

Multilingual Learners

DEFINITION

Multilingual Learners is the percentage of all public-school children (kindergarten through grade 12) who are receiving English language services in Rhode Island public schools.

SIGNIFICANCE

The population of Multilingual Learner (MLL) students in the U.S. has rapidly grown over the past half century.¹ In fact, MLLs are the fastest growing group of students, not only in large urban districts but also in many smaller cities and suburban districts.² Rhode Island experienced the highest growth rate of MLL students in the nation between 2010 and 2020. By 2020, 12.2% of its student population were MLLs, ranking fifth highest among all states. Compared to New England states, Rhode Island has the largest percentage of MLL students.³

Nationally, the majority of MLL students are born in the U.S., are racially, ethnically, linguistically, and culturally diverse, and have at least one immigrant parent.^{4,5} MLL students are more likely to live in low-income households and are more likely to attend high-poverty schools and have limited access to services needed to improve English proficiency.^{6,7} They may also experience discrimination, stigma, and stress related to different cultural expectations and English language proficiency status.^{8,9} Students in families with limited English proficiency

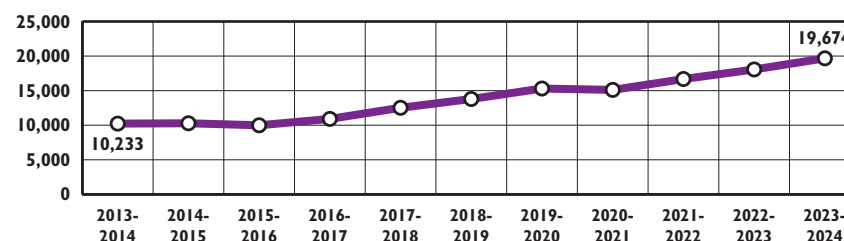
also have a harder time accessing health care and other social services.¹⁰

In the 2023-2024 school year in Rhode Island, MLL students were 14% (19,674) of the total student population, and 34% (6,731) of all MLL students in Rhode Island were in grades kindergarten to grade three. Of all MLL students, 73% were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch programs.¹¹ The majority of MLLs in Rhode Island are highly concentrated, with almost two-thirds (62%) attending school in the four core cities and 42% in Providence.¹² MLL students spoke different 108 different languages. Most (82%) spoke Spanish, 4% spoke a creole language, 3% spoke Portuguese, 1% spoke Arabic, and 1% spoke Chinese.¹³

Dual language programs can improve English reading proficiency, decrease dropout rates, increase the likelihood of going to college, and improve economic outcomes for MLL students.¹⁴ During the 2023-2024 school year, bilingual and two-way/dual language programs were offered in the Central Falls, Pawtucket, and Providence school districts and at the Rhode Island School for the Deaf, Nuestro Mundo Public Charter School, and International Charter School.^{15,16}

In 2024, funding for Multilingual Learners was incorporated into the core funding formula.¹⁷ Additionally, the Rhode Island Department of Education updated the MLL regulations for the first time in 17 years to better align with federal standards.¹⁸

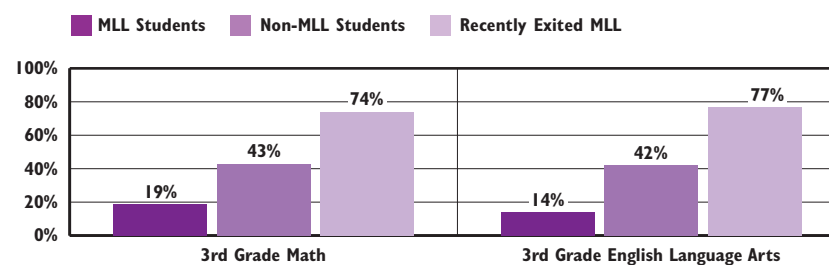

**Multilingual Learners, Rhode Island,
2013-2014 Through 2023-2024 School Years**



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2013-2014 through 2023-2024 school years.

◆ The number of MLL students in Rhode Island has almost doubled (increased by 92%) from the 2013-2014 to 2023-2024 school years.¹⁹


**Multilingual Learners Meeting Expectations in
Math and English Language Arts, Rhode Island, 2024**



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, *Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS)*, October 2024.

◆ In Rhode Island, MLL students who have not attended U.S. schools for at least 12 months 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.²⁰ Recently exited MLL students outperformed non-MLLs on the *RICAS*.²¹ Successful MLL programs have highly-qualified and culturally competent teachers.²² In October 2024, 2% (166) of Rhode Island public school teachers and instructional coordinators held an active Bilingual, Dual Language, or English to Speakers of Other Languages certification.²³

Table 40.

