



Oregon Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages

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Improving Academic Achievement for English Language Learners in Oregon

ORTESOL Statement on HB 3499

Salem, OR (December 10, 2015) --- As the state affiliate of the TESOL International Association, ORTESOL has been a major professional development organization for ESOL educators at all levels in Oregon since 1977. Our work to advance excellence in English language teaching is based on current theory and research in applied linguistics and culturally responsive pedagogy. Many of our members work in higher education; Oregon's university-based intensive English programs attract thousands of students annually from all over the world seeking to learn the English skills they need for college and careers in our global 21st century.

Despite this wealth of knowledge in our field of English language acquisition and the dedication of many ESOL teachers, English learners in Oregon PK-12 schools have not always experienced the success they and their families deserve. Oregon has experienced rapid growth in the number of PK-12 English learners in recent decades, and our systems need improvement in order to meet the specialized needs of these students. It was a step in the right direction in 2014 when community and educational organizations, including ORTESOL, worked together on Oregon House Bill 3499 "Relating to English language learner programs; and declaring an emergency" which passed with bipartisan support in June 2015.

ORTESOL joins with parents, community organizations, educational groups and policy makers to applaud the intention of HB 3499 to improve outcomes for PK-12 English language learners in our state. ESOL teachers devote their professional lives to the academic success of their students and know better than anyone what is happening, or not happening, in our schools and classrooms. Oregon's HB 3499 provides an unprecedented opportunity for stakeholders and experts to learn from each other and work together on behalf of our English learners' academic success.

Increased transparency, more accountability, and better systems as called for by HB 3499 are all goals shared by ORTESOL members. As we have seen, a positive result of accountability measures put in place by the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 has been an overdue focus on academic achievement for English learners. ESOL teachers have long advocated for better learning conditions and more resources for our students. We have learned much since 2001, however, and have seen that punitive accountability and misuse of data can have severe negative consequences for educators, students and communities.

HB 3499 offers us a chance to improve upon work done at the national level to best meet the needs of our students here in Oregon. TESOL's 2011 *Principles and Recommendations for the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act*¹ provides expert guidance for avoiding the pitfalls of NCLB and creating systems that will ensure the academic success of our English learners.

For implementation of HB 3499, ORTESOL advocates that the applicable TESOL suggestions for accountability be integrated into ODE rules and processes. The most relevant recommendations are these:

- Incorporate English language proficiency level as a weighted factor into accountability provisions for content-area achievement for ELLs. 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.
- Require states and districts to use psychometrically valid and reliable assessments to measure the continuous progress and content understanding of ELLs, and require states to submit psychometric evidence of the validity and reliability of these assessments for ELLs.
- Require states to report on how they will provide specific guidance to districts and schools regarding appropriate assessment accommodation practices.
- Allow states that provide bilingual education to make appropriate modifications to their accountability systems to allow for measures and reporting on linguistic and academic progress in more than one language.
- Allow the use of multiple measures to assess and report on the progress of ELLs for accountability purposes, such as curriculum-based, performance-based, and holistic assessments using scoring guides, checklists, or rubrics.
- Provide flexibility in graduation accountability measures so that late-entry ELLs have additional time to meet graduation requirements, as needed (e.g., a fifth or sixth year in high school).

Oregon is enriched by its diversity, including the wealth of languages, experiences and talents our English learners bring to our state. Well implemented, HB 3499 can be a step towards an equitable education for all our students and a stronger future for us all.

¹ TESOL International Association. (2011). *Increasing Academic Achievement and Enhancing Capacity for English Language Learners, Principles and Recommendations for the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act*. Retrieved from <http://www.tesol.org/docs/pdf/13611.pdf?sfvrsn=2>