

Cultivating and Expanding the Bilingual Educator Workforce in Rhode Island

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INTRODUCTION

In this white paper we put forth a proposal for how to cultivate and expand the bilingual educator workforce in the state of Rhode Island, both as a means to serve the growing MLL student population and to foster more multilingualism in our state. We begin by presenting the scope of the problem and then outline a series of challenges, opportunities, and recommendations. We also share case studies to highlight some of the specific challenges encountered by educators and to concretize our recommendations for improvement. We close with a discussion of potential bilingual teacher pathways and provide examples of how other schools, districts, and institutions of higher education have begun working to grow the bilingual teacher workforce in their communities.

Multilingual learners¹ (MLLs), or students in the process of acquiring grade-level academic English, are the fastest growing subpopulation within U.S. schools today. Between the 2000-2001 and 2016-2017 school years, the number of MLLs enrolled in U.S. schools increased by 28%, or by approximately 1.5 million students (OELA, 2022). MLLs now account for more than 10% of the total K-12 student population (NCES, 2020; OELA, 2022), and some estimates project that number to rise to as much as 40% by 2050 (USDOE, 2018). Mirroring national trends, the state of Rhode Island has seen an increase in the number of MLLs attending its public schools. According to the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE; 2020a), MLLs currently comprise 16% (23,931) of students in the state. This figure is a significant increase from the past decade, as MLLs represented only 5% of Rhode Island public school students in 2010 (Rhode Island Kids Count, 2022).

In response to these changing demographics, RIDE has made several commitments to better serve MLLs in the state, as outlined in [Rhode Island's Strategic Plan for Multilingual Learner Success](#) (RIDE, 2020b). While many of these efforts have focused on increasing teacher training in ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages), the RI Strategic Plan also identifies bilingual / dual language (BDL²) education as a key model for serving the growing population of MLLs. In BDL programs, students learn academic content and literacy through two languages with the goals of bilingualism and biliteracy, grade-level academic achievement, and cross-cultural competence. Unlike transitional bilingual education models,

¹ MLLs are also often referred to as English Learners (ELs). In this white paper, we prefer the term MLL, which is the current terminology used in the state of Rhode Island to refer to this student population and is also a more asset-oriented term, recognizing that students learning English as a new language at school are already proficient in one or more additional languages.

² These types of bilingual programs are also referred to as “dual language,” “dual language bilingual education,” and “dual language immersion,” among other terms. In this white paper, we use bilingual / dual language or BDL since it is the term used in the RI Strategic Plan and throughout the state of Rhode Island to refer to this type of bilingual education model.

in which language minoritized students receive home language instruction for only 1-3 years and then are “transitioned” into mainstream classrooms, BDL programs are designed to be long-term bilingual learning environments, beginning in kindergarten and extending until fifth grade (and, whenever possible, into secondary school). Many BDL models also serve both majority and minoritized language speakers (e.g., English-dominant and Spanish-dominant students) so that students can serve as language models for one another.

Research on the range of program models that serve MLLs has consistently found that BDL education is, by far, the most effective model for supporting their academic achievement and English language development. MLLs in BDL programs consistently outperform their peers in other program models—and sometimes even outperform native English speakers—on a range of measures of academic achievement and English language development (Lindholm-Leary & Hernández, 2011; Steele et al., 2017; Thomas & Collier, 2012; Umansky & Reardon, 2014). Importantly, MLLs in BDL programs also maintain and develop their home language. Yet, despite the clear efficacy of BDL education for promoting MLL achievement, only 3 percent of RI students are currently served by BDL programs (Papa, 2020). Put another way, as of 2023, there were only 13 BDL programs in RI, a state serving approximately 17,000 MLLs (Williams et al., 2023), meaning that the vast majority MLLs in RI are not being educated

in the bilingual learning environments that have been empirically shown to be the most effective in serving them.

One of the challenges for maintaining and growing dual language programs in Rhode Island is the shortage of bilingual teachers. It is a well-known reality that, in RI and around the country, the teacher workforce is largely white and monolingual (Schaeffer, 2021). Between 2018 and 2021, almost 81% of new teachers recruited in the state were white, compared to only 53% of RI public school students (RIPEC, 2022). Developing a pipeline of bilingual teachers in RI that can support BDL initiatives is essential and will require deliberate and purposeful planning, investment, and policies executed collaboratively with multiple stakeholders. It is also a necessity if the state is to meet the goals outlined in the RI Strategic Plan (RIDE, 2020b), in particular its goals to “expand bilingual services and dual language programs PK-12 in districts” (Goal 6.3) and to “recruit, hire, and retain bilingual teachers and strengthen their competencies” (Goal 6.6).



