

Praise for Advocating for English Learners: A Guide For Educators

“This book makes a very important contribution to the field by highlighting the importance of advocacy and, through its numerous examples of advocacy in action, showing how to achieve equitable and excellent education for ELs.”

—Diane August, Principal
D. August and Associates

“Staehr Fenner delves into the many facets of school-centered advocacy that promote the educational advancement of English language learners. Her thorough treatment of the roles of many stakeholders—including teachers, school leaders, district administrators, and family members—in viewing linguistic and cultural diversity from a strength-based perspective is motivation to read this valuable resource.”

—Margo Gottlieb, editor of Academic Language in Diverse Classrooms series
Director, Assessment & Evaluation, Illinois Resource Center and
Lead Developer, WIDA Consortium

“Diane Staehr Fenner coaches her readers on how to develop a much needed, decisive voice of advocacy. She makes a most compelling case for educators to share the responsibility for teaching English learners within and outside the school. A must read for all teachers, administrators, teacher educators, and policy makers!”

—Andrea Honigsfeld, Professor and Author
Molloy College, NY

“This book will equip educators with the research and the courage needed to make sure their EL students succeed. A true treasure trove of answers—whether the reader is a veteran educator of ELs, or someone who is new to the profession and the field, this book will improve practice, no doubt about it!”

—Giselle Lundy-Ponce, Associate Director
American Federation of Teachers, Washington, DC

“Just when you thought no one could hear you above the din of everyday life as an educator, Diane Staehr Fenner has written a book that demonstrates a broad understanding of the challenges we face. Advocating for English Learners is a great opportunity to engage colleagues in the reflective and collaborative discussions critical to needs assessment and proactive program development to address the needs of some of our most vulnerable citizens and newly arrived immigrant students. This book should be part of every pre-service and in-service program for teachers and administrators who serve English learners. The challenge is not what we can do for our students. Our challenge is to create learning environments that recognize and energize the potential of each child and each family to contribute to our communities.”

—Anne Marie Foerster Luu, TESOL, International Teacher of the Year, 2013
Montgomery County Public Schools and McDaniel College, MD

“This is a state-of-the-art, practical, comprehensive resource that will be extremely useful and valuable to practitioners as they advocate to make a positive difference in the lives of English learners and their families.”

—Teddi Predaris, Director, Office of Language Acquisition and Title I
Fairfax County Public Schools, VA

“Diane Staehr Fenner’s practical tips on how to effectively advocate for ELLs will be a valuable resource for schools nationwide. Highly recommended for professional development discussions, district-level planning teams, and pre-service settings.”

—Lydia Breiseth, Manager
Colorín Colorado, Arlington, VA

*“There are a plethora of books that tell teachers and instructional leaders how to best teach ELLs, but the field is in dire need of *Advocating for English Learners*. Finally, a book that tells us what we need to know before we can get to the work of actual instruction. This book provides educators with a firm understanding of the social and emotional supports that we must provide in order for our ELLs to maximize their academic potential. *Advocating for English Learners* goes beyond the classroom—linking our students’ realities to the school. It shows us how to use our sphere of influence to provide what might be the missing ingredients for helping our ELLs to learn. This book is a must read for any teacher or administrator who is interested in improving his or her practice and changing the culture of the school to one that embraces all learners.”*

—Esta Montano, Director, English Language Education Special Programs
Boston Public Schools, MA

*“With *Advocating for English Learners: A Guide for Educators*, Diane Staehr Fenner closes a gap in teacher education publications. This much-needed book addresses immigrant realities, teacher experiences, administrator preparation, and Title III policies by using advocacy as the organizing principle. Based on solid professional foundations and with great insight and skill, Dr. Staehr Fenner provides all stakeholders with tools for a collaboration that works so that linguistically and culturally diverse student population needs can be sufficiently addressed in K-12 contexts and beyond.”*

—Christel Broady, Director
ESL Teacher Endorsement Program, Georgetown College, KY

“Diane Staehr Fenner brilliantly outlines English language learner advocacy issues we all need to incorporate into our daily practice as educators to deliver a just and equitable educational experience for all ELL students and their families—one of the most important books for educators and advocates in education to be written.”

