

Reject Measure 58 limits on non-English education

Published: August 30, 2008

Yamhill News-Register

Ballot Measure 58 prohibits teaching public school students in a language other than English for more than two years. The teaching of a foreign language to English-speaking students is exempted.

We say No to another Sizemore ballot measure, this one because of its one-size-fits-all approach and the cost of its implementation.

It is incumbent on our school system to mainstream English language learners as soon as possible so they can excel at a rate equal to students who are native born. The problem is, students progress at different levels. This law takes individual educational decisions out of the hands of parents, teachers and local school districts.

According to the fiscal impact statement filed with the Secretary of State, the law "mandates that non-English speaking students be immersed in English for a limited amount of time." But federal law requires that students make satisfactory academic progress each year. If Measure 58 passes, meeting both federal and state requirements will require additional resources.

More teachers and instructional assistants would be required for each school, plus we'd need a 10 percent increase in spending for additional instructional materials. Schools would need extra staff to help English language learners keep up on other subjects. Measure 58 doesn't even make an exemption for students with learning disabilities, putting them under the same strict timeline.

The cost of this law is an estimated \$253 million for the first two years. In the current economy, that means resources will be taken from other classrooms, unless, of course, Mr. Sizemore recommends a tax increase.

It just doesn't make sense. It's a recipe for failure and increased drop-out rates of immigrant students already at risk.

We think English language learners should assimilate as soon as possible, and that's the goal of educators, too. How we do that says volumes about us as a society. Ballot Measure 58 is the wrong way; let's spend our energy on more positive methods that will accomplish the same goal.