

Testimony of Dr. Jacob Werblow
Before the Education Committee

In Support of HB6835 AN ACT CONCERNING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

Submitted by
Jacob Werblow, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Teacher Education
280 Stanwood Dr. New Britain, CT
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Dear Representatives Fleischmann and Slossberg, and other distinguished members of the committee,

I am writing to support and strengthen HB6835. I believe this bill has promise to help all children, especially English Language learners in CT's schools. First, requiring districts to provide bilingual education when there are six or more eligible students will help ensure that more EL students receive proper bilingual services. Currently, the requirement is 20 subjective and clearly leaves many children without being promised to receive any language services across our state.

Second, expanding Bilingual programs from 30 to 60 months is more in alignment with the science behind how children actually learn language (language acquisition research), which consistently finds that second language fluency takes 5-7 years. 30 months was never research based and has resulted in thousands of CT children being thrown into mainstream classes w/out any supports.

Third, we support the requirement for local districts to evaluate the quality of their language programs. This could have avoided the currently U.S. Civil Rights investigation of NB schools for implementing a language program that does not have any empirical support.

What should be added to strengthen the Bill:

1. EL students should not be required to take high-stakes standardized tests for the first three years. If there is a requirement to assess them, that should be done in their native language. The current testing mandate is symbolic of the larger school reform perspective, which largely treats ELs as a deficit as all CT schools enrolling mostly EL learners are automatically 'failing' because their native language is not valued, yet our students will be entering into a globalized economy..
2. Stronger language around supporting Dual Language models as these models are consistently found to be the best way to educate ELs as they create racially integrated classrooms (and schools), where both languages are valued, and both groups of students reach fluency in both languages. The current legislation says that (line 91) - "Each local and regional board of education that is required to 91 provide a program of bilingual education pursuant to this section shall 92 investigate the feasibility of establishing two-way language programs starting in kindergarten." - However, it's not clear if any districts are being required to follow through on that..And if so, how could DiLoreto's dual language program (in New Britain) could have been so easily terminated?