MAPPING THE PROBLEM: TEACHER SHORTAGES IN RHODE ISLAND

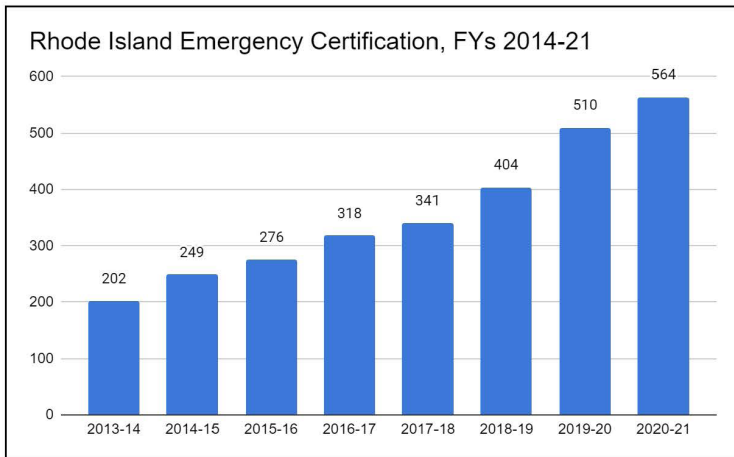
Teacher shortages remain an ongoing challenge across the nation. According to a recent survey conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2022), more than half of public schools in the country reported being understaffed at the start of the 2022-2023 school year, and 45% of schools reported still having one or more vacant teaching positions in October. In this national survey, school leaders reported that the primary challenge for filling vacancies was too few candidates applying for open teaching positions, followed closely by the lack of qualified candidates. When compared to other regions of the country, schools in the Northeast reported the greatest need in securing ESOL and bilingual education teachers, with 37% of public schools in the Northeast reported being understaffed in the area of English to Speakers of other Languages (ESOL) or bilingual education, compared to 30% in the Midwest, 36% in the South, and 31% in the West. The COVID-19 pandemic certainly exacerbated these changes, contributing to higher teacher turnover rates, especially in urban and high-poverty districts (Diliberti & Schwartz, 2023).

While Rhode Island does not publish comprehensive data on teacher shortages, we can gain some insight into the scope of the problem in the state through trends in emergency certificate issuance. When districts are unable to

find fully licensed teachers for a position, they can request that an emergency certificate be issued to individuals who do not yet hold a full certificate, whether for an initial teaching license or a more advanced certificate (such as ESOL). In recent years, the number of emergency certificates issued in Rhode Island has dramatically increased. Between 2014 and 2021, emergency certification issuances increased by 180% (Bellwether, 2022; see Figure 1). Emergency certificates in the areas of ESOL and Bilingual and Dual Language (BDL) are the most commonly issued, currently accounting for 39% of all certificates given by the state.

It is worth noting that emergency certifications can be a viable strategy for diversifying the teacher force by allowing individuals with diverse backgrounds, including local individuals with teaching backgrounds from other countries or international teachers. That said, while we recognize the important role that emergency certificates are playing in maintaining RI BDL programs and diversifying the teacher workforce, there are serious dangers when they are relied upon too heavily. Teaching in a BDL program requires highly specialized linguistic and pedagogical knowledge and skills, in addition to understanding how to balance programmatic structure, curricular demands, and sociocultural context (Guerrero & Lachance, 2018; Howard et al., 2018).

Figure 1. Number of Emergency Certificates Issued by RIDE between 2014-2021



In what other profession that requires certification or a license to practice would this level of “on the job training” be permitted without close mentorship and significant supervision by a licensed practitioner? Rather than continuing to rely upon emergency certificates, we strongly recommend that the state invest in reorganizing resources to increase the number of certified BDL teachers from the onset of their teaching.

