

HEALL Testimony

TO: Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission of the Connecticut General Assembly
FROM: Higher Education Advocates for Language Learners (HEALL)
RE: Bilingual Education in CT
DATE: 1/29/14

As university faculty members whose work focuses on the education of emergent bilingual students, we are proud to live in a state with a strong history of bilingual education and clear legislative guidelines for the implementation of bilingual programs. However, we have become increasingly concerned over the past several years as we have witnessed the ongoing dismantling of bilingual programs throughout the state, particularly in urban districts with large numbers of emergent bilingual students, such as Hartford, New Britain, and Windham.

The achievement gap for English language learners in Connecticut continues to widen (Megan, 2012), and we know that this is a concern that we share with parents, policymakers, and educators across the state, including those who have moved to limit native language instruction. However, the decision to restrict native language instruction in order to remedy this serious problem is misguided, as every meta-analysis conducted on the topic has concluded that native language instruction results in enhanced academic performance for emergent bilinguals (Francis, Lesaux & August, 2006; Greene, 1998; Rolstad, Mahoney & Glass, 2005; Slavin & Cheung, 2005; Willig, 1985). Further, states that have enacted restrictive language policies serve as compelling case studies, documenting that this approach is not effective for closing the achievement gap (Gándara & Hopkins, 2010). A more promising alternative is to provide 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). The sustained use of both languages for instruction is particularly 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.

Moving from compensatory to enriched models of bilingual education requires a shift in perspective that views bilingualism not as a liability, but rather as an asset for both the individual and society as a whole, particularly in today's global economy (Ruiz, 1984). Two-way immersion education (also known as dual language education), a form of bilingual education that provides ongoing instruction through two languages to integrated groups of English language learners and native English speakers, is one such model of enriched bilingual education that has been shown to be highly effective (Howard, Sugarman, & Christian, 2003; Lindholm-Leary & Howard, 2008). In Connecticut, two-way immersion is specifically referenced in the General Statutes, Section 10-17i, a: "**Encouragement of increased language instruction.** The Department of Education shall assist and encourage local and regional boards of education to institute two-way language programs and provide early second language instruction for English-speaking students" (http://www.cga.ct.gov/current/pub/chap_164.htm#sec_10-17a).

While it is encouraging to see explicit mention of this robust form of bilingual education in the General Statutes, it would be even more helpful if it were accompanied by resources to support its successful implementation. Marie Salazar Glowski (see testimony) of the Connecticut State Department of Education has met continuously over the past several years with two-way

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immersion educators who have been working to form a support network, but the efforts of one person with many other responsibilities are not sufficient to ensure high quality implementation of two-way immersion programs across the state. Two-way immersion educators in Connecticut have since joined forces with those in Massachusetts and Rhode Island through the leadership of the Massachusetts Association for Bilingual Education (MABE) (see testimony), resulting in annual conferences and the development of a dual language leadership network. The third annual regional conference will be held this year at Columbus Family Academy in New Haven. These self-initiated activities clearly indicate that there is a high level of motivation to improve two-way immersion education in Connecticut, and suggest that policies and resources targeting this enriched form of bilingual education would be put to good use. To that end, Connecticut could look to states such as Utah, Delaware, and North Carolina, all of which have determined that promoting bilingualism, biliteracy, and cross-cultural competence in addition to academic achievement is essential for their current students and future workforce.

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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