

# Young Multilingual Learners in Rhode Island: Summary of Study Findings



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Multilingual learners (MLLs) represent about 11% of all students enrolled in public school from prekindergarten (PreK) through Grade 12 in Rhode Island, a twofold increase in the past 10 years.<sup>1</sup> With this growth in mind, it is important to understand from administrators and teachers who serve young MLLs (ages 0-5) in early learning settings about the approaches and strategies they use and the additional supports they need to build the foundation for MLLs' educational outcomes. Language development begins in the early years, so the experiences and supports available in early childhood education are important.<sup>2</sup> In addition, research shows that positive connections between schools and families shape academic<sup>3</sup> and social-emotional outcomes<sup>4</sup> of children. Gathering input from MLLs' families about their experiences, including the ways in which they engage with their children's early learning programs, can help program directors and educators think about the best ways to communicate and engage with families. The [American Institutes for Research® \(AIR®\)](#) was engaged by the Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) to conduct a landscape analysis of services, supports, and experiences of MLLs in early learning in Rhode Island to inform its planning. To better understand the nature of supports and experiences of MLLs, AIR collected data from early childhood education (ECE) site directors, teachers, parents, and a home visitor, as well as

## Key Findings

- All parents interviewed expressed a value for bilingualism and that they would like their children to grow up to be bilingual.
- Site directors and teachers are committed to improving family engagement and are actively thinking through approaches to enhance partnerships with families.
- Site directors and teachers are interested in having more learning opportunities to improve understanding of ways to support MLLs in the classroom.
- Teachers use promising instructional practices to support MLLs' home languages, and parents feel students' home languages are being supported in the classroom.
- Using applications (e.g., Bloomz, ClassDojo) was considered an effective communication method by teachers and parents. It was uncommon, however, for parents to receive information about the benefits of multilingualism and how to foster the home language.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.rikidscount.org/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Issue%20Briefs/2.27.23%20MLL%20IB.pdf?ver=2023-02-27-112007-840>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10556667/#:~:text=Indeed%2C%20research%20suggests%20that%20language,acquisition%20across%20early%20learning%20settings.>

<sup>3</sup> <https://psycnet.apa.org/manuscript/2019-38879-001.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2973328/>

reviewed state documents. This report summarizes those activities and presents a set of findings synthesized from what we heard, read, and analyzed.

This report begins with a brief description of our processes for data collection and analysis. Next, we present parents' goals for their MLL children's language development, as well as early learning programs' goals and priorities to support MLLs. The report then describes findings on the following:

- **Professional development (PD).** The types of PD teachers have received and would like to receive to continue supporting MLLs.
- **Instructional practices.** The strategies, resources, and materials teachers use to support MLLs, including resources they would like. Parents' perspectives on instructional supports are also embedded.
- **Family and community engagement.** The approaches early learning programs and teachers use to engage with families, the participation of families in their children's learning and program events, and ideas to better engage with families.

The report concludes with a summary and recommendations.

## Data Collection and Analysis Process

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The findings reported here are from interviews with two RI PreK site directors, a home visitor, four teachers (i.e., two family child care home providers, one RI PreK teacher, and one district PreK teacher), and five parents of MLLs.<sup>5</sup> The team sent teacher and parent flyers and the link to an online form to internal partners as well as to school districts across the state with the goal of reaching families and programs with young children from different language backgrounds. Participants completed the online form to express their interest in participating in a one-time conversation in fall 2023. Data collection protocols were tailored to individual participants based on their role and the appropriateness of each question. After conducting all the interviews, researchers analyzed the data by stakeholder group to identify emergent themes from participant responses and direct quotes to support those emergent findings. AIR also conducted a document review of various state resources and documents such as evaluation rubrics, tips for educators, and professional learning plans. The intent for the review of such documents was to gather information about current practices and guidance documents implemented in RIDE. The AIR team reviewed these documents and made notes

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<sup>5</sup> Site directors, the home visitor, and teachers we spoke with reported serving MLLs who speak Spanish. Although less common, site directors have had a small number of Portuguese, Chinese, Hindu, Tagalog, Creole, Arabic, and/or Turkish MLLs in their program. Four of the five parents had Spanish English-speaking children (preschool- and kindergarten-age children), and one parent had two Russian-English-speaking children (first grade and fifth grade).

on the alignment with *Rhode Island's Strategic Plan for Multilingual Learner Success*,<sup>6</sup> Goals 2 and 5, and suggestions for RIDE.