Of course, investing in certifying BDL teachers before they enter the classroom also means reckoning with the reality of declining enrollment in traditional teacher certification programs. A recent report by Bellwether (2022) found that, between 2010 and 2020, enrollment in teacher preparation programs in Rhode Island decreased by 36%. It is important to note that declining enrollment is a national challenge, as there are too few teacher candidates in the higher education pipeline across the country

to keep up with current teacher shortages (Guerrero & Lachance, 2018). While there are alternative pathways to teacher certification outside of traditional teacher preparation programs (e.g., Teach for America), these alternative training programs are not sufficiently bolstering the number of teachers in the state, as evidenced by the number of vacancies and increase in emergency certificates. Clearly, more concerted efforts are needed to recruit and support educators to enroll in teacher preparation programs, particularly bi/multilingual individuals who can best serve the growing MLL student population.

Finally, it is important to note that addressing the bilingual teacher shortage is not limited to initial training and recruitment; it is also vital to consider teacher retention. Research on school climate has shown that bilingual teachers and other teachers of color often lack a sense of belonging in U.S. schools due to systemic inequities perpetuated within the U.S. public school system (Biegen, 2018; Kim-Seda, 2022). BDL programs, however, differ from many traditional school settings in that they are identity-affirming workplaces for minoritized teachers (Sada & Ward, 2022) and spaces where teachers’ languages and cultures are valued (DeMatthews & Izquierdo, 2018; Howard & López-Velásquez, 2019). Supporting dual language programs, therefore, could be a vehicle for diversifying and growing the teacher profession, more broadly.

STRENGTHENING THE PIPELINE: POTENTIAL BILINGUAL EDUCATORS

Having outlined important facets of the problem, we now highlight three groups of potential bilingual educators that could be strategically identified and supported in order to strengthen the bilingual teacher workforce in Rhode Island.

GROUP 1: BILINGUAL ADULTS LIVING IN RHODE ISLAND

Rhode Island is fortunate to already have a wealth of linguistic resources. According to data from the Migration Policy Institute (2023), as of 2021, 22% of the state's population age 5 and older reported speaking a language other than English. The largest subpopulation within this group is working-age adults (age 18-64), of whom approximately 24% speak a language other than English. This untapped resource is a significant opportunity for growing the bilingual teacher workforce in the state. Many bilingual adults are already working in schools, although they might be working in schools without a BDL program and/or as teachers' assistants and paraprofessionals because they do not yet have certification to teach in RI (although, notably, they may be certified teachers in other states or countries). There are also bilingual adults who are not currently working in Rhode Island schools, but who have a background in education or might be interested in switching careers if there were clear pathways for doing so.

GROUP 2: BILINGUAL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS LIVING IN RHODE ISLAND

Rhode Island also is fortunate to have many young people who are proficient in two or more languages. Approximately 22% of children and young adults (age 5-17) speak a language other than English, a subgroup that could greatly strengthen and diversify the teacher workforce in the state. Yet, as discussed above, nationwide data reveals that fewer students are entering the teaching profession. While there are some promising efforts toward recruiting more diverse students into programs of education (e.g., the new [Urban Residency Initiative Pathways to Education program](#) at the University of Rhode Island), there are still few initiatives and supports to attract bi/multilingual students, specifically, into teacher preparation programs. Building pathways within institutions of higher education to recruit, train, and certify bi/multilingual students is essential to addressing the shortage of bilingual teachers.



GROUP 3: INTERNATIONAL TEACHERS

Finally, since finding bilingual teachers in the U.S. is a challenge, many BDL programs around the country have turned to outsourcing bilingual teachers from other countries (Amanti, 2019; Howard & López-Velásquez, 2019). In Rhode Island, schools with BDL programs have also begun to recruit international educators, often through forming partnerships with third party agencies that connect schools with candidates. Some schools have also begun partnering with foreign embassies, such as Nuestro Mundo Charter School’s partnership with the Spanish Embassy’s Office of Education Visiting Teachers Program, which permits candidates to work in the United States on a three-year visa.

While recruiting international teachers is a great opportunity for dual language programs and is a pipeline that should be supported, it is important to emphasize the additional challenges that may emerge when working with international teachers (Lachance, 2017). First, international teachers often have insufficient preparation to meet the demands of U.S. school logistics and may struggle with student-centered pedagogies and the education system overall (Haley & Ferro, 2011). Additionally, there are fiscal and logistical concerns that can threaten the sustainability of reliance on international teachers. There are also additional costs when working with a private agency, and most international teachers are hired on short-term immigration visas for temporary employment in the U.S., which means that every few years, school leaders must again begin the process of hiring and training international teachers. Furthermore, Dunn (2011) notes that some efforts to hire international teachers are less about authentic intercultural exchange and more focused on the pressure to fill vacancies in urban schools by any means possible which, ultimately, can generate more problems and obscure pressing issues related to teacher shortages. Therefore, while international teachers can help address bilingual teacher shortages in the state, we caution school, district, and state leaders against relying too heavily on international teachers and to, instead, view them as a complementary group to a robust local bilingual teacher workforce.

