



Multistate Association for Bilingual Education – Northeast, Inc.

An educational nonprofit organization for educators, families, and policy makers to promote multilingualism, equity, and social justice in communities

Senator Sal DiDomenico, Cambridge
Representative Mary S Keefe, Worcester
Representative Kimberly Ferguson, Worcester
Representative Patricia Duffy, Holyoke
Representative David Paul Linksy, Wayland
Representative Jack Patrick Lewis, Framingham

Dear Legislators,

We write to you as representatives of the Multistate Association for Bilingual Education (MABE). We represent a group of educators who are invested in expanding bilingual education in the state of Massachusetts, and are composed of teachers, students, parents and guardians, district administrators, community members, and professors.

We share a concern that the bill [An Act to promote high-quality comprehensive literacy instruction in all Massachusetts schools](#) which you support poses a threat to the efficacy and expansion of bilingual programs. Long standing research shows that dual language programs; those that use both English and another language for literacy, language arts and content instruction, produce the most effective outcomes for English learners in part because these programs develop students' bilingualism and biliteracy. An English-only literacy focus gets only half of the picture. We must capture a complete picture of students' progress in literacy in both languages for true accountability and for students to reap the program's benefits.

We have concerns about the Massachusetts Early Literacy Universal Screening Assessment that primarily focuses on (a) Phonological and phonemic awareness; (b) Sound symbol recognition; (c) Alphabet knowledge; (d) Decoding skills; (e) Rapid naming skills; (f) Encoding skills; and (g) Oral reading fluency. While research supports the idea that what is true about teaching reading to monolingual students is also true for students learning to read in two languages, the research points out two important differences. One difference is that students learning to read in a new language need additional oral language support so that they will understand the words and text being used to teach them to read. Another difference for language learners is that the student's home language can serve as a resource for learning to read in the other language. Research supports using what children know in their first language to support their learning in a second language. (C. Goldenberg, 2023, Colorin Colorado) The current screening assessment does not take into account a holistic view of bilingualism, recognizing that the two languages being learned in a DLE program are always activated in the child's brain and that a student's performance needs to be considered simultaneously across languages, not just in one language.

The current English-only literacy approach is at odds with districts' desires to expand bilingual education. If they are held to a monolingual literacy structure, then bilingual programs simply cannot reach their full potential because the students are being evaluated as something they are not: Monolingual students. This may cause districts and schools facing potential consequences for low English-literacy test scores, which can occur in early grades if literacy is

not evaluated, in both program languages, to be less likely to plan and implement dual language education models

We are available to meet with you and further explain our concerns about the impact of this bill on the Dual Language Education programs in your district as well as the potential erosion of the goals of the Look Act.

Respectfully,

Phyllis Hardy, Executive Director
Susan McGilvray-Rivet
Fabian Torres-Ardila