



news

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TESOL Contact: John Segota
Tel. 703-518-2513
E-mail jsegota@tesol.org

TESOL Responds to President's Address on Immigration, English Language Legislation

Alexandria, VA – Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc. (TESOL), a global education association representing more than 13,000 English language educators, issued the following statement in response to President Bush's May 15 address concerning comprehensive immigration reform and the U.S. Senate vote on May 18:

TESOL lauds the recent comments of President Bush recognizing the important role that the English language plays in the United States, and the role it plays for immigrants coming to this country. There is no question that English is the common language of the United States, and as the President said in his speech, English "is the key to unlocking the opportunity of America."

However, TESOL opposes measures such as the amendment approved by the U.S. Senate on May 18 that seek to "preserve and enhance" the status of English as the national language by limiting government communications to English-only. With U.S. Census figures showing that 92% of Americans have no difficulty speaking English, and with English becoming the language of global communication, it is in no way endangered or in need of preservation. Moreover, policies that limit the government's ability to

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communicate with people who are speakers of other languages will only divide rather than unite the country, and could jeopardize the public's health and safety.

Immigrant adults do want to learn English, but have limited opportunities to do so. While English language learners make up almost half of the 1.2 million students enrolled in federally funded adult education programs, many programs across the country report long waiting lists for English as a second language (ESL) programs, with waits up to months or even years for space. The overwhelming demand for ESL programs far surpasses the current supply.

Enhancing English language learning will come not from official decrees, but from committing resources to those programs and services working directly with immigrants to help them learn English and become U.S. citizens. TESOL urges the President and Congress to affirm their support for educators of adult English language learners and for ESL programs by increasing federal funding for adult education, and thereby increasing access to these critically needed programs. ESL educators and programs are on the front lines in helping immigrants and others learn English and become citizens. TESOL stands ready to work with the President and the Congress in helping to enhance these opportunities for all new Americans.

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Founded in 1966, Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc. (TESOL) is a global education association with more than 13,000 members and 90 affiliates in over 120 countries. TESOL is recognized as a nongovernmental organization (NGO) of the United Nations Department of Public Information. TESOL's mission is to ensure excellence in English language teaching to speakers of other languages.