

ConnTESOL participates in TESOL Advocacy Day 2009

On June 24, 2009, Christie Ward joined 22 other TESOL members representing 18 U.S. based affiliates in Washington, DC for TESOL Advocacy Day 2009. This event featured a day of issue briefings and workshops, capped by visits to Congressional offices on Capitol Hill. The goals of Advocacy Day were not only to lobby on key issues for TESOL, but also to provide an interactive learning experience for affiliate representatives on elements of advocacy. By the end of the day, TESOL members had visited the offices of more than 70 representatives and senators.



Members of the 18 USA TESOL Affiliates on Advocacy Day 2009

Responding to recent Congressional action, TESOL Advocacy Day 2009 was focused on adult ESL and the efforts to reauthorize the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). To maximize the impact of TESOL Advocacy Day, key members of Congress serving on the education and appropriations committees in the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives were identified for meetings. This year, Christie Ward met with staff from the offices of Joe Courtney, Christopher Dodd, and Joseph Lieberman to discuss adult ESL and the impact in Connecticut.

To participate, each affiliate representative was required to do several activities in preparation. For example, participants had to set up their own individual meetings with their Congressional representatives. To assist with this, TESOL provided directions and guidance, as well as the list of specific representatives and senators to contact. Getting an appointment with a representative requires some perseverance. Many

representatives appear to prefer email as the easiest method of communication, and it is very important to check junk mailboxes for replies.

Participants were also sent talking points and background information on WIA and adult ESL so that they could begin to familiarize themselves with the issues in advance. To help make their Congressional meetings more effective, participants were also encouraged to find examples from their own programs to illustrate the talking points. For example, it is important to note that in Connecticut, the population of well-educated immigrants is growing faster than the population of less-educated immigrants, and yet many of these newcomers are in need of English language education. Under the current funding formula, LEP students with a high school diploma or GED can be served, but not counted for funding. A change in the WIA funding formula would strongly impact the resources available to Connecticut's adult education ESL programs.

TESOL Advocacy Day commenced with a welcome from TESOL President Mark Algren, who was also joined by President-Elect Brock Brady. The morning workshop was led by John Segota, Director of Advocacy and Professional Relations, and was comprised of two briefings. The first featured congressional staff from both the House and the Senate discussing the "view from the Capitol Hill" on WIA reauthorization and the key issues under debate. The second briefing featured representatives from the National Coalition for Literacy, the Center for Law and Social Policy, and the National Council of State Directors of Adult Education all discussing their activities and perspectives on the reauthorization.

Following these briefings, an interactive workshop was held on how to have an effective meeting with one's congressional representative. This workshop was led by Ellen Fern and Krista Heckler of Washington Partners, LLC, TESOL's legislative consultants. Participants were provided key information to prepare for their meetings and given the opportunity to role play. The purpose of the briefings and the workshop was to help the participants practice and prepare for their meeting on Capitol Hill that afternoon.

ConnTESOL representative Christie Ward had the opportunity to meet with Education Policy staff members in the offices of Senator Lieberman, Senator Dodd, and Congressman Courtney. As acting Chairman of the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP), Senator Dodd is in an excellent position to support the reauthorization of WIA, and his staff indicated his sincere interest in funding ESL adult education initiatives. Likewise, Representative Courtney is a strong education advocate and has a seat on the House Education and Labor Committee. His staff expressed his support for increasing ESL Adult Education funding, and indicated particular interest in providing more federal support for workplace ESL programs.

At the end of the day, the participants shared their experiences and what they learned over dinner. It was interesting to hear what other people experienced on their visit.

Overall, all of the participants agreed this event was a very positive experience for them and for TESOL.

Additional information about TESOL Advocacy Day, including photographs and video of the interactive workshop, will be available on the TESOL web site at <http://www.tesol.org>. If you are interested in learning more about your Congressional representatives, and the legislative issues TESOL is tracking, go the TESOL U.S. Advocacy Action Center at <http://capwiz.com/tesol>.