

NJTESOL/NJBE, Inc.

AN AFFILIATE OF NJEA, TESOL, NABE

New Jersey Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages/New Jersey Bilingual Educators, Incorporated

A professional organization for those concerned with the teaching of English as a Second Language,
Bilingual Education and Standard English as a Dialect

TO: Assemblywoman Angela McKnight
Assemblywoman Pamela Lampitt
Assemblywoman Valerie Vainieri Huttle
New Jersey Assembly Education Committee

FROM: NJ Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages/ NJ Bilingual Educators
(NJTESOL/NJBE)

RE: NJTESOL/NJBE Position Statement on A-5126

DATE: December 18, 2020

On behalf of NJTESOL/NJBE, a professional organization for those concerned with the needs of English Learners, we want to state that we share the sponsors' focus and concern about the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on student learning. We especially share that concern and the impact the pandemic has had on multilingual children and families. According to our members, it has been extremely challenging to engage our multilingual children and families for a myriad of reasons: lack of communication in native languages, lack of technology, high quality Internet access, language barriers on how to operate the technology, quiet work space, minimal distractors, rate of virtual attendance, parents working, lack of parental or academic supervision, family obligations, student employment, family or personal illness, financial hardship, and food scarcity. Learning is now taking place in an environment that is stressful and taxes resources for both schools and families. We are fairly certain that there has been learning loss.

Even though it is important to evaluate assessment data to ascertain student progress or educational gaps, with the hope of providing additional resources to close that gap, it may be an additional burden for local districts, at this time. Teachers and administrators prioritize providing instruction as effectively as possible under conditions that are tenuous at best. The concerns of safety and health supersede those of ideal academic progress. Trauma and economic issues have wreaked havoc with our students and their families. It may be impossible to measure the effects of the pandemic on instruction at this time as we are still in the midst of it.

However, we do have a concern that because of the tremendous burdens previously mentioned that multilingual learners suffered more than the general population. Thus, when legislators gather data on how schools operated, we encourage the legislators to ask how schools served their most vulnerable populations. Much attention (as it should be) has been centered on students with special needs. We argue that services for multilingual learners are just as critical. Oftentimes, the needs of this population are overlooked and discounted. Therefore, we urge the legislators to specifically request that districts report how services were provided for their English Learners.

We look forward to working with the Assembly Education Committee on this issue in the future. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Fernandez
Executive Director

Margaret Churchill
President