Get Involved: Advocacy and Policy for ELL Professionals

**TEN THINGS YOU CAN DO**

Anyone can be an advocate. If you are worried or bothered by the state of our profession or the situations our students find themselves in, advocacy can become a way to renew your optimism and regain a sense of control. Action is better than worrying, and there are steps you can take toward positive changes. Here are ten suggestions.

1. **Define the problem(s) that mean the most to you.** Sit down and make a list of things that bother or scare you. Which ones do you see as most vital?

2. **Look for opportunities.** Some problems can be fixed, and some are out of our control. A problem you can fix is an opportunity.

3. **Learn who your allies are.** Talk to colleagues and find out which of your concerns are systemic. Who among you shares your concerns?

4. **Get together to share ideas.** Discuss with like-minded people what you think are the roots of a problem. What would it look like if the problem you identified didn’t exist?

5. **Find out who the players are.** Who ultimately has the power to make the change you’d like to see? Are you talking about a policy that comes from your institution? Is your institution responding to the constraints of a state or federal law or some other outside agency? Does your institution receive funding from a state or federal grant? Which ones? What effect does the grant have on your ability to do what you want to do? Are you dependent on marketing and recruiting students, and do you have to communicate your value in a competitive marketplace? If so, is that being done effectively?

6. **Ask an administrator you trust (nicely) to learn more about the laws and grants that define your institution.** If someone has recently written a grant application, ask to read it. Understand that, if a grant is accepted, the institution is then obliged to follow the plan laid out in the grant application exactly, or risk losing funding. This may answer a lot of questions you may have about “Why can’t we…?” or “Why do we have to…?” If you have a good relationship with your administrators, you may discover that they share your concerns, or maybe they don’t! But this is a good place to start thinking about policies you’d like to change.

7. **Become a source of feedback.** Educate policymakers. You’re an educator! You do this all the time in the classroom, but consider the fact that there are good people trying to set policy who need information that you have. Don’t let them
work in a vacuum. Reach out and let policymakers know how their good intentions are playing out in the real world. If you don’t tell them, maybe no one will. You don’t have to become an adversary. Work from a place of shared values. Be willing to offer an alternative and make it clear you’re dedicated to working toward that change together.

8. Have a specific ask. Write to school boards, state and federal lawmakers. Find out what actions they are taking, and let them know how you’d like them to proceed.

9. Appeal to the head and the heart. Start collecting interesting facts that support your view, and be ready to share them. When asking for money, be prepared to show the good that you do, and don’t be shy about talking about things like “return on investment”. Combine hard facts with stories that are rich in detail so that you can bring a human face to the issues that concern you.

10. Follow the news, and explore resources.

- For more information about ESSA, WIOA, Immigration and Refugee Concerns, check out TESOL Advocacy.
- For communication templates, take a look at ISTE’s Advocacy Toolkit.
- AFT does a lot of advocacy work for students and teachers.
- The Migration Policy Institute is a think tank with lots of data on immigration issues.
- The National Skills Coalition has data on adult education and workforce trends.
- Get in touch with your Senators and Representatives in Congress.
- Get in touch with Washington State Legislators.
- Find your School Board or State Board of Community and Technical Colleges.
- Dive deep with a good book on the subject, Advocating for English Language Learners.