

# 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> Rhode Island experienced the highest growth rate of MLL students in the nation between 2010 and 2020.<sup>3</sup> In the Fall of 2021, 12.5% of Rhode Island's students were MLLs, the sixth highest percentage in the United States and the highest rate in New England.<sup>4</sup>


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.<sup>5,6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> They may also experience discrimination, stigma, and stress related to different cultural expectations and their English language proficiency status.<sup>8</sup> The increase in immigration enforcement

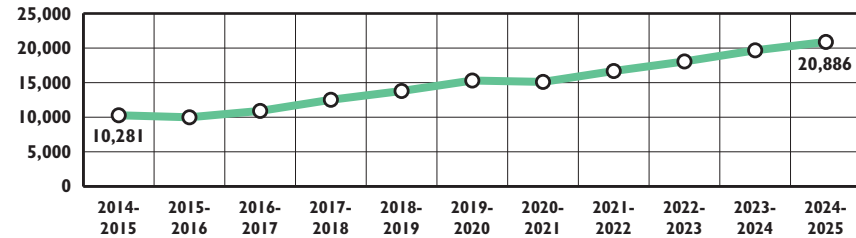
in Rhode Island is associated with lower attendance rates among MLL students.<sup>9</sup>

In the 2024-2025 school year in Rhode Island, MLL students were 16% (20,886) of the total student population, and 35% (7,230) of all MLL students in Rhode Island were in grades kindergarten to grade three. Of all MLL students, 90% were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch programs.<sup>10</sup> The majority of MLLs in Rhode Island are highly concentrated, with almost two-thirds (63%) attending school in the five core cities and 40% in Providence.<sup>10</sup> MLL students spoke 106 different languages. Most (81%) spoke Spanish, 4% spoke a creole language, 3% spoke Portuguese, 1% spoke Arabic, and 1% spoke Chinese.<sup>10</sup>

MLL students in dual-language programs are more likely to achieve English proficiency than students in English dominant programs.<sup>11,12</sup> During the 2024-2025 school year, bilingual and two-way dual language programs were offered in the Central Falls, Pawtucket, and Providence school districts and at the Nuestro Mundo Public Charter School and International Charter School.<sup>13</sup>

In 2024, funding for Multilingual Learners was incorporated into the core funding formula.<sup>14</sup> The Rhode Island Department of Education recently updated the MLL regulations for the first time in 17 years to better align with federal standards.<sup>3</sup>

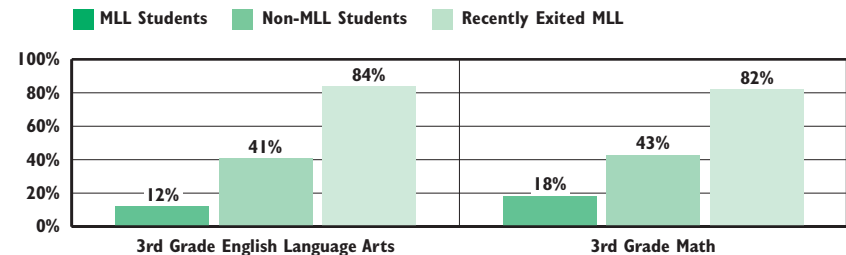
  
**Multilingual Learners, Rhode Island,  
2014-2015 Through 2024-2025 School Years**



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, 2014-2015 through 2024-2025 school years.

◆ The number of MLL students in Rhode Island has more than doubled (increased by 103%) from the 2014-2015 to 2024-2025 school years.<sup>15</sup>

  
**Multilingual Learners Meeting Expectations in  
Math and English Language Arts, Rhode Island, 2025**



Source: Rhode Island Department of Education, *Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System (RICAS)*, October 2025.

