

Testimony in Support of SB-2555  
An Act Relating to Education – The Support and Access to Bilingual  
Education Act  
Senate Committee on Finance  
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**The Economic Progress Institute strongly supports Senator McKenney’s SB-2555**, which would invest \$650,000 in funding multilingual teacher certifications and \$300,000 for districts to start, expand, and improve Pre K-12 dual language programs, which are proven to improve outcomes for multilingual learners and also benefit non-multilingual learners.

All students deserve equal opportunities to learn regardless of language barriers. However, Rhode Island is currently underinvesting in its multilingual learners. **Rhode Island’s multilingual learner population has grown by 104% in the last 10 years and currently makes up 16% of the overall student population.**<sup>1</sup> However, only 8.9% of multilingual learners are enrolled in dual language programs, which have been proven to improve outcomes for multilingual learners.<sup>2</sup>

Dual language programs encourage students to engage with materials in two different languages. These programs embrace the culture of multilingual learners and encourage them to see their language skills as an asset. Dual language programs have been shown to improve English reading proficiency, decrease dropout rates, increase the likelihood of going to college, and improve economic outcomes for multilingual students.<sup>3</sup>

Dual language programs also benefit students who speak English as a first language. In the US, bilingual employees are paid an average of 5 to 20% more than if they were monolingual. **Ninety percent of US employers report a reliance on employees who know a language other than English.**<sup>4</sup> Multilingualism is a growing priority among employers; to ensure students have opportunities to succeed and Rhode Island has a strong workforce, we must invest in dual language programs.

To grow more dual language programs, the state must invest in recruiting more bilingual educators, especially given the current shortage of teachers (**Rhode Island currently has 206 educator vacancies across the state**). Rhode Island has a wealth of multilingual adults who need clear guidance and financial support to obtain teaching certificates, and the scholarship program instituted through this bill would make that available.

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<sup>1</sup> RIDE Data on Multilingual Learners

<sup>2</sup> RI Kids Count 2026 Factbook

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.participatelearning.com/blog/positive-impacts-of-dual-language-programs/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://workforceessentials.com/career-benefits-of-being-bilingual/>

SB-2555 would improve equity in Rhode Island by removing financial barriers for multilingual teacher certifications and increasing the diversity of Rhode Island's teaching population. The bill would also improve educational outcomes for multilingual learners, who tend to belong to historically marginalized communities. The Economic Progress Institute strongly urges passage of SB-2555.