

Position Statement on Fairness and Equity in ESL Program Reduction

During turbulent economic times, educational programs that serve culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse student populations may be at a disadvantage when competing for reduced funding with programs that serve conventional, mainstream student populations. This disadvantage is particularly acute for English as second language (ESL) programs, which are often mischaracterized as being remedial in nature.

In fact, language programs for nonnative English speakers in the United States and other Anglophone countries hold as their primary goal the achievement of native-like proficiency in English for the purposes of interacting both culturally and economically with the traditional English-speaking culture. This high level of proficiency is critical to students' academic, social, and financial success. One's ability to communicate effectively in the language of commerce and society is vital to the integration of language-minority individuals and families. Effective language skills are essential to seeking jobs and developing careers. Program reductions will only further limit the possibility of successful cultural and economic adjustments of ESL students contributing to the regeneration of our economy in these difficult times.

In addition, the denial of advancement opportunities to those most at risk in our communities may have negative and long lasting effects that are disproportionate to students in other programs. Those students in ESL programs often depend more heavily on educational resources at public institutions, as they do not have the financial or social resources to do otherwise. In fact, deep cuts in language acquisition programs may actually increase the sense of cultural, linguistic, and economic marginalization that many ESL students experience.

Exacerbating this situation is the fact that many ESL programs at the post-secondary level in the United States and elsewhere are staffed with part-time, adjunct, or contingent faculty. Unfortunately, during difficult economic times, educational programs face the temptation of laying off part-time, adjunct, or contingent faculty educators that the institution is rarely under any legal or collectively bargained obligation to retain. Reductions of this kind only serve to reduce the level of continuity in high-quality instruction to which ESL students have become accustomed. TESOL strongly supports all ESL faculty's employment rights — part-time and full-time during these harsh economic times.

When economic conditions necessitate cutbacks in funding, TESOL urges public policy makers and managers of educational institutions to exercise fairness and equity in administering program cuts so as not to disadvantage culturally and linguistically diverse student populations or those who may already be suffering the debilitating effects of poverty.

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TESOL further urges institutions and agencies to provide full support to the maintenance, especially during uncertain economic times, of programs that strive to address the cultural, linguistic, and academic needs of students at all educational levels and institutions who are learning English as a second language. As they may be disproportionately affected by difficult economic times, we urge the continued funding of such programs and their staff at levels sufficient to ensure the positive impact that such programs bring.

*Approved by the Board of Directors
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