



To: Chair Kaiser and members of the Ways and Means Committee
From: Shamoyia Gardiner, Education Policy Director
Re: House Bill 1255: Education – Bilingual Learner Prekindergarten Grant Program
Date: March 6, 2020
Position: Support

Early access to bilingual education yields clear benefits not limited to: (1) early secondary language acquisition enables children to become native speakers of multiple languages with significantly more ease than adults experience; (2) better executive functioning, which enables brains to shift attention, multi-task, and problem-solve with more ease;¹ (3) **development of empathy for others and different perspectives, which promotes inter-cultural tolerance and harmony**; and (4) serves as a protective factor against declines in brain function like Alzheimer's disease.²

The Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education, a body whose recommendations heavily influenced the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, was tasked with making policy recommendations to create a world-class system of public education in the state. **We already live and operate in a globalized economy**, though Maryland's students are not prepared to successfully compete in it. Since 2016, the state has offered a Seal of Biliteracy for high school graduates who have attained proficiency in two or more languages, but it is difficult to find data on outcomes, specifically regarding the number of students who have been awarded the seal.

Maryland's students don't have to wait until graduation to come face-to-face with globalization, however. Jurisdictions throughout the state have seen large increases in non-native English speaker enrollment. In Baltimore county, for example, 710 of 900 newly enrolled students in the school system spoke English as a second language, if they were proficient in the language at all. If unaddressed, linguistic and cultural differences in students can become ever-widening gulfs, rife with missed connections and squandered learning opportunities. The expansion of prekindergarten offerings throughout the state presents a window through which the General Assembly could create generations of learners who are more linguistically and culturally diverse than previous generations *and* the rest of the nation. Our children's potential would cross geographic and socio-political boundaries with ease.

House Bill 1255 would establish a Bilingual Learner Prekindergarten Grant Program to: (1) assist local boards of education in implementing best practices in early bilingual education; (2) training teaching staff to deliver content to speakers of other languages;

¹ Bialystok, Ellen. *Reshaping the Mind: The Benefits of Bilingualism*. September 2011.

² Fan, et. al. *The Exposure Advantage: Early Exposure to a Multilingual Environment Promotes Effective Communication*. May 2015.

and (3) encourage the development of strong relationships between members of the school community, students, and their families and home communities. **ACY strongly urges a favorable report on this bill.**