

ConnTESOL participates in TESOL Advocacy Day 2010

On June 23, 2010, Christie Ward joined 32 other TESOL members representing 25 U.S. based affiliates in Washington, DC for TESOL Advocacy Day 2010. 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 75 representatives and senators.

Responding to recent Congressional action, TESOL Advocacy Day 2010 was focused on the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), currently revised as No Child Left Behind (NCLB). 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 Joseph Courtney and Christopher Dodd to discuss TESOL's recommendations for ESEA reauthorization and the impact of the current law upon English language learners 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. For the

ConnTESOL representative, appointments were easily arranged with the offices of Senator Dodd and Representative Courtney, but for the second year in a row, Representative DeLauro's office was not able to schedule a meeting on TESOL Advocacy Day. This was rather disappointing, as Representative DeLauro is an important member of the House Committee on Appropriations.

Participants were also sent talking points and background information on ESEA reauthorization 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. In order to best represent the views of the ConnTESOL membership, Christie Ward collected feedback on the impact of No Child Left Behind from ESL educators around the state and created a flyer to share with the legislators. Also, she came to the meetings armed with relevant statistics. For example, during the 2009 – 2010 academic year, the State of Connecticut served 30,212 English Language Learner (ELL) students in 162 public Local Education Agencies (LEAs).

TESOL Advocacy Day commenced with a welcome from TESOL President Brock Brady, who was also joined by Past President Mark Algren. The morning workshop was led by John Segota, Director of Advocacy and Professional Relations, and was comprised of two briefings. The first panel featured congressional staff from the Senate discussing the "view from the Capitol Hill" on ESEA reauthorization and the key issues under debate. The second briefing featured Richard Smith, Acting Assistant Secretary and Director of the Office of English Language Acquisition at the US Department of Education discussing the Obama Administration's proposal for reauthorizing ESEA.

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 Audrey Bush 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 Dodd, and Representative Courtney, and to leave a packet of materials at the office of Representative DeLauro. As a high-ranking member of the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP), Senator Dodd has expressed a sincere interest in funding ESL education initiatives. Also, Senator Dodd is currently leading a series of hearings on the "State of the American Child," and Ward recommended that a ConnTESOL professional be invited to serve as a witness on behalf of children who are English language learners. Likewise, Representative Courtney is a strong education advocate and has a seat on the House Education and Labor Committee. Courtney's staff expressed the congressman's support for expanding Title III to provide

more resources for professional development for educators, and to expand state and local districts' capacities to serve English language learners.

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 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>.