STORIES FROM THE FIELD

The following vignettes tell the stories of three individuals who have sought to become bilingual educators in the United States: Alicia, Sandra, and Roberto. To protect their privacy, their names have been changed (and the photos showcase other bilingual teachers), but the details of their stories are true. Both Alicia and Sandra are highly qualified education professionals living in Rhode Island who have overcome a number of barriers to be able to obtain their certification as bilingual educators. Roberto is an international teacher from Peru who currently teaches in North Carolina—his story mirrors the experiences of many international teachers in Rhode Island. Their stories offer important insights about pathways, barriers, and opportunities for cultivating and expanding a bilingual educator workforce in our state.

CASE # 1:

FROM TEACHER'S ASSISTANT TO CLASSROOM TEACHER: ALICIA'S STORY

When you walk into Señora Alicia's classroom, you are immediately struck by a sense of active engagement and the sound of Spanish all around you. Alicia is a very skilled dual language second grade Spanish-side teacher. Observing her, you might not guess the long path she took to get to this stage of her career. For 18 years, Alicia worked as a teacher's assistant in a kindergarten Spanish classroom at International Charter School in Pawtucket, RI. During this time, she consistently engaged in professional development and developed her expertise as an educator. In 2019, with the encouragement of the Assistant Director, Alicia decided to embark on becoming a classroom teacher.

Alicia already held a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration from the Dominican Republic but did not have the requisite courses for becoming a certified classroom teacher in RI. In the fall of 2020, she entered Rhode Island College full-time in order to fulfill a Bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education and a Certificate of Graduate Studies (CGS) in Dual Language Education. Since the program is not designed for those who hold full-time jobs, her classes were held in the middle of the day. This meant that Alicia had to take personal time to be able to attend class. She also had to complete all of her coursework in English, which is not her native language. Nevertheless, Alicia worked diligently on her degree while also working as the second grade Spanish-side



teacher. She paid for the coursework herself, never missing a day of work and always working to the expectations of the position—and all during the COVID-19 pandemic. In May 2022, she graduated summa cum laude.

What can we learn from this story?

While her story is inspirational, it also offers important insights into some of the challenges faced by aspiring bilingual educators and how we might address these challenges for future teachers. First, the cost of her coursework could have been supplemented by the state or district, which may have enabled Alicia to pursue certification earlier. Second, the coursework could have been offered in Spanish and with more flexible hours to accommodate practicing teachers. Bilingual paraprofessionals in Rhode Island are a tremendous asset to our community and could be a powerful resource for growing the bilingual teacher workforce.

CASE # 2:

FROM TEACHER TO JANITOR: SANDRA'S STORY

Sandra is an experienced elementary school teacher who taught in Venezuela prior to immigrating to the United States. Upon moving to Rhode Island, Sandra wanted to teach in a bilingual setting to support MLLs. However, she was not yet confident enough with her English or her knowledge of the process for becoming a teacher, so she started working in schools as a janitor to have some exposure to the U.S.



school system. Eventually, through word-of-mouth she was connected to the Credential Review Pathway (CRP) at Rhode Island College (RIC). Since she was certified as a teacher in Venezuela, the CRP Director referred her to RIDE for the initial elementary educator certification and helped connect Sandra with an open elementary bilingual educator position.

However, after conducting a transcript review, RIDE was not satisfied with her Venezuelan credentials. Therefore, Sandra was referred back to RIC's Credential Review Pathway. Fortunately, the RIC reviewer concluded that her Venezuelan educator preparation was equivalent to the elementary educator coursework, leaving only the Praxis for Elementary Education as the remaining requirement for initial certification (which, it should be noted, is still a significant hurdle for a bilingual teacher still acquiring English and the cultural knowledge necessary to pass the test). As a result, Sandra is currently working as a long-term substitute teacher in a

dual language classroom, as she prepares for the Praxis and continues coursework in Bilingual/Dual Language Education so that she can be certified to teach in U.S. bilingual contexts.

What can we learn from this story?

