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**Testimony Re: RIDE Multilingual Learner Regulations  
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Rhode Island has taken significant steps to ensure all children have access to high-quality education and early learning opportunities while recognizing multilingualism as an asset. These efforts include moving multilingual learner (MLL) funding from categorical funds into the core funding formula and implementing the Seal of Biliteracy. This initiative allows high school students who earn the Silver or Gold Seal of Biliteracy to receive college credits toward a minor or major in a world language at the state's public higher education institutions.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT commends the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) for updating the outdated 17-year-old regulations to align with federal standards and address the current needs of multilingual learners. We also applaud their commitment to involving community stakeholders in the process before finalizing the regulations.

**Rhode Island KIDS COUNT echoes the Coalition for a Multilingual Rhode Island's recommendations to further strengthen the regulations and better serve students.** These recommendations include:

- **Align bilingual dual language teacher certification requirements with the National Dual Language Teacher Preparation Standards.**
- **Add specific language to the placement standards** (Section 3.6) requiring districts to implement bilingual education program models when student enrollment reaches a defined threshold. New York, for example, requires that schools form bilingual education classes for at least 70% of the students in grades K-8 when there are 15 or more MLLs of the same language in two contiguous grades and in grades 9-12 when there are 20 or more MLLs in any single grade (CR Part 154-2.3(d)(2)).
- Mandate rather than merely encourage LEAs, to employ at least one **bilingual school counselor.**
- **Strengthen accountability measures** to ensure transparency in implementation and accessibility for families by ensuring access to annual reports, information, or data that illustrate the progress of LEAs in adopting and implementing the requirements outlined in the MLL regulations.

**In addition, we offer these recommendations specific to early childhood education:**

Rhode Island is ranked 7<sup>th</sup> **highest in the U.S. for young children in need of multilingual learning support** tied with New Mexico and Arizona. [With 41% of all children in Rhode Island under age 6 having at least one parent who speaks a language other than English at home, Rhode Island has a higher concentration of potential young multilingual learners than any other state except California \(59%\), Texas \(48%\), New Jersey \(47%\), New York \(45%\), Nevada \(44%\), and Florida \(42%\),](#)

More than 15 years ago, [neuroscience research by Dr. Patricia Kuhl documented that learning a second language is easiest in the early childhood years](#) and that skills in the second language are stronger when you learn the language earlier, ideally during the critical period when our brains are optimally primed to learn languages. The best time to learn a second language is before age 3. Strong second language outcomes also result when the second (or third+) language is learned between ages 3 and 8 with learning outcomes declining with every year of delayed instruction.

**RIDE does not have any systems in place to identify young children who would benefit from multilingual instruction.** Data provided to Rhode Island KIDS COUNT each year shows **very few, if any, young children are receiving MLL services.** Rhode Island KIDS COUNT urges RIDE to engage national experts to develop systems that would identify young children in the community as early as possible who would benefit from multilingual instruction and develop policies to provide developmentally appropriate multilingual instruction starting with:

- young children ages 3-5 already enrolled in public schools (with an IEP and their typically developing peers funded through Title I, through parent tuition, or state/local funding)
- all young children ages 3-5 with an IEP receiving any early childhood special education services in community classrooms and through “walk-in” services,
- all children enrolled in RI Pre-K classrooms overseen by the Department of Education, and
- all children enrolled in Head Start classrooms.

Key resources include:

- [Encouraging the Development and Achievement of Dual Language Learners in Early Childhood](#)
- The [Children’s Equity Project at Arizona State University](#) which focuses on equitable learning experiences for young English Learners, particularly those from marginalized communities.
- Bipartisan Policy Center, [Start with Equity: From the Early Years to the Early Grades – Data, Research, and an Actionable Child Equity Policy Agenda](#)

- Migration Policy Institute, [Ending the Invisibility of Dual Language Learners in Early Childhood Systems: A Framework for DLL Identification](#).
- Brown University TRI-Lab Policy Brief: [Promoting Early Language and Literacy Development in Young Dual/English Language Learners in Rhode Island](#).
- The new federal technical assistance center - [Center for Early School Success](#) which supports states and LEAs in implementing comprehensive and aligned preschool through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade early learning systems.

We also urge RIDE to continue working with the **Rhode Island Early Learning Council** to understand and support policy changes needed to expand access to high-quality learning opportunities for children from infancy through K and to implement strategies in partnership with other departments and community-based agencies to support early language acquisition in home languages and English in infancy through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade.

The RI Early Learning Council has identified young children in non-English speaking families as a population with high needs that needs particular attention.

Recommendations from the RI Early Learning Council include:

*GOAL: Improve access to high-quality early learning and development programs for children from non-English speaking families*

- *Use data systems to understand children from non-English speaking families and that population's access to high quality early childhood education (ECE) programs*
- *Develop outreach materials in Spanish and increase outreach to non-English speaking families to let them know about opportunities to enroll in high-quality programs to support children's learning and development.*
- *Increase the number of bilingual and native Spanish speaking ECE teachers*
- *Expand the availability of dual language programs (English/Spanish) for children in the core cities.*
- *Double the number of PK-Grade 3 students participating in dual-language programs that focus jointly on English and world language literacy and fluency*

We also urge RIDE to advocate for the passage of the *Support and Access to Bilingual Education (SABE) Act*, which aims to expand dual language programs, and the *Bilingual, Dual Language, and World Language Teacher*

*Investment Act*, which seeks to increase the pipeline of bilingual and world language educators.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today.