

Testimony in favor of HB 1160, 2/27/17

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Good afternoon Members of the Committee. My name is Emily Volkert and I am representing myself. I taught third grade bilingual learners in Denver Public Schools for four years and have spent two years supporting bilingual teachers in DPS as an elementary literacy specialist for the district, and as Dean of Instruction at Centennial Elementary. I am pleased to speak today in favor of House Bill 1160.

I fully support the intentions of the READ Act. Identifying struggling readers is of utmost importance for our K-3 classrooms so that teachers and literacy specialists can target their instruction to support the most at-risk students. I have testified in support of House Bill 1323 and have hosted a focus group to bring educator's perspectives to further inform READ act implementation.

Much like in the field of medicine, the READ act assessments educators use allow us to effectively diagnose students' needs. The original intent of the READ Act is to help teachers determine their students' reading proficiency, as well as understand in which areas students need the most support—for example in comprehension, fluency or phonics, to name a few.

A student's ability to read is not limited by the language that she or he speaks nor the language in which he or she receives instruction. As the Attorney General stated in 2014, "the purpose of the READ Act is to ensure that students become proficient in reading. There are other provisions of law that seek to test proficiency in understanding the English language, but the READ Act's focus is on the skill, not the language in which it is employed."

A teacher who teaches in Spanish will not be able to use data from an English assessment to drive their instruction, much like a hearing test would not give a doctor information about patient's broken arm. It is a waste of instructional time to have teachers unnecessarily assess their students in languages that they do not teach.

Allowing districts to choose whether or not to double-test students does not mean that students will not progress in their English language proficiency. Under Colorado's English Language Proficiency Program, districts are required to provide evidence-based English instruction for all English learners and track that progress annually with the ACCESS test.

The passage of this bill will empower districts and restore local control to the experts who know their students and their needs the best. If this bill passes and a district opts to end double-testing, hours of instructional time to support students will be restored and teachers will be able to use appropriate assessment data to target their reading instruction.

Thank you, committee members, for the opportunity to appear before you today in support of HB 1160. I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have.