

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: A MIXED METHODS INVESTIGATION OF
ESOL TEACHER ADVOCACY: “IT’S NOT
GOING IN AND JUST TEACHING
ENGLISH”

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It is widely acknowledged that English language learners (ELLs) are a population in need of advocacy in K-12 public schools in the United States. The main professional standards for initial teacher certification call for English to speakers of other languages (ESOL) teachers to be advocates for ELLs. This mixed methods study investigates ESOL teachers' cognitions (beliefs, thoughts, attitudes; Borg, 2006) about advocacy and their actions as advocates. A survey of 511 ESOL teachers in five diverse school districts in one Mid-Atlantic state, and interviews with 15 of those teachers, confirm that ESOL teachers recognize the need for advocacy and have positive cognitions about advocacy. The ESOL teachers believe it is their professional responsibility to advocate, defined by those interviewed as monitoring for obstacles to ELLs' success, speaking up to raise awareness or inform others about ELLs and ESOL, providing resources or services, affirming ELLs' linguistic and cultural diversity, and empowering ELLs to self-advocate. This research found that most ESOL teachers engage in instructional advocacy, while fewer engage in political advocacy. Variables predictive of greater advocacy actions include belief in professional advocacy responsibility, knowledge of the standards, years

of ESOL teaching experience, a supportive school context for advocacy, and self-efficacy in advocating. This study also points to the importance of the teacher education program in continuing to develop awareness of the need to speak up for ELLs and in preparing ESOL teachers with the skills needed for advocacy work.

This dissertation proposes a framework for advocacy that identifies the intended recipients of ESOL teacher advocacy to be ELLs, ELL families, and ESOL teachers themselves, and highlights ESOL teachers' potential co-advocates to be ELLs, ELL families, general education teachers, school administrators, and community leaders. Finally, this study clarifies three overarching goals of advocacy: improving ELLs' educational outcomes, enhancing their life chances beyond the school, and challenging societal injustices that continue to make advocacy necessary. Future research could investigate how ESOL teachers who engage in instructional advocacy may also become involved in political advocacy for ELLs, and could probe the distinction between advocacy and activism for ESOL teachers and within the TESOL field.