

Testimony on SB 897

Special Education programs exit students from time to time. When those students are exited, the districts no longer claim them for additional ADMw. It wouldn't make sense to continue to pay districts for students who no longer receive services. Neither would it make sense to apply a blanket formula to districts limiting Special Education funding to a certain number of years for students with specific disabilities. So why would a similar approach to funding the support of English learners make sense?

Any state official who has taken the time to visit English Learner programs around the state should realize that teachers are working hard to help their students make ever-increasing gains in literacy, math and other core content areas. What they would have heard, in their conversations with those teachers, is that teachers lack time to provide the individual attention that many English learners need to make accelerated growth; that schools lack consistency in coordinating the efforts of EL specialists with the efforts of Title I, SPED and content area teachers; that districts often lack expertise in providing the specialized training needed by all staff who work directly with English Learners; and that educators everywhere need additional funding and flexibility if they are to help English learners make the equivalent of 1 ½ years' growth each year for several years in order to become academically competitive with their English-speaking peers, meet Smarter Balanced requirements for high school graduation, and earn college scholarships.

This bill appears to assume that teachers are deliberately keeping students from succeeding, in order to game the system by generating more funding. Nothing could be farther from the truth. This bill obfuscates the funding issue by offering additional money for students who no longer need it, and by failing to provide additional funds for students who do. This bill removes the flexibility that local districts must have to prepare students for success by removing additional funding for any student who fails to exit the EL program within 7 years—leaving schools the difficult decision of exiting students who are not ready, or of supporting them at the expense of other programs.

Depending on which research you choose, studies show that students take from 5 to 9 years to become academically proficient in English at grade level. Requiring **all** students to do what only **most** students can do is going to leave **some** students in the cold. Take, for example, SPED students who are legitimately learning disabled and also English learners. Such students are often most limited in the area of writing—an area in which they must demonstrate proficiency in order to graduate. The present bill would pressure schools to exit such students from the English Learner program after 7 years, in spite of students' inability to score a passing grade on either the ELPA or on Smarter Balanced. Only now, instead of receiving help from both the SPED and EL specialists, those students would only qualify for help from SPED teachers—most of whom do not have the time or training to meet the additional challenges of dual identified students. As a result of passing this misguided bill, in a few years' time we could expect to see an

increasing number of former ELs on IEPs graduating with modified diplomas.

Everyone involved in educating English learners wants to accelerate their learning. This bill offers neither the funding nor the technical support nor the flexibility that districts desperately need in order to provide that acceleration. No doubt, the supporters of this bill have excellent motives. But their premises regarding the deep-rooted problems faced by English learners and their teachers are built on misconceptions, their conclusions are at odds with research—and their proposed solutions will only create more problems. This bill is not the way forward for Oregon to either accelerate the learning or increase the graduation rate of its English learners.

Kristian Frack
EL & Migrant Program Coordinator
McMinnville School District #40
(503) 565-4010