TESOL Releases Findings From Meeting on Common Core State Standards

Alexandria, VA (7 May 2013) — TESOL International Association has just released the findings of its recent meeting to discuss the changing role of the teacher of English as a second language (ESL) under the new Common Core State Standards.

On 14 February 2013, TESOL invited 30 ESL teachers and district administrators, education experts, researchers, and thought leaders from Maryland and the District of Columbia to discuss the impact of CCSS on ESL teachers and English learners in the United States. The meeting was held at the TESOL headquarters in Alexandria, Virginia.

“English language teachers have, for the most part, been treated as an afterthought in the discussions on the Common Core,” said TESOL Executive Director Rosa Aronson. “We held the convening to bring them into the conversation.”

The meeting generated a lively and productive discussion of the challenges and opportunities presented by the CCSS. The group’s findings included the following:

**Teacher preparation:** The credentialing and training systems for ESL teachers and content-area teachers who teach English learners vary widely from state to state. This variation creates ambiguity for ESL teachers’ roles, which sometimes obscures their expertise. It also means that some content-area teachers are not fully prepared to teach English learners.

**ESL teacher involvement in policy making:** ESL teachers have not had a voice in policy-making discussions. Participants noted that they had not been invited to meetings at their schools to discuss CCSS implementation because administrators did not believe the CCSS affected English learners. All felt strongly that ESL teachers need to find their voices and advocate for their students.

**Importance of academic language:** The CCSS requires all students to develop competence in using academic language. ESL teachers have the training and expertise not only to help their students meet this requirement but also to advise their content-area teacher colleagues on how to help native-English-speaking students succeed as well. ESL teachers are thus critical to the success of the CCSS across the United States.
Role of administrators and principals: Administrators and principals can play a key role in the success of English learners under the CCSS. When they are aware of ESL teachers’ expertise in language and culture, they are more likely to promote a school culture that includes ESL teachers and English learners.

Promising strategies for supporting ESL teachers: The meeting also yielded a set of strategies that will empower and support ESL teachers in their critical role as implementers of the CCSS for English learners. These strategies include giving ESL teachers a voice in policy making, particularly as it affects English learners; requiring content-area teacher training programs to include an ESL teaching component and all K-12 teacher training programs to include a CCSS component so that all teachers are informed about how these new standards will affect their students; and providing ongoing, high quality professional development for all teachers that contains authentic activities, examples, and modeling of effective strategies to enable teachers to support English learners within a CCSS framework.

Bryan Sebobo, a state education Title III specialist, participated in the convening. “I hope that educational stakeholders will have more opportunities like this, where all voices are shared and heard equally,” he said. “After all, we all serve the same clients: children.”

A detailed summary of the discussion and the group’s findings, titled “Implementing the Common Core State Standards for English Learners: The Changing Role of the ESL Teacher,” is available for download on TESOL’s website.

For a brief history of the CCSS within the context of U.S. education reform, see the TESOL issue brief “Overview of the Common Core State Standards Initiatives for ELLs.”

About TESOL International Association
Founded in 1966, TESOL International Association is a professional community of educators, researchers, administrators, and students committed to advancing excellence in English language teaching for speakers of other languages worldwide. With more than 13,000 members representing over 150 countries, TESOL fosters the exchange of ideas, research, and peer-to-peer knowledge, and provides expertise, resources, and a powerful voice on issues affecting the profession. Through professional development programs, its international conference, special interest groups, and publications, TESOL engages tens of thousands of professionals to collaborate globally and create a world of opportunity for millions of people of all ages who want to learn English. For more information, please visit www.tesol.org.

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