Sandra's story highlights how capable and experienced bilingual educators can face serious barriers of entry to fill the many vacancies in the state. Despite being a certified and experienced teacher in Venezuela, Sandra spent many years working as a janitor in local schools and is still facing many barriers to becoming fully certified so that she can teach in her own classroom. There are important takeaways from this story. First, RIDE should honor certification from other countries, rather than sending teachers back and forth to Credential Review Pathway offices in institutions of higher education. Second, alternatives to Praxis exams should be offered to allow international teachers to become fully certified based on holistic assessment of per-

CASE #3:

FROM PERU TO THE UNITED STATES: ROBERTO'S STORY



Roberto was educated at the post-secondary level and nationally credentialed as a high school science teacher in Peru. He taught in a Peruvian public school for seven years prior to coming to the U.S. to teach in a dual language program. Based on the Peruvian educational system and grade-level structures, Roberto was qualified to teach chemistry, physics, and environmental science in Spanish in a U.S. middle school setting. He was hired to teach science in the U.S. via a private teacher recruitment service on a temporary three-year contract. The services were expensive

and while Roberto wasn't responsible for some of the fees, it was made clear to him that his salary would be less than what he earned in Peru.

Roberto arrived in the U.S. shortly before the beginning of the school year and was issued an emergency, temporary teaching license. Despite being an experienced teacher, Roberto struggled with many of the differences between teaching in the U.S. and Peru. For example, he was unclear about the importance of high-stakes standardized testing and the pressure his colleagues expressed about students'

results, as he was used to designing his own systems of assessment. He was also unaccustomed to the level of student-centered teaching and learning he was expected to deliver, given his previous experience with more teacher-directed instruction. Furthermore, Roberto was surprised by how frequently students were pulled from his classroom for special services, which made them miss substantial amounts of class time. For these reasons and more, Roberto, an experienced and highly qualified teacher, required two full school years to become proficient in his role. Given that his contract was limited to three years, Roberto had only just “learned the ropes” by the time he needed to return to Peru. Even though he was issued an emergency license and could have explored a few possibilities to convert the certification to permanent, he was too overwhelmed to consider taking courses in higher education.

What can we learn from this story?

International teachers undoubtedly contribute many linguistic and cultural assets to BDL programs that enrich the learning community. Yet, there are many challenges with international teachers, including a costly and time-intensive hiring process and substantive investment in training and supporting an educator who will have to leave after a few years. Therefore, one important takeaway is that there is a great need for increasing the BDL teacher pipeline. Temporarily hiring international teachers from outside the U.S. should not be the primary solution to the BDL teacher shortage. At the same time, international teachers can and should be part of growing the bilingual teacher workforce, and would benefit from more formalized professional development support, both when they arrive and throughout their time in the U.S., to ensure their success in a new teaching context.



CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We now turn to detailing specific challenges to cultivating the bilingual educator workforce in Rhode Island. We organize our discussion of challenges following Williams and Zabala (2023), who identified three primary pressures impacting the national bilingual teacher shortage: financial, logistical, and linguistic. To these, we add pedagogical, acknowledging the need for enhanced professional training to support bilingual educators, particularly those on international teaching visas. We address each of these challenges separately, although it is important to emphasize that many potential bilingual teachers experience aspects of all four to varying degrees. After addressing each challenge, we discuss opportunities—or the ways that different stakeholders are already working to address these challenges—and recommendations for future work that is needed to cultivate a bilingual teacher workforce in Rhode Island.

CHALLENGES

Financial Challenges

One major barrier for those seeking BDL/ESOL certification is cost. This pressure is augmented for bilingual teachers, who have additional testing requirements. BDL certification in Rhode Island minimally requires taking and passing three Praxis tests (if teachers already have certification from another state or country that is considered valid for the state of Rhode Island) but, more often than not, requires substantive coursework that can be cost-prohibitive for many would-be bilingual teachers. Bi/multilingual adults who were certified as educators in their home countries are often initially hired as BDL teachers on multiple emergency certificates, which require higher application fees and completion of the Praxis exams and multiple courses per year, while also teaching full time and maintaining other life responsibilities.

For young adults who are bi/multilingual

and interested in pursuing a career in bilingual education, there are also significant financial barriers. Many are first-generation college students who may need to navigate complex financial aid systems to be able to attend college and, once there, may need to work part-time or full-time, which limits their ability to participate in the (typically unpaid) required clinical practice experiences, not to mention the additional costs of certification exams.

