



March 26, 2010

The Honorable George Miller
Chairman
Committee on Education and Labor
U.S. House of Representatives
2181 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable John Kline
Ranking Member
Committee on Education and Labor
U.S. House of Representatives
2181 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

RE: Recommendations for the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)

Dear Chairman Miller and Rep. Kline:

Thank you for continued leadership and commitment to providing every child in the United States with the high-quality education he or she needs and deserves. On behalf of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc. (TESOL), a global education association representing approximately 12,000 English language educators in 150 countries, I am pleased to provide you with TESOL's principles and recommendations for the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). With its mission to ensure excellence in English language teaching to speakers of other languages, TESOL and its network of nearly 100 affiliates represent nearly 50,000 English language educators working at every level worldwide.

As statistics and census figures have shown, English language learners are the fastest growing segment of the school-age population in the United States. When it was signed into law, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) went further than any preceding version of ESEA in holding schools accountable for the academic performance of all students—including English language learners. As you well know, under ESEA, as amended, schools are specifically required to report on the academic achievement of English language learners, as well as the development of their proficiency in English.

One of the results of these requirements has been the heightened attention states, schools, and educators have given to the academic performance of English language learners, which is both a positive and laudable outcome. However, flaws in the accountability system at the heart of ESEA, as amended, as they relate to English language learners, challenges in the law's implementation, and an overarching emphasis on performance on assessments at the risk of sanctions have had a negative impact upon English language learners as well.

As the Congress and the administration look toward the reauthorization of ESEA, TESOL advocates that the following principles be used to guide the reauthorization

process to help ensure the academic success of English language learners:

Developing Sound Assessment and Accountability Systems for English Language Learners

Any effective accountability system for English language learners must be built on a framework of appropriate, valid, and reliable measures in order to accurately assess student performance. In addition, effective accountability systems must take into consideration the unique needs and characteristics of English language learners, and be focused on measuring individual student performance. Systems built on inappropriate assessment tools or built around the use of singular tests for high-stakes decisions will undermine, rather than promote, the academic success of English language learners.

Moreover, the achievement goals in an accountability system should be both ambitious and based on real-world evidence, not on arbitrarily defined timelines. The goals for any accountability system must be focused on improving student outcomes through identifying and providing resources for areas of need, not solely through punitive measures.

Recommendations:

- Provide clear and firm guidance on appropriate accommodations for English language learners when tested with state instruments.
- Allow local educational agencies the authority to determine at what stage in their English development English language learners must take reading, math, and science assessments in English.
- Weigh the English language proficiency and academic assessments for English language learners. For accountability purposes, both the language proficiency assessment and academic assessments should be taken into consideration and weighed according to each student's level of language proficiency. For English language learners at the beginning levels of language proficiency, more weight should be given to language proficiency assessment results. As a learner becomes more proficient in English, gradually more weight can be given to the academic content assessment results.
- Track individual English language learner's language proficiency and aggregate by age group for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) (i.e. growth model).
- Increase research and investment in appropriate assessment instruments for English language learners, including native-language assessments.
- Allow the use of multiple measures to assess and report on the progress of English language learners for AYP, such as curriculum-based, rubric, and holistic assessments.

Advancing Expertise and Expanding Capacity

As the population of school-age English language learners continues to grow, so must the United States' capacity to effectively serve them. English language learners must be taught by highly trained educators who are qualified to serve their specific needs in order to achieve high standards. Initiatives to promote teacher quality must recognize and promote the specialized training that English as a second language (ESL) and bilingual specialists receive to effectively serve English language learners. In addition, more of these highly trained and qualified professionals are needed, as well as training for mainstream teachers on meeting the needs of English language learners.

Continued professional development for all educators is essential, as well as the flexibility for local programs to determine how best to serve their students. The body of research in the field of ESL and bilingual education documenting effective practices for serving English language learners should be both acknowledged and widely disseminated. Most important, additional resources are needed to ensure that schools and programs can effectively serve the growing population of English language learners.

Recommendations:

- Expand the definition of Highly Qualified Teacher to recognize the training of ESL and bilingual specialists.
- Fund studies on evidence-based research and programs for English language learners.
- Re-institute federal grants for graduate study in ESL and bilingual education.
- Provide funding for in-service programs for mainstream teachers on effectively serving English language learners.
- Develop a comprehensive and unified definition of English language learner with longitudinal studies measuring English language learners' progress.

Building Community

Parents are their children's first teachers, and thus schools must have the tools and resources to maintain open lines of communication with parents so that they play an active role in their children's education. Adequate accommodations must be made for the parents of English language learners, and thus parental involvement initiatives must take into account parents' cultural and linguistic characteristics. Moreover, schools should both serve and involve the entire community. Articulation must occur between schools and programs serving English language learners in order to effectively meet their specialized needs, especially those students who are late-entry or have limited formal schooling.

Recommendations:

- Provide funding for specialized secondary programs for late-entry English language learners.

- Increase support and funding for programs that carry out parent education and family involvement activities, and specifically reauthorize the Local Family Information Centers and the Parental Information and Resource Centers.
- Reauthorize Even Start Family Literacy Programs.

Promoting Multilingualism

As the world becomes more and more interconnected, multilingualism and respect for diversity are critical values that should be promoted. Proficiency in two or more languages should be promoted for all students. Developing students' language skills should be viewed holistically: not only should foreign languages be taught to native English speakers, but the native language skills of English language learners should be developed as well. For the United States to remain globally competitive, the ability to speak more than one language is essential, and tapping into existing linguistic resources is an opportunity the country can ill-afford to miss.

Thank you again for the opportunity to offer these suggestions. TESOL looks forward to working with you, your fellow Committee members, and your staff as the process of reauthorizing ESEA continues.

If you or your staff has any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at 703-518-2513 or by e-mail at jsegota@tesol.org.

Sincerely,

John Segota
Director of Advocacy and Professional Relations