



Congressman Pedro R. Pierluisi  
Statement As Prepared For Delivery  
Committee on Education and Labor  
Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education  
Hearing on “Elementary and Secondary Education Act Reauthorization:  
Addressing the Needs of Diverse Students”  
*March 18, 2010*

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to extend my own welcome to the witnesses, particularly Ms. Diaz, who I understand was raised in Puerto Rico. Welcome everyone!

Today’s hearing addresses the educational issues faced by a range of diverse learners. Because I have only a brief period of time, I want to focus my questions on the needs of English language learners, which are the fastest growing segment of the nation’s school-age population. How well our schools educate these students will likely dictate the future success of our nation.

To meet the needs of English learners, our schools must provide not only highly qualified teachers of English as a Second Language, but also teachers who can teach these students in their native tongue. Yet schools in Puerto Rico and in many states are having great difficulty recruiting highly qualified bilingual teachers certified to teach ESL and subject-specific classes in the students’ native language. Due to the dearth of quality applicants, many teachers of English learners do not have the fluency or ESL teaching skills necessary to provide effective instruction to this student population.

The need for high quality bilingual education extends beyond the needs of English learners. We must prepare all students to work and succeed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century worldwide marketplace and to provide students in the United States with the same language skills already required of students in Europe and Asia. That is why it is important that high school graduates of all backgrounds be able to communicate in more than one language.

The need to improve teacher quality is part of the reason I have introduced the Teacher Exchange Act of 2010, which would fund teacher exchanges between school districts in different regions of the United States. Exchanges provide teachers with exposure to new and innovative instructional strategies, especially those in low-performing schools. Exchanges also hold great promise for teachers of foreign languages and of English as a Second Language, who can be placed in schools where the predominant language spoken is the language taught by the teacher.

I now would like to ask the witnesses how we might best educate English language learners.