

TESTIMONY OF RENÉ LARA
ON BEHALF OF THE TEXAS FEDERATION OF TEACHERS
REGARDING SB 78
BEFORE THE SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE
FEBRUARY 22, 2005

The Texas Federation of Teachers has supported the modern bilingual education movement in our state as far back as we can remember. The concept of teaching subjects in students' native language while we help them make the transition to English has worked where we have certified bilingual education teachers.

We also have encouraged the teaching of languages in addition to English for all Texas students who desire such instruction to help them compete better in the global job market. That is why we support SB 78 by Senator Shapleigh.

This new approach to bilingual education comes in different instructional variations. You will hear terms such as "two-way bilingual education" and "dual-language immersion." Senator Zaffirini has used the term English-Plus instruction. Unlike traditional bilingual education, which focused only on the transition of immigrant children into the English language, dual-language instruction enables both English and non-English-speaking students to learn all subjects in two or more languages. By popular demand, this new approach to bilingual education is taking off across the state.

Both President Bush and Lieutenant Governor Dewhurst are bilingual. Many of our state legislators have bilingual skills. Our organization's president, John Cole, is bilingual as well. Even more relevant to the young people in our school system, many of the workers they will compete with in the global job market are bilingual. Those foreign workers speak their native language plus English and oftentimes even a third language. Can our students obtain the additional skills to become more competitive? Many are doing so across the state.

In 2001, we supported Senator Zaffirini's SB 467, which authorized the commissioner of education to set dual-language immersion standards. The legislation also notified school districts of their ability to create their own programs using state guidelines. Senator Shapleigh's legislation would establish a pilot program that looks at dual-language education as a strategy to improve graduation rates. Other legislation on the same general subject is in the pipeline, such as Senator West's SB 61, which encourages the certification of additional bilingual and dual-language education teachers in our colleges and universities.

SB 78 by Senator Shapleigh would create a statewide pilot program for dual-language instruction. In our experience, however, sometimes great ideas in education falter or deteriorate as they go through rulemaking or as they are implemented at the local level. With that concern in mind, we offer the following suggestions. First, keep in mind that the key to the success of dual-language programs is an adequate supply of certified

bilingual education teachers. In fact, we think that the lack of qualified teachers has caused some bilingual education programs to falter.

Second, we ask that you not view dual-language instruction as a replacement for bilingual education programs—at least not until you learn the results of the pilot testing. Immigrant children must still make the transition into English in the meantime.

Third, do not be surprised if educators disagree as to which dual-language approach is the best. There are many variations. But most involve mixing English and non-English-speaking students and alternating between English and a second or third language.

Fourth, a dual-language program should be voluntary in all respects. No student, parent, teacher, or school district ought to be required to participate.

Finally, we ask that you look for additional bilingual education teachers within our state. There are plenty of bilingual individuals who could be effective as bilingual educators simply with some focused learning and training in bilingual education through existing teacher preparation programs. Many school districts have looked instead to other countries for a supply of bilingual teachers. While such a strategy will yield a crop of educators well-versed in a foreign language, these individuals may be deficient in English.

Thank you for considering our testimony.