



## TESOL Statement on Oregon Ballot Measure 58

*October 30, 2008*

On November 4, 2008, voters in the state of Oregon will be asked to vote on ballot Measure 58, which seeks to amend Oregon state statute to require “English immersion” programs for English language learners in public schools. If passed, Measure 58 would establish strict limits on the amount of specialized language instruction English language learners receive based on the grade of entry in public schools, terminating English as a second language (ESL) instruction after one (1) or two (2) years. Moreover, the measure would effectively forbid bilingual education programs such as two-way immersion.

TESOL strongly opposes Measure 58, as the initiative seeks to implement educational policies that are not based in sound pedagogical principles and, in fact, conflict with research findings in second language acquisition. Language learning is a complex, multifaceted process that encompasses academic and cultural knowledge as well as basic communicative skills. While social language is learned in a relatively short time, academic language proficiency – the level of language proficiency needed to succeed in school – is especially demanding, and can take anywhere from 5 to 7 years to develop. Moreover, multiple factors influence rates of language acquisition, including an individual’s educational background, native language literacy, learning style, cognitive style, societal factors, motivation, and personality. Imposing artificial time limits on programs and services for English language learners fails to account for these factors and will not help students reach academic level proficiency more quickly, but may in fact result in lower levels of academic achievement for such students.

Equally as important, Measure 58 will tie the hands of teachers and districts in offering the best programs for their students. Research has shown that there are several valid methods for English language instruction, and what matters most is the quality of

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instruction, not the language used in the classroom. With a large variety of local factors affecting a program's success – such as resources, community involvement, and size and diversity of the English language learner population – what works in one school district may not work well in another. As parents maintain the right to choose the educational program for their children, so too should classroom teachers and school district officials maintain the ability to determine how to best meet the needs of their students. In other words, there is no "one-size-fits-all" approach to English language instruction.

As stated in its *Position Statement on Local Flexibility in the Education of English Language Learners* (2003), TESOL advocates that education policy should be based on sound pedagogical principles and research, and not on politics or ideologies. Moreover, TESOL opposes efforts at a state or national level that seek to superimpose politically expedient or otherwise pedagogically unsound policies for English language learners.

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Incorporated in 1966, Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Inc. (TESOL), is a global association for English language teaching professionals headquartered in Alexandria, Virginia, USA. TESOL encompasses a network of approximately 60,000 educators worldwide, consisting of more than 14,000 individual members and an additional 45,000 educators within the 100 plus TESOL affiliate associations. Representing a multifaceted academic discipline and profession, TESOL offers members serial publications, books, and electronic resources on current issues, ideas, and opportunities in the field of English language teaching. TESOL also conducts a variety of workshops and symposia, including an annual convention, regarded as the foremost professional development opportunity for English language educators worldwide. TESOL's mission is to develop and maintain professional expertise in English language teaching for speakers of other languages worldwide.