

Chairperson and Members of the Salem-Keizer Budget Committee, Superintendent Sandy Husk, School Administrators, Teachers, Staff and Community members, my name is Eduardo Angulo and I am the Chairman of the Salem/Keizer Coalition for Equality.

I am testifying tonight to ask you to continue supporting English Language Learners in Salem-Keizer by maintaining funding for ELL programs and services for the 7,500+ ELL, mostly Latino students in our School District.

According to a recent Chalkboard Project Report, Latino students are 13% less likely to graduate than their peers.

In addition, the High School graduation rate for ELL students statewide is up 63% compared to 87% for non-English Language Learners.

Today, the achievement gap is especially more persistent between the 7500, mostly Latino English Language Learners (ELL) and the rest of the student population.

The Latino ELL achievement gap is most persistent in our NE Salem schools.

And that fact alone should worry all of us and it demands that we stay focus on it, more than ever!

That is the one of the main reasons why we commissioned this Data Research Report we are presenting to you tonight. It is based on the Oregon Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (OAKS) academic achievement data submitted by our school district to the Oregon Department of Education.

This data research was done by Jan Calvin, a well-respected researcher and Salem community leader.

We did it to get a snap shot of our School District related to English Language Learners overall academic performance and while doing it we found reasons to celebrate. And that is that our 40,000 STUDENTS ARE IMPROVING THEIR ACADEMIC STANDARDS in reading, writing and doing math compared to previous years!

We also have several Northeast Salem schools that are pockets of success, and that gives us a strong reason to continue believing that our Superintendent and her Leadership Team are on the right track.

And that is the main reason all our Latino Parent Leaders and our Latino families are here tonight. To show their support for the hard work that our Superintendent and her Leadership Team have been doing trying to come out with the best case scenarios to maintain the course of our school district guided by our on-going Strategy Plan in this hard economic times for all of us in our Salem-Keizer community.

Our parent leaders are also here tonight because the OAKS data clearly show that English Language Learners are struggling to perform at the same level as their non-ELL peers in Salem/Keizer schools. And most of these 7500+ ELL students are Latinos.

Our state and our district are changing – there are more low-income students and students of color. This presents huge challenges for educators, as you all well know.

It is challenging to find bi-lingual and bi-cultural teachers and staff. Teachers require professional development to understand new populations and strategies for success.

Poverty creates other issues for students: hungry, stressed children don't learn well.

In the face of all these challenges I have to tell you that over the past 12 years that the Salem/Keizer Coalition for Equality has been advocating for these students and working to educate their parents that there have been significant improvements.

There are partnerships in the community to provide afterschool programs, mentors, advocacy and support for students and their families. Communication is much improved.

There are committed teachers and principals adopting best practices to engage ALL students.

There are ELL kindergarten classrooms where students are doing BETTER on state tests than their white peers.

Teachers have access to quality professional development and schools are seeing results from programs like AVID and ASPIRE.

We all know that there is room for improvement.

We must work together to close that gap so that every student in this District feels supported from early childhood to college and career.

The School Board and the Administration have made a commitment to support English Language Learners by adopting Literacy Squared and training teachers. And we thank you for that.

This is especially important because 1 in 5 of new kindergarteners in Oregon is an English Language Learner.

In order to be on grade level in the third grade these students need quality, effective programs and teachers in kindergarten (and, preferably, before).

Other districts are watching our progress and funding decisions as they face similar cuts.

You all know that English Language Learners bring additional funding to the District because of the additional costs associated with ELL instruction.

You also know that this money is shared with all the students in our district to support our schools.

Our English Language Learners face hardships and struggles and need an equitable education system.

They need you to speak for them by continuing your commitment to an equitable and robust education for all students.

Together we are making a difference for these children. We cannot stop now.

Thank you.