

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2026

A N A C T

RELATING TO EDUCATION -- THE SUPPORT AND ACCESS TO BILINGUAL
EDUCATION ACT

Introduced By: Senators McKenney, Ciccone, Vargas, Tikoian, Britto, Gu, Murray, and
Acosta

Date Introduced: February 13, 2026

Referred To: Senate Finance

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Legislative findings.

2 The general assembly hereby finds and declares that:

3 (1) Consistent with Rhode Island's vision for education, every Rhode Island student
4 deserves access to the highest quality education possible in order to thrive, graduate, and step into
5 college or a career ready to succeed.

6 (2) Consistent with § 42-5.1-1 (c) and (d), the economic well-being of the state depends on
7 foreign trade and international exchange. To compete effectively, Rhode Island requires a
8 multilingual and multicultural workforce, and proficiency in one or more additional languages is a
9 key driver of economic growth and global competitiveness.

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

13 (4) Consistent with § 42-5.1-1(j) and (k), native language instruction facilitates the
14 development of English proficiency with multilingual learners and boosts their overall academic
15 achievement.

16 (5) Decades of research confirm that high quality dual language bilingual programs lead to
17 academic engagement and achievement, a drop in chronic absenteeism, and promote positive
18 social-emotional development, and overall well-being. These outcomes directly advance the Rhode

1 Island Department of Education’s strategic priorities related to equity, excellence in learning,
2 engaged communities, and world class talent.

3 (6) The Rhode Island Blueprint for a Multilingual Learner Success (2021) calls for a nimble
4 system that "secures and allocates human and fiscal resources to support high-quality core
5 instruction to meet the diverse needs of MLLs, including professional learning opportunities for all
6 teachers and administrators."

7 (7) The state faces a growing demographic divide, characterized by increasing numbers of
8 multilingual learners and an insufficient number of certified bilingual dual language and world
9 language teachers. Despite eleven (11) local education agencies having a high incidence of
10 Multilingual Learners, as determined by the Rhode Island Regulations Governing the Education of
11 Multilingual Learners (200-RICR-20-30-3), only eight percent (8%) of multilingual learners are
12 enrolled in bilingual/dual language programs. This is a result of both the shortage of certified
13 language educators and the related challenge of too few dual language bilingual programs in the
14 state.

15 (8) Additionally, bilingual dual language programs are a stated state priority. The Rhode
16 Island Regulations Governing the Education of Multilingual Learners (200-RICR-20-30-3)
17 encourage LEAs “to open Bilingual/Dual Language Programs, especially LEAs where overall
18 student enrollment includes 250 or more MLL students who share the same home/native language”.

19 (9) A diverse educator workforce, comprised of certified bilingual dual language and world
20 language educators, is essential to the success of dual language programs. These educators provide
21 culturally and linguistically responsive instruction, serve as role models for students, and help foster
22 inclusive school communities and may, in turn, translate into better academic outcomes such as
23 student motivation, improved interest in academics, consistent attendance, and grades.

24 (10) It is, therefore, in the best interest of the state, its residents, and its students to develop
25 and support dual language and world language teachers.

26 (11) Support for increased preparation and training of bilingual, dual language and world
27 language teachers can successfully be leveraged by providing direct financial support to traditional
28 public school districts or community-based organizations in collaboration with traditional public
29 school districts in Rhode Island working to expand dual language programs K-12.

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

32 [CHAPTER 54.1](#)

33 [THE SUPPORT AND ACCESS TO BILINGUAL EDUCATION ACT](#)

34 **16-54.1-1. Short title.**

1 This chapter shall be known and may be cited as “The Support and Access to Bilingual
2 Education Act.”

3 **16-54.1-2. Definitions.**

4 For the purposes of this chapter:

5 (1) “Bilingual dual language teacher”, or “BDL teacher,” means a teacher who provides
6 integrated language and content instruction in a partner language only or in a partner language and
7 in English, appropriate to the instructional program model they teach in, and holds the appropriate
8 certification pursuant to the department of education regulation 200-RICR-20-20-1.

