

July 5, 2022

The Honorable Anthony J. Portantino  
Chair, California State Senate Appropriations Committee  
State Capitol, Room 412  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: Assembly Bill 2465 (Bonta) – SUPPORT**

Dear Mr. Chairman:

On behalf of UnidosUS (formerly the National Council of La Raza), I am writing in support of AB 2465 (Bonta), as amended June 23, 2022. AB 2465 lays out a multifaceted strategy to address persistent gaps in literacy rates and to support bilingualism and multiliteracy. Student literacy and biliteracy is a determining factor for academic success. Thus, targeted investments are key to the success of Latino and English learner (EL) students.

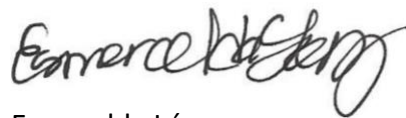
UnidosUS is the nation's largest Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization and has built a stronger country by creating opportunities for Latinos for more than 50 years. Through its unique combination of expert research, advocacy, programs, and an Affiliate Network of nearly 300 community-based organizations across the United States and Puerto Rico, UnidosUS simultaneously challenges the social, economic, and political barriers at the national and local levels. The UnidosUS California-based Affiliates include 63 community-based organizations that invest more than \$1.8 billion and employ more than 15,000 staff to provide direct services to approximately 1.8 million Californians annually. UnidosUS is headquartered in Washington, DC, and has an office in Los Angeles and staff in Sacramento. Through partnerships, community investments, and state research and advocacy on housing, health, and education, UnidosUS advances opportunities for the more than 15 million Latinos who call California home.

Reading proficiently by the end of third grade is an important benchmark in a child's educational development as, by the fourth grade, students are using their skills to understand subjects such as math and science, solve problems, think critically about what they are learning, and share their knowledge with others.<sup>1</sup> Research also shows that students who live in poverty are three times more likely to drop out or fail to graduate high school; for Black and Latino students, the combined effects of poverty and poor third-grade reading skills make the dropout rate eight times greater.<sup>2</sup> AB 2465 would make significant changes in how the state promotes literacy for California's students.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), [only 32% of California's fourth-graders read proficiently](#). Furthermore, [low-income students and students of color](#) are far behind the average student. In 2019, 49% of White fourth-graders were proficient compared to 18% of Black and 22% of Latino fourth-grade students. Moreover, only 20% of fourth-graders receiving free and reduced-price lunch were proficient compared to 52% of students not eligible for free and reduced-price lunch. Given the disproportionate impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on students of color, it is necessary to address their academic needs and support their literacy skills.

UnidosUS is pleased to support AB 2465 to address the literacy gaps disproportionately impacting low-income students of color. This bill is essential for providing the academic support that vulnerable students need to reach academic success. If you have any questions regarding our support, please contact Viviana Martin, Policy Analyst, Policy and Advocacy at [vmartin@unidosus.org](mailto:vmartin@unidosus.org).

Sincerely,



Esmeralda López  
California State Director  
UnidosUS

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<sup>1</sup> Leila Fiester, *Early Warning! Why Reading by the End of Third Grade Matters* (Baltimore, MD: Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2010), 9, [https://assets.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/AECF-Early\\_Warning\\_Full\\_Report-2010.pdf](https://assets.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/AECF-Early_Warning_Full_Report-2010.pdf) (accessed June 22, 2022).

<sup>2</sup> Annie E. Casey Foundation, "Students Who Don't Read Well in Third Grade Are More Likely to Drop Out or Fail to Finish High School," *Annie E. Casey Foundation Blog*, April 8, 2011, <https://www.aecf.org/blog/poverty-puts-struggling-readers-in-double-jeopardy-minorities-most-at-risk> (accessed June 18, 2022).