



Testimony of

*New York State Congress of Parents & Teachers
(NYS Parent Teacher Association)*

*By Kyle McCauley Belokopitsky, Esq.
Executive Director*

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I am Kyle McCauley Belokopitsky, the new Executive Director of the New York State Congress of Parents and Teachers, Inc. (NYS PTA) and it is my honor to address the committee discussing the importance of making every child's potential a reality, especially for those children for whom English is a new or second language.

On behalf of the nearly 300,000 members of NYS PTA and the parents of nearly 2.6 million New York school children, we appreciate the opportunity to comment on increased support for New York's English Language Learners (ELL), students and their families.

Thank you to Assembly Education Chairwoman Catherine Nolan and members of the Assembly Education Committee for your interest and attendance today. Your dedicated work on behalf of our students and children should be commended and we thank you for your commitment.

New York has a reputation as a uniquely diverse state and our diversity is what makes our state an interesting and well sought destination. According to recent press reports, New York State may become the sanctuary for an even more diverse school population in the coming year(s) so this conversation is both timely and important.

The goal of our public education system is to provide successful outcomes for *all* students, which is made acute when expectations for higher levels of literacy and college/career requirements have fundamentally changed. Together we must build solutions to meet the specialized needs of ELL students and families who are an integral part of our community.

According to the 2013-14 NYS Student Information Repository System, over 61% of New York's ELL students were born in the United States. While New York ELLs frequently speak Spanish, Chinese, Haitian, Korean and Russian, there are astoundingly over 170 different languages spoken by our more than 210,000 ELL students according the State Education Department.

While there are districts and schools where a substantial number of ELL students speak the same language, many other schools may have significantly more diversity, where fewer students speak many different languages or dialects that need to be supported.

The State Education Office of Bilingual Education has substantial information, which can be found at: <http://www.nysed.gov/program-offices/office-bilingual-education-and-world-languages-obewl/>.

Adequately supporting ELL students and their families to reach our educational goals in a timely manner continues to be a challenge for many districts and communities, as they try to provide increased services and supports for all students while juggling limited state resources and bound by a tax levy limit that has been devastatingly low for the past few years.

Today, districts and school leaders need to accomplish a daunting list of supports for students:

- access and finance the interpretation and translation supports, which are often costly and hard to find;

- provide equivalent curricula materials and instructional resources that are language and age appropriate;
- hire from a limited pool of bilingual educators, or English as a Second Language (TSOL/ESOL) or Languages Other Than English certified educators;
- rethink and retrain *all* educators to embed recent bilingual research-based classroom practices; and
- develop intentional, culturally competent family engagement practices and connect with community supports that can accelerate student success.

In a March 2016 Educational Conference Board (ECB) report entitled “Urgent Action Necessary to Support English Language Learners,” the ECB called for a dedicated \$75 million to help school districts meet challenges of educating ELL students and noted a critical shortage of certified teachers in these areas. The report added that nearly one third of New York’s schools are experiencing significant increases in ELL students and families.

The March 2016 ECB recommendations included:

1. Creating a new ELL aid category with \$75 million in new funding;
2. Modifying BOCES aid by allowing language-related services eligible for aid to offset costs, particularly in small, low-wealth rural districts;
3. Adjusting special services aid for the Big 5 school districts and others not affiliated with a BOCES, to account for costs associated with educating ELL students;
4. Providing greater flexibility for school districts to assign bilingual teachers, teachers working on bilingual certification "extensions" and certified TSOL teachers to fill staffing gaps under specified circumstances;
5. Providing expedited opportunities for current teachers to obtain bilingual extensions and for TSOL teachers to gain certification extensions to teach additional grade levels or in other content areas; and
6. Offering incentives for teacher candidates in teacher preparation programs to become certified to teach ELLs.

At PTA, we speak for every child and family, with one voice, and strive for collaborative conversations to develop solutions. We will address six general areas for your consideration and look forward to more discussions in the future on how we can best work together to support our children:

1. Additional dedicated funding for ELL students within the state budget and an increased focus on supports for school districts experiencing high density populations of diverse language speakers;
2. Improved current aid to address influxes of unaccompanied minor students and for districts with high unaccompanied minor populations;
3. Fiscal support for and examination of Part 154 implementation and requirements;
4. Accelerated teacher training for all educators in supporting ELL students and their families, along with expedited certification of bilingual and TSOL educators;
5. Implementation of the Office of Family Engagement, with staff dedicated to enhanced research based supports for families of ELL students along with developing resources and supports for community collaboration for dedicated family engagement activities in diverse communities; and
6. Expanded state capacity to provide translation and interpretation services for key parent documents and other materials to minimize local district impact.