◆ 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.<sup>16</sup> Recently exited MLL students outperformed non-MLLs on the *RICAS*, but by contrast, MLLs that have not exited, struggle academically.<sup>10,11</sup> Successful MLL programs have highly-qualified and culturally competent teachers.<sup>8</sup> In October 2025, 1% (122) of Rhode Island public school teachers and instructional coordinators held an active Bilingual, Dual Language, or English to Speakers of Other Languages certification.<sup>10</sup>

Table 41.

## Multilingual Learner Students, Rhode Island, 2024-2025 School Year

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	3,227	45	19	21	85	3%
Bristol Warren	2,625	37	14	17	68	3%
Burrillville	1,942	*	*	*	21	1%
Central Falls	2,400	611	281	467	1,359	57%
Chariho	2,837	15	*	*	21	1%
Coventry	3,910	15	10	13	38	1%
Cranston	9,830	580	235	403	1,218	12%
Cumberland	4,754	170	66	63	300	6%
East Greenwich	2,443	23	14	12	49	2%
East Providence	4,977	132	60	118	310	6%
Exeter-West Greenwich	1,459	*	*	*	19	1%
Foster	225	*	0	0	*	0%
Foster-Glocester	1,268	0	*	*	*	1%
Glocester	557	*	0	0	*	1%
Jamestown	383	*	0	0	*	0%
Johnston	3,025	180	64	95	338	11%
Lincoln	3,159	61	21	21	102	3%
Little Compton	206	*	0	0	*	2%
Middletown	1,807	111	33	29	173	10%
Narragansett	900	*	0	*	*	1%
New Shoreham	120	*	*	*	18	15%
Newport	1,746	172	74	123	370	21%
North Kingstown	3,685	47	17	19	83	2%
North Providence	3,414	199	94	142	434	13%
North Smithfield	1,591	37	10	*	55	3%
Pawtucket	7,468	865	458	578	1,900	25%
Portsmouth	2,115	26	*	10	41	2%
Providence	19,841	3,979	1,724	2,739	8,443	43%
Scituate	1,178	*	*	0	*	0%
Smithfield	2,295	16	*	*	29	1%
South Kingstown	2,192	23	13	11	47	2%
Tiverton	1,492	*	*	*	15	1%
Warwick	7,636	176	47	61	284	4%
West Warwick	3,354	79	38	67	185	6%
Westerly	2,053	36	18	18	71	3%
Woonsocket	5,448	635	195	327	1,157	21%
<i>Charter Schools</i>	<i>12,605</i>	<i>2,035</i>	<i>610</i>	<i>633</i>	<i>3,278</i>	<i>26%</i>
<i>State-Operated Schools</i>	<i>1,949</i>	<i>*</i>	<i>*</i>	<i>279</i>	<i>293</i>	<i>15%</i>
<i>Collaboratives</i>	<i>247</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>30</i>	<i>22</i>	<i>52</i>	<i>21%</i>
<i>Five Core Cities</i>	<i>36,903</i>	<i>6,262</i>	<i>2,732</i>	<i>4,234</i>	<i>13,229</i>	<i>36%</i>
<i>Remainder of State</i>	<i>80,659</i>	<i>2,057</i>	<i>806</i>	<i>1,171</i>	<i>4,034</i>	<i>5%</i>
<i>Rhode Island</i>	<i>132,363</i>	<i>10,364</i>	<i>4,182</i>	<i>6,340</i>	<i>20,886</i>	<i>16%</i>

### Sources of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department Education, 2024-2025 school year. Total number of Multilingual Learner students is the number of students in each district who were receiving English Language services in the 2024-2025 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 five 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, Sheila Skip Nowell Leadership Academy, Rhode Island School for the Deaf and Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center.

Collaboratives include Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program and YouthBuild Preparatory Academy.

Five core cities are Central Falls, Newport, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket.

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

Collaboratives include Urban Collaborative Accelerated Program, West Bay Collaborative and YouthBuild Preparatory Academy.

Five core cities are Central Falls, Newport, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket.

The October 2025 enrollment is for the full month of October and is not comparable with the October 1, 2025 enrollment numbers reported elsewhere in the 2026 *Factbook*.

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