

Members of the House Education Committee,

I am writing in support of HB 3423. I believe this bill will be a good step towards helping our most struggling English Learners to getting the support they need.

I have worked with English Language Learners in both Oregon and California since 1987. I was among the first group of teachers to obtain the newly required ESOL/Bilingual endorsement in Oregon in the early 1990s. While many ELL students come well prepared to learn, having been born in this country or having had adequate and regular schooling in their home country and an uneventful move to the US, many students come to us under much different circumstances. Many come from countries that are torn by poverty, violence, or war. Many have traumatic experiences during their journey to the United States. Many have no hope of returning ever again to their birth country. We should not expect those students to learn their second language at the same rate as students who arrive with their families intact and on solid financial footing.

Another variable in student learning is their parents' level of education. Some students have parents who are professionals who hold degrees. Some students have parents with little education who work at jobs requiring few skills for low pay. Some students have parents who come here having once held professional jobs in their home country for which they lack the language skills or certifications to hold here. Again, there are a wide variety of reasons why students learn at different rates. This bill would provide an opportunity to determine what specific supports students need to be successful in learning English by establishing plans for students according to their needs.

I also hope that the task force which would be formed by this bill would take into consideration the value for all students in retaining and improving their linguistic and literacy skills in their native languages and advocate for bilingual programs that do that whenever possible. There is great value in being bilingual, both to the bilingual individual and to our society as a whole. Bilingual citizens not only build personal and social connections with communities in other countries, but professional connections as well. It would seem to me that we should all agree that bilingualism a goal that is worth the effort and possibly extra time that it might take to achieve.

Finally, I would like to tell you about a study my district did about four years ago to try and find out why students were what we referred to as "Long Term ELLs". We, a group of teachers, principals, and district administrators, literally looked at every single child in our district who had not exited our ELD program after 6 years. Many were dual identified ELL and Special Education. These are students who had disabilities ranging from severe to mild; physical disabilities (such as the young man who was a quadriplegic as a result of a car accident) and cognitive disabilities ranging from Down syndrome to learning disabilities that made language or reading or math more difficult. And one thing we also found was that every single student came from an economically disadvantaged home. Many students spent a significant part of each school year in Mexico. One of the principals in our group made the comment that if we could just reach out to about 5 extended families with extra support, that support would affect a lot of students.

Please do not forget these most vulnerable students when planning and studying and forming committees. Please don't forget that each one of these is a child, who may have challenges you cannot even imagine.

Thank you.
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