

Testimony in Support of Bilingual Education in Connecticut

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Distinguished Members of the Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission:

I am the Rev. Joshua Mason Pawelek, a resident of Glastonbury and the minister of the Unitarian Universalist Society: East in Manchester. Thank you for this opportunity to offer testimony in support of strengthening bilingual education in Connecticut. I offer this testimony not as a teacher, school administrator or expert in language acquisition (I am none of these things), but rather as a concerned Connecticut citizen who feels strongly that our state (and our nation) ought to take advantage of every opportunity to improve educational outcomes. Bilingual education is one such opportunity.

I find the work of Dr. Stephen Krashen, professor emeritus at the University of Southern California, very helpful in identifying the value of bilingual education. In short, Krashen's research shows that bilingual education achieves two goals. First, it helps non-English speakers learn English. How does it do this? According to Krashen, if a student "has good education in their first language, they get background knowledge, and this knowledge helps make the English they hear and read more comprehensible."<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, "developing literacy in the first language is a short cut to developing literacy in the second language." Krashen refers to this phenomenon as "literacy transfer."

The second goal bilingual education achieves is the "maintenance and development of the heritage language and an appreciation of the heritage culture."<sup>2</sup> For some this goal may seem less important than the goal of learning English. However, it is my observation that non-English speakers who are required to "give up" their first language in order to learn English risk developing a negative, even shameful view of their culture and themselves. Such negative self-appraisal can lead to low self-esteem, low expectations, lack of enthusiasm for learning and a host of other factors that may lead to poor educational outcomes. A recent *New York Times* Op Ed from Yale Law School Professors Amy Chua and Jed Rubenfeld entitled "What Drives Success?" underscores the value of cultural pride in educational and career success.<sup>3</sup> Bilingual education helps maintain cultural pride for non-English speaking students.

Whatever the alternatives to bilingual education may be, I feel strongly that Connecticut and its school districts have no business moving away from bilingual education. We know it works, so we ought to be investing more heavily in it. We ought to invest not only for the sake of our immigrant and bilingual students; but for the sake of Connecticut's future.

Respectfully submitted,



The Rev. Josh Pawelek

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<sup>1</sup> Krashen, Stephen, "Let's Tell the Public the Truth About Bilingual Education," National Association for Bilingual education, Keynote Plenary Address, Albuquerque, NM, February 7, 2004. For full text see [http://www.sdkrashen.com/content/articles/tell\\_the\\_truth.pdf](http://www.sdkrashen.com/content/articles/tell_the_truth.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Chua, Amy and Rubenfeld, Jed, "What Drives Success?" *New York Times*, Sunday, January 26, 2014. See <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/01/26/opinion/sunday/what-drives-success.html? r=0>.