

Submitter: Gregg Heacock
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Education
Measure: SB1534

After having submitted testimony twice, supporting this bill, I have listened to the hearing on this bill to see whether some of the opportunities provided by this legislation were ever mentioned. They weren't, so let me address one of those now:

For all of our talk about valuing diversity, inclusion, and equity, we continue to ignore the fact that many students with families, where English is not the language spoken at home, have family members, often taking care of younger children, who are not employed and could be served by being provided instruction designed to strengthen their academic literacy in their home language to provide a foundation for developing their ability to read and write in English. This was done in the Even Start program that came into effect during the Bush administration and was dropped by the Obama administration without giving due consideration to its possible value. The biggest problem was that it funded non-profit organizations willing to sponsor and oversee these classes. This meant that they didn't get started until later in the year and they were forced to turn in paper-work for each session to show that the funds were well-spent. But, there were advantages to this program that would accrue if it were sponsored by community colleges across the state and where classes would be taught at the same school-sites where family members enrolled had children attending that school. What Even-Start had that would need to be included here is on-site child-care for those who would otherwise have to stay at home minding young ones not in school.

Frankly, I don't know what school districts mean when they pat themselves on the back for their efforts to honor diversity, inclusion, and equity when they ignore the needs of those student's families.

What I discovered was that schools are a natural base for providing community services. Families received healthcare, family counseling, and resources for those where spousal abuse was a problem. As part of our weekly class, one day included instruction in parent education, addressing my adult students' needs to reflect on their own child-rearing practices. In effect, this provided the kind of support some people get through group therapy. Given the problems of becoming a part of a larger community from which many experienced isolation, this addressed needs many never expected to ever have addressed.

I should add that out of the 35 Spanish-speaking students attending my class, about 1/3 dropped out of school once they had finished the 1st grade; nearly another 1/3 dropped out after the 3rd grade; a similar number stopped continuing their education

after finishing 5th grade; 2 had completed their junior year in high school, 1 had finished her junior year in college, and 2 grandmothers were illiterate in their home language. So, you can see why ignoring their needs would amount to ignoring the needs of their children enrolled in our schools. When they were allowed to use the computer lab and learning to produce a letterhead with their names and addresses, they realized that what they wrote made them equal in the eyes of anyone receiving communications from them.

SB 1534 opens the door for receiving support from many community organizations to bring such a program to our local school campuses so that those attending can serve as aides in classrooms where their help would earn them the respect they deserve. Their inclusion would also benefit those children sharing similar backgrounds and those who would appreciate receiving support from people with backgrounds much different from their own.

Since no one has considered this as a benefit that could result from the passage of this bill, I thought I should mention it now.

I urge you to support SB 1534 to open the door to this opportunity to live up to the values of diversity, inclusion, and equity we profess to uphold.

Gregg Heacock, grateful to my family literacy students who made me proud to be a teacher