The team synthesized findings across the data sources as outlined in the following sections. The findings have an important caveat: All individuals who have participated have done so voluntarily. The findings we report present a snapshot of perceptions and may not be representative of or generalizable to the state. On the other hand, the findings reveal emerging themes for consideration, supported by comments from multiple stakeholders.

## Parents' Language Goals for Their Children

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### Parents reported wanting their children to grow up to be bilingual.

All five parents who were interviewed and asked about the languages they would like their children to speak when they grow up said they would like their children to speak English and their home language (e.g., Spanish, Russian). The reasons for fostering bilingualism varied. For example, for two parents, retaining the home language was important because they preferred to communicate in that language and have family members who speak only that language. The bilingual Russian-English parent added, "Well, my parents, they don't speak English. So, if they [the parent's children] want to communicate with their grandparents, they should speak Russian." Two Spanish-speaking parents also mentioned the benefits of speaking two languages for future employment opportunities. Lastly, two other Spanish-speaking parents noted English is the preferred and most common language spoken in the United States and thus also important to learn and speak.

## Early Learning Program Priorities, Goals, and Supports to Address the Needs of MLLs

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### Improving family engagement and attending to students' social-emotional needs were two of the key goals and priorities reported by program directors.

The two site directors expressed the desire to enhance family engagement and make that an ongoing focus of their early learning programs. This is in part due to the language barriers between MLLs' parents and lead teaching staff. For example, one site director said,

Our program-wide goal this year is to enhance our practices around family engagement, especially with families who come to us speaking a language other than English, because a lot of our teachers, most of our teachers here are English speaking . . . but we're still kind of treading water with how to accomplish it.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED615849.pdf>

The two site directors also added the importance of attending to the social-emotional needs of all students in their early learning programs, including MLLs. They acknowledged that navigating school in two or more languages can be a daunting experience for young MLLs. Building MLLs' confidence in their skills and identities are key foci to address their social-emotional needs.

Other priorities the site directors shared for teachers, MLLs, and families include the following:

- building teacher capacity to serve MLLs from language backgrounds other than Spanish by equipping them with tools, strategies, and PD;
- creating rich learning environments for MLLs; and
- offering wraparound services (e.g., connecting families to resources [e.g., diapers], organizations, and other programs; parenting and child development classes).

For instance, the home visitor explained that some Spanish-speaking parents her and her staff work with fear sending their children to school at a young age, fear repercussions for receiving assistance, and fear getting involved in school because of their immigration status. In her role, she tries to explain and answer parents' questions and concerns.

### **Program directors are actively pursuing strategies to meet their intended goals and priorities for MLLs.**

The two site directors described strategies they use to improve family engagement. For example, their early learning programs use translation tools such as Duolingo and leverage the support of Spanish-speaking staff and bilingual family members. However, these site directors also reported that they would like to be able to do more to engage families. Ideas that site directors shared to improve their practices include the following:

- **Use multiple modalities to engage MLL families.** Because language between MLLs' parents and lead teaching staff is often a barrier, a site director, for example, has events for MLL families that include more visuals:

We try to invite them to activities that don't require a lot of language exchange. We want them to be confident in what they're doing . . . so when I do the big facilitation of something, I don't want it to be about me, the speaker. I need it to be about the activities so that families can come. Instructions are visual. . . . We try to push making the engagements sort of nonverbal so that everybody has the same ability to learn from it.

Through such activities, the site director has noticed MLL families meet other parents who speak the same language and create support systems: "A lot of times I find that families of same languages get to know each other quickly and use each other as sort of guides. They come together."