Additional dedicated funding for ELL students within the state budget and an increased focus on supports for school districts experiencing high density populations of diverse language speakers:

The state obligation under the Campaign for Fiscal Equity lawsuit is still unrealized. Our students and schools are still owed approximately \$3.8 billion in school aid and a fully-funded Foundation Aid formula that accounts for the cost of educating ELL students has become increasingly important. However as this process is detailed and will take time to implement, additional targeted funding is needed to ensure schools can provide necessary programs and services for ELL students.

We appreciate the Assembly's effort to try to fund ELL needs with targeted funding such as the SPELLS program however, the need for widespread support of bilingual learning programs and ELL/ENL support services for students is urgent.

As we (hopefully) move toward an adequate, fair and equitable, full implementation of the Foundation Aid formula, we respectfully request significant state funding in *this* year's state budget targeted towards services for ELL students and families.

Targeted state support for ELL students will allow districts and educators the resources to provide for successful strategies for educating ELLs through both traditional and unique programs directed at ELL student success.

Improved current aid to address influxes of unaccompanied minor students and for districts with high unaccompanied minor populations

According to the Office of Refugee Resettlement, New York communities have accepted 5,955 unaccompanied children in federal fiscal year 2014, 2,630 children in fiscal year 2015 and 4,985 children in fiscal year 2016.

Refugee resettlement often requires schools to meet complex student needs, where many cultural differences must be addressed across multiple languages. Among migrants and unaccompanied minors the language needs may be exacerbated by transience, trauma and interrupted formal education even within a student's native language. Therefore these children need more intense support to meet their academic expectations. Some students come with both language and special education needs which compete for attention during the school schedule. Adapting both programs in an integrated fashion is costly.

We know that certain parts of the state continue to have an influx of unaccompanied minor students who arrive during the school year. An infusion of funding mid-year, as unexpected enrollment increases occur, is necessary to assist school districts who often lack the resources or unallocated fund balances to meet the immediate student needs. Many school districts try their best under difficult fiscal circumstances to support quick and unexpected increases in unaccompanied ELL students, however as with any unplanned expense under the tax cap, it is difficult to absorb these extra costs without cutting other programs and services.

Therefore, we respectfully request targeted fiscal and programmatic support for districts with high and sudden influxes of unaccompanied minors.

Relevant federal services and program information can be found here:

https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/orr/orr_uc_updated_fact_sheet_1416.pdf

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/programs/ucs/state-by-state-uc-placed-sponsors>

Fiscal support for and examination of Part 154 implementation and requirements

New York took a positive step forward in supporting ELL students when it established Commissioner Regulation 154, the Comprehensive ELL Education Plan (CEEP) and Data Report. While the entire education community supports the great intent of these regulations, these regulations were implemented without adequate funding or state support for school districts.

We must examine the local cost of compliance, looking especially at items like the need to provide certified staff to immediately assess new student language abilities, the cost of accessing bilingual/dual language educators for groups of 20 students at a grade level and the opportunity cost of accelerated learning in a blended or dual language program.

Unexpected costs have arisen under Part 154. For example, some districts have multiple schools across a wide geographic area and Part 154 requires the establishment of a bilingual class if 20 students in a grade level within a district speak the same language. There is a cost in

transportation and allocation of educator schedules for this requirement, along with the need to provide additional support services in multiple locations. Beyond elementary years, blended or co-teaching models to support ELLs have shown great opportunity for success in subject areas; however, this too has great staffing costs.

These are all extremely worthwhile initiatives, but without fiscal support greater burdens are placed on school districts with high ELL populations. Part 154 regulations, in some cases, have necessitated reduction or elimination of other student programs and staffing.

Therefore, as we fully support the intent of Part 154 and continue to hope its implementation increases success of ELL students, we respectfully request fiscal and programmatic support from our state government.

Accelerated teacher training for all educators in supporting ELL students and their families, along with expedited certification of bilingual and TSOL educators

Educators, especially classroom teachers, do more with less every day. It is important to note that the “T” in “PTA” matters to us.

As the ELL population in New York continues to grow, along with the demands for increased student learning expectations based on the NY Standards for college and career readiness continues, we must increase support for our educators, both general and ELL teachers, principals and school-related professionals.

