



Testimony to the Joint Committee on Education of the 189th General Court of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, in support of H422 and S336, Seal of Bilingualism, May 12, 2015

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Thank you, Senator Chang-Diaz and Representative Peisch, and members of the Joint Committee on Education, for the opportunity to testify in support of H422 and S336, which create a Seal of Bilingualism for high school graduates of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

On behalf of the 106 member organizations of the National Council for Languages and International Studies, let me express our strongest support for these Bills. Recognizing the bilingual skills of Bay Staters as they finish High School will serve the children and the Commonwealth as Massachusetts continues to lead the nation in recognizing the impact of language on the economy of Commonwealth and the contributions language skills make to the national interest.

Language and cultural skills are vital to America's prosperity and security. In terms of job growth, a recent survey by Michigan State University and the National Council for Languages and International Studies showed that 11% of American mid- and large-size companies are seeking college graduates to fill jobs requiring language skills. Moreover, American companies actively seek, and prefer to hire, professionals with significant language proficiency and meaningful experience overseas. These graduates are needed to work in increasingly global and diverse workplaces and to develop products and services for multilingual and multicultural markets here and abroad. The survey showed that language proficiency connotes a range of associated habits of mind, such as flexibility, adaptability, and critical thinking, as well as deeper interpersonal skills, all of which taken together constitute the most important and hardest to find attributes sought among new employees.

Beyond the important and vital external advantages individuals with language skills have on the job market, language learning confers educational advantages and lifelong cognitive benefits. Recent research on the differential impact of Dual Language Immersion in locales as diverse as

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North Carolina, Portland, Oregon, and San Francisco show that fifth-graders who complete Dual Language Immersion programs score as much as a full year ahead of their peers on state assessments of literacy and math, and this holds for immersion students from even the most disadvantaged groups.¹ Recent studies show that bilingual and biliterate Hispanic students are admitted to and finish college at rates higher than any other group, and that they earn significantly more than monolingual English speakers.² Finally, using a second language on at least a weekly basis as an adult correlates with a broad range of cognitive benefits, among them delaying the onset of the symptoms of Alzheimer's³ and making better financial decisions,⁴ as compared to monolinguals.

By providing a mechanism for the school systems of the Commonwealth to endorse the language skills of our high school graduates, however the language was learned, the Bilingual Seal will give Massachusetts students a competitive advantage in college admissions and will recognize a vital skill for the 21st century. Thank you for your attention today and your support for these Bills.

1 Thomas, Wayne P., Virginia P. Collier, and K. Collier. *English learners in North Carolina, 2010*. Fairfax, VA: George Mason University. A research report provided to North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. Retrieved from http://p1cdn4static.sharpschool.com/UserFiles/Servers/Server_4502383/File/NC_ELL_Study_Yr2_Final%20Report_Jul27_2011.pdf (2011).

Umansky, Ilana M., and Sean F. Reardon. "Reclassification patterns among Latino English learner students in bilingual, dual immersion, and English immersion classrooms." *American Educational Research Journal* 51.5 (2014): 879-912.

2 Porras, Diane A., Jongyeon Ee, and Patricia C. Gándara. 2014. "Employer Preferences: Do Bilingual Applicants and Employees Experience and Advantage?" In: Callahan, Rebecca M., and Patricia C. Gándara, eds. *The bilingual advantage: Language, literacy and the US labor market*. Vol. 99. Multilingual Matters.

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3 Alladi, Suvarna, et al. "Bilingualism delays age at onset of dementia, independent of education and immigration status." *Neurology* 81.22 (2013): 1938-1944.

4 Keysar, Boaz, Sayuri L. Hayakawa, and Sun Gyu An. "The foreign-language effect thinking in a foreign tongue reduces decision biases." *Psychological Science* 23.6 (2012): 661-668.