- **Hire teachers from diverse backgrounds.** Site directors have had success hiring bilingual and diverse support staff (e.g., teaching assistants, paraprofessionals). A site director would like to hire more qualified lead teaching staff that reflect the student population: “All of our certified teachers are White women. Like our lead certified teachers. So, it’s really a challenge to find people that are qualified, that represent the population that we serve.”
- **Include teachers in the program’s decision-making processes.** A site director reported high teacher retention in her early learning program, with both lead teachers and paraprofessionals, and attributed part of their success to involving the teaching staff in the program’s growth: “I think they are very proud of what they’ve built. They started it. As it gets better, they go, wow! . . . The program has shifted in on really supporting teachers so that they support students.”

## Supports for Teachers

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### Site directors and teachers reported receiving some MLL-related PD but that they would like to receive more.

A site director could remember only one webinar for teachers focused on MLLs:

Last year we had, I think it was a 2-hour session, a webinar around supporting multilingual learners. It was on Zoom, and there was probably about 200 people on there. And I could see the teachers kind of zoning out. We watched it on a TV together.

For teachers in another early learning program, an MLL director provided a training on the WIDA standards even though there is no expectation for teachers to use the standards.

Of the four teachers interviewed, only a family child care home provider mentioned taking PD focused on supporting MLLs. The family child care home provider had taken a workshop years ago and vaguely recalled learning strategies, such as asking the parent of an MLL student to give the provider common words that they would need to communicate with the child (e.g., bathroom, hungry, lunch). The other three teachers (a family child care home provider, a RI PreK teacher, and a district PreK teacher) described taking courses and/or trainings on topics such as individualized learning and behavior management, but not specific to MLLs.

When teachers were asked about the PD they would like to receive to support MLLs, they expressed interest in receiving training on best practices for teaching diverse language learners when teachers do not speak the language of students and on strategies focused on language and literacy development and PD that integrates content and diverse learners. For example, a RI PreK teacher said,

There should be a portion of it [training] where we talk about students who might have disabilities, like students who use different languages, it should just be part of it. So it's integrated, so it's not so separate . . . instead of it just being like, you have to go off and do a training completely separate. That doesn't feel fair to me. It doesn't feel inclusive, but it hasn't been included for the most part, and it needs to be going forward.

Site directors and the home visitor discussed the following additional supports they would like for teachers:

- **Hire additional MLL experts to provide ongoing support.** Teachers who have received support from an MLL coordinator have liked having someone they could reach out to with questions. A site director recommended expanding the pool of MLL experts by funding the TESOL certification for teachers in the RI PreK program because the certification is currently not financially feasible for some teachers.
- **Provide coaching.** Site directors expressed that, through coaching, teachers can receive targeted support in the areas of most need.
- **Create a self-reflection tool.** Site directors and teachers could use a tool with detailed actions to self-assess their practices with MLLs and track their progress.
- **Offer PD on cultural competence.** Participants also recommended more PD sessions to support staff members' cultural responsiveness and multicultural awareness. Staff often engage with families from diverse cultural backgrounds, and one participant said they would like staff to understand, for example, why some parents or caregivers might not read to their children when they are little (e.g., parents do not have the resources), and this participant would like staff to take the appropriate course of action (e.g., talk with parents about the importance of reading and fostering the home language).

The following sections describe teachers' accounts of the instructional strategies they use to support MLLs in the classroom and engage with MLLs' families. Parent findings are also embedded throughout.

## Instructional Practices

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### Teachers use promising instructional practices to support MLLs in the classroom.

Three of the four teachers (family child care home provider, RI PreK teacher, and district PreK teacher) reported using visual aids and props to support students with developing language. For example, one teacher uses visuals and labels in English and Spanish to help students remember tasks:

I have visual schedules with photographs. I have pictures in every center. I've got photos of things that they can build [in the block center], and the words are in English and Spanish. I use a ton of visuals because I have a diverse class of students, and I feel like it helps everybody be more successful in the room.

These teachers also supported the children's home languages by

- reading to MLLs in both English and Spanish,
- sending learning activities home for parents to do with their children in both languages,
- switching from one language to the other as a scaffolding strategy during one-on-one activities,
- using Google translate, and
- incorporating music and songs.