—Luís-Gustavo Martínez, Lecturer I of Applied Linguistics
University of Massachusetts, Boston, MA

*“It is common knowledge that English language learners (ELLs) are the fastest growing population in our schools. Most teachers are likely to have one or more ELLs in their classrooms, and yet there is still so much misunderstanding and confusion about what a quality equitable education represents for ELL students. Staehr Fenner’s work sheds light on what is different about ELL students. She highlights the importance of *Advocacy and Collaboration* in order to develop and implement a well-rounded*

education program for ELLs. And she does so with a refreshing perspective, using clear, real-life examples and providing guidance about how to implement those promising practices and tackle challenges along the way. Staehr Fenner's work will no doubt dispel the myths and encourage positive changes for ELLs in our schools."

—David G. Nieto, Division Administrator
Division of English Language Learning, Illinois State Board of Education

"It's evident from the first pages that Diane Staehr Fenner knows what it's like to be in a classroom, hallway, or meeting where English language learners and their needs are being overlooked or marginalized. In this essential new book, she gives teachers the framework and the tools we need to advocate effectively and ensure our students the seat at the table they so deserve. I would recommend this book to anyone who educates ELLs, and since today that is nearly everyone in education, it could not be more timely. These beautiful, multi-talented children are the future. Thank you, Diane, for helping to make our voices stronger on their behalf."

—Barbara Page, ESL Teacher
Meadow Park Middle School, Portland, OR

"Wow! This is the first book I have encountered which is devoted solely to the area of advocacy for English language learners (ELLs). In education, where the effects of political and judicial decisions are apparent, this is a very much needed book in guiding future educators and inservice teachers to be strong catalysts in advocating effectively for the academic success of ELLs."

—Arlene Costello, 2007 Christa McAuliffe Educator/Teacher on Special Assignment
ESOL Department, Escambia County School District, Pensacola, FL

"In this timely and utterly necessary book, Staehr Fenner explains why all educators need to advocate for English language learners, based in solid yet accessible research, and how to do so with the supporting resources and activities provided. She guides readers in understanding and implementing 'scaffolded advocacy,' including effective instruction for ELLs. Margins notes included throughout will allow teacher educators to easily use this as a training manual for pre-service and in-service teachers working with ELLs. Finally, the personal anecdotes, stories, and vignettes from the field leave the reader with the crucial message of the book: everyone can and should be an advocate."

—Heather A. Linville, TESOL Instructor and ELL Advocate
College of Arts and Sciences, American University, Washington, DC

Advocating for English Learners

A Guide for Educators

Diane Staehr Fenner

Foreword by John Segota

A Joint Publication





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Corwin
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Associate Editor: Kimberly Greenberg
Editorial Assistant: Heidi Arndt
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Copy Editor: Cate Huisman
Typesetter: C&M Digitals (P) Ltd.
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Foreword

When Diane Staehr Fenner asked me to write the foreword to this book, I began to think about my own experience with the TESOL field and what I had come to observe over the past decade and a half of working for TESOL International Association. With a background in political science and international studies, I had come to the association with an interest in working for an international nonprofit, but I had little knowledge of the TESOL field. As I began to learn more about the rich and diverse world of TESOL, I quickly came to admire and respect the uniqueness of the academic discipline and the expertise of those working in the field.

I also saw a field that was more than language teachers and researchers. With aspects of social justice and multiculturalism embedded at its core, the TESOL field is perhaps unique among all academic disciplines. Regardless of where they are working, or the level they are working at, I saw that those in the field have a deep passion for their students, often putting the needs of their students ahead of their own.

This passion and advocacy for their students is not only important, but is vital. In countries where English is the dominant language, English learners are often the most marginalized student population. In the United States, English learners are often from disadvantaged backgrounds, so they must contend not only with the challenges that other disadvantaged students face but also with linguistic and cultural differences that can be barriers to academic achievement. Those in the TESOL field understand this perhaps better than any other group of educators, and this positions them in a way to serve as some of the most effective advocates for their students.