SED outlines in its "Blueprint for ELL Success" that all teachers need to plan for diverse engagement of students, which requires knowing the culture of ELL students, integrating content support with language support scaffolding, expanding curriculum resources, collaborating with support personnel and community resources.

This “Blueprint” requires that 15% of the previously required 175 professional development hours for all teachers be dedicated to ELL-specific professional development. It also requires that school leaders provide and support academic, linguistic, social and emotional needs of ELLs with purposeful planning, supportive environments and a culture of high expectations. Additionally, parents need training and accurate information on what schools are required to provide in relation to ELL education. These important responsibilities demand great fiscal support for professional development for all educators and all school leaders.

Therefore, we respectfully request both programmatic and fiscal support for general and ELL educators and school related professionals in support of their mission to support ELL students.

Implementation of the Office of Family Engagement with staff dedicated to enhanced research based supports for families of ELL students and developing resources and supports for community collaboration with dedicated family engagement activities in diverse communities

We all know the old adage; it takes a village to raise a child. This is most relevant when we talk about increasing engagement of ELL families in communities and in schools. While we were pleased that the State Education Department had received state funding for a new Office of Family Engagement, this funding has yet to be fully released and staffing is incomplete. As we read the charge of the office, there is an opportunity to expand the scope of addressing the needs of our diverse language students as well.

Family engagement is unique to each school and community, and meaningful family engagement is often difficult to accomplish in many communities. Educator preparation programs barely offer family engagement opportunities, therefore educators learn during their first years on the job. Research points to advantages in better student attendance, behavior and achievement when effective, collaborative, intentional, culturally responsive family engagement is present.

National PTA, along with nationally recognized researchers designed the research-based National Standards for Family School Partnerships which offers schools and school leaders a six-standard framework to analyze current practice and build intentional practices for engaging *all* families.

The Standards offer a systemic look at (1) Welcoming, (2) Two-way Communication, (3) Focusing on Student Success, (4) Speaking Up for All Children, (5) Sharing Power and (6) Engaging the Community in school-family goals. The Dual Capacity Framework jointly empowers educators, school leaders and families to work together to recognize that family knowledge builds capability, connections, cognition and confidence to create success for children.

Where cultures of home and school differ, this work is even more critical and challenging. If we want families to support student success, we need to reach families directly. When language is a barrier, or fear of the school system exists, educators and school leaders must be prepared to engage families differently.

Therefore, we respectfully request state support that will help advance the home-school connection to lead to greater success for our ELL students.

Expanded state capacity to provide translation and interpretation services for key parent documents and other materials to minimize local district impact

ELL students and families cannot begin to comprehend information needed to succeed unless they have access to information in a language they understand.

As mentioned earlier, there are over 170 different languages or dialects spoken by our school children. With approximately 740 school districts, it is not cost effective for each one to bear the

burden of translating written materials and providing language interpreters for every event and meeting. Yet language is the key to communication, so as a state we need better supports for providing translations for classroom materials, written notices, and other information like individualized education plans, parent conferences and other daily interactions English speakers take for granted at school.

We need to help schools have access to curricular materials in languages students understand, because research indicates literacy in the native language accelerates English literacy. Students need access to other items like translated Regents exams, which are costly for local districts.

We understand translation and interpretation fees can be considerable, yet necessary. We recommend supporting the State Education Department in the expanded development and provision of translation and interpretation supports for both written documents and through technologic devices. Translation for standard documents, such as registration materials, parent report cards, parent rights and responsibilities and other special education documents, are most important for meaningful family engagement and student understanding.

Often school districts and educators who serve ELL students do not have the resources to be able to provide translation, so by consolidating some of this activity we can leverage the investments. Our State Education Department has begun this work and we hope the work will continue to be supported among a broader number of languages.

NYS PTA has proudly begun to translate key documents for our members and families. We have begun translation into Spanish, three dialects of Chinese and Arabic. We are currently looking to expand this venture to other languages. While this work is not easy, we view this as necessary to effectively communicate with our members, families and communities.

Therefore, we respectfully request fiscal and programmatic support for districts and educators in translation services for both students and families.

Conclusion

New York State has long been the gateway for immigrant success; the door to the American Dream. Our economic and social success relies on an educated, globally aware citizenry, prepared to address the issues of an ever changing world.

We need to continue to build the success of our diverse community through investments and support for our key resource; our children. Every parent has a dream for their child. It is our job to ensure their dreams come true.

We humbly ask that you continue to advocate for infusing our schools with the tools and resources necessary to accelerate the success of our children and families. Together, we can make every child's potential a reality. There is no other work that is more important.