### High-quality bilingual books are the most common materials teachers would like to receive and incorporate into their classroom spaces.

For example, a RI PreK teacher and two family child care home providers said that finding high-quality bilingual books and materials, including in languages other than English and Spanish, is challenging. An added challenge for some teachers is not being able to read and/or support students' home languages when they themselves do not always speak students' home languages. A teacher suggested having audiobooks available in students' home languages to help with the language barrier:

More books on tape so children can hear their native language in the classroom. I know I've tried to have families in the past make recordings of reading a favorite book in their language, but I feel like more books.

Other materials and resources mentioned by teachers include more visuals of culturally diverse families that they can add on their classroom walls, authentic multicultural toys, and tablets.

## **PARENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORTS FOR MLLS**

### **Parents feel MLLs' home languages are supported inside and outside of the classroom.**

Four of five parents stated English, and some Spanish are the languages used in their children's classrooms for instruction. According to these parents, the lead teacher speaks English, and the teaching assistant, who speaks Spanish, provides the support to Spanish-speaking and Spanish-English-speaking students. A few parents had a general understanding of the instructional practices used in the classroom to foster the home language (e.g., reading, learning the alphabet, singing songs, assessing in a student's home language and English). Three parents added that the school sends home activities or worksheets in students' home languages (e.g., Spanish, Russian).

### **Parents are satisfied with their children's programs and services, and recommendations to improve services varied.**

Most parents expressed liking their children's programs for reasons such as getting updates about the type of work their children are doing in the classrooms via parent apps, teachers' responses to children's emotional needs, and teachers' attempts to foster bilingualism. Parents provided recommendations to improve services, which are tied to the goals they have for their children's learning (e.g., more school and home activities for students to practice their English language skills, more individualized attention, fostering bilingualism at a younger age).

## **Family and Community Service Engagement**

### **Parents learned about early learning programs primarily through social service providers and flyers.**

Parents were asked how they learned about their children's early learning programs, and almost half of the parents mentioned learning about them from the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and home visitors. One parent explained the positive experience she had with the Head Start program she was connected with:

When I was first introduced to Head Start, I was here [in this country], what, a year? Maybe less than 2 years. I just had a baby, my first child, and I had no family around. None. . . And when I had that home visitor from Head Start coming, that was the first time I was able to leave my 6-month baby with someone in another room and go to kitchen and drink my coffee while it was still hot. . . All those wrapped up services that we talked about, I had no idea they existed. . . Head Start was my support system.



Two additional parents learned about their children’s early learning programs through a flyer they received from the school and posted in the community, as well as from friends. In fact, the site directors we interviewed mentioned posting flyers in places like doctors’ offices. Also, partnering with community agencies was a key strategy they used for families to learn about their programs.

Parents’ decisions to enroll their children in early learning programs was with the goal of continuing to foster their children’s social and/or academic development. For instance, one parent enrolled her children in the Head Start program because she witnessed how much they were learning at home with her support and how much more they could learn if they were enrolled in a program:

*Yo sabía que después de la pandemia, lo ideal para ellos [los niños] como estaban pequeños era salir y conocer amiguitos y poder aprender más de lo que yo les había enseñado. [I knew that after the pandemic, the ideal thing for them [children], since they were little, was to go out and meet friends and be able to learn more than what I had taught them.]*

### **Overall, parents did not have worries about enrolling their children in an early learning program or sharing information about the languages spoken at home.**

Most of the parents interviewed did not express any concerns about enrolling their children in a preschool, PreK, or Head Start program. One parent did express feeling uneasy about her child’s safety and well-being at school (e.g., injuries, eating habits, bullying) but thought it was best the child get acclimated to school routines and procedures at a young age.

