

**Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc.**

A Global Education Association Founded in 1966

December 12, 2008

Presidential Transition Team



Washington, D.C. 20001

Dear Transition Team:

As the Executive Committee of the Board of Directors of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc. (TESOL), a global education association representing English language teaching professionals worldwide, we are writing to provide TESOL's views and priorities on a number of critical issues that will be considered by President-elect Obama and the team at the Department of Education. The growing demographic shifts in the cultural and linguistic diversity in the United States are having a profound impact upon the education system at all levels, and truly require a new focus on meeting the demands of the English language learner population.

Incorporated in 1966, Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc. (TESOL), is a global association for English language teaching professionals headquartered in Alexandria, Virginia, USA. TESOL encompasses a network of approximately 60,000 educators worldwide, consisting of more than 14,000 individual members and an additional 45,000 educators within the 100 plus TESOL affiliate associations. TESOL's mission is to develop and maintain professional expertise in English language teaching for speakers of other languages worldwide.

Over the past decade, the population of English language learners among the school-age population has grown by 57%, with estimates of over 5 million English language learners in U.S. schools. The 2000 Census showed that approximately 1 in 5 households in the U.S. speak a language other than English at home. The need for effective English language services is continuing to grow dramatically in the U.S., and this factor needs to be at the forefront of all policy considerations.

### **U.S. Department of Education**

- *Leadership at the Department of Education* – When appointing new leadership at the U.S. Department of Education, TESOL encourages consideration of leaders who not only have a comprehensive view of life-long learning, but also who understand the unique needs of English language learners. The top officials at the U.S. Department of Education, including the Secretary of Education, should have knowledge of second-language acquisition and the diversity of English language learners. In addition, the Office of English Language Acquisition, which serves a critical need, should be strengthened with additional staff and resources, and have all of its responsibilities restored, including oversight of the Title III state grants.
- *Elementary and Secondary Education* – The assessment of, and accountability for, the academic achievement of English language learners has become one of the most challenging

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issues under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Developing academic level proficiency in English, as well as having valid and reliable assessments to accurately measure academic progress is critical for the academic success for English language learners. A significant investment of resources is needed to achieve this aim, as well as the commitment to creating a fair and reliable accountability system for English language learners.

- *Bilingual Education* – Thank you for the support for bilingual education asserted in President-elect Obama’s platform. When reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act comes up for consideration, TESOL urges greater support from the new administration for programs that support biliteracy and bilingualism for English language learners, such as outlined in the Providing Resources to Improve Dual Language Education Act of 2007 (H.R. 3842).
- *Teacher Preparation and Education* – There is a critical shortage of trained teachers in the U.S., not only in English as a second language (ESL) and bilingual specialists, but also general education and content-area teachers with training in aspects of second-language acquisition. TESOL supports expanded funding for and improving professional development for teachers of English language learners including the development and dissemination of best practices such as proposed in the English Language Instruction Improvement Act of 2007 (H.R. 2957).
- *Adult Education* – The growth in the English language learner population in U.S. schools has been reflected by an increased demand for adult ESL classes and programs. Unfortunately, while demand for English language instruction has dramatically increased, federal funding for adult education and ESL programs has actually declined in the past several years. A recent survey among 176 ESOL providers conducted by the National Association of Latino Elected & Appointed Officials (NALEO) showed that 57.4 percent maintained waiting lists, ranging from a few weeks to more than 3 years. The needs of the adult education, language, and literacy system in the U.S. have been too often overlooked, especially at a time when they are in most need of attention. A significant investment of resources is desperately needed in this sector, and TESOL urges the new administration to include the needs of adult learners and adult ESL educators among its education priorities.

### **U.S. Departments of State and Homeland Security**

- *International Students* – The past eight years have seen tremendous change in the U.S. student visa system, and while some of the barriers for international students have been overcome, there are many improvements that can still be made. All of the agencies of the U.S. government should work more collaboratively in improving access for international students, and visa policies should be revised and updated to reflect current practices in international education, such as short-term study programs.
- *Immigration Reform* – As many adult English language learners are themselves immigrants, immigration reform will undoubtedly have a profound effect upon this learner population when it is ultimately implemented. TESOL recommends the new administration support more resources for ESL and citizenship programs as part of any immigration reform legislation, as well as pathways to citizenship for undocumented learners.



TESOL stands ready to work with President-elect Obama and his team as they face appropriations challenges, consider the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and the Workforce Investment Act, and address important issues that affect classrooms, teachers, administrators, parents and students. The association looks forward to working with the new administration to support the academic achievement of all students, including the growing number of culturally and linguistic diverse students in U.S. schools.

Thank you for your attention to these views. As the transition progresses, if TESOL can provide you with any additional information, please contact John Segota, Advocacy and Professional Relations Manager, at 703-518-2513 or by e-mail at [jsegota@tesol.org](mailto:jsegota@tesol.org).

Our best wishes go to President-elect Obama and his team at the start of the new administration.

Sincerely,

Shelley Wong  
President

Mark Algren  
President Elect

Sandy Briggs  
Past President

Cc: TESOL Board of Directors  
Charles S. Amorosino, Jr., Executive Director  
John Segota, Advocacy and Professional Relations Manager