



May 6, 2009

The Honorable Darrell Steinberg
Chair, Senate Rules Committee
State Capitol, Room 205
Sacramento, CA. 95814

RE: Opposition of the Appointment of Raeneene Belisle to the State Board of Education

Dear Senator Steinberg,

On behalf of the National Council of La Raza (NCLR), the nation's largest constituency-based Latino organization with over 52 affiliates and 24 charter schools in the state of California, I am writing to urge you to oppose the confirmation of Raeneene Belisle appointment to the State Board of Education (SBE).

As the governing and policy-making body of the California Department of Education, the SBE sets K-12 education policy in the areas of standards, instructional materials, assessment, accountability and granting charters. Ms. Belisle has a long history of state service which has included work in the state legislature, the State Board of Education and the Sacramento County Office of Education. However, it is her role as Chief Counsel and Executive Director to the State Board of Education from 1997 to 2004 that gives NCLR its greatest concern.

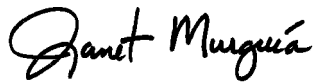
Her track record on the schooling of English learners was to consistently support a "one size fits all" approach. This impacted textbook adoptions, statewide testing policies, and professional development for teachers and administrators. As a result, English learners were denied access to the most appropriate and effective instruction and curriculum thus marginalizing the 1.5 million English language learner (ELL) students attending California's K-12 schools.

In addition to Ms. Belisle's narrow interpretation of the law and view of education affecting English learners, she consistently supported the promulgation of Title V Administrative Regulations that undermined the rights of parents to choose the best education for their children and to restrict the rights they have at the local level. Title V Regulations on the "waiver provision" of Prop 227 were issued. Her legal advice led to litigation and policy reversal by legislation pertaining to Reading First regulations prohibiting bilingual classrooms or schools with one or more bilingual classrooms from eligibility for receiving Reading First funds.

NCLR and our member organizations, understand that a good working relationship with members and staff of the State Board of Education is critical and necessary to help shape the best policies and practices for improving schools and ensuring academic success for all students, English learners in particular. It is clear that agreement with the members on all issues is not possible but lines of communication must be open and the work of the Board must be accessible and transparent to the public.

While we appreciate Ms. Belisle's support for public education and her years of public service, we must oppose her appointment to a four-year term on the State Board of Education due to her past track record, which has not advanced the status of English Learners in California. Thank you for the opportunity to express our concerns over this important appointment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Janet Murgia". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Janet Murgia
President

Cc: Senators Jenny Oropeza and Gilbert Cedillo