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Patricia Sandoval –Taylor
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Tucson Unified School District
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Dear Ms. Sandoval-Taylor,

I am writing about dual language programs in the Tucson Unified School District (TUSD), specifically the report completed by the Association of Two-Way and Dual Language Education (ATDLE) indicating that, due to Arizona’s current law, Spanish-speaking children are being denied entry until they are deemed “fluent in English.” Since the topic at hand is elementary school children, I hope you’ll indulge a hopefully useful analogy about peanut butter and jelly. Many people in the U.S. like jelly as well as peanut butter. But it’s combining them together makes an iconic and delicious sandwich. The salt and sweetness **together** is more than the sum of its parts.

Let’s add a social twist to this analogy: Imagine that in the U.S., jelly is king. Without it, it’s very difficult to complete school or access a well-paying career. Jelly, of course, is the English language. Spanish is peanut butter. We all know that English Language Learning children who have only peanut butter need to acquire jelly to be successful. Ideally, they can keep their peanut butter while they do so. In fact, **more jelly sticks to your bread** if the peanut butter is thick and strong. This is counterintuitive to a lot of people: “What? My kid needs jelly! The more jelly you give her, the better!” You want jelly? Give her peanut butter too. There are 30+ years of research findings showing that dual language programs result in higher levels of English acquisition, academic proficiency, and Spanish literacy for kids who showed up to school with little to no English abilities.

Now let’s think about the jelly kids, who have no peanut butter. Sure, they can succeed in school and future career prospects without it. But their parents have read reports about how bilinguals display impressive cognitive and social advantages. Maybe they also have personal and social reasons for wanting their children to be bilingual, and they don’t want to wait until high school “foreign language” classes because they know that younger children are better at learning languages. Some of these parents don’t speak a word of Spanish and are thus willing to be unable to help with their children’s homework, so strong is their belief in the value of dual language education and having their kids become pb&j sandwiches. Ecstatic that they got a spot in a dual language program – *dual* meaning peanut butter **and** jelly – they send their jelly kid off to

kindergarten. But at this school, it turns out that the only source of peanut butter is the teacher. Where are all the peanut butter kids? TUSD isn't letting the peanut butter kids in until third, fourth, or sometimes fifth grade, because they are deemed to not have "enough jelly" before then. It's no wonder that the jelly kids develop very low levels of peanut butter, as evidenced by the ATDLE's report. The way to acquire a new language is to use it in meaningful contexts **with peers**.

In summary, this practice is bad for the peanut butter kids because the best way for them to acquire jelly is through enhancing their peanut butter. This is bad for the jelly kids because it limits their exposure to peanut butter. And ultimately, it results in a *de facto* one-way immersion school, for jelly kids only, although it's being advertised as two-way. Besides being nonsensical, this practice could be accused of having a racist undertone in that Latino children are being denied access to a high-quality educational program.

My research in dual language classrooms in Chicago over the past 15 years supports the large body of literature showing that combining these two types of learners starting in Preschool, and engaging them in a high quality bilingual curriculum via well-prepared teachers, leads to high levels of bilingualism and biliteracy, deep cultural knowledge, and relationships built on mutual respect. It is a welcome respite from the toxic xenophobic environment we sometimes see around us, and could perhaps inoculate children against such views. When you are yourself a pb&j sandwich, it's unlikely that you'll develop a hatred towards peanut butter.

Short of repealing Proposition 203 – yet as you probably know, California will vote on repealing Proposition 227 this November – I urge TUSD to allow parents who sign a waiver to enroll their Spanish-speaking children in two-way programs at all grade levels.

Sincerely,



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