



New Haven Public Schools

February 24, 2016

Public Testimony Regarding Bill 175

Members of the Education Committee – thank you for this opportunity to give my testimony. My name is Jessica Haxhi and I am the Supervisor of World Languages for New Haven Public Schools. I would like to express our full support of the Seal of Biliteracy described in Bill No. 175.

In New Haven, we believe strongly in the importance of knowing a second language and we recognize the great diversity of languages spoken in our city. Students in our schools speak 67 different languages and represent 118 different countries. Twenty-five percent of students speak a language other than English at home. We have three Spanish dual-language immersion programs and a French immersion program in our K-8 schools. There are Spanish for Native Speaker courses in our high schools and bilingual and English learner programs offered K-12. We have world language offerings in Arabic, Chinese, French, Italian, Latin, and Spanish. All of our students begin world language study by 7th grade, if not earlier.

The simple recognition of the Seal of Biliteracy on a diploma could have a profound effect on how students view their own language skills. It would give our English learners pride in their home languages as they pursue mastery of English skills. It would encourage heritage language speakers who grew up in the United States to maintain and improve their language literacy beyond the spoken language they may have learned at home. It would motivate our English speakers to start and continue world language study far beyond the beginning levels and to interact with native and heritage speakers as they pursue high levels of proficiency.

Students who wish to receive the Seal of Biliteracy would be required to go far beyond the memorized words and phrases of a first-year course. Because the Seal would be awarded based on a “proficiency-level” versus seat-time in a classroom, it would require both teachers and students to focus on developing *real-world* speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills. This is not just about being able to conjugate a verb! When students reach a high level of proficiency, they are able to use the language in a variety of situations to accomplish tasks, participate in conversations, comprehend all types of texts, and write with accuracy and purpose. In addition, they become interculturally competent through being immersed in a new culture, comparing it to their own, and coming to understand the nature of culture itself and how it influences all human interactions.

Graduates with these language and culture skills will be a valuable asset as we continue to build strong economies and communities in the cities and towns of Connecticut. In New Haven Public Schools, we are excited for students to receive

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this recognition of their hard work toward biliteracy – an undeniably valuable skill for college, career, and life in the 21st Century.

We look forward to assisting in any way we can throughout this process and in the implementation phase, should it become law. Thank you very much for your consideration.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jessica Haxhi". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "J" and "H".

Jessica Haxhi