Logistical Challenges

As evidenced by the case studies, there are also many logistical challenges that make it difficult to obtain BDL/ESOL certification in Rhode Island. Bilingual adults who are certified in other states or countries frequently encounter lengthy and cumbersome processes of reciprocity to obtain certification (Rodrigues, 2023), often requiring them to take additional coursework while they teach under emergency licensure, despite their existing qualifications and experience. For international teachers, visa restric-

tions make it extremely difficult for them to remain at their schools beyond the three-year contract. And, for undergraduates, the Basic Skills Test (ACT, SAT, and/or Praxis Core), a requirement for admission to educator preparation programs in the state, remains a significant barrier, often requiring students to complete additional modules in reading and/or math, which adds time and stress to meeting their degree requirements. Additionally, students who completed high school outside of the United States and never took the SAT or ACT must find the time and money to take one of the Basic Skills Tests to gain admission to an educator preparation program.

Linguistic Challenges

There are also significant linguistic barriers facing potential bilingual educators. In the state of Rhode Island (and around the nation), there is significant English bias in certification and licensing requirements (Myers, 2019). Bilingual teachers are required to take certification exams in English, even if they exclusively teach in the non-English partner language. The lack of availability of assessments in languages other than English leads some bilingual/international teachers to spend a significant amount of time and money preparing for and (re)taking assessments in English, when many could easily meet the content and knowledge requirements if assessments were available in their native languages. Additionally, as with the BDL/ESOL certification exams, initial credentialing tests are

available only in English, which likely contributes to the lower pass rate of Latinx teacher candidates compared to their white peers (Williams & Zabala, 2023).

Pedagogical Challenges

Teaching students academic content in two languages requires a specialized skill set, one that extends beyond proficiency in the instructional language(s) (Guerrero & Guerrero, 2008; Guerrero & Lachance, 2018). A challenge for BDL programs is to ensure that all educators have the specialized knowledge required to effectively teach bilingual learners, including knowledge of second language acquisition, culturally responsive teaching, holistic biliteracy development, and content-language instructional strategies (Escamilla et al., 2014; Howard et al., 2018). Additionally, given that most BDL programs in Rhode Island are structured with separate teachers for each instructional language, it is vital that teachers develop competency in effective collaboration techniques (Lachance & Honigsfeld, 2023). The need for improved pedagogical training specific to BDL extends to both local and international teachers: international teachers have often not received training for teaching in bilingual contexts specifically, and there is no requirement in the state that BDL certification programs be aligned with the National Dual Language Education Teacher Preparation Standards (DLeNM, 2018), which may lead to gaps in the competencies teachers need to demonstrate for successful teaching in bilingual settings.

OPPORTUNITIES

While these are significant challenges, there are also many opportunities already in place in Rhode Island to support the development and expansion of a bilingual teacher workforce. First, education leaders in the state are increasingly defraying costs for teachers to obtain the necessary training and certification to effectively serve MLLs. For example, Providence Public School District (PPSD) has budgeted \$4 million to provide \$8,000 of tuition reimbursement for BDL/ESOL certification programs for 500 teachers, with the aim of having 52% of its teachers certified in this area by the 2026-27 school year (Machado, 2022). While such efforts are often externally mandated (PPSD enacted these funding increases following a Department of Justice [DOJ] audit), the results have nevertheless been promising. PPSD has reported increases in fully credentialed BDL/ESOL teachers every year since its DOJ agreement, which demonstrates the impact of tuition reimbursement toward increasing the number of BDL/ESOL certified teachers. Thanks to the advocacy of the Coalition for a Multilingual RI in collaboration with state legislators, there is also a funding stream to support multilingual adults through RI Reconnect, a program that aims to help RI adults finish college and/or change careers. Multilingual adults can now access up to \$5,000 of non-academic support (e.g., technology, gas, groceries) to help them gain certification in bilingual education, world language education, and/or special education.

Second, there are existing pathways toward certification in bilingual education at two universities within the state: the University of Rhode Island and Rhode Island College. Both offer coursework for bilingual educators in the range of competencies and knowledge bases needed for effective BDL program implementation. There are also efforts at both institutions to diversify the pre-service teacher population. The Rhode Island Foundation recently awarded Rhode Island College, the University of Rhode Island, and the Central Falls School District \$1.2 million in grants to create pathways for partnership between universities and local school districts to diversify teacher pipelines through grow your own and apprenticeship programs.

