

Good afternoon,

My name is Steve Sweeney. I am the president of the PTA at Tyler Elementary School and I am addressing you in your capacity as advisors to the Office of the State Superintendent.

I want mention a matter of concern to Tyler parents, specifically paraprofessional testing which ~~are~~^{is} conducted in English only. This concern also may be of interest to the parents of students in any other of the six dual language programs at Bancroft, Bruce-Monroe, Cleveland, Marie Reed Learning Center, Oyster-Adams, and Powell. Current proposals for strengthening middle schools would include a strong language component for Eliot-Hine.

Because that test is provided only in English, the testing requirement creates a significant obstacle for Spanish programs like Tyler's, not only in recruiting and hiring, but also retention.

In the Head Start classrooms that require educational aides, the effect is particularly harsh because the teaching model specifies 100% Spanish language in the classroom all day long. Given the other non-classroom English exposure when students are accompanied only by the educational aide, the ability of the aide to speak Spanish to the children during those periods is very important given that at that stage they are learning the language, not practicing speaking it. If the teacher is absent, the educational aide provides continuity in the classroom should a Spanish-speaking substitute not be available.

The English-only testing requirement shrinks the pool of available educational aide candidates. Recruiting is harder. Hiring is harder. At Tyler, we lost at least one aide who had been at Tyler for 4 years because she failed the English-only paraprofessional test by a single point.

In closing, we urge the State Board of Education to advocate with OSSE to help DCPS produce solid dual language Spanish programs, like the Spanish program at Tyler. The parents and the school are committed to educating high performing bilingual and bi-literate students. We seek your help to assist with removal of the English-only paraprofessional testing requirement that presents an obstacle.

Thank you