9 (2) “Bilingual language instruction program model” or “Bilingual education program
10 model” is an approach that serves multilingual learners at all stages of English language
11 development and who share a common home/native language. The goal of this approach is
12 proficiency and literacy in English and a partner language, as well as content achievement in both
13 English and a partner language. Instruction is provided in both English and home/native or partner
14 language. The bilingual education approach consists of dedicated English language development
15 and integrated language and content instruction components and can be structured in any of the
16 instructional program models as defined by 200-RICR-20-30-3.

17 (3) “Eligible teacher” means a full-time teacher certified to teach in a kindergarten through
18 grade twelve (K-12) school by the department of elementary and secondary education and is
19 actively teaching within a public school with a high-incidence of multilingual learners in
20 accordance with the department of education regulation 200-RICR-20-30-3.

21 (4) “High incidence of multilingual learners” means a local educational agency with a
22 multilingual learners student population that meets at least one of the following two (2) criteria: (i)
23 Is greater than or equal to two hundred and fifty (250) total multilingual learners; or (ii) Is greater
24 than or equal to twenty percent (20%) of the local educational agency's total student population
25 pursuant to the Rhode Island regulations governing the education of multilingual learners (200-
26 RICR-20-30-3).

27 (5) “Local education agency” or “LEA” shall have the same meaning as defined in § 16-
28 92-3.

29 (6) “Multilingual individual” means an individual who has demonstrated advanced low or
30 higher proficiency in the target language of certification in accordance with the American Council
31 on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) proficiency scale through any of the approved
32 seal of biliteracy language proficiency assessments including, but not limited to: ACT, SAT,
33 advanced placement (English language and composition, English literature and composition, and
34 world language), ACCESS, LAS Links (Form C/D), AAPPL, STAMP 4S, and ASLPI.

1 (7) "Qualifying languages" means the most common languages other than English spoken
2 in the local education agency according to the U.S. Census Bureau and Rhode Island department
3 of education data sources.

4 (8) "State" means the State of Rhode Island.

5 (9) "World language educator" means a person who is certified by the department of
6 elementary and secondary education as an all grades world language teacher in accordance with
7 the department of education regulation 200-RICR-20-20-1.

8 **16-54.1-3. Support and access to bilingual education act fund authorized.**

9 The department of elementary and secondary education (the "department") shall establish
10 a bilingual education support fund within the department. Commencing FY 2027, the general
11 assembly shall annually appropriate, the sum of nine hundred and fifty thousand dollars (\$950,000),
12 with three hundred thousand dollars (\$300,000) appropriated for implementation of traditional
13 public school district dual language programs, and six hundred thousand dollars (\$600,000)
14 appropriated for strategy and support to expand teaching certifications for bilingual dual language
15 and world language teachers. In order to support administrative and implementation efforts, an
16 amount not to exceed fifty thousand dollars (\$50,000) shall be used as discretionary funds by the
17 department. Any unexpended discretionary funds shall revert to their original purpose of providing
18 dual language support grants. In addition to appropriations by the general assembly, charitable
19 donations may be accepted into the grant program.

20 (1) The department shall establish and maintain a bilingual education support fund to
21 provide grants to traditional public school districts that establish and expand bilingual language
22 instruction program models; community-based organizations in collaboration with traditional
23 public school districts that establish and expand bilingual language instruction program models; or
24 institutions of higher education in partnership with traditional public school districts that establish
25 and expand bilingual language instruction program models.

26 (2) The expenses of administering the fund shall be paid from money appropriated in
27 accordance with subsection (a) of this section.

28 (3) The fund shall consist of:

29 (i) Appropriations made by the general assembly pursuant to this section;

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

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

32 **16-54.1-4. Implementation of traditional public school district dual language**
33 **programs.**

34 (a) Eligibility for applicants shall be a minimum of one the following:

1 (1) A traditional public school district within the state consistent with the provisions of 34
2 CFR § 303.2;

3 (2) A community-based organization working in partnership with one or more traditional
4 public school district(s) within the state consistent with the provisions of 34 CFR § 303.2; or

5 (3) An institution of higher education (IHE) working in partnership with one or more
6 traditional public school district(s) within the state consistent with the provisions of 34 CFR §
7 303.2.

