

Position Statement on Adult English as a Second or Additional Language Programs

Countries where English is the common, dominant, or official language have witnessed in recent years increases in their populations whose first language is not English. For example, in the 2000 Census in the United States, approximately 21.3 million people—or 18% of the U.S. population—reported that they spoke English “less than very well.” This is an increase from 14% of the U.S. population who spoke English “less than very well” in 1990. In its 2006 census, the Australian government reported that the population that spoke English “not well or not at all” increased 6% from 2001. In Canada, the allophone population—meaning the population whose native tongue is neither of the official languages of English or French—grew from 18% in 2001 to 20% in 2006. Moreover, the population who reported no knowledge of English grew 6% during the same time period.ⁱ

Access to and participation in high quality education is imperative for every individual. This is poignantly true for adults, who must adapt to continuing changes in their workplaces and communities, while guiding the next generation to meet the challenges of this century. Unfortunately, adult English language learners are too frequently overlooked and underserved by educational authorities and systems. In many of these countries, programs that serve adult English language learners are frequently underfunded, with the demand for adult English as a second or additional language (ESL/EAL) programs far outweighing the supply.

TESOL urges countries where English is the common, dominant, or official language to make commitments to developing national systems of high quality, appropriate language and literacy services specifically tailored to the needs of adults learning ESL/EAL in their populations. These systems should involve all stakeholders in the review, creation, and implementation of education policies and be no less in quality, recognition, and support than the system in place for public primary, secondary, and higher education.

The services developed within these systems should support adults learning English, regardless of their language and cultural backgrounds and previous schooling, to accomplish their immediate and long-term educational goals, to contribute economically by being fully enfranchised in the 21st century workforce, and to make significant and discernible progress toward reaching their full potential in their roles in society. In addition, these educational systems should:

- Have adequate resources at the national, regional, and local levels to provide regular access to appropriate, high quality classes, with components such as ESL/EAL instruction (including newcomer programs that focus on beginning ESL and literacy instruction), native language services, bilingual services, citizenship and civics education, and other academic, functional, or life skills preparation.

- Use assessment and accountability plans that are consistent with program goals and learners' needs, and that support learning and teaching rather than driving instruction.
- Have committed understanding of multiculturalism and respect for ESL/EAL learners and educators from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds.
- Have articulation mechanisms within and across programs to allow adult English language learners to move from beginning to intermediate to advanced language and literacy classes; to academic and workforce preparation classes; and to postsecondary or workforce programs.
- Provide or facilitate access to support services such as child care; health care; transportation; social and legal counseling in human and civil rights; job counseling, placement, and employment services; and immigration services.
- Have committed resources from the national, regional, and local levels to provide for full-time positions for instructors with salaries and benefits that are commensurate with those of public education.
- Make teacher (and other program staff) salaries, benefits, and working conditions commensurate with education, credentials, experience, and responsibilities and on a par with those of professionals in public education.
- Make available ongoing paid professional development for program staff (full-time and part-time teachers, administrators, tutors, and volunteer staff) and include ways to work effectively with linguistically and culturally diverse learner populations.
- Provide for certification and credentialing of teachers and administrators.

*Approved by the Board of Directors
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ⁱ This includes the population who reported knowledge of either French only or neither English nor French.