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Testimony to the Senate Education Committee Regarding Interim Charge 5

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On behalf of our 65,000 members, thank you to the committee for giving special attention to the needs of English Language Learners. Our members would also like to thank Senators Davis, Shapiro, and Van de Putte for inviting them to the English Language Learners professional development course and forum in August. The forum served as an opportunity for educators to exchange ideas on what strategies are most effective in helping ELL students make a successful transition into the public school system. The presenters emphasized the importance of first ensuring that ELL students have a firm foundation in their primary language and the significance of maintaining their original language. Also frequently noted by the presenters was the need for more parental involvement and support.

Meeting the needs of ELL students is especially important considering recent TEA data that show the number of students receiving bilingual or English-as-a-second-language instructional services increased by 58.2 percent over the past 10 years. Within the bilingual and ESL programs, as well as within the LEP population, 87.3 percent of students were categorized as economically disadvantaged.

AFT has been a strong proponent of “wraparound services,” provided in schools by city or county agencies, community organizations, and nonprofit groups to help involve parents and address the unmet needs of disadvantaged kids and their families. After-school academic programs; health, dental and social services; job banks; housing counseling and information; and GED and training programs for parents all help eliminate the barriers to success for students and entire communities. Plano ISD serves as a good example of how schools can reach out to the community to help ELL students by helping parents. Plano ISD uses an outreach bus to reach out to parents in *colonias* and helps parents, mostly women, enter vocational classes. The LUCHA program, administered by the University of Texas, is another example of how outreach services can assist students by validating coursework and helping ensure students have the ability to graduate on time.

Toward the end of the August forum, Senator Davis asked the audience: What would be the best intervention to assist ELL students? Overwhelmingly, the educators in the audience stated that providing access to high-quality prekindergarten would be the single best intervention for these students. The educators also stated that this would assist in creating a PK-16 vision for parents.

As this committee moves forward with its recommendations, we hope that you will take note of the many successful strategies suggested by the educators who have seen first-hand what is most effective for ELL students. The committee should also recommend an increase in resources for these programs so that all students in need can have the same access to these effective initiatives.

(For a valuable overview of what the research does and doesn't tell us at this point about teaching ELLs, we encourage you to look at the articles by Claude Goldenberg in the Summer 2008 issue of *American Educator*, AFT's professional journal, at this link: http://www.aft.org/pdfs/americaneducator/summer2008/ae_summer08.pdf.)