All five parents mentioned they were comfortable sharing information with their children’s early learning programs about the languages spoken at home. In fact, two parents described disclosing the information directly to teachers at the beginning of the school year. Through these conversations, parents learned about the types of supports their children would receive in the classroom. For example, one parent learned the classroom had an assistant who spoke Spanish and could provide support to her child as needed:

*Ellas me comentaron que siempre había como que esta tercera persona [asistente de enseñanza] que también habla español. Pues no, no tuve mayor preocupación. [They told me that there was always like this third person [teaching assistant] who also speaks Spanish. I didn’t have any major concerns.]*

One parent said it was important for the teacher to know details about the languages spoken by her and her husband and her child’s comfort level speaking English and Spanish to help the teacher understand her child’s participation in the classroom. One parent added that disclosing her limited English skills was an embarrassing and intimidating experience for her as a parent:

*A veces uno no se siente cómodo. Porque pues uno no entiende muy bien el inglés. Entonces, hasta cierto punto, a nosotros como padres, digamos, nos da un poco de pena, como ir a las reuniones, como compartir con los demás papás, porque dependiendo del área donde tú vives, en su mayoría son americanos en su mayoría son morenos. Casi no hay hispanos. Entonces a veces toca que compartir con los papás y hay cosas que uno como que, hay mejor hablen en español. [Sometimes you don't feel comfortable. Because one doesn't understand English very well. So, to a certain extent, we as parents, let's say, feel a little embarrassed, like going to meetings, like sharing with other parents, because depending on the area where one lives, Americans are the majority, Black people are the majority. There's really no Hispanics. So sometimes we have to share with parents and there are sometimes you wish they speak Spanish.]*

### **Teachers use various approaches to communicate with MLL families about their children's progress and program activities and events.**

Apps like Bloomz and Kinvo, newsletters, and in-person contact with families are the most prevalent ways teachers share information with families. The apps have a two-way translation feature that allows families to select their language of choice. Teachers recognize that translating materials, such as newsletters, for example, into languages other than English and Spanish is challenging. Instead, teachers communicate with the parent or caregiver who speaks the best English; however, it is not always clear to teachers what each parent's level of understanding is.

Other methods of communication include bulletin boards, sending notes home, placing information at the podium where parents sign in, and speaking over the phone with an interpreter, if needed.

#### **PARENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON COMMUNICATION WITH SCHOOLS**

##### **Parents reported communicating with schools in more than one way and in the language of their choice.**

Similar to teachers' reports, more than half of the parents reported communicating with teachers and learning about their children's learning and school events (e.g., early release days, no school days) through apps like ClassDojo and ParentSquare. Emails, text messages, handouts, bulletin boards, and phone calls are other ways in which parents learned about their children's learning and/or school events.

All parents accessed information in the language of their choice (e.g., English, Spanish). ParentSquare and ClassDojo, for example, have a translation feature that allows parents to select the language they would like the information translated into.

It was uncommon, however, for parents to receive information about the benefits of multilingualism and how to foster the home language. Two parents received some information from their children's Head Start program, but one parent added that she received "a little [information] but not really hands on . . . more of theoretical, I guess."

### **Parents did not consider communication with their children's schools as a barrier or challenge.**

Parents attributed their satisfaction to having information accessible in the language of their choice and staff who speak Spanish, for example, and can communicate with them directly when they have questions or concerns. In fact, all parents felt welcome at their children's schools. They referred to the staff as kind, friendly, and welcoming. One parent noted being treated equally as other parents: "*Eso es lo que me encanta de los programas . . . a todos los tratan igual*" ["That's what I love about the program I was part of . . . they treat everyone the same."] However, it is important to note that this may not be the experience for parents who speak a less common language.

### **Opportunities exist for MLL families to participate in their children's school activities and events, but sometimes it takes time for families to get involved.**

According to teachers, parents and/or family members most commonly visit family child care homes and PreK programs to read to children, share about their profession, and attend events. For example, a family child care home provider added, "When we did a fire safety week, we had a little girl's uncle who was a firefighter come in." This same family child care home provider has also asked families who speak a language other than English at home to share some basic words in the child's home language as an effort to bridge the student's understanding.

Teachers have learned that families appreciate the work that they do and enjoy receiving pictures and videos of their children learning in the classrooms. A RI PreK teacher added, "They want their kids to be successful and want to know that their children are doing well and they're trying. If I send work home, they take such pride in sending it back and doing it." A district PreK teacher also recognized that partnering with families helps educators get to know them and the children: "A huge benefit to have the parents on your side because they're the first people that the children are learning from. So, we're learning from the parents and they're learning from us."

