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NEW YORK STATE ASSOCIATION FOR BILINGUAL EDUCATION

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September 18, 2014

Dr. Deborah S. Delisle
Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education
United States Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Assistant Secretary Delisle:

On behalf of the New York State Association for Bilingual Education (NYSABE), I am writing to reaffirm our vigorous support to the New York State Education Department's requested ESEA waiver amendment in relation to English Language Learners.

The main goal of NYSABE is to advocate for equitable educational opportunities for all English language learners (ELLs)/bilingual students in New York State by promoting the professional skills of the educational community. To this end, the views presented in this letter reflect our members' experience and expertise in the implementation of research-based successful bilingual instructional practices aligned to the Common Core State Standards.

NYSABE urges the US Department of Education to approve the New York State Education Department's waiver renewal request to: 1) exempt recently arrived ELLs from participating in the English Language Arts (ELA) test for two years, 2) include the New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test (NYSESLAT) in addition to the ELA as part of the Performance Index to better measure ELLs' progress, and 3) develop Spanish Language Arts assessments and offer school districts the option of utilizing them when they would best measure the language arts knowledge and skills of Spanish-speaking ELLs.

A growing number of studies reveal that during their first year of attendance at a school in the United States, ELLs are at the initial stage of understanding and using English; consequently, the English Language Arts (ELA) exam, designed for the non-ELL population, is not granular enough to capture the growth made by newly arrived ELLs in their acquisition of Language Arts skills (Abedi, 2002; Solórzano, 2008; Menken, 2010). As expected, this practice generates discouraging effects among students and parents as well as educators since the granular data is not captured and therefore does not hold schools accountable in a meaningful way that will drive higher student outcomes and promote higher standards.

We are strong advocates of holding teachers and schools accountable for assisting all students, including ELLs, in meeting high standards. However, appropriate measures must be used to achieve this goal. The NYSESLAT is now aligned with the Common Core Standards and was specifically designed to measure ELLs' progress toward proficiency in Language Arts. It also provides more accurate and useful information to teachers and administrators so they can design, plan, and implement appropriate Language Arts instruction. Using the NYSELAT *in addition to* the ELA as part of the Performance Index is appropriate.

We also acknowledge the ability of a large number of ELLs to demonstrate their progress in Language Arts through the use of home language assessments. In this regard, considering that Spanish-speaking ELLs constitute the largest ELL sub-group in New York State, we believe that it would be most appropriate to develop and utilize Spanish Language Arts assessments for recently arrived Spanish speaking ELLs.

On behalf of the students, families, educators, members of community-based and private entities whom NYSABE represents, we thank you for your commitment to address the educational needs of ELLs.

Sincerely,

Yazmín Torres

Yazmín Torres
NYSABE President 2013-2014

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