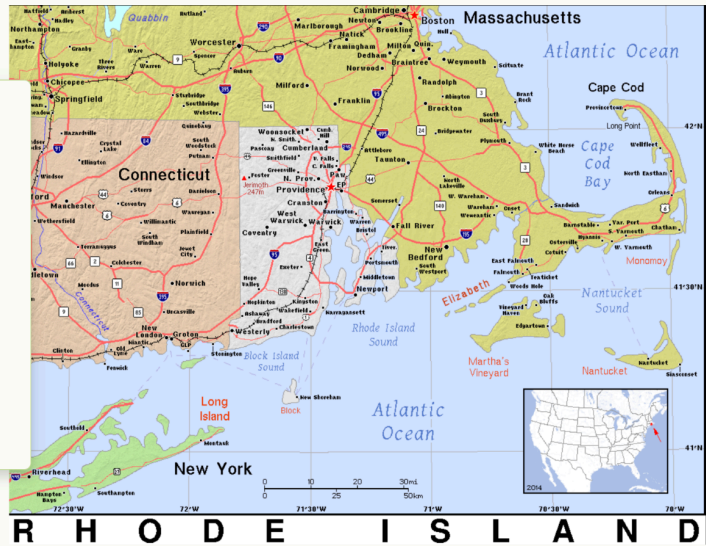


Bilingual Roots, Thriving Communities

Exploring where and how
Spanish/English Bilingualism
is thriving in Rhode Island

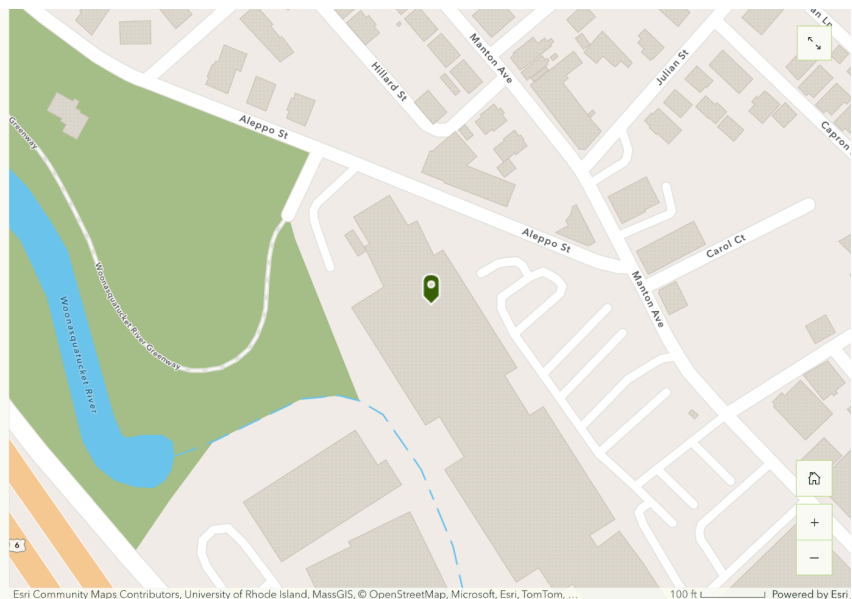
July 15, 2025



Everywhere across Rhode Island,
there are hubs of culture and
bilingualism. Whether it be in...

- **early childhood education**
- **environmental education**
- **community hubs**
- or more,