Teachers (two family child care home providers and a district PreK teacher) noted it takes time for MLL families to feel comfortable being involved in their children's schools or sharing information about the languages spoken at home and by the children. For example, a RI PreK teacher described supporting families who do not always understand the information that is sent to them:

Sometimes there are times where I'll put something out or we'll have an event coming up and they won't always be able to understand. I know it was hard for families to understand what it

meant for a half day. We were having a half day, so kids would go home at 11. And I've had multiple families over the years not understand what that means and trying to point and show. So even sometimes there can be confusion . . . because that could maybe be something that they never heard of a half day before. So just being patient and taking time with those families, I always say, oh, if you just wait a minute, I'm going to talk to this other family.

## **PARENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON PARTICIPATING AND VOLUNTEERING IN THEIR CHILDREN'S SCHOOLS**

**According to parents, there have been limited opportunities to participate and volunteer in their children's classrooms and/or schools.** Parents were interviewed in late October and early November 2023, and they felt there had not been many opportunities so far to participate or volunteer in their children's preschool programs. One parent, for example, remembered participating in two events. One was a welcome event at the beginning of the year where they toured the school, and the second was a Halloween event. A second parent who had a daughter in kindergarten participated in weekly cooking classes at her daughter's school and had monthly meetings scheduled with the teacher to talk about her daughter's academic performance, including her English and Spanish development. Two parents who had not participated yet expressed interest in learning more about the different ways they can be involved, including outside work hours.

## **SCHOOLS ARE ACTIVELY PROVIDING PARENTS WITH INFORMATION ABOUT COMMUNITY SERVICES.**

Most parents said their children's schools share information about services that may be of interest to them (e.g., courses, food pantries, speech therapists). For example, one parent mentioned how wraparound services were part of the Head Start program her child attended, which is not necessarily the case once children go on to elementary school:

Within Head Start, because you had an actual family advocate that was meeting with you and they were just like, here's the information. It sort of felt like more supports. Within the school system, you're sort of on your own. They probably have something available, but you have to dig yourself. . . . And I imagine if you don't speak English, that could be hard or intimidating or just difficult.

Another parent had recently received a survey from her child's program about topics she would be interested in learning more about:

*La semana pasada, el viernes, nos dieron una encuesta a los padres de temas que nos interesaban para ellos podrían brindar esa información. Incluía información de asistencia, quizás de pagar cuentas o asistencia, y había varias opciones para seleccionar. [Last week, on Friday,*

they gave us a parent survey on topics that interested us so they could provide that information. It included information about aid, maybe paying bills or other assistance, and there were several options to select from.]

## **Teachers would like to see family workshops and informational materials for parents translated into more languages.**

When teachers were asked about the supports, guidance, or resources they need from the state to better engage with families, family workshops in languages spoken in the community and information and materials for parents translated into more languages were the two most common recommendations. For example, a district PreK teacher described the benefits of offering workshops in multiple languages:

Maybe the state could offer opportunities for families and to be able to get together and have workshops in their language that talks about what to expect for early childhood. Families could be with families who speak the similar language so that they felt like they were making connections with other people as well and really understood and be able to ask questions.

In addition, a district PreK teacher and a RI PreK teacher believe information and materials like the Rhode Island Early Learning and Development Standards should be translated into more languages to better serve the needs of more families. The district PreK teacher added,

Maybe more languages being translated when it comes to the formal papers. So, a lot of times people get left out because if they don't have it translated in, say, Arabic, how do those parents get it? Or a language that they have to rely on their child who may speak English but not fully. So maybe something like that or more ways to incorporate that into the school system.

Other suggestions include family nights at a time convenient for families, parenting classes, guidance on the benefits of children learning a second language, and how to support families when a language barrier exists between teachers and families.

