January 19, 2017

Tim Carter
Yavapai County School Superintendent
Yavapai County Education Service Agency
2970 Centerpointe East Drive
Prescott, AZ 86301

Dr. Karol Schmidt
Executive Director
Arizona State Board of Education
1700 W. Washington St.
Phoenix, AZ 85007

Dear Mr. Carter and Dr. Schmidt:

On behalf of TESOL International Association, the largest professional association serving English language educators, and Arizona TESOL (AZTESOL), the state affiliate of TESOL, we are writing in reference to the college- and career-readiness indicators under consideration by the Arizona State Board of Education for its system for School Accountability achievement profiles. According to the published notes from the January 4 meeting of the A-F School Accountability Ad Hoc Advisory Committee, two years of foreign language is one of the proposed indicators for college- and career-readiness. The ability to speak more than one language is a critical skill for today’s global economy, so both TESOL and AZ-TESOL support including this as an indicator of college- and career-readiness.

Research has shown that the ability to speak more than one language brings multiple cognitive benefits, and facilitates higher-order brain functions. A significant study in 2004 from Bialystock, Craik, Klein, and Viswanathan showed that individuals with the ability to speak more than one language demonstrate higher cognitive and executive controls than those who spoke only one language. A more recent study published in 2016 from Bak, Long, Vega-Mendoza, and Sorace demonstrated that even short-term language study benefits mental agility.

Foreign and second language skills are especially pertinent and relevant to college and career readiness our 21st century world. Further, access to foreign/second language instruction and mastery is accessible to students who receive public education regardless of socio-economic status or most geographical locations. This includes students whose speak a native language other than English, but who have developed academic-level proficiency in English. We strongly urge Arizona to include foreign or second language high school course work, or demonstrated
proficiency in a foreign or second language, as an indicator of College and Career Readiness for its system for School Accountability achievement profiles.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide input as you consider these indicators for college- and career-readiness for Arizona students.

Sincerely,

Marjaneh Gilpatrick, EdD
AZTESOL President
Executive Director, Educational Outreach
College of Education, Grand Canyon University

Rosa Aronson, PhD, FASAE, CAE
Executive Director
TESOL International Association