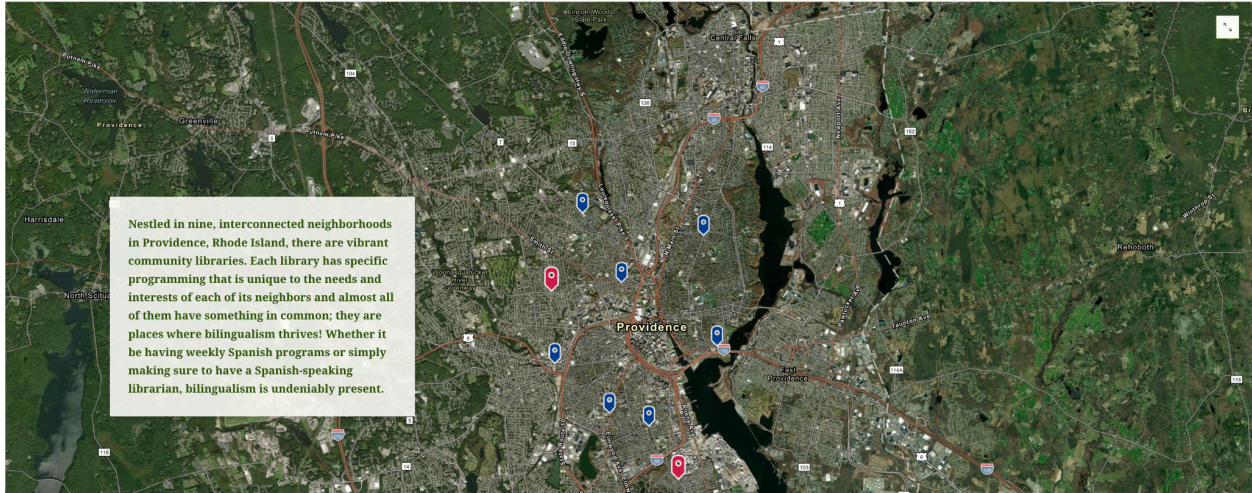
Bilingualism is thriving all around
us. Language is ever flowing, but
our rich, historic communities are
place based. This map highlights
places and organizations across
Rhode Island where
English/Spanish bilingualism and
community are one.



Esri Community Maps Contributors, University of Rhode Island, MassGIS, © OpenStreetMap, Microsoft, Esri, TomTom, ...

100 ft | Powered by Esri

Bilingualism in Libraries and Early Childhood Education



All community libraries have rich collections of Spanish books and novels, and many of those collections include bilingual and Spanish children's book! Oftentimes, there is a whole section for Spanish and bilingual books within the children's books area! These collections are popular, as they include anything from simple board books to longer, more elaborate stories suited for elementary school children. For the many parents and families in Rhode Island that have Spanish as a primary language, these bilingual book collections at the libraries are an excellent resource. Also, parents and families who are interested in teaching their children to be bilingual and speak Spanish may greatly benefit from these book collections.



Hora de Cuentos Bilingües en la biblioteca de Mt. Pleasant



Colección de libros bilingües en Washington Park

Regardless of who is checking out bilingual children's books or their reasons for doing so, they are all coming together to benefit from the richness that bilingual education offers. Studies have shown that children who maintain bilingualism at a young age have positive correlations with cognitive and socio-emotional development, as well as school readiness. With that, it is impossible to ignore the importance of reading bilingual stories to children and giving them the chance to reap the benefits of bilingualism as early as possible.



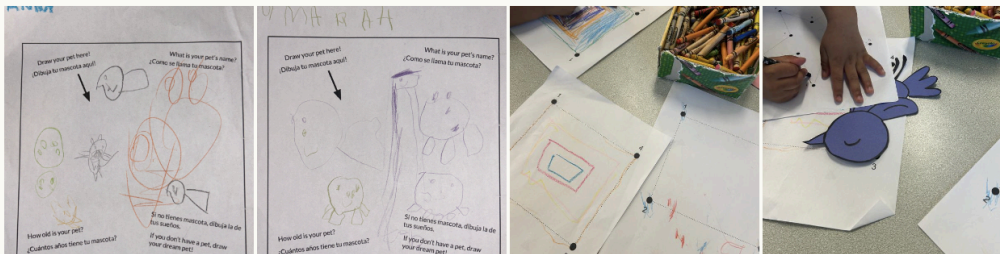
“The way that language can mean so many different things in both languages and it just gives you a richer understanding of the concept”

Lucrecia Mendez, Bilingual Outreach and Family Engagement Coordinator at Providence Promise

Many libraries also complement their bilingual and Spanish children’s book collections with bilingual story hours. For example, Washington Park Community Library has **weekly bilingual story hours** with Ms. Kaia, a kind and wonderful bilingual librarian! This summer, Paola Chapilliquen, a student from Brown University, was able to volunteer and see how early childhood education and bilingualism interacted during story times at the libraries. At Washington Park community library, Paola worked with Ms. Kaia and at Mount Pleasant, Paola worked with Youth Service librarians Ms. Karina and Ms. Jennifer.



