



Legislation Text

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Res. No. 637

Resolution calling on the New York City Department of Education and the New York State Education Department to collaborate on and prioritize increasing the number of educators trained to work with English Language Learners and to improve the quality and comprehensiveness of English Language Learners' education.

By Council Members Ayala, Louis, Restler, Hanif and Riley

Whereas, In the 2020-21 school year, there were over 147,000 English Language Learners (ELLs) enrolled in New York City (NYC) Department of Education (DOE) public schools, meaning that these students had not yet tested as proficient on the New York State English as a Second Language Achievement Test (NYSESLAT), which meets federal requirements for annual assessment of ELLs, and, thus, were entitled to additional educational support, under the New York State Commissioner of Education's Regulations; and

Whereas, In the 2020-21 school year, about half of the ELLs in DOE schools were born in the United States (U.S.), and about half were not; and

Whereas, The number of DOE students identified as ELLs continues to increase due to the recent arrival of asylum seekers and their children, with about 14,000 children having enrolled so far; and

Whereas, According to a May 9, 2023, article by Reema Amin in *Chalkbeat*, DOE teachers "are finding that many of these children [of asylum seekers] are learning English at the most basic level, and that some hadn't attended school regularly" even before their arrival in the U.S.; and

Whereas, In the 2020-21 school year, about 80 percent of ELLs in DOE schools were served by the English as a New Language (ENL) program, either through full-time separate classes for students or in individual periods when students were pulled out of their regular class for English instruction; and

Whereas, Another approximately 10 percent of ELLs were served in a transitional bilingual program,

through some instruction in each language, but increasingly in English as students became more proficient; and

Whereas, About 7 percent of ELLs were served in a dual language program, through equal instruction in English and another language and with the goal of becoming fluent in both, although there were only 245 programs K-12 in 13 different languages in NYC using this model; and

Whereas, According to the United Federation of Teachers, fewer than 3,000 NYC teachers are certified as bilingual teachers, yielding an unmanageable ratio of about one teacher to 47 ELLs; and

Whereas, Even that relatively small number of bilingual teachers is unevenly distributed across DOE schools such that some schools have a considerably worse ratio than one bilingual teacher to 47 ELLs; and

Whereas, There are also 3,455 teachers certified to teach in ENL program classes, although they are not necessarily bilingual themselves and typically teach primarily in English; and

Whereas, Linguistics professor Kate Menken of The City University of New York's Queens College noted that research shows that bilingual programs are more effective than the ENL programs that serve the vast majority of ELLs in NYC public schools; and

Whereas, Anecdotes abound about ELLs in many understaffed schools not getting the services that they need and are entitled to and about those students who are more capable in the home language being called on repeatedly to translate for other students in classes where the teacher cannot speak the language and often must rely on a digital translation application in order to communicate with students; and

Whereas, According to a DOE Annual Special Education Data Report, in June 2022, only about 36 percent of bilingual special education students were fully served, 62 percent were partially served, and 2 percent were not served by special education programming and services that they are legally entitled to receive; and

Whereas, According to the National Center for Education Statistics, bilingual teachers, along with special education and computer science teachers, are the top three teacher vacancies, especially in underserved schools; and

Whereas, Corey Mitchell wrote in *Education Week* on February 7, 2020, that inadequate training programs, low teacher salaries, a lack of incentives, and difficult working conditions have all contributed to the nationwide problem of finding or producing a sufficient number of bilingual teachers to serve the nation's growing number of bilingual students; and

Whereas, Buffalo Public Schools Acting Assistant Superintendent of Multilingual Education Jenna Colerick noted that her district was “[l]ooking at our multilingual teacher aides and assistants and seeing how possibly they could become certified as ENL or bilingual teachers” as one possible solution, which could be used as a model for other districts; and

Whereas, The New York State Education Department (NYSED) has developed some programs to address the crisis in bilingual education, including the Clinically Rich Intensive Teacher Institute initiative, which provides grants to colleges to offer subsidized bilingual or ENL certification programs for up to 20 candidates per year, and Supplemental Certification Pathways, which make it easier for teachers to meet certification requirements; and

Whereas, More innovative programs and supports for teacher education students, certified teachers, paraprofessionals, teacher aides, and teacher assistants could be put in place to increase the number of teachers and assistants who are qualified to give ELLs the education they deserve; and

Whereas, More innovative programs and supports in school for ELLs, whether they are current NYC residents or newly arrived immigrants, could be put in place to improve the quality of their academic education and their integration into extracurricular school activities, including programs that provide legally mandated special education services for eligible students and services that could help NYC's newest New Yorkers thrive here; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York calls on the New York City Department of Education and the New York State Education Department to collaborate on and prioritize increasing the number of educators trained to work with English Language Learners and to improve the quality and

comprehensiveness of English Language Learners' education.

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