

January 29, 2019

Student Achievement and Support Committee
Board of Education for the School District of Philadelphia
440 N. Broad Street
Philadelphia PA 19130

Dear Co-Chairs Dr. McIver and Dr. McGinley,

Our organizations work with families throughout the School District of Philadelphia (the “District”) to ensure that immigrants, English Learner (“EL”) students and limited English proficient families have equitable access to and quality services in our schools. We greatly appreciate the school staff that have committed to valuable child-serving partnerships with our organizations and advocates. There is more that the District can and must do to improve its policies and practices so that together we can ensure all ELs reach their potential. ***We write to respectfully urge the Committee to convene a meeting devoted solely to how the District can more effectively meet the educational needs of vulnerable English Learners.***

There are over 15,000 English Learners who speak more than 100 home languages in the District. Throughout all our individual and collective work on behalf of ELs, we have observed a number of common concerns and barriers that are routinely experienced by these students. As was described in more detail in the various statements of public testimony presented at the Committee’s meeting on January 10, 2019 (attached hereto as appendix), these priority concerns include, among others: eliminating delays and inappropriate denials of special education evaluations for English Learner students; ensuring sufficient and effective ESL instruction; providing consistent interpretation and translation services for limited English proficient parents and students; and providing sufficient specialized support for ELs to ensure access to high school opportunities and that they are “college and career ready.”

We look forward to speaking about these issues in greater detail at a future Committee meeting dedicated to the concerns of English Learners, where we will encourage parents and students, teachers and community members to share their experiences, struggles, and recommendations with you directly. Thank you for prioritizing the important issues confronting these exceptionally vulnerable students.

Sincerely,

Education Law Center, Maura McInerney, Kristina Moon

Community member, former ESOL teacher and TESOL educator, Cheri Micheau

African Family Health Organization, Kiera Kenney

Asian Americans United, Teresa Engst

Bethany Christian Services of Greater Delaware Valley, Peter Gottemoller

HIAS Pennsylvania, Valeri Harteg

Pennsylvania Immigration and Citizenship Coalition, Maria Sotomayor

Pennsylvania Migrant Education Program, Gena Bernal
Philadelphia HUNE, Inc., Yovana Bustamante-Arroyo
Nationalities Service Center, Danielle Bossert

Appendix: January 10, 2019 Testimony of Education Law Center; HIAS Pennsylvania; Cheri Micheau
cc: Lynn Rauch, General Counsel