Third, there are many existing professional development supports for bilingual educators. Teachers in Rhode Island can participate in a variety of professional development offerings through the Multistate Association for Bilingual Education-Northeast (MABE), a regional organization with deep expertise in BDL. There is also support for international teachers such as the recently established International Teachers' Project that aims to address the national teacher shortage through the recruitment of qualified international teachers globally via a J-1 Visa program for 3-5 years.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As we hope is evident, there are many promising initiatives already underway in the state that will help to grow the bilingual teacher workforce in Rhode Island. That said, these initiatives are insufficient to address the many challenges to building a robust state-wide bilingual education system and meeting the needs of the growing multilingual learner population. We close, therefore, with a series of recommendations and next steps for different stakeholders to help Rhode Island cultivate and expand the bilingual workforce it needs.

FOR DISTRICT AND STATE EDUCATION LEADERS

- 1 Continue and expand efforts to subsidize costs for teachers to obtain ESOL certification.
- 2 Offer *additional* financial incentives for individuals to pursue BDL certification (e.g., covering the cost of certification/licensing exams, signing bonuses, etc.).
- 3 Identify bilingual teachers not currently teaching in a BDL program and incentivize their switching.
- 4 Offer certification exams in languages other than English and offer alternatives to certification exams.
- 5 Streamline reciprocity of certification between Rhode Island and other states and countries (e.g., Puerto Rico).
- 6 Develop additional opportunities for professional development for bilingual educators, in collaboration with expert organizations such as MABE and institutions of higher education.
- 7 Establish clear criteria for assessing the qualifications of incoming international teachers, considering factors such as educational background, teaching experience, and references.
- 8 Implement mentorship programs that pair new bilingual teachers or international teachers with experienced bilingual educators to provide guidance and support during the initial stages of their teaching careers in U.S. bilingual classrooms.



FOR POLICYMAKERS

- 1 Formalize funding mechanisms for teachers to obtain BDL/ESOL certification by passing legislation such as the Bilingual Educator Act (HB5777) and the Multilingual Educators Investment Act (HB6023), both of which were proposed but not passed in the 2023 legislative session (and have been proposed again in the 2024 session as “The Support and Access to Bilingual Education Act” and the “Bilingual, Dual Language and World Language Teachers Investment Act”).
- 2 Create a funding stream to compensate student teachers to work in their clinical (“student teaching”) placements.
- 3 Increase funding for in-service teacher professional development supports, including for international educators and those on emergency licensure.
- 4 Develop a working group to examine findings from educator surveys currently underway by the Educators for a Multilingual Multicultural America (EMMA) and the Coalition for a Multilingual Rhode Island to inform the redesign of bilingual educator certification processes in the state.

FOR INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

- 1 Continue to partner with districts and state education leaders to ensure that BDL/ESOL certification programs are meeting the needs of working teachers.
- 2 Develop additional pathways and funding streams to support bilingual undergraduates and graduate students pursuing BDL/ESOL certification.
- 3 Expand bilingual education offerings and align bilingual/dual language teacher education programs with the [National Dual Language Education Teacher Preparation Standards](#).
- 4 Work with school and district leaders to develop a comprehensive orientation and training program for international teachers to familiarize candidates with local education policies, curriculum standards, and classroom management practices.



In closing, we also encourage all stakeholders to consider models for strengthening the bilingual teacher workforce that could be developed in our state by learning about those that have been successfully developed and implemented across our region and beyond.

Table 1. Sample Bilingual Teacher Pathway Programs and Supports

RHODE ISLAND			
Program	Facilitator	Target Audience	Description
TA to BA Program	Central Falls School District (CFSD)	Paraprofessionals or any non-certified staff member interested in pursuing a Bachelor’s degree and eventually becoming a classroom teacher	In order to increase the diversity among certified educators, CFSD has partnered with The Equity Institute and College Unbound to provide paraprofessionals with a career advancement pathway as they obtain their Bachelor’s degree, the first step in their ultimate goal of completing a teacher certification program.
The International Teachers Project	Victor Capellan (President and Founder)	International teachers	The International Teachers Project brings international teachers via a J-1 visa program to work in U.S. public schools for 3-5 years. They offer 4 phases of services to recruit and support teachers from abroad: phase 1 is teacher recruitment, phase 2 is providing training to teachers prior to placement, phase 3 is providing continued training and acclimation support, and phase 4 is placing and supporting the teacher in the U.S. school.

