

2/17/2016

Re: Testimony in opposition to SB444

Dear Chair Abrams and Members of the Senate Education Committee,

Thank you for hearing my concerns regarding SB444.

I am a parent of an adult with profound hearing loss. I have been studying trends and methods of education for deaf and hard of hearing children for about 36 years now, watching the pendulum bang back and forth, raising the same questions as to why our children still, on average, only achieve a 3rd or 4th grade reading level. Just like every other person here, my desire is to find efficient means for linguistic competency for all children. I commend and applaud the inventors of this proposition and hope that we can work together to iron out differences and fill in gaps to make it work for Kansas' kids.

My impression at first reading of SB 444 is based on gut emotion from my first exposure to education presented in ASL. At my introductory meeting with a Deaf teacher of the deaf, I was told that our toddler was born deaf and should be raised Deaf. His culture would be that of the Deaf, not of the hearing. He should be raised in the Deaf Community and I should learn to sign ASL if I wanted to communicate with him. Needless to say, I wasn't willing to give up my offspring to a world of which I had no knowledge. I believe my experience is much like the vast majority of parents who find themselves with children who have hearing loss, searching for educational programs to fit their own children's needs. Therefore, I propose amendments to:

Section 1. (a) line 10scope of the program includes language developmental milestones in American sign language, English literacy and, if applicable, spoken English and visual supplements. *Not every parent chooses ASL. Why is it listed first on all of the assessment tools and evaluations? What are "visual supplements"? If manual codes of English, Signed English, or Signing Exact English, cued speech, or visual phonics are in this category, where is that defined? And why do they appear as an afterthought?*

Section 1. (c) lines 26 – 36both ASL and English...*if parents choose auditory options and spoken English or one of the visual forms of English, what qualified specialists will be evaluating those components?*

Section 1. (e) (1) lines 37-38 Collaborate with the coordinating council on early childhood developmental services: *Have Sound Start, Sound Beginnings, Kansas School for the Deaf...been collaborating on this proposal? Will there be coordination with newborn screening programs and speech-language pathologists for early identification and diagnoses?*

Section 1. (e) (2) lines 39-40 ...input from experts...developmental milestones:
Experts from bi-bi programs? Experts from a variety of educational programs for the deaf? Developmental milestones on a scale of expectations for children with hearing loss or compared to average hearing children?

Section 1. (e) (4) lines 39-40 Identify criteria for qualified ASL and English language experts....*spoken and visual English?*

Section 1. (f) (2) line 18 ...stages towards ASL and English literacy...*Couldn't we just say "language competence" for all children...*

Section 1. (h) (2) line 4 ...English with the use of visual supplements. *Can we please define "visual supplements"? Visual phonics, cued speech, Signed English, Signing Exact English, PSE, CASE...*

In conclusion, it has taken some research to determine who wrote this bill and what their ideas are for the proposal. The reading of it scares me in that there is precious little mention of parents and their contribution to the education of their children ages 0-8.

It scares me that I see much time and consideration has been placed in the writing, yet very little time has been given in making the public aware of its introduction and therefore, very little time for parents to gather their thoughts about legislation that will make such a major difference in their lives and the lives of their children.

It scares me knowing that so many attempts for bilingual-bicultural education have resulted in abysmal comprehension and reading rates. This bill, as it is presently written, points to bi-bi education.

Programs to assess, track and monitor language development in children 0-8 are needed. Parents are the first and most constant teachers of their children and they need help in knowing where their children stand with respect to language development. They especially need unbiased advice from a variety of qualified language researchers, speech-language pathologists, audiologists, teachers, and from other parents, not only about the assessments, but how to develop language plans appropriate for their families. I feel strongly that this bill can be rewritten to include all philosophies of education for the deaf.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of these hot topics.

Patrice Stephenson
Goddard, Kansas
316-794-8993