Colección de libros bilingües en Washington Park



Actividades bilingües fueron creadas para complementar los libros leídos durante las horas de cuentos bilingües.

In addition to bilingual story hours, Washington Park and Mount Pleasant Community libraries have bilingual book repositories. Highlighting about 30 books total, the repository was created to serve as a guide for parents and families to read to their children in Spanish. Whether parents are fluent in Spanish and want to continue teaching their children or are looking to learn Spanish and also teach their children, the repository is meant for anyone and anyone who wishes to interact with bilingualism on a deeper level.



Página de Inicio del Repositorio Bilingüe de Mount Pleasant

Especially in early childhood, it is important for parents to read to their children and explain events or plots that may have happened. As a result, each book featured in the repository has 5 discussion questions for parents, families, and loved ones to ask the children later in the day. The questions are in English and Spanish and are meant to stimulate reasoning related to reading comprehension, memory recall, and broader cognitive development. Some of the books in the repository also have activities or songs attached in addition to the discussion questions.

[Washington Park Book Repository](#)

[Mt. Pleasant Book Repository](#)

Bilingualism is thriving not only in the library sector of early childhood education but also in organizations dedicated to educational equity, such as Providence Promise.

Providence Promise is an organization that supports Providence Public and Charter School students by promoting college goals, advocating for college savings accounts, boosting financial literacy, involving families, and easing the cost of higher education.



Lucrecia Mendez, Bilingual Outreach and Family Engagement Coordinator, leads many events and initiatives within the organization. She is a beloved community member and a paragon for the benefits of bilingualism. In an interview, Lucrecia shared how bilingualism is vital to her work at Providence Promise, as she has seen that her ability to communicate with parents and families in their native language makes them feel more comfortable and at ease.



Cuando le preguntamos a Lucrecia cómo ella siente que el bilingüismo profundiza su sentido de comunidad, esta fue su respuesta.

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There was no, there was no bridge before... Now there's so many options. I think it can only improve our relationships, our community, economy, you know it can only empower us to being able to understand."

Lucrecia Mendez, Bilingual Outreach and Family Engagement Coordinator at Providence Promise

Overall, bilingualism plays an immense role in Providence's early childhood education experience. Librarians, community leaders, and children themselves are all working together to communicate and understand each other. Bilingualism is thriving in libraries, daycares, before and after school programs, and much more. This upcoming generation is showing their communities that bilingualism is central to their education, culture, and sense of self. Although Spanish has been the main language highlighted, it is important to know that Providence is home to many other languages. Bilingualism, regardless of the languages, is a practice and means of connection between education and most importantly, between generations.



Bilingualism in Environmental Education



WOONASQUATUCKET RIVER WATERSHED COUNCIL

The Woonasquatucket River played a prominent role in the industrialization of Rhode Island, powering textile mills and fueling technological innovations that helped shape the nation's economy. Yet, as the industrial era waned, the river became neglected, its once-thriving banks marred by abandoned factories, polluted sites, and environmental degradation.

Central to the Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council's (WRWC) vision is the creation of thriving, vibrant spaces where people and nature coexist harmoniously. The Greenway project is a direct manifestation of this vision, transforming the once-neglected riverfront into an accessible and adored public resource. But WRWC's work extends beyond environmental restoration to include social engagement and community empowerment.

The organization champions initiatives like the **Nuevas Voces and Campeones del Combate Climático leadership programs**, which provide local residents with the tools, knowledge, and networks to become active stewards of their communities. The integration of community action programs like these, alongside the development of public green spaces, positions the Woonasquatucket River as a symbol of resilience, uniting the area's rich history with its robust future.

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"A través del programa aprendí que la resiliencia es la capacidad de nosotros como comunidad adaptarnos y recuperarnos de alguna adversidad"

Laimily Nuñez, Nuevas Voces Participant



El Hombre Araña se une al Consejo de Cuenca del Río Woonasquatucket en su caminata por Riverside Park.

In the image to the left, the following is clear: people, and dog alike, smile and surround 02908's only friendly neighborhood Spider-Man. Except, there is not a Tom Holland or Andrew Garfield behind the red, black, and white webbed mask. Instead, it is your local politician, RI State Representative David Morales, serving the seventh district in the arachnoid armor. He took on this secondary—but of primary importance—position by choice, often to cheer children at library readings and apparently, to surprise them at María José's Caminata.

