



WINOOSKI SCHOOLS

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To: Senate Committee on Education
From: TP Niroula, Bhutanese Nepali Multilingual Liaison
Kirsten Kollgaard, Director of Multilingual Learner Programs
Re: Pupil Weighting: ELL Categorical Aid Proposal
Date: February 1, 2022

Good afternoon. We are educators in the Multilingual Learner Program at the Winooski School District: TP Niroula, Bhutanese Nepali Multilingual Liaison, and Kirsten Kollgaard, the Director of Multilingual Learner Programs.

The majority of multilingual learners in the Winooski School District come to the US through the refugee resettlement process through US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI). This makes our community of multilingual learners incredibly diverse and unique. Refugee families come to the US through incredibly challenging circumstances that most who are born in the US cannot begin to comprehend. Their resiliency and bravery is astounding. These multilingual families need additional support that might not be traditionally thought of in many US public schools.

These families come to the US after long, dangerous journeys to escape persecution in their home countries. During their time in refugee camps, which oftentimes may have been over 20 years, there is typically limited access to schools. In many camps girls may have been denied access to school, and resources and staffing were minimal. These families come to the US dedicated to giving their children a better life and they know that the core of that is for them to get a good education.

Winooski School District Multilingual Liaisons

One of the most important aspects of our multilingual program is our Multilingual Liaison Team. We currently employ eight multilingual liaisons and multiple additional oncall interpreters to support the families of the almost 350 students who speak 18 different languages across the district. When multilingual families resettle at WSD, one of the biggest challenges they encounter is a language barrier when interacting with any organizations and businesses outside of their homes. Many of our families are not literate in their native language because they were denied educational opportunities as

part of the persecution they faced in their home countries. As a result, parents need a lot of support with any type of paperwork and navigating resources in their new community.

The liaisons support families and students from the very beginning, meeting with them and our multilingual intake educator to welcome them, help them register and assess their English and academic skills to figure out the appropriate placement in our system. As students settle into their new school, liaisons provide a wide variety of support to them including academic tutoring, native language & English support, behavior management and social emotional support. Some liaisons run skills groups with guidance counselors to help students adjust to US culture and build resiliency skills. Oftentimes the refugee resettlement experience has been traumatic and our students need support processing those experiences and moving forward. This work builds a sense of community for these students and makes them safe and loved and able to learn.

In addition, the adults who work with our multilingual students at WSD need to understand their students well to be able to best educate them. The liaisons provide cultural presentations to staff regularly about the culture and history of the students they work with. This education is essential for our predominantly white, US born staff to help them truly understand and connect with our students. The liaisons consult with teachers, administrators, behavior staff and others on a daily basis to ensure that students are supported and understood.

As we've added three new liaison positions this year with temporary ESSER funds, liaisons have been able to start going into mainstream classrooms more to provide cultural education to all students. They read bilingual books in their native languages and share presentations about their cultures. This work helps multilingual students feel more included and seen in their classrooms, while it also supports all students in gaining cultural competence and promoting cross-cultural understanding.

In addition to the wide variety of ways they support students, our liaisons provide critical support to our multilingual families as well. For a new multilingual family, their children's school is the place where they most consistently interact with US culture and systems outside the home. Multilingual parents often tell us that teachers are their children's second parents and that they appreciate how much teachers do to support their children. In many ways, they view the school as an extension of their family and teachers and liaisons are the people they look to for support in navigating their new community, culture and language.



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Liaisons support families with school related paperwork and other paperwork that is essential to our students having their basic needs met, which enables them to come to school ready to learn. Liaisons work tirelessly each day to sign up students for school activities, field trips, summer camps, afterschool, athletics, the school based health clinic and dental programs.

Additionally, during the COVID pandemic, the needs of our multilingual families increased substantially. The ongoing shifts in testing and quarantining policy need to be shared out with our school community in different languages by the liaisons. Families have ongoing questions and concerns that we need to address. In addition to their regular work the liaisons have become COVID experts for the community, addressing all types of questions and concerns and regularly translated and recording voice message and video updates to their language communities.