This is crucial, as in many cases TESOL educators may be the only people advocating for the rights and needs of English learners. Like the parents of other particular student populations, such as special needs students, the parents of English learners may be marginalized, perhaps more so than other parents. Because of linguistic and cultural barriers,

unfamiliarity with school systems, or even concerns over immigration status, parents of English learners often feel they are not in a position to advocate for their children, and thus there is often no one left to speak up but the TESOL educator.

In English-dominant contexts, English learners are automatically perceived to be immigrants, and thus they may also have to contend with societal attitudes that may not be the most supportive. For example, it is well documented that the majority of English learners in U.S. schools are born in this country. In addition, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled in 1982 that immigration status has no bearing on a school-age students' right to a public education. Despite these facts, it is not uncommon in some contexts in the United States for English learners to be dismissively referred to as "illegal immigrants" and a drain on resources. Even where there is no overt hostility, English learners are often viewed as a problem that could be solved with a quick-fix solution.

Fortunately, education policy has shifted in the United States over the past 15 years to more explicitly acknowledge the needs of English learners; however, they are still quite misunderstood. They are often treated as a monolithic block in terms of education policy, despite the fact that English learners as a population are incredibly diverse in terms of culture, language, socioeconomic status, and educational background. Even though they are the fastest-growing student population in the United States, much of the policy focused on English learners is developed secondarily or as an afterthought. For example, when the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) were published in the United States in 2010, they did include some discussion on the needs of English learners, but little else. It wasn't until a year later that new initiatives were announced that sought to address the needs of English learners in the CCSS.

This lack of understanding and attention impacts not only English learners, but the TESOL field itself. The unique pedagogy of the TESOL field is often not fully understood by others in education, never mind the public at large. In fact, despite a rich history of research and other academic bone fides, the TESOL field is one that is chronically misunderstood, even among its peers in education.

There are many common misperceptions about language teaching and second language acquisition that impact the TESOL field itself. For example, one of the most common myths is that any native English speaker can teach the language, or that native English speakers make better TESOL educators. Another common myth in English-dominant contexts is that ESL (English as a Second Language) is simply a remedial activity and not a core academic subject. Misperceptions such as these have often undermined the status of the field and the many programs that serve English learners.

In the United States, resources to support ESL programs have been at best stagnant over the past decade. Federal funding for ESL primarily comes from two sources: Title III of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB),¹ which serves elementary and secondary education, and Title II of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA), which serves adult education. Despite the fact that the English learner population has increased steadily over the past 10 years, neither program has received any major increases in federal funding. The EL/Civics grant program, created through appropriations in 1999, targets adult education funding at programs that combine ESL and civics education. It remains funded at the same level now as it was then (approximately \$75 million) and is still awaiting authorizing language in statute. Moreover, cuts in education funding at the state and local levels have had the effect of a net decrease in funding for ESL programs in some locations.

There are a variety of other factors that do not help the status of the TESOL field. For example, in the United States, NCLB does not include ESL as one of the core academic subjects defined by the law. In addition, the requirements for teaching K–12 ESL vary tremendously from state to state in the United States, representing a broad range of credentials and requirements. For adult ESL, there are few credentials available. These issues compound many misperceptions about the field, so much so that TESOL educators must advocate not only for their students but also for themselves.

Just as many education policies consider English learners as an afterthought, so too many policy decisions fail to consider the needs of TESOL educators or include them in policy conversations. I've heard from several educators active in the field that they grew tired of waiting for invitations to participate in policy discussions, because after a while they saw those invitations were not just going to come. Instead, they realized they needed to invite themselves.

Whether it's advocating for their students, their programs, or themselves, the need for action by TESOL educators is clear. Moreover, TESOL educators can be effective at any level. Advocacy in the classroom or in the building is just as important as advocacy within the district. Advocacy at the state level is just as important as advocacy at the national level. Where it's done, advocacy by TESOL educators is vital, so much so that advocacy is included in TESOL International Association's P–12 Professional Teaching Standards and the English as a New Language (ENL) Standards for certification by the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards.

