



New Haven School Change

NEW HAVEN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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TESTIMONY CONCERNING HOUSE BILL NO. 6835, AN ACT CONCERNING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS.

Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee; good day and thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill No. 6835, *An Act Concerning English Language Learners*. My name is Pedro Mendia-Landa and I am the Supervisor of Bilingual and ESL programs for New Haven Public Schools.

Districts and schools across the state are mandated to ensure that English Language Learners (ELLs) receive specialized services to meet their language and academic needs per the United States Civil Rights Act of 1964, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and the Connecticut Bilingual Statutes. I am here to explain how New Haven Public Schools is attending to the needs of our students and to advocate for additional or additive programs that can benefit all our students, while at the same time providing program options for those families who may prefer other types of programs, such as transitional bilingual education, or structured English immersion.

In the position statement on the education of students who are English Language Learners, adopted by the Connecticut State Board of Education in July 2010, the Board states the belief that high-quality, comprehensive and effective English as a second language and bilingual education programs are essential to acquire English and academic proficiency for students who are ELLs.

By increasing the number of months for bilingual education as proposed in HB 6835, this legislative body would reaffirm and strengthen the type of programs that our students deserve and need as they acquire English while accessing grade level appropriate content in their primary, English, or a combination of both languages. We urge you to take action and increase the number of months that a student is eligible to be enrolled in a bilingual program from 30 to 60 months. We also recommend that in the case of students who enroll in a secondary school when the student has fewer than 20 months before graduation that such student continues to receive bilingual services as stated on the proposed legislative changes.

However, under the current proposed formula in determining when bilingual services must be provided, the implications for small and large districts would create an undue burden, as the number of bilingual programs that a given district would need to implement, would increase exponentially. For example, in New Haven it would mean mandated bilingual services in Mandarin, Swahili, Farsi, Turkish, French, Arabic, Cantonese, Korean, and Russian at multiple schools. This proposed change would be close to impossible to implement given the current teacher shortage and the difficulty in hiring highly qualified bilingual candidates.

We ask that you consider taking into account all the research conducted on enrichment and additive models of bilingual education such as two-way immersion programs, developmental, or maintenance bilingual programs. Through these types of programs, all of our students would be able to take advantage of the benefits of becoming bilingual and have positive and long lasting cognitive and linguistic effects in the lives of our students and communities. In order to implement additive models, where all students can benefit and that integrate a culturally responsive curriculum, additional funding to address the needs of students and families is necessary.

In addition, we propose that all teachers and administrators receive professional development on

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addressing the linguistic and academic needs of language minority students; that additional funding is provided; and that all teacher prep programs require at least 6 credits on meeting the needs of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Finally, we support incentive programs and flexibility in teacher certification requirements that will increase the number of bilingual teachers who are necessary now and will be even more necessary when the number of months is increased.

As Dr. Gort states, a large and growing number of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds have the potential to develop bilingualism and biliteracy if they were to be supported in the immediate environment. In New Haven we are doing so by:

- valuing that the cultural and linguistic resources that this population possesses is an asset and not a problem that we must solve;
- aligning and formalizing the PreK to K-12 educational experiences;
- providing program options as we move from traditional subtractive models such as transitional bilingual education to additional two-way dual language programs;
- designing special programs to address the linguistic and cultural diversity of our students at the High School level, such as the International Academy at Wilbur Cross or the Sheltered English Programs; and

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. We look forward to working with you in making sure our English Language Learners succeed in our schools as well as college, career and life.

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