



*Written Testimony of the*

***Connecticut Education Association***

**Connecticut Education**

**Association**

*Before the*

*Education Committee*

**Governance**

Sheila Cohen, President

Jeff Leake, Vice President

Pat Jordan, Secretary

Thomas Nicholas, Treasurer

John Horrigan, NEA Director

Gary Peluchette, NEA Director

**Re: HB 6835, An Act Concerning English Language Learners**

*February 25, 2015*

CEA represents 43,000 active and retired teachers across the state, many of whom are teachers of English as a second language, or teachers of bilingual education. We submit this testimony in support of HB 6835 An Act Concerning English Language Learners.

**Executive Office**

Mark Waxenberg

Executive Director

We believe that providing bilingual education for students who come from homes where English is not the primary language is crucial (English Language Learners, or ELL). We applaud this committee for considering extending the amount of time students may be provided with bilingual education from thirty to sixty months. However, we lend our support with two strong caveats.

**Policy, Research & Reform**

Dr. Linette Branham, Director

First, we believe that the provision requiring school boards to apply to use certified teachers of English as a second language (TESOL) to fill bilingual shortage areas is well intentioned, but could be improved. TESOL and bilingual teachers have very different backgrounds and roles (see background section below). TESOL programs teach ELL students how to speak English. Bilingual teachers teach subject matter in a student's native, non-English language. Consequently, they are not interchangeable.

We recommend that this provision in HB6835 be amended to provide TESOL teachers, tapped for bilingual teaching assignments, suitable professional development to help them succeed in the bilingual instructor role.

Second, since HB 6835 would require districts to apply for the flexibility to use TESOL certificate holders in place of bilingual instructors, CEA is also concerned that TESOL teachers might be involuntarily transferred into positions for which they are not trained or adequately prepared. Because of this, CEA recommends the inclusion of language that prevents TESOL certification holders from being placed into bilingual teaching assignments involuntarily.

## **Background on TESOL and Bilingual Teacher Roles**

For the purpose of clarification, Bilingual Education and TESOL are very different and require separate certifications because:

- Bilingual teachers teach specific subject content to students, and are required to possess double majors—one in a specific content area, and one in bilingual education—whereas ELL teachers focus on teaching their students how to speak English.
- Bilingual teachers are required by certification regulations to speak and write in the native language of the students they teach, as demonstrated by a series of national exams; ELL teachers do not have these requirements.

In some districts there are so many native languages spoken, it is not possible for a TESOL teacher to take the place of a bilingual teacher. For example, in Bridgeport alone, families speak 69 languages in their homes other than English.<sup>1</sup> The chances that TESOL teachers have the specific foreign language fluency to serve in bilingual roles (i.e. to teach subject matter in a child's native foreign language) are slim. This is one example of why Connecticut TESOL certification regulations only permit the certificate holder to teach the English component of bilingual education at both the elementary and secondary levels.<sup>2</sup>

In summation, CEA supports the extension of bilingual programs to ensure students have ample opportunity to master the subject matter and build stronger English language skills. CEA also strongly advocates for the training and professional development of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages asked to fill bilingual education positions. Our aim is to ensure that teachers serve in positions in which they can excel and, as a result, provide the best quality education for all students.

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<sup>1</sup> Connecticut Strategic School Profiles: <http://sdeportal.ct.gov/Cedar/WEB/ResearchandReports/SSPReports.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> Regulations Concerning State Educator Certificates, Permits and Authorizations, State of CT State Board of Education, 10-145d-475, p. 74