1. Under federal law, funding for language instructional programs is to come from state and local education funds. Title III funds are to be supplemental only and are not to serve as the primary funding source for language instructional programs.

As a closing thought, I was leading a discussion recently at a workshop for TESOL educators being run by a local TESOL affiliated association. As part of the conversation, one local educator discussed the preservice training she received that related to advocacy. While there was some significant work in terms of understanding education policy, there was very little training in terms of how to address advocacy issues (such as unequal policies or students' rights issues) once they come up. In her experience as a TESOL educator, it wasn't a matter of *if* these issues would come up, but rather *when*. "If you aren't interested in getting involved and advocating for your students," she concluded, "then you probably might want to consider another field of education."

John Segota, CAE
Associate Executive Director for Public
Policy and Professional Relations
TESOL International Association

Preface

As a newly minted English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher in a rural school in the southeastern United States, I was asked the following question by a nervously laughing fourth grade teacher: “Could you please try to have José’s mom keep him¹ home from school next week during state content testing?” While this teacher appeared to be joking, I knew there was a great shred of truth behind her request. Prior to the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA) in 2001, commonly called No Child Left Behind (NCLB), states were beginning to phase in high-stakes content area testing.

This classroom teacher surely knew that José, an English learner (EL) born in the United States to a mother who had never received any formal education in her home country of Mexico, would not perform well on the end-of-year content assessment delivered in English. She also knew there might be consequences for her career due to his potentially low test scores. José was years behind grade level in all aspects, especially in reading and writing, and still qualified for ESL support after nearly five years in an English-only academic environment. José was a frustrated kid who was starting to act out in class, because he realized he wasn’t meeting his teachers’ expectations or keeping up academically with his classmates.

I knew I needed to help provide a voice for this student, because he did not know his rights, and his mother, with no proficiency in English and illiterate in her native language, Spanish, was not in a position to speak up on his behalf. I needed to advocate for him because at the time I didn’t think anyone else was going to do so. I had never heard the word *advocacy* in any of my teacher education courses, nor had I known that to make a positive impact on ELs’ educational experience and increase their chances for academic success, someone had to speak up for them.

Although I didn’t realize it at the time, the experience I had teaching ESL in this rural community in the Southeast significantly shaped who

1. All student, teacher, and administrator names appearing in this publication are pseudonyms unless otherwise indicated.

I am as an educator and most of all as an advocate for ELs today. I often look back on my first years as an ESL teacher in the United States as some of the most challenging yet most rewarding years of my career. Those years helped me see the stark inequities ELs can face, develop strategies for advocating for ELs, and set the course for my present work with teachers, administrators, and researchers to ensure that ELs receive the educational opportunities they are entitled to.

Fast Forward

More than a decade later, while presenting about the revised TESOL P–12 Professional Teaching Standards at the TESOL International Association convention, I mentioned how TESOL’s professional standards contained a new focus on advocacy for ELs. I explained how the standards reflected recent changes and heightened responsibilities for those who teach ELs and that advocacy for ELs is central to the role of the ESL teacher. I showed how the TESOL P–12 Professional Teaching Standards helped define this need for ESL teachers to advocate for ELs in K–12 settings.

At the end of the presentation, a professor in an ESL teacher licensure program who was in the audience asked me if there were any books on advocacy for ELs that I could recommend to her. I answered her that I did not know of any book she could use in her program that could help her teacher candidates learn about advocacy for their ELs.

Immediately after that presentation, I met some colleagues for lunch and shared the outcome of this presentation with them and how I thought the field of EL education could benefit from at least one book focused on advocacy for ELs. As I told them this, I realized that my career path had been built around my role as an advocate for ELs. I had been advocating for ELs all along and knew so many others that were also advocates for ELs. I suggested to my colleagues that I could be the person who attempted to write this book, and they wholeheartedly supported this idea. In the spirit of collaborating to best serve our ELs, I would now like to share this book.