8 (b) An applicant may be eligible to receive a grant pursuant to the provisions of this chapter
9 if:

10 (1) The traditional public school district uses or is planning to create a high-quality
11 bilingual language instruction program model in accordance with chapter 54 of title 16 (“education
12 of limited english proficient students”) and in accordance with regulations promulgated pursuant
13 thereto.

14 (2) The LEA has a high incidence of multilingual learners as defined in 200-RICR-20-30-
15 3. For purposes of this section, the qualifying language(s) of instruction, in addition to English,
16 shall be determined based on the predominant home language(s) of the multilingual learner (MLL)
17 student population.

18 (3) The LEA develops and commits to an immediate or gradual staffing plan to support the
19 kindergarten through grade twelve (K-12) dual language program.

20 (c) Traditional public school districts are encouraged to leverage existing funds including
21 the state share of the MLL funding formula distribution and federal funds.

22 (d) Traditional public school district, community-based organization, and institution of
23 higher education recipients funded pursuant to § 16-54.1-3, shall utilize such monies for dual
24 language program planning and implementation activities including, but not limited to:

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

26 (2) Developing and executing professional development for administrators and instructors;

27 or

28 (3) Traditional public school districts self-evaluation program planning and
29 implementation of staffing needs including, but not limited to:

30 (i) Providing financial support for bilingual dual language and world language teacher
31 certification;

32 (ii) Providing in-service educator dual language professional development;

33 (iii) Procuring high-quality curricular materials to enhance dual language instruction; and

34 (iv) Other activities designed to facilitate or promote the LEA’s existing or emerging dual

1 language programs.

2 (e) Only programs that adhere to high quality dual language program standards shall be
3 funded.

4 **16-54.1-5. Strategy and support to expand teaching certifications for bilingual dual**
5 **language and world language teachers.**

6 (a) The department of elementary and secondary education shall collaborate with the office
7 of the postsecondary commissioner, and in consultation with any approved educator preparation
8 program, to increase and streamline the issuance of world language and bilingual dual language
9 certifications for purposes of increasing the number of bilingual dual language and world language
10 teachers in LEAs with a high incidence of multilingual learners as defined in 200-RICR-20-30-3.

11 (b) Eligibility for applicants shall be at a minimum one of the following:

12 (1) A traditional public school district within the state consistent with the provisions of 34
13 CFR § 303.2;

14 (2) A community-based organization working in partnership with one or more traditional
15 public school district(s) within the state consistent with the provisions of 34 CFR § 303.2; or

16 (3) An institution of higher education (IHE) working in partnership with one or more
17 traditional public school district(s) within the state consistent with the provisions of 34 CFR §
18 303.2.

19 (c) An applicant may be eligible to receive a grant pursuant to the provisions of this chapter
20 if:

21 (1) Support for teacher certification costs are granted to multilingual individuals who plan
22 to teach in a traditional public school district and use, or is planning to create, a high-quality
23 bilingual language instruction program model in accordance with chapter 54 of title 16 (“education
24 of limited english proficient students”) and further in accordance with regulations promulgated
25 pursuant thereto;

26 (2) The LEA has a high incidence of multilingual learners as defined in 200-RICR-20-30-
27 3; or

28 (3) The qualifying language(s) of instruction, in addition to English, shall be determined
29 based on the predominant home language(s) of the multilingual learner student population.

30 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 -- THE SUPPORT AND ACCESS TO BILINGUAL
EDUCATION ACT

1 This act would appropriate nine hundred and fifty thousand dollars (\$950,000) to establish
2 a bilingual education support fund within the department of elementary and secondary education.

3 This act would also provide for the implementation of the support and access to bilingual education
4 act for all local education agencies, community-based organizations, and institutions of higher
5 education recipients.

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

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