



From The Desk Of
Rep. Gene Whisnant

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Gene Whisnant'.

June 1, 2015

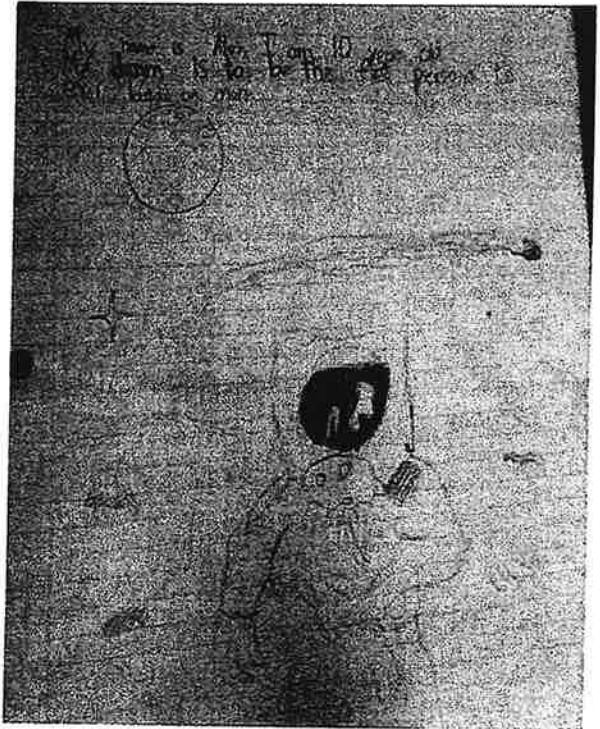
Members of the Oregon House of Representatives,

We represent a community of parents in East Multnomah County with high hopes for our children – English learners and former English learners. On behalf of the many English learners in our community, and the 57,000 English learners across the state, we thank our lawmakers for prioritizing their education in the 2015 legislative session. Today, we urge you to vote yes on HB 3499, so the many children in our community with dreams have better opportunities to reach those dreams.

Each of our stories have much in common. Sometimes we do not understand why our children are placed in English development programs. We are dissatisfied with their lack of progress. Often times we are unaware of our power as parents to remove our children from these services when they are not necessary. For example, take these two excerpts from our colleagues' testimony on HB 3499:

"I asked the school board and the superintendent of my daughter's school district how they classified children as English learners. They told me that students are classified as ELLs if their parents check the 'speak another language other than English' box in one of the school forms. This was frustrating to hear because my child, like the rest of my family, is bilingual."

"One day I found my son crying alone in his bedroom. He told me he had heard that in the future a giant meteorite would crash into earth, causing everyone's death. In consolation, I told my child that there is nothing to fear, because by then he would be an astronaut and he could use his intelligence to figure out how to destroy the meteorite and save Earth. I also told him that to achieve his dreams, he needs to work hard and never give up. That's when he raised his chin up, with his face shining in happiness, and gave me a beautiful smile. My children are not perfect, but they sure dream big. Unfortunately, I am concerned about them because in Oregon only 49% of ELL's graduate in four years. At this rate, I am afraid they will never make their dreams into reality."



Thank you for believing in the dreams of our children.



Collectively, we parents want to provide English learners across the state with a public school system that meets their needs and sets them up for success after high school. We believe in sharing best practices. We need better ways to document spending and we would like to see increased transparency and programmatic support. We also need to start implementing research-based practices that have been proven to exit students in a timely manner from ELL programs. HB 3499 is a comprehensive bill that provides more children from our community with the education they deserve, and that we've long been waiting for.

Thank you for your support,

Stand for Children Oregon Parent Leaders: Olivia Hernandez, Maria Delgado, Marcelina Torres, Ines Carrasco, Sara Garcia, Aurora Ayon, Silvia Suarez