

Reflections from the 2021 TESOL Advocacy and Policy Summit

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Summary: WAESOL Board Members participated in the 2021 TESOL Advocacy and Policy Summit and arranged meetings with U.S. Senators and Representatives from Washington State on equity issues in K-12, adult immigrants and refugees, and teacher education programs.

Keywords: K-12, adult immigrants and refugees, teacher education, advocacy, policy

The 2021 Virtual TESOL Advocacy and Policy Summit took place June 21-23, 2021. The only event of its kind in the world, the TESOL Virtual Advocacy and Policy Summit is an unparalleled professional development opportunity for educators to learn about U.S. federal and international education issues and advocate for policies that support English learners and the field of English language education. Throughout the three days of the summit, attendees learned from experts and insiders, shared a powerful message with members of Congress through the TESOL Advocacy Action Center, shared information about the issues and policies impacting our work locally and internationally, joined colleagues from around the world and across the United States to make a difference, and engaged in multiple professional development opportunities. Board members Rosemary Colón, Kate Reynolds, and Alex Tang attended on behalf of the WAESOL Board, learning about the latest federal and international education policies and equity issues pertaining to K-12, adult immigrants and refugees, and teacher education programs. This allowed us to share powerful messages with our members of Congress through the TESOL Advocacy Action Center. Resources were available through the TESOL Advocacy Action Center for attendees to use when contacting our elected representatives in office.

There were many workshops throughout the first two days of the advocacy summit, and I learned a lot from lawyers who are committed to advocating for English language education nationally and internationally. In particular, the session that resonated with me was “The Rights of Immigrant Students and ELs in Public Schools”, a workshop related to U.S. policy in immigration. This session was facilitated by Roger Rosenthal, who is a lawyer who advocates for equity for new arrivals in the United States. Rosenthal provided suggestions and options for TESOL professionals with an overview of how to combat

restrictive school policies in K-12 education for newly-arrived students and their families; for example, we were reminded that if a student does not have a transcript from the country of origin, an administrator could not turn that student away since there is little to no legislation in any state that would deny an immigrant student the right to education. This session provided insight and language to use when I advocate for the students I serve in the adult education setting, and prepared me to have difficult conversations with any administrator seeking to prevent a student from studying.

On the last day of the TESOL Advocacy Summit, we connected with the legislative staff members of U.S. Senator Patty Murray, U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell, U.S. Representative Pramila Jayapal, and Representative Adam Smith, all of whom represent Washington state as our elected officials. Through our consultations with the staff members of each congressperson, we shared what we had learned about the issues and policies impacting our work locally and internationally. The WAESOL Board members shared a number of important issues critical to English learners and educators at all levels in Washington state and how Congress could better support them with more resources. These productive conversations allowed us to create relationships with the aforementioned elected officials, and to implore our elected officials to sustain their efforts in support of the English language teaching field and with the support of the TESOL International Association.

As WAESOL commits to this event every year, here are a few things I learned from this experience that I would like to pass on to our readers:

- Contact your elected U.S. congress officials in advance and follow up with them a week before any advocacy and policy summit.

- Prepare your talking points with your colleagues and have resources available when you meet your U.S. Congressperson and/or their staff personnel.
- Use resources that are available within the TESOL International Associations' Advocacy Center.

As your WAESOL representatives, the Board members secured meetings with the offices of our elected congress-people (Representatives Jayapal and Smith, and Senators Cantwell and Murry) days before the Advocacy and Policy Summit. Since the schedules of the officials and their legislative staff frequently change, confirming their availability and our meeting times was essential.

As we wrapped up the TESOL Advocacy and Policy Summit, we believe that we left a lasting impression with the legislative staff members supporting our busy U.S. Senators and Representatives from Washington state. Board member Kate Reynolds made connections with Senator Patty Murray's staff member in regard to

teacher education and the edTPA ([Educative Teacher Performance Assessment](#)), which is a requirement that was eliminated by Washington state's legislature this past year during the 2021 legislative session. Rosemary Colón followed up on social media to summarize WAESOL's engagement during the advocacy summit, which included details of the meetings with our elected representatives.

With the skills I gained during this year's summit, I am excited for the 2022 TESOL Advocacy and Policy Summit which I will be attending with another selected board member. (The WAESOL Board sends one board member who attended last year along with a new board member committed to advocacy and policy.) As we transition to 2022, I am hopeful that an in-person summit will allow further conversations with Washington state's elected representatives. As advocacy and policy affect the lives of our students who are English language learners, it is of the utmost importance that we continually engage in professional development to better serve our multilingual learners.



Alex Tang is an adjunct faculty member in the Basic and Transitional Studies Division at Seattle Central College. His research interests include but are not limited to: the use of LI in the second language classroom, sociolinguistics, and less commonly taught grammar structures such as multiword units and focus structures. He is currently researching second language acquisition among adult learners, as well as focusing on bilingual education efforts with Cantonese and English. He serves on the WAESOL Board as a Member-at-Large, as well as the One City Project Board of Directors as a Board Member. He is also on the Seattle College's District Distance Learning Committee, Seattle College's Faculty Diversity and Inclusion Committee, and Seattle Central's College Council as a representative for the Basic and Transitional Studies Division. He also teaches Cantonese and Korean through One City Project. Alex hopes to pursue doctoral studies within the next year. Contact him at alexander@waesol.org.