



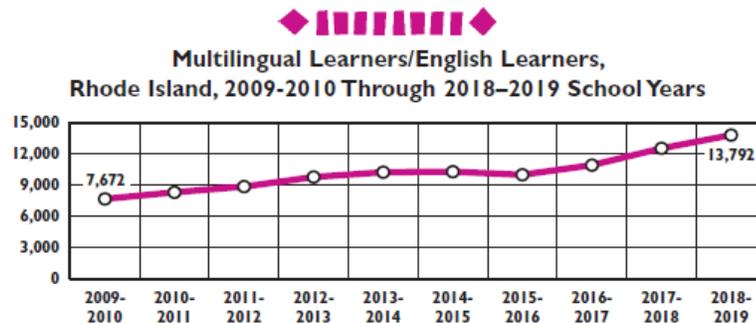
RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT

ONE UNION STATION
PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND 02903
401/351-9400 • 401/351-1758 (FAX)

Testimony Re: Senate Bill 90 Regarding Multilingual Learner/English Learner Education Funding
Senate Education Committee
April 7, 2021
Paige Clausius-Parks, Senior Policy Analyst

Madam Chair 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 90 which 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 (MLL/EL).

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 MLL/EL students, although more support is needed in this area.



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2009-2010 through 2018-2019 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 2018-2019 school year in Rhode Island, MLL/EL students were 10% (13,792) of total students, and 39% of all MLL/EL students in Rhode Island were in grades preschool to grade three. The number of MLL/EL students in Rhode Island has nearly doubled (increased by 93%) from the 2009-2010 to 2018-2019 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. Recent 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 2019, 20% of MLL/EL students met expectations in reading compared to 52% of Non-Multilingual Learners and 11% of MLL/EL students met expectations in math compared to 40% 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.

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.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT strongly supports increasing funding for MLL/ELL students 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. We also support efforts that increase transparency of and accountability for funds used to support MLL/EL students and families.

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