

HEALL Testimony

TO: The Education Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly
 FROM: Higher Education Advocates for Language Learners (HEALL)
 RE: S.B. No 476 (Raised) “An Act Concerning the Academic Achievement Gap”
 DATE: 3/17/14

As university faculty members whose work focuses on the education of emergent bilingual students, we are concerned about the persistent achievement gap for English language learners in Connecticut. We are encouraged by recent conversations within the state to address this problem by increasing the time limit for bilingual instruction from 30 months to 60 months. We endorse this proposed change, as every meta-analysis of research on language of instruction has concluded that bilingual instruction results in enhanced academic performance for English language learners (Francis, Lesaux & August, 2006; Greene, 1998; Rolstad, Mahoney & Glass, 2005; Slavin & Cheung, 2005; Willig, 1985). Moreover, the sustained use of both the native language and English for instruction is crucial in light of research indicating that it can take up to 7 years to develop full academic proficiency in a second language (Hakuta, Goto Butler, & Witt, 2000). Given the implementation of the Common Core State Standards, which have raised the expectations for academic language use in the classroom considerably, attention to forms of education that promote academic language development is more essential than ever. As a result, we advocate not only for extending the time limit for native language instruction, but also for ensuring that districts across the state implement robust forms of bilingual education that are characterized by features such as sustained instruction through both English and the home language, highly trained teachers and administrators, strong parental involvement, and culturally relevant pedagogical materials (Brisk, 2006; García & Kleifgen, 2010). Together with colleagues at our respective institutions of higher education, the faculty members comprising HEALL have been engaged in sustained efforts to prepare teachers and administrators to work effectively with English language learners, to carry out research to learn more about effective practices for these students, and to deliver technical assistance to districts and schools. We welcome future opportunities to work collectively with policymakers and practitioners across the state to implement high quality educational programs for emergent bilingual students.

Higher Education Advocates for Language Learners (HEALL):

- Dr. Elizabeth Howard, University of Connecticut (Chair)
- Dr. Ann Anderberg, Eastern Connecticut State University
- Dr. Anne Campbell, Fairfield University
- Dr. Matt Ciscel, Central Connecticut State University
- Dr. Andrea Dyrness, Trinity College
- Dr. Eileen González, University of St. Joseph
- Dr. Robin James, Western Connecticut State University
- Dr. Elena Koulidobrova, Central Connecticut State University
- Dr. Angela López-Velásquez, Southern Connecticut State University
- Dr. Regine Randall, Southern Connecticut State University
- Dr. Laura Reynolds, Southern Connecticut State University
- Dr. Elena Schmitt, Southern Connecticut State University
- Dr. Enrique Sepulveda, University of St. Joseph
- Dr. Lorrie Verplaetse, Southern Connecticut State University
- Dr. Manuela Wagner, University of Connecticut

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