MASSACHUSETTS			
Program	Facilitator	Target Audience	Description
Somerville Public Schools and Lesley University Partnership	Lesley University in partnership with Somerville Public Schools	Pre-service and in-service bilingual teachers and paraprofessionals	The Somerville Public Schools in Massachusetts, in collaboration with Lesley University, covers the cost of graduate coursework towards the MA Bilingual Education Endorsement for pre-service and in-service bilingual teachers using state funding.
Bilingual Education / Accelerated Community to Teacher Program (BE/ACCT)	Boston Public Schools	Racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse aspiring educators, with a focus on Boston residents and BPS paraprofessionals / substitute teachers	The BE/ACTT program prepares candidates to become elementary or secondary teachers with a preliminary/provisional license and a Bilingual Education endorsement. BE/ACTT participants develop their teaching skills in a cohort and learn from highly-skilled teachers and community partners through a rigorous, interactive hands-on experience.
Western Massachusetts Bilingual Hub	University of Massachusetts-Amherst, in partnership with Amherst-Pelham, Holyoke, and Springfield Public Schools	In-service bilingual teachers and paraprofessionals	The Western Massachusetts Bilingual Hub was developed in 2020 through the partnerships between UMass-Amherst and local school districts with support of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. This partnership seeks to prepare and sustain diverse educators in BDL programs.

MASSACHUSETTS (cont.)			
Program	Facilitator	Target Audience	Description
Para-to-Teacher (PtT) Pathway Program for Early Childhood Education (ECE) Licensure in Massachusetts (Pre K-2)	University of Massachusetts-Amherst, in partnership with Holyoke Public Schools (HPS) and Springfield Public Schools (SPS).	Paraprofessionals	The program established a pathway for paraprofessional educators to become highly-qualified ECE teachers. A key feature of the program is to recruit and prepare educators of color in order to diversify the teacher workforce in the Commonwealth, while simultaneously providing professional development for the teachers that will mentor these future educators along their journey.

CONNECTICUT			
Program	Facilitator	Target Audience	Description
ARCTEL	Connecticut State Department of Education (CT)	Practicing teachers seeking BDL/ESOL certification	ARCTEL was developed by ACES in response to the statewide shortage of qualified, certified PreK-12 educators in the areas of Bilingual Education and Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) in CT. Candidates can also begin with a teacher residency program to get their bachelor's degree and then move to ARCTEL to obtain their bilingual endorsement.
Paso a Paso Puerto Rico Recruitment Program	Hartford Public Schools	Bilingual teachers from Puerto Rico	Hartford Public Schools has created a program to hire and support bilingual teachers from Puerto Rico. Candidates are provided with financial support for relocation and assessments, a school-based mentor, ESL coursework, and other benefits.

ADDITIONAL PROGRAMS OUTSIDE OF NEW ENGLAND			
Bilingual and Diverse Teacher Scholars Program	Western Oregon University	Bilingual high school students	Recruits and supports students interested in pursuing an undergraduate or graduate degree in education. As part of this program, students receive academic support, individualized advising, and professional development opportunities. Students receive an annual scholarship of \$3,000.
Bilingual Teacher Pathway (BTP)	Portland State University	Bilingual adults	The BTP program recruits and prepares bilingual and bicultural individuals to become licensed teachers. This two-year program seeks to support bilingual adults (including paraprofessionals) in obtaining their teacher certification.
Cumbres	University of Northern Colorado	High school students	The Cumbres program is a scholarship and support program for students interested in pursuing an education degree with a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Education specialization. Students in the program receive an annual scholarship (\$1500/year) and targeted support during their undergraduate studies.

ADDITIONAL PROGRAMS OUTSIDE OF NEW ENGLAND (cont.)			
Transitioning Paraprofessionals into Teachers (TPT)	Illinois State University	Paraprofessionals	The Transitioning Paraprofessionals into Teachers (TPT) program is a federally funded program designed to provide a course of study for bilingual paraprofessionals to earn an elementary education teaching license with bilingual and ESL endorsements. The TPT program is offered through the School of Teaching and Learning at Illinois State University.
The Woodring Multilingual Teaching Fellows Program	Western Washington University and school districts in the state of Washington	Paraprofessionals, with preference for bilingual candidates	This two-year, BA completion program supports employed paraeducators who seek to become K-8 certified teachers. Preference is given to bilingual candidates employed and referred by partner districts.

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