

Debbie Sternecky's Report on TESOL Advocacy Day
June 6 and 7, 2011, Washington, D.C.

On June 6 and 7, 2011, an Illinois delegation attended TESOL Advocacy Day in Washington, D.C. The delegation consisted of Tim Collins, Professor of ESL and Bilingual Education at National Louis University and board member of International Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL); Gevik Anbarchian, ELL teacher at Niles West High School and Vice-President of Illinois TESOL-Bilingual Education (ITBE); and Debbie Sternecky, ELL teacher at Jefferson Jr. High School in Naperville, Adjunct Professor at National Louis University, and Executive Secretary of ITBE.

On June 6, delegates from across the nation were provided with training on the fundamentals of advocacy as well as TESOL's recommendations for ESEA reauthorization as it relates to ELLs. Presenters at this training were: Lindsay Hunsicker, Senior Education Policy Advisor for Senator Mike Enzi; Michele McLaughlin, Senior Education Policy Advisor for Senator Tom Harkin; Rosalinda Barrera, Assistant Deputy Secretary and Director, Office of English Language Acquisition; Amanda Karhuse, Director of Government Relations for the National Association of Secondary School Principals; and Luís-Gustavo Martinez, Senior Policy Analyst of NEA.

On June 7, the Illinois delegation had meetings with four Senate and House education staffers on Capitol Hill: Jonathan Rucks, Senior Policy Advisor for Representative Jan Schakowsky (9th District); Andrew Adai, Legislative Correspondent for Senator Mark Kirk; Lexi Barrett, Legislative Assistant for Senator Dick Durbin; and Brian Looser, Legislative Assistant for Representative Judy Biggert (13th District).

The Congressional staffers were very receptive to the interests of English Language Learners in Illinois and most took copious notes at the meetings. The meetings lasted between 30 and 45 minutes each. Jan Schakowsky's staffer asked to meet again with the delegation at the district office.

On behalf of English language learners and educators in Illinois, the Illinois delegation made the following recommendations for the reauthorization of ESEA:

Assessment:

- **Reliable and Valid Assessments for ELLs.** Currently, content-area assessments required of students across the nation are neither reliable nor valid for English language learners who have lower levels of English language proficiency. The Illinois delegation recommended the development and use of reliable and valid assessments for English Language Learners.
- **Use of Growth Models.** The current "snapshot accountability" requirements of NCLB are particularly unreasonable in assessing ELLs who arrive in the U.S. from countries in which have a wide range of educational opportunities. Yet, NCLB holds U.S. schools accountable for these students' previous content-area knowledge. The Illinois delegation recommended using growth-model assessments to show the growth of ELLs over time.
- **Use of More than One Data Point.** Currently in Illinois, schools must use results of a single English language proficiency examination (the ACCESS test) to determine eligibility and exit for ELL or Bilingual services. The Illinois delegation recommended

that schools be permitted to use more than one data point to determine eligibility for ELL or Bilingual services.

- **Weighting of Language Proficiency and Content-Area Assessments.** The Illinois delegation recommended that for accountability purposes of ELLs with low levels of language proficiency, more weight should be placed on language proficiency assessments than content-area assessments. As students' language proficiency increases, increasingly more weight should be placed on content-area assessments for accountability purposes. The weighting should not be tied to a specific number of years in an ELL or bilingual program, since language development rates vary greatly.

Program Design:

- **Content-Area Testing in Multiple Languages.** Current research shows that bilingual and dual immersion programs are proven effective models for learning language. Despite this, NCLB favors Transitional Program of Instruction models by requiring content-area testing of students in English after three years. Students in bilingual and dual immersion programs will often not perform as well as their native English speaking peers on English assessments in such a short amount of time. The result is that districts are penalized for pioneering research-based language-learning programs such as Dual Immersion. The Illinois delegation recommended allowing districts to provide content-area assessments of student progress in more than one language.
- **Late-Entry ELLs.** Under NCLB, districts are penalized when late-entry ELLs graduate after four years of high school. However, many ELLs need five or six years to accumulate the credits required for graduation. Additionally, because of the many cuts in non-academic programs (such as technical fields and arts), there are few opportunities for students who are not college bound to continue their education. The Illinois delegation recommended that districts be permitted to continue educating ELLs beyond four years without penalty and that the new legislation offer incentives to districts to offer course alternatives for students who are not college-bound to provide these students with tools to become productive members of society.

Teacher Certification:

- **Qualifications of ESL Teachers.** The Illinois delegation recommended that teaching English as a Second Language be defined as a core academic subject, and that ESL teachers meet the same requirements as other teachers of core academic content areas.