

Priorities for the U.S. Administration and 119th U.S. Congress in Support of the English Language Teaching Profession and Multilingual Learners of English

TESOL International Association¹ represents thousands of educators, administrators, teacher educators, volunteers, and researchers across the United States and the world who compose the English language teaching (ELT) profession serving multilingual learners of English² (MLEs) and their families and communities. The priorities and recommendations submitted herein reflect the values and commitment that our association and profession hold for the U.S. educational system and our belief in the fundamental rights of all individuals in accessing quality educational opportunities allowing for greater agency³ economically, socially, culturally, and linguistically.

Importance of English Language Teaching and Multilingual Learners of English

Multilingualism enriches lives⁴ and serves as a bridge in our interconnected world in which communication knows no boundaries. Educators here in the United States and across the world play a pivotal role in this process by supporting MLEs and fostering linguistic, social, and cultural understanding through English for a robust and impactful global citizenship.

For educators, teaching English is more than just transmitting vocabulary and grammar; it is nurturing confidence, fostering empathy, and empowering individuals to engage meaningfully within our communities and across our connected world. Educators inspire learners to embrace diversity, including the invaluable asset that is their home language(s). In short, we educate, we advocate, we contribute, and we build for the whole student, no matter their background, experience, education, or identity.

For MLEs, the journey of becoming multilingual is transformative and propels them toward greater academic, personal, and professional success. The journey broadens their horizons and cultivates adaptability, access, resilience, and empathy, empowering them to navigate diverse cultural contexts with confidence and sensitivity.

TESOL champions the importance of teaching English as an additional language and advocates for recognition of the invaluable contributions educators and learners alike bring in shaping a world where language is not a barrier but a bridge to understanding, cooperation, and progress, embodying the spirit of global citizenship, enriching lives, and forging connections that transcend all boundaries.

Our policies as a nation should and must reflect these contributions, empowering and enabling educators, learners, schools, and communities.

¹ Founded in 1966, TESOL International Association, www.tesol.org, represents over 13,000 members worldwide who serve their communities by providing quality English language instruction and support. TESOL is committed to the support, advancement, and elevation of the English language teaching profession.

² TESOL has adopted the asset-based terminology of MLEs over that of ELs or English learners (see: <https://www.tesol.org/media/aemfcp1u/2024-terminology-position-statement-final.pdf>)

³ Source: <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2017/03/the-link-between-english-and-economics/>

⁴ Source: <https://ncela.ed.gov/sites/default/files/legacy/files/announcements/20200805-NCELAInfographic-508.pdf>

Challenges

The United States faces challenges in our education system for learners, families, schools, communities, and educators. For public education, the challenges manifest in the increasing number of MLEs coupled with a decline in the diversity and number of ELT educators. For adult and higher education, the challenges rest within the complexity of immigration and global outreach. Educating all learners at all levels through quality instruction should and must serve as the moral compass.

The number of MLEs at all levels of education and throughout society have steadily and, at times, dramatically increased in the United States, with over 5 million in public education⁵ and hundreds of thousands in adult education programs⁶. Additionally, the United States remains both the number one destination country in the world for international migrants⁷ and the primary academic destination for international students⁸.

Coupling this growth with the shortage of ELT instructors⁹, budget cuts in postsecondary institutions affecting language programs¹⁰, and issues surrounding immigration (including visa denial rates in the Global South¹¹ and improving but still backlogged visa processing¹²), the time is now for the United States to invest in education and to pursue policies that uplift the ELT profession, support MLEs and their families, and strive toward fair, equitable, and realistic comprehensive immigration reform.

