

**Testimony for Governor Cuomo**

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While 73 percent of New York's students graduated from high school this year, a slight increase from last year, the graduation rate for our state's English language/bilingual learners (ELL) decreased slightly from 40.3 percent to 38.2 percent. The percent of ELL/bilingual learners who were deemed to be college and career ready by the Aspirational Performance Measures of ELA and Mathematics was only 6% compared to 37% statewide. These and other unacceptable results, historically the norm for this population, make the need to improve education for these, our newest students obvious and urgent.

As the NY Education Reform Commission gathers testimony and evidence from around the state, it is essential that the unique needs of the various subgroups of students be considered. At the same time, it is essential to recognize that the lines between these subgroups are fluid and that they overlap. Schools with high numbers of ELL/bilingual learners are working to educate students who may fall into almost every traditionally high-need category (e.g. Hispanic, ELL, SWD, economically disadvantaged). It is also critical to recognize that while our ELL/bilingual learners face many obstacles and present schools with challenges, they bring many gifts, talents, and resources that enrich the diversity of our schools and communities. Students who successfully attain proficiency in English, and especially those who reach maintain and enhance their native language skills, often outperform their native English speaking peers. Given these considerations, the following are some critical issues affecting the education of ELL/bilingual learners in New York State.

### **Objective 1**

**Find ways to improve teacher recruitment and performance, including the teacher evaluation system**

**Action Item** – Teacher Certification in ESL or Bilingual Education

The Governor's Commission seeks to examine factors contributing to teacher recruitment and performance. In the area of certification of teachers specially trained in ESL or bilingual education the State of New York has experienced shortages in every region of the state.

**Reasons for the shortages include:**

- Current teachers do not want to switch to another certification area and forfeit their current tenure status.
- Bilingual education teacher preparation programs in languages other than Spanish are not available in Western New York.
- There are no incentives to help promote the attainment of certification in ESL and bilingual education.

**Possible solutions include:**

- Review NYS labor laws that require teachers who change tenure areas to give up their tenure and start over in the new area.
- Offer alternative pathways to certification for speakers of different languages, including accelerated pathways for refugees and immigrants who have evidence of having been a teacher in their home country.
- Offer incentives such as a pay differential for the bilingual extension and/or stipends for teaching in bilingual and ESL programs in high-need districts and schools.

**Objective 2****Improve Student Achievement****Action Item – Increase bilingual and dual language programs statewide**

In our increasingly global society, it is essential that we prepare our students to compete with their international peers. Students in other parts of the world may be outperforming Americans in math, science and technical subjects, but they may also be excelling in English and other languages. In order to prepare our students for college and careers, we must give them the linguistic capabilities they need to compete globally. Every year, thousands of immigrants and refugees arrive in New York State schools, bringing with them their home language and often one or two or three other languages as well. We need to do more to value, preserve, and enhance these linguistic skills. In addition, we need to ensure that our native-born English speakers develop the multilingual capacities that will allow them to excel in the global market. Increasing the number and quality of bilingual and dual language programs would ensure that our great state of New York would be a leader in the global society and help us to capitalize on what has made us strong throughout our history – the diversity of our citizenry.

### **Action Item – Adopt Seal of Biliteracy**

In an effort to encourage and promote the development of more than one language the New York State legislature has passed a bill aimed at supporting biliteracy. The support of Governor Cuomo is critical for the people of our great state to internalize the value of knowing two or more languages. The linguistic capacity of our immigrant families is a treasure that should be promoted and supported. The seal of biliteracy is an important tool to carry this message forward, including recognizing the linguistic diversity that exists in communities across the state and actively rewarding the efforts of schools and students to achieve biliteracy. Lastly, it will build respect for bilingualism which is a treasured value throughout the world.

### **Action Item – Advocate for Fair and Appropriate Assessment of ELLs**

Currently, newly arrived ELL/bilingual learners are expected to take and pass the same content assessments as their native English-speaking peers and are only given a one year reprieve with regard to the English language arts assessment. Years of research on second language acquisition show that this process takes 5-7 years for students who are literate in their native language and even longer for those who are not. While demonstrating progress and requiring accountability for results is important and desirable, we must examine differentiated ways of achieving this.

Although they are lumped together in one accountability group, the ELL subgroup is actually quite diverse. These students differ in their age, level of English proficiency, native language literacy and content knowledge upon arrival. They also differ in cognitive capacity, prior experiences, economic status, and social and emotional state. Developmental milestones and expectations differ among different cultures as well. Within the ELL/bilingual learner subgroup we have new arrivals, students with limited or no formal education (SIFE), long-term ELLs who for one reason or another have not achieved proficiency despite 6 or more years of instruction, students who are also identified as having disabilities, those suffering from post traumatic stress, and a host of other differences that makes grouping them all together counterintuitive.

A differentiated accountability system that would at the least disaggregate ELL/bilingual learner data out by number of years of services and separate SIFE from other ELLs would allow schools to more accurately use data for program development and instructional planning and provide for a more equitable accountability system for schools and educators.