Multilingual Students, Rhode Island, 2023-2024

SCHOOL DISTRICT	TOTAL # OF STUDENTS	NUMBER OF MULTILINGUAL LEARNER STUDENTS			TOTAL # OF MLL/EL STUDENTS	% OF TOTAL DISTRICT
		ELEMENTARY (GRADES PRE-K-5)	MIDDLE (GRADES 6-8)	HIGH SCHOOL (GRADES 9-12)		
Barrington	3,366	64	*	14	85	3%
Barrington	3,289	49	12	17	78	2%
Bristol Warren	2,760	32	14	14	60	2%
Burrillville	2,002	*	*	*	17	1%
Central Falls	2,599	566	295	486	1,347	52%
Chariho	2,960	18	*	*	23	1%
Coventry	4,103	15	*	11	35	1%
Cranston	10,075	600	243	340	1,183	12%
Cumberland	4,821	171	59	53	284	6%
East Greenwich	2,500	22	13	12	47	2%
East Providence	5,074	118	62	108	288	6%
Exeter-West Greenwich	1,537	*	*	*	16	1%
Foster	221	*	0	0	*	1%
Foster-Glocester	1,317	0	*	*	*	0%
Glocester	554	*	0	0	*	0%
Jamestown	400	*	*	0	*	1%
Johnston	3,093	180	69	67	316	10%
Lincoln	3,256	50	23	24	97	3%
Little Compton	210	*	0	0	*	1%
Middletown	1,934	98	39	37	174	9%
Narragansett	1,071	*	*	*	*	1%
New Shoreham	124	*	*	*	14	11%
Newport	1,837	176	72	115	364	20%
North Kingstown	3,724	45	16	23	84	2%
North Providence	3,524	208	90	124	423	12%
North Smithfield	1,643	23	<10	<10	34	2%
Pawtucket	7,831	820	436	509	1,766	23%
Portsmouth	2,143	28	<10	<10	45	2%
Providence	20,622	3,825	1,708	2,642	8,175	40%
Scituate	1,170	*	0	0	*	0%
Smithfield	2,382	15	*	*	30	1%
South Kingstown	2,323	34	11	16	61	3%
Tiverton	1,543	11	*	*	17	1%
Warwick	7,847	152	50	49	252	3%
West Warwick	3,511	66	37	50	154	4%
Westerly	2,183	40	15	18	73	3%
Woonsocket	5,531	534	179	289	1,002	18%
Charter Schools	11,843	1,848	562	468	2,878	24%
State-Operated Schools	1,758	*	*	182	192	11%
Collaboratives	443	NA	39	85	123	28%
Four Core Cities	36,583	5,744	2,619	3,926	12,289	34%
Remainder of State	85,128	2,182	878	1,132	4,192	5%
Rhode Island	135,755	9,780	4,101	5,793	19,674	14%

Sources of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department Education, 2023-2024 school year. Total number of Multilingual Learner students is the number of students in each district who were receiving English Language services in the 2023-2024 school year. Former MLLs who have exited are not included.

* Fewer than 10 students are in this category. Actual numbers are not shown to protect student confidentiality. These students are still counted in district totals and in the four core cities, remainder of the state, and state totals.

NA indicates that the school district does not serve students at that grade level.

The “% of Total District” is based on the total number of Multilingual Learners divided by the “Total # of Students,” which is the average daily membership in the districts of instruction.

Charter schools include the Achievement First Rhode Island and Blackstone Valley Prep Mayoral Academy Networks, Beacon Charter School, Blackstone Academy, Charette Charter, The Compass School, Excel Academy Rhode Island, The Greene School, Highlander Charter School, The Hope Academy, International Charter School, Kingston Hill Academy, The Learning Community, Nuestro Mundo Public Charter School, Paul Cuffee Charter School, Providence Preparatory Charter, Rhode Island Nurses Institute Middle College, RISE Prep Mayoral Academy, Segue Institute for Learning, SouthSide Charter School, Trinity Academy for the Performing Arts, and Village Green Virtual.

State-operated schools include William M. Davies Jr. Career & Technical High School, Rhode Island School for the Deaf and Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center.

Collaboratives include Sheila Skip Nowell Leadership Academy, Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program, and YouthBuild Preparatory Academy.

Core cities are Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket.

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Source of Data for Table/Methodology for Children Participating in School Meals

Core cities are Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket.

The October 2024 enrollment is for the full month of October and is not comparable with the October 1, 2024 enrollment numbers reported elsewhere in the 2025 Factbook.

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