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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2025

A N A C T

RELATING TO EDUCATION -- SUPPORT AND ACCESS TO BILINGUAL EDUCATION

Introduced By: Senators McKenney, Murray, Vargas, Gu, Lawson, Quezada, and Acosta

Date Introduced: February 26, 2025

Referred To: Senate Finance

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Findings.

2 The general assembly hereby finds and declares that:

3 (1) Consistent with § 42-5.1-1(l), proficiency in a second or multiple languages can be a
4 major tool for economic growth for our state and help overcome this country's disadvantage in the
5 world economy as we move into the twenty-first century.

6 (2) Consistent with § 42-5.1-1(j), the state both affirms the right of every resident to nurture
7 their native language and also encourages all citizens to become proficient in English to facilitate
8 full participation in society and promote cross-cultural communication.

9 (3) Consistent with § 42-5.1-1(j) and (k), native language instruction facilitates the
10 development of English proficiency with multilingual learners and boosts the overall academic
11 achievement of such children.

12 (4) Consistent with § 16-22-37, the department of education ("department"), in consultation
13 with local education agencies ("LEAs") that have a dual language program, was mandated to create
14 a model policy and timeline to assist LEAs in developing and implementing a dual language
15 program.

16 (5) The Rhode Island Blueprint for a Multilingual Learner Success (2021) calls for
17 expansion of opportunities for MLLs to access high-quality bilingual/bicultural programs while
18 developing literacies in multiple languages.

19 (6) There is overwhelming evidence that the state could expect a very high return to the

1 public by investing in high quality bilingual and dual language programming for all of our students.

2 (7) Dual language investments targeted towards program development for disadvantaged
3 children will help to promote both efficiency and educational equity for the children of our state.

4 (8) The expansion of funding for bilingual and dual language programs that advance
5 outcomes for multilingual learners is critical to achieving the state's goal for grade-level reading by
6 the third grade and other academic achievements.

7 SECTION 2. Title 16 of the General Laws entitled "EDUCATION" is hereby amended by
8 adding thereto the following chapter:

9 CHAPTER 54.1

10 SUPPORT AND ACCESS TO BILINGUAL EDUCATION ACT

11 **16-54.1-1. Short title.**

12 This chapter shall be known and may be cited as "The Support and Access to Bilingual
13 Education Act.

14 **16-54.1-2. Definitions.**

15 For the purposes of this chapter:

16 (1) "Dual language " or "DL" means a method of instruction that promotes a student's full
17 proficiency in all aspects of English and another language. DL programs educate students using
18 both English and a partner language for academic instruction and may divide the day by language
19 of instruction. Dual language programs may include: two (2)-way immersion programs that teach
20 multilingual learners alongside English-speakers who are learning a partner language; and one-way
21 immersion programs that serve a student population comprised of a predominant majority of
22 speakers of the same home language. This may include a student population with limited to no
23 proficiency in English (these one-way immersion programs are sometimes called developmental
24 bilingual) or a student population with limited to no proficiency in the partner language (these one-
25 way immersion programs are sometimes called world language immersion); and teachers pursuant
26 to these programs shall meet appropriate state certification requirements in accordance with the
27 department of education regulation 200-RICR-20-20-1.

28 (2) "Local education agency" or "LEA" shall have the same meaning as defined in 34 CFR
29 § 303.23.

30 (3) "Qualifying languages" means the most common languages other than English spoken
31 in the state according to the U.S. Census Bureau, and other state data sources including, but not
32 limited to, the Algonquin Narragansett language.

33 **16-54.1-3. SABE act fund authorized.**

34 The department of elementary and secondary education (the "department") shall establish

1 a dual language program fund within the department. For purposes of funding this chapter, the
2 general assembly shall appropriate the sum of three hundred thousand dollars (\$300,000).

3 (1) Subject to funding for the program, the department shall establish and maintain a dual
4 language ("DL") pilot program to provide grants to school districts and schools that establish DL
5 programs.

6 (2) The expenses of administering the fund shall be paid from money in the fund.

7 (3) The fund shall consist of:

8 (i) Appropriations made by the general assembly;

9 (ii) Charitable contributions to the fund subject to the provisions of § 38-2-2(4)(G); and

10 (iii) Other sources deemed appropriate by the department.

11 (b) Eligibility. Applicants shall be a certified local education agency (LEA) within the state
12 consistent with the provisions of 34 CFR § 303.2.

13 (c) An LEA may be eligible to receive a grant pursuant to the provisions of this chapter if:

14 (1) The LEA uses a high-quality bilingual language instruction program model in
15 accordance with chapter 54 of title 16 and in accordance with regulations promulgated pursuant
16 thereto.

17 (2) The LEA has a multilingual learner student population exceeding fifteen percent (15%)
18 of the total pupil enrollment per RIDE data.

19 (i) The language(s) of instruction, in addition to English, shall be determined based on the
20 predominant home language(s) of the multilingual learner (MLL) student population.

21 (3) LEAs are encouraged to leverage existing funds including the state share of the MLL
22 funding formula distribution and federal funds.

23 **16-54.1-4. Implementation of LEA dual language programs.**

24 (a) LEA recipients of the SABE act fund per § 16-54.1-3, shall use funds for dual language
25 program planning and implementation activities including, but not limited to,

26 (1) Partnering with education professionals and organizations to design programs;

27 (2) Develop and execute professional development for administrators and instructional
28 staff;

29 (3) Procure high-quality curricular materials to enhance dual language instruction; and

30 (4) Other activities designed to facilitate or promote the LEA's existing or emerging dual
31 language programs.

32 (b) Develop and commit to an immediate or gradual staffing plan to support the
33 kindergarten through grade twelve (K-12) dual language program; or

34 (c) Only programs that adhere to high quality dual language program standards may be

1 [funded.](#)

2 SECTION 3. This act shall take effect on July 1, 2026.

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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF
A N A C T
RELATING TO EDUCATION -- SUPPORT AND ACCESS TO BILINGUAL EDUCATION

1 This act would appropriate three hundred thousand dollars (\$300,000) to establish a dual
2 language program within the department of elementary and secondary education. This act would
3 also provide for the implementation of the support and access to bilingual education (“SABE”) act
4 for all local education agencies (“LEA”) recipients.

5 This act would take effect on July 1, 2026.

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