The event was developed by the WRWC Community Action team, consisting of David Morales as the Community Action Director, Nicole Wright as the

TerraCorps Community Engagement Coordinator, Haley Essington as the Community Resilience Liaison, Jenny Mercado as the Olneyville Resilience Hub Liaison, Sayda Arriaza as the Nuevas Voces Co-Facilitator, and María José Gutierrez as the other Nuevas Voces Co-Facilitator. Natalia López joined the team this summer as a student intern, hoping to learn more about their bilingual team's efforts.

A typical event at WRWC convenes the community, often with the help of food, friends, and facilitated fun—this time, shiny medals were part of the equation. The idea emerged from letting participants of previous WRWC programs show their leadership skills. María José and Sayda graduated from the Nuevas Voces programs, and were hoping to give back to the community. Sayda held a yoga event the week prior, inviting people from all ages to Riverside Park to reminisce about their childhood and trees through poses.



El equipo de WRWC, en playeras parecidas de azul marino, le sirve fruta a los maravillosos caminantes.

Having been a tour guide in Bolivia, while also deeply loving conversing with people, it was only natural for María José to lead a walk in Spanish, showcasing the Woonasquatucket River Greenway project—a principal part of the organization's revitalization efforts. Enticed by this walk were people of all ages and backgrounds. The WRWC Community Action Team expected mostly Spanish speakers to attend but were pleasantly surprised to see that emerging bilinguals in English and Spanish, particularly those who were just beginning to learn Spanish, showed up. WRWC hosts many bilingual events that can range from lessons about the environment, kayaking in the river, and simply, walking around in the park. It's a wonderful place to learn Spanish, and perhaps, to meet friendly neighbors, including a particular red. blue. and white one.



Las imágenes de arte, alegría y amor son comunes en los espacios dominados por WRWC. Ilustrado arriba son tres sitios centrales donde se encuentra WRWC y donde el bilingüismo está prosperando.

One thing you will find in many WRWC spaces is, of course, the color green and their love for plants.

La Oficina	La Vía Verde	El Jardín Comunitario Joslin
<p>In the office, someone labeled regular objects in Spanish and English. A pot with pink flowers illustrates the essence of WRWC: fluorescent flora, tilted towards the sun for light, blooming with black text in Spanish and English. Bilingualism is thriving, making space for all living organisms.</p>	<p>In the second image, alongside the previously mentioned Greenway, there are many beautiful artworks to see—each a reminder to stop for a second, catch a breath, and bask in the breeze alongside the seven miles of the urban bike path. This trash can is a bright aqua color, covered in green stems and pink petals. In dark bold letters is the phrase “Protege Tu Espacio” or “Protect Your Space,” reminding passersby that nature is meant to be preserved, property of none, but a responsibility shared by all.</p>	<p>The last image is a sign painted by community members that reads “Pollinator Garden.” It was a community-led initiative, where WRWC was granted funds to implement garden beds in Joslin Park. As of now, the Pollinator Garden is maintained by community members. Currently in the Campeones cohort—another WRWC bilingual environmental program—Luis and Waleska are the main stewards of the garden, ensuring that plants and pollinators are protected.</p>

Spanish and English are deeply embedded throughout the Providence area, reminding residents of the vibrant multiculturalism that is prevalent. If you take a walk into the office, venture into the greenway, or stroll into the garden, you’ll see just how beautiful bilingualism can be.



RI Representante Morales, sirviendo al séptimo distrito

Representative David Morales was first elected in 2020 to serve the people of District 7 in Providence's Mount Pleasant, Valley, and Elmhurst neighborhoods.

Born September 16, 1998, he was raised by a single immigrant mother in the rural town of Soledad, CA, alongside his older sister. He graduated from Soledad High School in 2016, and two years later, he graduated from the University of California Irvine with a bachelor's in urban studies. In 2019, at age 20, he became the youngest graduate in the history of the Brown University Public Affairs master's program.