## **Summary and Implications**

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Overall, the interview findings show that parents value bilingualism, early learning programs are committed to improving family engagement, and teachers are using several promising practices to support MLLs in their classrooms and to communicate with families and parents. In many ways, site directors and teachers are making great strides to support young MLLs and are actively thinking through ideas to support teacher capacity and family engagement. The picture painted by the findings

thus far, however, suggests teachers and site directors want to improve their partnerships with MLL families and learn more strategies to support MLLs in the classrooms.

The preparation of this report helped identify ways in which supports for MLLs could be improved—AIR’s analysis of documents identified ideas for improvement, and site directors, teachers, and parents articulated other ideas during interviews. Next, we provide practical recommendations for consideration.

## Recommendations

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- **Build capacity for working with MLLs.**
  - **Offer PD opportunities to support MLLs.** Create a plan of PD opportunities that aligns with teachers’ needs and suggestions. In our conversation with teachers, trainings on best practices for teaching diverse language learners when teachers do not speak the students’ languages, strategies focused on language and literacy development, and incorporating content and diverse learners are some of the ideas teachers shared.<sup>7</sup>
  - **Encourage early learning programs to create professional learning communities (PLCs).** In PLCs, teachers, teacher assistants, and paraprofessionals can collaborate to learn about existing resources, tools, and strategies to engage with diverse families and to support MLLs.<sup>8</sup>
  - **Hire and develop bilingual lead teachers.** Provide funding for teachers in RI PreK programs to get TESOL certified to expand the pool of teachers qualified to teach MLLs. Relatedly, encourage paraprofessionals and teaching assistants, who are often bilingual speakers, to pursue an early childhood educator preparation program.<sup>9</sup>
- **Develop and increase family engagement practices.**
  - **Encourage early learning programs to offer family workshops in languages spoken in the community.** Workshops can give families opportunities to engage with their children’s programs while also building their skills and relationships with other parents. In turn, programs can share the benefits of children learning a second language and how families can support their children’s home languages.<sup>10</sup>
  - **Create a teacher and parent advisory committee to gather input about decision-making processes.** The state can gather input from family child care homes, RI and district PreK and preschool programs, Head Start, and childcare programs that serve diverse learners, as well as

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<sup>7</sup> This recommendation aligns with *Rhode Island’s Strategic Plan for Multilingual Learner Success* high-leverage strategies 2.2 and 2.4 and related action steps.

<sup>8</sup> This recommendation aligns with *Rhode Island’s Strategic Plan for Multilingual Learner Success* high-leverage strategy and action step 2.4.D.

<sup>9</sup> This recommendation aligns with *Rhode Island’s Strategic Plan for Multilingual Learner Success* high-leverage strategy 2.6.

<sup>10</sup> This recommendation aligns with *Rhode Island’s Strategic Plan for Multilingual Learner Success* high-leverage strategy and action step 5.1.D.

from parents about initiatives and topics of interest, including effective family engagement strategies.<sup>11</sup>

- **Promote multilingualism.**

- **Translate information and materials for parents into more languages.** Although Spanish is the most prevalent language of MLLs in Rhode Island, languages such as Creole, Portuguese, Arabic, and Chinese are also common. Translating documents into more languages can help increase parents’ understanding of their children’s progress, school events, and announcements (e.g., early dismissal).<sup>12</sup>
- **Promote and create resources that inform parents about the benefits of multilingualism.** The parents we spoke with largely value multilingualism but seldom received information about the benefits of multilingualism. The state can promote existing resources (e.g., Colorín Colorado) and co-construct resources with parent or family engagement coordinators (e.g., strategies for supporting young students’ home language development).<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> This recommendation aligns with *Rhode Island’s Strategic Plan for Multilingual Learner Success* high-leverage strategy and action steps 5.1.A., 5.2.A., 5.4.C.

<sup>12</sup> This recommendation aligns with *Rhode Island’s Strategic Plan for Multilingual Learner Success* high-leverage strategy and action step 5.3.C.

<sup>13</sup> This recommendation aligns with *Rhode Island’s Strategic Plan for Multilingual Learner Success* high-leverage strategy and action steps 5.1.B, 5.2.C. and 5.2.D.