



TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

HB1098 – Education – English Learners and Dual Language Immersion Programs – Funding and Establishment (Multilingualism Is an Asset Act)

POSITION: Support with amendments

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Date: March 7, 2023

The League of Women Voters of Maryland (LWVMD) is a nonpartisan organization that works to influence public policy through education and advocacy. LWVMD supports programs and reforms that promote equal access to quality education and ensure all students have access to research based programs. In addition, LWVMD is committed to [diversity, equity, and inclusion](#) in principle and in practice. HB1098 meets these priorities.

LWVMD supports (with amendments) HB1098 English Learners and Dual Language Immersion Programs – Funding and Establishment (Multilingualism Is an Asset Act) which provides additional funding for English Learners (EL) and establishes a process for schools to become a Dual Language Immersion School. By providing funding for all students (English learners as well as English speakers learning another language) enrolled in Dual Language Immersion Schools, it incentivizes local education agencies (LEAs) to develop dual language immersion schools. The changes to the foundation program funding weights also recognizes varying proficiency levels of EL and attempts to direct more funding to students who need more support.

Given the growth of the English Learner population and the increasing diversity of students in Maryland, there is a clear need for well-designed dual language immersion programs that recognize the varying needs of students.

This bill will support the services needed to address the learning needs of the growing population of English Learners (EL) in the state. The enrollment of English Learners in Maryland increased from 6.5% in 2013 to 11.7% in 2022. While the distribution of EL students is not evenly distributed across the state, the EL student enrollment increased in every Maryland school district. Disparities exist in learning outcomes (graduation, dropout rates, and attendance) of EL compared to their peers. On average, EL students underperform their English-speaking peers across the state.

[Empirical studies](#) show that well implemented dual language programs gradually and steadily close the achievement gap between emergent bilingual children and their monolingual English-speaking counterparts. Dual language education is widely supported by research as a highly effective additive bilingual education approach that is associated with significant academic and linguistic benefits as well as amplified sociocultural and socioemotional competencies, or what might be called 21st century skills.

In addition, dual language programs provide English speakers the opportunity to learn another language and acquire cultural competency by offering dual language learners support in both languages. Establishing implementation guidelines and regulations will provide schools and districts guidance while allowing local flexibility to develop and implement dual language programs. Linking funding to English proficiency of each EL recognizes that proficiency levels vary by directing more funding to students needing more support. The funding mechanism also incentivizes districts to adopt dual language immersion programs by providing funding for all students participating in the program.

Dual language program effectiveness depends on adequate funding and a common framework for developing and implementing them. This bill provides both.

To strengthen the bill, we suggest two amendments:

1. Include language in the bill that will ensure data integrity and incentivize language proficiency gains so that the funding weights by language proficiency is not abused or misreported.
2. Simplify the application process for dual language school certification and provide application support by the state; and assure that the application process is not overly onerous, especially for schools with fewer resources but high needs so these schools have a clear pathway for becoming a dual language immersion school.

We urge a favorable report with amendments on HB1098.