## **Action Item – Provide High Quality Early Childhood Programs that include Bilingual and ESL Services**

New York State does not mandate Pre-K instruction. As a result, all students do not have access to Pre-K experiences before entering Kindergarten with the exception of those students in districts that are funded through Universal Pre-K or pay for private Pre-K experiences. All eligible Pre-K students can apply for universal Pre-K in the Buffalo Public Schools, but enrollment is limited and generally available only on a first come, first serve basis. In addition, where Pre-K services are provided there is no mandated requirements for ESL or bilingual education for students identified as an English language learner.

Illinois has recently adopted a policy of bilingual education for pre-school students. They seek to promote the first language linguistic abilities of their students. This policy is purposeful in that it recognizes the early education needs of students, many of whom are at risk and would benefit from early exposure to developmentally appropriate instruction targeted at cognitive development. In New York State, our most vulnerable students would benefit from ESL and bilingual education services in Pre-K. Currently, these educational services are not mandated and if a student is fortunate to receive such services the funding is vulnerable in tough economic times when decisions have to be made without regard to sound pedagogy. Additionally, when Pre-K is provided ESL or Bilingual Education is not mandated and access to such services is at the mercy of district funding.

Parents of ELLs have long requested that their children have access to Pre-K schooling so as to prepare their children for the transition to a new language. Many families of modest means cannot afford a pre-school education when Pre-K is not available and it directly places children who need enriched environments to begin their education in their new language.

Please consider the following principles, developed through the Southern California Comprehensive Assistance Center in the spring of 2005:

### **Six Research-Based Guiding Principles Serving the Needs of English Learners in Preschool “School Readiness” Programs**

**Principle # 1:** A child’s home language is a crucial foundation for cognitive development, learning about the world, and emerging literacy.

**Principle # 2:** A learning environment that facilitates social-emotional growth and affirms a child’s culture and language is essential for full participation and healthy identity development.

**Principle # 3:** One language is enhanced by another – therefore, effective programs provide intentional support and access to opportunities to learn in, whenever possible, both the home language and in English.

**Principle # 4:** Effective approaches for linguistic and cultural congruity build strong home-school partnerships and support parents as a child’s first teacher.

**Principle # 5:** High quality, research-based professional development is needed in order for teachers, paraprofessionals and early childhood caregivers to meet the needs of preschool age English Learners and their families.

**Principle # 6:** Culturally, developmentally and linguistically appropriate assessment is essential for effective, quality early childhood education.

### **Action Item – Provide Alternative Pathways to College and Career for ELL/Bilingual Learners**

Over the past several years, the district has experienced an increase in the number of over-age (17-21 year old) ELLs with little or no documented high school attendance who wish to enroll in a BPS high school. Until now, their only option has been to enroll in the newcomer program that follows a traditional pathway towards graduation. Many of these students have little or no chance of learning English and accumulating the necessary credits to graduate by age 21. The graduation rate for ELLs, only 21%, is the lowest of all subgroups in the district.

<b>New Entrants to BPS Ages 17-21</b>			
<b>School Year</b>	<b>English Proficient</b>	<b>LEP/ ELL</b>	<b>Total</b>
2011-12	9	60	69
2010-11	5	70	75
2009-10	6	54	60
2008-09	49	57	106

Years of research on second language acquisition show that it takes 5-7 years of instruction for students who are literate in their native language to achieve native-like proficiency in English. Adolescent ELLs arriving for the first time in U.S. schools face the double challenge of learning English and mastering the rigorous content required to attain a high school diploma. A 2012 research study report published by the Center for Applied Linguistics for the Carnegie Corporation found the following common features among successful programs for adolescent newcomers:

- Flexible scheduling of courses and students
- Careful staffing plus targeted professional development
- Basic literacy development materials for adolescents and reading interventions adapted for English language learners
- Content area instruction to fill gaps in educational backgrounds

- Extended time for instruction and support (e.g., after school, Saturday, and summer programs)
- Connections with families and social services
- Diagnostics and monitoring of student data
- Transition measures to ease newcomers into the regular school programs or beyond high school

ELL/bilingual learners who fall within this group need programs and services that will meet their academic needs and put them on a pathway to college and/or career readiness. They should not fall under the same accountability measures as their peers who have had the time and educational opportunities necessary to meet traditional graduation requirements.

### **Objective 4**

#### **Increase parent and family engagement in education**

##### **Action Item - Translation and Interpretation**

New York State has long been a place where immigrants and refugees from throughout the world have settled. Despite the success of attracting new citizens worldwide we have no mechanism at the school level to successfully address the translation and interpretation needs of students and families. Currently, state examinations in math and science used for accountability are limited to Spanish, Chinese, Korean, Haitian Creole and Russian. Buffalo Public Schools serves students speaking 67 different languages. The reality of many New York State schools is that the funding needed to adequately provide translation and interpretation is woefully lacking. The services are not only needed to ensure the academic success of students, but also to support the emotional development of children adapting to the United States from countries where they suffered war, hunger or strife.

