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### Coalition launches campaign against education measures

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With two months left before the Nov. 4 election, a coalition of education organizations, parent groups, elected officials, public employee unions and immigrant rights groups came out swinging Thursday at two education-related ballot measures sponsored by anti-tax activist Bill Sizemore.

In an afternoon press conference at Eugene's River Road-El Camino del Rio Elementary School, speakers with the fledgling Parents and Teachers Know Better campaign called the measures costly, ill-conceived, inflexible and potentially damaging to the children of Oregon.

"It's clear from these ballot measures that Bill Sizemore is not an education expert," said south Eugene parent Jennifer Geller, chairwoman for the Lane County chapter of the advocacy group Stand for Children. "They're poorly written, vague and not based on best practices."

Measure 60 calls for using "classroom performance," not seniority, as the basis for teacher pay raises and retention.

Measure 58 would limit the amount of time students with little or no English could be taught in a language other than English to no more than two years for students in grades 9 through 12, 18 months for those in grades 5 through 8 and one year for those in kindergarten through grade 4.

The latter has particular resonance at River Road, whose staff is in the throes of planning for a likely conversion next year to a two-way, Spanish/English immersion school.

Such programs, which have sprouted throughout the country and in Oregon in recent years as the Hispanic population grows, serve roughly equal numbers of native English and Spanish speakers, who are taught in English half the day, Spanish the other half. Several studies have found both groups benefit from dual immersion, demonstrating higher achievement, bilingual literacy skills and more positive cross-cultural attitudes.

Treasure Mackley, manager for the opposition campaign, said the measure is

sufficiently vague that it's unclear what its effect on such programs might be, but that they could well be sunk.

In a telephone interview, Sizemore said so long as Spanish-speaking students demonstrated "proficiency" in English within the measure's proscribed time line, they could continue on in a dual immersion program, although the measure does not appear to explain how that would work.

Abby Lane, the Eugene district's English Language Learner coordinator, said research has found it can take anywhere from five to 10 years for a non-native English speaker to master English well enough to keep up academically. Measure 58 mandates a "one-size-fits-all" approach that will hamper districts' ability to serve each student, she said.

Sizemore said too many English language learners get "sidelined" in special programs, partly so schools can continue collecting the extra state funds attached to them.

"When kids come to this country, they can only succeed if they become proficient in English," he said.

"English proficiency is the gateway to economic success in this country. This measure is not anti-immigrant, it's the opposite."

Measure 60 doesn't define how classroom performance would be measured, but Geller and other speakers cautioned it would likely lead to more high-pressure standardized testing and wrest local control from schools and districts.

"In places where these kinds of things have been implemented, there's been a big increase in standardized testing," Mackley said.

Sizemore said Measure 60 differs in a key way from an unsuccessful measure he floated in 2000, which tied teacher pay to student learning. It would be up to the Legislature and/or local districts to determine how to measure classroom performance, he said, and standardized testing might play no role at all.

"The reality is under the current system 95 percent of the teachers' pay is based on how long they've been there, not whether they're good teachers, not whether they're doing a good job or their school performance is up to par," said Sizemore, who has sparred repeatedly over the years with teacher unions.

"They just get paid more because they've been there longer, and that's not good for the kids and it's not good for public education."

Thursday's press conference also cited the estimated \$600 million-plus price tag of the two measures in the 2009-2011 biennium, noting they would siphon dollars directly from the classroom.

Sizemore called the numbers, put out by a committee of state and local government officials, “fabricated.”

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