⁵ Source: <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cgf/english-learners#>

⁶ Source: <https://nrs.ed.gov/rt/reports/aggregate/2022/all/table-3>

⁷ Source: <https://worldmigrationreport.iom.int/msite/wmr-2024-interactive/>

⁸ Source: <https://www.migrationdataportal.org/themes/international-students>

⁹ Source: <https://ncela.ed.gov/sites/default/files/2023-06/ELsTeachers-Infographic-20230616-508.pdf>

¹⁰ Source: <https://www.highereddive.com/news/can-colleges-recover-from-the-gut-punch-of-inflation/720214/> and <https://www.chronicle.com/article/whats-behind-the-academic-program-cuts-youve-seen-this-summer>

¹¹ Source: <https://www.presidentsalliance.org/press/disproportionate-f-1-visa-denials-persist-for-african-and-other-students-from-the-global-south/>

¹² Source: <https://www.uscis.gov/EOY2023>

Priority Recommendations for the U.S. Administration and U.S. 119th Congress

Appropriately Fund the U.S. Department of Education in Support of English Language Teaching Educators, Multilingual Learners of English, and Families

- Prioritize Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). While the number of MLEs in U.S. public education have increased by over 10% in the last decade, Title III funding, when adjusted for inflation, has decreased by almost 10%, resulting in a decrease of 13.5% per student expenditures from 2010 levels¹³.
- Prioritize investment in the National Professional Development Program¹⁴ administered through the Office of English language Acquisition (OELA). This program provides grants that invest in and improve teacher preparation for the instruction of MLEs.
- Prioritize and enhance investment in Title II-A of ESEA to strengthen professional development both for ELT educators and general educators. Currently more than 20 states have no requirements for general educators who work with MLEs¹⁵. Programs such as TESOL's Teacher Leadership for School-Wide English Learning¹⁶ can help address this need.
- Prioritize investment in the social-emotional learning (SEL) needs of MLEs and immigrant students through programs such as TESOL's SEL series, appropriately tailored for their cultural and linguistic needs¹⁷.
- Prioritize investment in Title II of the Higher Education Act (HEA) for Total Quality Partnership Programs. This program provides grants for partnerships between higher education institutions and school districts to provide pathways into education for MLEs — a “grow your own” program.
- Prioritize investment in Title II of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). Title II of WIOA is the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) and provides states funding for adult education, of which more than half the participants are adult MLEs. Grow funding from the current \$715.5 million to \$1 billion by 2030.

Support Multigenerational Literacy for Multilingual Learners of English

- Reaffirm the Office of Civil Rights in the U.S. Department of Education in protecting the civil rights of MLEs, immigrant students, and their families.
- Work with Congress in support of family engagement programs, such as the Families Learning English Together (FLUENT) Act¹⁸.

¹³ Source: https://unidosus.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/unidosus_budgetbrief_investinginenglishlearners.pdf

¹⁴ Source: <https://ncela.ed.gov/national-professional-development-program>

¹⁵ Source: <https://reports.ecs.org/comparisons/50-state-comparison-english-learner-policies-10>

¹⁶ <https://www.tesolswel.org/>

¹⁷ <https://www.tesol.org/professional-development/education-and-events/on-demand-facilitated/tesol-me/tesol-me-social-emotional-learning/>

¹⁸ <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-bill/3606>

- Encourage and support activities within the U.S. Department of Education that promote interagency strategy between OELA and the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE) focused on aligned multigenerational programs supporting literacy, cultural orientation, digital literacy, and language access.

Support Higher Education for Multilingual Learners of English

- Establish a national strategy for international education.
- Implement fair and transparent visa processing to reduce visa denials for study in English language programs.

Support Fair and Equitable Immigration Policy

- Create opportunities for immigrants to learn English and civics by building and enhancing the capacity of current systems and programs.
- Enhance resources and opportunities for the linguistic, economic, and civic integration of immigrants into the United States.
- Offer protections and opportunities for undocumented students who were brought into the country as minors; work with Congress to pass legislation supporting Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA).
- Lower the barriers that unfairly target students and scholars who wish to come to the United States legally for academic and language study — and provide a path to residency for MLEs in STEM and English language programs.
- Provide support for refugees and those fleeing oppression so that they may develop the resilience needed for successful resettlement and integration.
- Offer orderly and fair pathways to legal residency and citizenship for all immigrants.
- Foster respect and appreciation for the contributions made by all immigrants and those who work with them.
- Respect the human and civil rights of all immigrants, refugees, and their families.

TESOL International Association and its members stand ready to support this administration and the U.S. Department of Education in promoting these priorities. Collectively, we continue to strive for a nation and a world in which all learners, regardless of language background, are valued for their linguistic, cultural, and social assets and in which all educators have the resources and high-quality professional development to equip them for success.