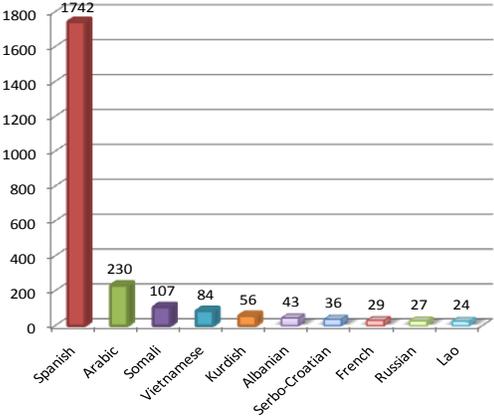
New York State under the leadership of Governor Cuomo has agreed to translate critical state documents in the top ten languages in New York State. It must be pointed out that the top ten languages in Western New York do not reflect the same languages as often identified in the New York City area. If we are to be a friendly and welcoming state to immigrants and refugees we have to rethink the services and the method of delivering those services to our newest citizens.

Additionally, the composition of our ELL/bilingual population is constantly changing. As depicted in the graphs below, our top ten languages changed significantly over the 5 year period from 2004 – 2009. This is a phenomenon occurring statewide and nationally. Access to translation and interpretation services, as well as other native language supports such as academic coaches and teacher assistants, must be flexible and updated regularly to keep up with the ever-changing demographics.

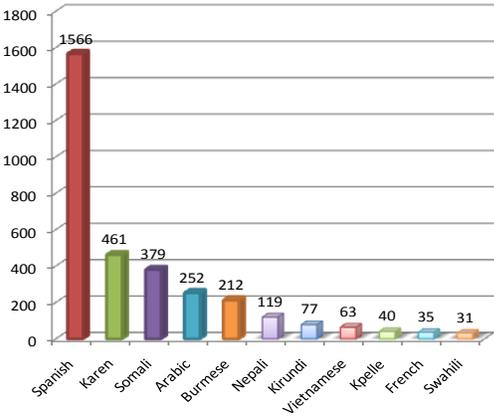
**2004-2005**  
 District: 36806  
 ELL: 2539  
 # of Languages: 46

**2009-2010**  
 District: 34332  
 ELL: 3481  
 # of Languages: 67

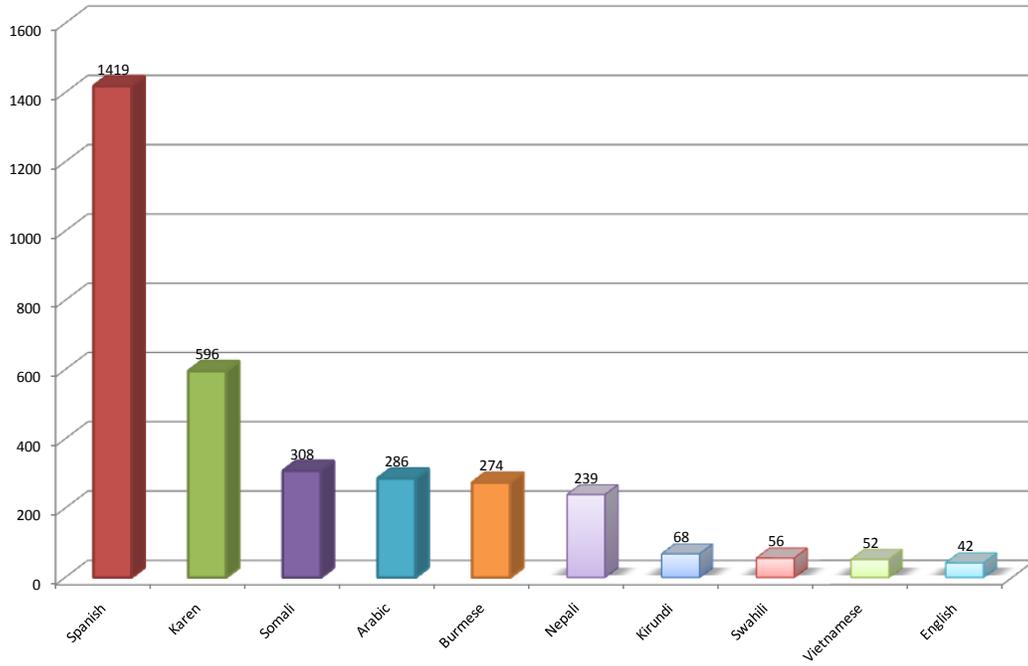
**BPS LEP/ELL TOP 10 LANGUAGES  
 2004-2005**



**BPS LEP/ELL TOP 10 LANGUAGES  
 2009-2010**



## BPS LEP/ELL TOP 10 LANGUAGES 2011-2012



## Total BPS LEP/ELL Population 2004-2011

