

HILL REGIONAL CAREER MAGNET HIGH SCHOOL

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Dr. Madeline Negrón, Principal

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Testimony Concerning Bill Number 476, An Act Concerning the Academic Achievement Gap

Good Day Members of the Education Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on Bill Number 476, *An Act Concerning the Academic Achievement Gap*. I am Dr. Madeline Negrón, Principal of Hill Regional Career High School in the city of New Haven.

The Connecticut Bilingual Education Statute as it currently stands limits the amount of time a student may spend in bilingual education to 30 months. This limitation goes against a wealth of research on second language acquisition such as that of Jim Cummins and Virginia Collier which indicates that on average, a student will require at least five years to attain grade level competency on academic aspects of English proficiency. This statute forces English Language Learners (ELLs), whether ready or not, to exit the bilingual program only mandating that districts provide language transitional support services to these students. This results in ELLs having to continue acquiring proficiency in English while learning core academic content in mainstream classrooms and reaching mastery on high stakes state assessments.

The current statute also prohibits high school students with fewer than 30 months to go until graduation from receiving a program of bilingual education placing them in mainstream classrooms. In other words, should a student register in the 10th grade, he/she would be ineligible to access the services of a bilingual program. Districts are only responsible for providing intensive services to enable students to speak, write and comprehend English. Unfortunately, this is not enough to support students who in many cases were performing at grade level or above in the academic institutions while in their countries; but now have the challenge of having to acquire English proficiency while also mastering the demands of the content knowledge in various disciplines.

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It is also important to note that most mainstream classroom teachers are not sufficiently prepared to assist ELLs in learning academic content and skills through English while still developing proficiency in English. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, the majority of teachers have had little or no professional development for teaching ELLs. The scope of the problem of providing appropriate instruction for ELLs becomes greater when you consider recent statistics. The overall results from the Pew Hispanic Center's Report in 2008 confirmed that ELLs are among the groups least likely to meet state proficiency standards. This data highlights the compelling need to closely examine teacher preparation programs in their ability to equip prospective teachers with sound methodology to support ELLs.

The Connecticut State Board of Education "believes that high-quality, comprehensive and effective English as a Second Language (ESL) and bilingual education programs are essential to acquire English language proficiency and academic proficiency for students who are English language learners" as they so proclaimed in their Position Statement on the Education of Students Who Are English Language Learners in 2010. Supporting this bill would increase the amount of time a student may spend in bilingual education from 30 to 60 months, thus ensuring that ELLs receive the necessary supports needed to acquire both language and academic proficiency. We must demand the very best for all students in our state, including our English Language Learners. I urge you to support this bill.

Thank you.

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