Family Engagement

Our multilingual teachers and liaisons also support students with figuring out scholarships for summer camps, running summer programming, or volunteering to register and drive students to community based sports leagues. Without these supports many multilingual students would be left out of any non-essential programming, as their parents do not have the language, literacy and advocacy skills to navigate the complex systems we often take for granted.

Learning US systems is something that we at WSD work hard to support families with so they can be more independent and better advocate for their children. This year we added several new positions with the temporary ESSER funds in order to more adequately support our students and families. One of these positions is our Multilingual Learner Intake and Family Engagement Educator, who has greatly improved our intake process and our family engagement work. Working in partnership with the liaisons, this teacher has been able to offer parents English classes, technology classes and monthly workshops on a range of topics that address the complex educational system in the US. In these interpreted workshops, families are learning about Winooski's proficiency based learning system, the college admissions process, financial aid, the state's early college program, different technical and career pathway programs, summer camp and

job opportunities for students and many other resources that are more accessible to native born English speakers. Culturally, these systems are dramatically different from the ones in many of our multilingual families' native countries, so they need support in navigating them and need multiple opportunities to engage with learning about them. Already we have seen many of these families show increased engagement and understanding as a result of these workshops and classes. The complexities of these systems along with the differences in culture and language, means that it takes a lot more time and people to support multilingual families with navigating these systems. We need more guidance counselors and liaisons to provide adequate support to these students.

Winooski's Multilingual Learner Programs

Information about WSD's ML student numbers and programming is laid out in the attached PowerPoint presentation.

ESSER Funded Positions

We are currently funding three new Multilingual Liaison positions and three new Multilingual Teacher positions this year with temporary ESSER funds:

- 1.0 FTE Somali/Mai Mai Speaking Liaison
- 1.0 FTE Nepali Speaking Liaison
- 1.0 FTE Swahili/French/Kirundi Speaking Liaisons
- 1.0 FTE JFK Elementary Multilingual Teacher
- 1.0 FTE Multilingual Learner Intake & Family Engagement Educator
- 1.0 FTE Multilingual Learner Middle High School Math Teacher

We took a giant chance in adding these positions with temporary funds, but we knew they were necessary in order to continue developing a strong, supportive program for our multilingual students. Over the past decade we have built a strong program by adding several locally funded ML liaison and teaching positions at a pace the taxpayers could support. To adequately support the needs of our community we need these additional positions to build capacity and reduce extremely high caseloads.

If the pupil weights are not adjusted we may have to cut some or all of these positions, increasing caseloads and disadvantaging students and families who are currently benefiting from better support.



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Concerns About Categorical Aid

Winooski School District has a demonstrated track record and commitment to creating inclusive educational programs that are responsive to all of our students' needs. We are a district that has always focused on our students and thought outside the box to come up with innovative, locally-funded programming. We take a whole school approach to budgeting and developing programming. Examples of that are our commitment to funding year round bussing and expanding our pre K program in next year's school budget. These are programs that our multilingual families have advocated for, but they will also support all of our students and families.

Adjusting the pupil weights allows for maximum flexibility in how we use funds to support all of our students, and to build the inclusive programming our students need. Categorical aid can lead to unnecessary siloing of students, as those funds are only allowed to be spent on "EL" students.

An example of categorical aid that proves challenging is the Refugee School Impact Grant that we receive from the Vermont Agency of Human Services each year. This grant is inconsistent year-to-year, as it's based on the number of refugee students we have each year and can vary dramatically based on external geo-political forces, making it hard to sustain long term programming. Additionally, in the past this categorical aid had a stipulation that it could not be used to serve any student who had been in the US longer than exactly three years. Trying to create programming for only the students who fit this criteria was challenging because it disregarded student need and left out a significant number of children who could have benefitted from those programs, but had been in the US "too long" to qualify.

We hope you will consider our testimony and adjust the pupil weights to adequately fund school districts with Multilingual Learners, so we can develop equitable & inclusive programs that have strong outcomes for all of our students.

Thank you.