

**HB 2056 & -1's: Access to Linguistic Inclusion**  
**House Education Committee**  
**February 2, 2021**

Chair Alonso Leon, Vice Chairs Weber, Vice Chair Neron, and members of the committee, I am Mary Martinez-Wenzl, an education researcher with Education Northwest. Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of HB 2056 and the dash 1 amendment. Our goal with HB 2056 is to **advance research-based and equitable language policies for Oregon youth.**

From June 2019 to July 2020, I served as a senior advisor on emergent bilingual education and policy at the Oregon Department of Education. Through this one-year special appointment, I worked with stakeholders throughout the state to develop a long-term vision for serving the state's 102,786 emergent bilingual students who collectively speak 165 unique home languages.<sup>1</sup> I also developed recommendations for evidence-based policies to advance equity for emergent bilingual students.

**Current diploma requirements have resulted in structural barriers to graduation for our high school English learners.** Among Oregon students identified as English learners, it is often the students in secondary grades who struggle the most. Completing four years of English language arts credits is especially challenging for high school English learners, who may not have access to English language arts classes until they have been classified as English proficient. HB 2056 will help these students in two ways. First, it will lay the groundwork for students to transfer credit from language arts courses completed outside of the United States, recognizing the value of prior learning experiences. Second, it will facilitate the expansion of dual immersion program instruction in the secondary grades, providing schools with greater flexibility to provide multilingual courses in core content areas that meet diploma requirements. This will help students who are ready to meet grade-level language arts standards to stay engaged while they are developing academic English proficiency, which takes, on average, 4 to 7 years ([Hakuta, Butler, & Witt, 2000](#)).

**Learning language arts should not be conflated with learning how to speak, read, and write in English.** Successful completion of high school diploma requirements requires four years of English language arts. In Oregon, this has been interpreted as four years of language arts taught in English. Yet, Oregon's English language arts content standards do not specify a language of instruction. Out of Oregon's English Language Arts and Literacy Standards for grades 9-12,

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<sup>1</sup> For further details on Oregon's English learner population, see the June 2020 English Language Learners in Oregon Annual Report at <https://www.oregon.gov/ode/reports-and-data/LegReports/Documents/Oregon%20English%20Learners%20Report%202018-19%20Final.pdf>

only 15 out of 232 (6.4%) include a reference to the English language. Changing the state diploma requirement from “English” to “language arts” will ensure the diploma requirements clearly articulate what students should know and be able to do, and not a English-only language ideology.

**Literacy concepts, and particularly higher-level thinking and metacognitive skills and strategies readily transfer from one language to another.** In research, this is known as cross-language transfer, and there is a wide body of evidence that skills learned in one’s home, or dominant language transfer to other languages (see [Chuan, Joshi & Dixon, 2011](#); [Durgunoğlu, Nagy, & Hancin-Bhatt, 1993](#); [van Gelderen et al., 2007](#)).

**Students can and should develop multilingual reading, writing, and critical thinking skills.** When students develop language arts skills in Spanish and other languages, there are important academic and social benefits to individuals and our communities. Advancing multilingual learning recognizes the linguistic assets of students who are multilingual, and helps to ensure they do not experience language loss. Students who are multilingual reap cognitive benefits, such as increased metalinguistic awareness and cognitive flexibility (see [Marian & Shook, 2012](#); [Bialystok, 2011](#)). Multilingual students consistently outperform their monolingual peers academically. In fact, one of the most rigorous studies to date of dual immersion programs was conducted in Oregon, and found strong benefits for both English learners and native English speakers ([see Steele et al., 2017](#)).

**Advancing multilingual education for Oregon students makes good economic sense.** Oregon students need to be prepared to thrive in an increasingly global economy and labor market. The demand for bilingual workers has more than doubled in recent years, and employers desire workers who speak multiple languages. Oregon has a high demand for bilingual workers compared to other states; in 2015, close to 14,000 job postings required bilingual workers (see [New American Economy, 2017](#)).

The changes put forward through HB 2056 and the amendment are grounded in research and will advance equity for Oregon students. I urge your support of HB 2056 and dash 1 Amendment.

Respectfully,

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