Representative Morales works at the Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council as the Director of Community Action. Outside of his legislative and job responsibilities, Representative Morales likes revealing to people that he dresses up as Spider-Man sometimes and supports multilingual education every day.



David Morales comparte su opinión sobre lo que significa estar en la vista pública, manteniendo al mismo tiempo sus conexiones culturales.

“
I always want to make a priority, as part of being in the public eye, being a good example for our community, especially for our youth: to make the youth remember that there is a lot of power in knowing your culture, knowing your language, and that power of communication will take you quite far. Not just in professional situations, but also in modes where one can create and share relationships; modes one can't create if they believe English is the only way to communicate.

David Morales, RI State Representative

Bilingualism in Community Hubs



¡Ven a aprender, conectarte y tomar acción junto a tus vecinos!

Olneyville Neighborhood Association (ONA), otherwise known as la Asociación de Vecinos de Olneyville, is a thriving community hub. Open to all people from the neighborhood and even beyond, ONA has continued to be a place where speakers of all languages gravitate to. ONA offers a variety of support for the community, such as Spanish literacy classes, English classes, college and career advising with a bilingual speaker, and they are always open to having people use the space to grow the community.



Una historia que comenzó en los 1990s

[ONA Website](#)

[ONA Brochure](#)



Bilingualism Through The Youth

In February of 2025, Allinson Morales, a current student at Brown University, became a member of ONA and began to offer bilingual services for college and career advising to K-12 and young adults. Throughout her time at ONA, she has become ingrained in the community as an active member who encourages students and their parents to voice their concerns and wants about their education.

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During a monthly community meeting at ONA, the college and career advising program was introduced to several parents and students. Many parents, after watching the presentation, reported how they thought it was really important to have someone to motivate their kids when it came to their education. During the Q&A portion, a parent asked if the service was solely for students or if parents were allowed. The program was meant to be open to parents of students as well, so that they would be able to understand the public school system and college process alongside their child.

A large population of Rhode Island students are Spanish speakers, and many are learning English as a second language. Moving to a new place can be challenging, and not being able to speak the local language can be even more difficult. Having a resource like an advisor who is able to speak both English and Spanish can bridge the gap between what students and parents should know and help keep students in check when it comes to the progress of

These students have shown resilience, although being placed in a system that works against them. Many students who joined the program came from Hispanic communities (Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Mexico, etc.) and were raised to speak primarily Spanish. These students struggled transitioning into a school at older ages because of their limited English speaking skills, leading teachers to think these students lack interest in their education. But throughout this program, it was clear you could see the students' personalities shine through in their native language. Many were passionate about pursuing higher education to become a nurse, mechanic, or even a professional artist.

These students have so many passions hidden inside of them that sometimes take time to express in a second language, but with the use of bilingual academic and career guidance, they began to be able to express their interests to their families, teachers, and peers. These same students continue to be members of ONA using their bilingualism to express themselves in every aspect of life.

One of the main objectives of the program was to involve the parents in the advising process and keep them updated on progress. Parents who struggled to understand English could reach out to ask for help when they needed to fill out school applications, find summer camps, and even enroll their kids in sports. The program's use of both English and Spanish helped make the process for both parents and students easier when it came to navigating the education system.

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"Mi nombre es Anna, soy la mamá de Juan. Me sentí muy bien porque pude ver cómo mi hijo le escuchaba a ella y a veces eso necesitan los jóvenes ya que están cansados de los consejos de papá y mamá . Y toman más en cuenta el consejo o la guía de alguien de afuera del hogar y es por eso que necesitamos a personas como Allinson allá afuera para que den buenos consejos."

Bilingualism Across Generations

Rosario has been a member and volunteer of the Olneyville Neighborhood Association for over twenty years, volunteering her services as "una maestra de alfabetización." Over the years, she has had students of all generations and has seen how bilingualism can connect all ages, not only through her students but through her personal life as well. Rosario has always been close to her nieces, who grew up in America, and she attributes their closeness to the language bond that they have. She taught them Spanish at home while they learned English at school, which Rosario says is the most beneficial for the youth, especially nowadays, as bilingualism becomes a tool not only for personal but professional use as well.



Una charla entre Allinson y Rosario



Rosario speaks about how her granddaughters bilingualism has helped them form stronger bonds.