



NEW YORK STATE ASSOCIATION FOR BILINGUAL EDUCATION

New York University
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July 14, 2018

Mr. Michael J. Romagnino
Superintendent of Schools
Cliffside Park Board of Education
525 Palisade Avenue
Cliffside Park, New Jersey 07010

Dear Mr. Romagnino,

We are writing this letter in support of Yennifer Pinales and the immigrant community in Cliffside Park, NJ.

The New York State Association for Bilingual Education (NYSABE) is a professional non-profit organization that represents educators, parents, members of community-based organizations, private agencies, and institutions of higher education as well as advocates involved in the education of English language learners/bilingual students in New York State. One of the purposes of our organization is to advocate for broad public recognition of the importance of bilingualism and biliteracy as a path toward equitable participation in a global, multilingual and multicultural world.

In October 2017, we learned from the news that a student in the 12th grade at Cliffside Park High School, named Yennifer Pinales, had been punished by her teacher for speaking Spanish in school. In a video taken by a classmate that received widespread media attention with millions of views, the teacher is recorded telling students they must "Speak American." NYSABE, as the leading professional organization advocating for the linguistic rights of diverse communities, expressed its support for Ms. Pinales and invited her and Mr. Kleidon Ndreu, the student council president, to speak at our 2018 NYSABE conference about their experiences before over 500 members of our organization.

We promote bilingual education and the use of students' home languages in school as valid and research-based pedagogy to ensure the academic success and socio-emotional development of students as they develop bilingualism and biliteracy. Decades of research have again and again validated the benefits of bilingualism, both for students whose home language is other than

English and for those whose home language is English and who are learning another language. Bilingualism has proven advantages for the cognitive, academic, social, and civic development of our youth, and help to influence and shape how students experience learning, friendships, and their communities.

Any teaching approach requiring bilingual students, or any students, to speak only English in school is a form of *de facto* English-only policy and implies a deficit view of bilingualism. As an organization, we oppose English-only policies in schools for their negative academic and socio-emotional impact on English language learners/bilingual students, and their promotion and validation of xenophobic attitudes among their classmates and teachers. For these reasons, we hope that you and the school board members of your community school district will take corrective actions to ensure that bilingualism is valued and promoted in the schools of Cliffside Park and that immigrants and their languages are supported and sustained.

Thank you for your commitment to ensure the academic success and the socio emotional development of all students, including those from linguistically and culturally diverse communities in Cliffside Park.

Sincerely,

Iraida Bodré
NYSABE President

C: Cliffside Park Board Members
NYSABE Board of Directors