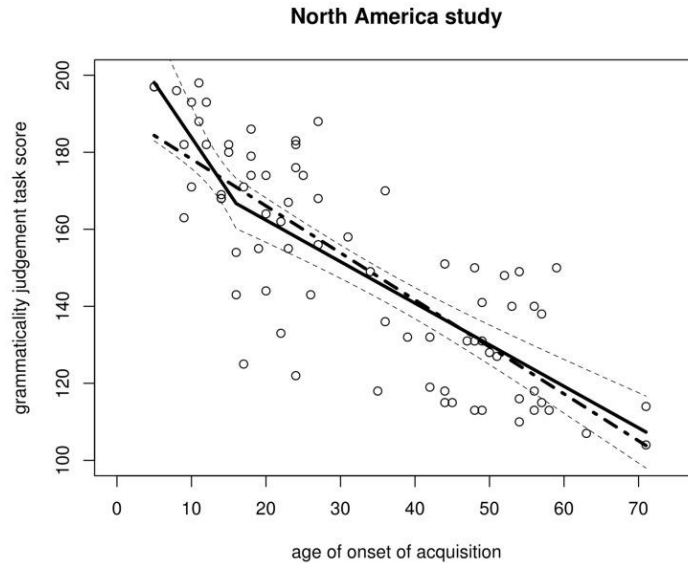


Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS), October 2019.

In order to achieve the state’s goal, we need to tackle disparities in access to high-quality early learning opportunities. Multilingual Learners need additional supports in order to achieve proficiency in reading. **As of 2019, only 20% of Multilingual Learners/English Learners (MLL/EL) were reading on grade level in third grade.** Dual language programs can significantly improve English reading proficiency, decrease high school dropout rates, increase the likelihood of going to college, and improve economic outcomes for MLL/EL students.

Language learning is most effective and efficient during the early childhood years, between birth and age eight. When provided with high-quality learning opportunities, **young children learn new languages faster** and with more competence than older children and adults.

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The majority of the world’s population is bilingual or multilingual. High-quality multilingual education, starting in the early grades or in preschool, effectively promotes English language acquisition and proficiency while also building proficiency in a child’s native language. **Being bilingual or multilingual is associated with increased economic and social opportunities and improved executive function skills that contribute to academic success.** Multilingualism is also associated with a delay or prevention of cognitive challenges that are connected to aging.

In the 2018-2019 school year, MLL/EL students were 10% (13,792) of total students, and 39% of all ML/EL students in Rhode Island were in grades preschool to grade three. During the 2018-2019 school year, bilingual and two-way/dual language programs were offered in the Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, and South Kingstown school districts, Rhode Island School for the Deaf and at the International Charter School.

Investments in a dual language program fund and a specialist in world language and dual language instruction could help expand dual language programs to additional schools and districts. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT supports efforts to expand children’s access to high-quality dual language programs.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. We urge support for this bill.