



**Maryland
TESOL**



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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Katie Miller



The key word for the events of recent months has been unknown. When will the global pandemic reach a conclusion whereby people are safe, healthy, and unafraid? Unknown. How will schools meet the needs of English learners who have been underserved by school closings? Unknown. What will be the results of the 2020 elections where so much is at stake? Unknown. We don't know what is going to happen from one day to the next, and it leaves many of us feeling powerless.

But amid the uncertainty, there is action and there is power. We see the community rallying to support those in need, with donated food, money, and masks. We see people taking to the streets to affirm the rights and dignity of Black lives. We see teachers who press forward in uncharted teaching territory, doing their best to connect with students and families. There is much we do not know about the future, but we are not helpless. We help ourselves, we help each other. We do not let despair and fear cloud our judgment of what is right and what is needed. As I write this, I am working to find my own footing in virtual teaching. Like many of you, I have missed school dearly. But I'm ready to embrace new methods, new structures, and new technologies. All we can do is put one foot in front of the other, knowing that we always travel on the path to what is best for our students. Teachers are more than facilitators of learning; we are advocates for our learners, institutions, and communities. We listen to our students to find out what they need, and we organize that support. We like to say that in these times teachers have been going "above and beyond" for the success of their students, but the truth is that teachers have been doing that long before the pandemic and will continue to do so no matter the state of the world.

There are always many unknowns, but our collaboration creates the actionable answers. In that space of uncertainty, we have the power to dream. We have the power to be creative, to think differently, to challenge what has been the norm and push for more, different, and better. I invite you to attend our events, participate in our networking, and share your ideas and suggestions so that we can create collaborative spaces that are meaningful to you.

This year marks the 40th Anniversary of Maryland TESOL. I am honored to serve as the 40th President of an organization that champions the education and personal growth of every English teacher and learner. We have come a long way in the past forty years and while the future of the next forty years is unknown, we are dreaming of possibilities with smiles on our faces. We know this to be true: teachers will also advocate for the success of their students, and Maryland TESOL will always advocate for you.

Katie Duda Miller President
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Editor's Letter

Happy New Year! My name is Rishan G Habte and I am excited to be your new Maryland TESOL Newsletter Editor. My vision for our Newsletter is create a viable resource for TESOL professionals. The Maryland TESOL Newsletter will feature more research based articles, community organization spotlights, profiles of educators that are making important impacts and calling attention to issues that affect our work. I invite you to send in your works to be published.



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Statement from Maryland TESOL on Racial Injustice

We have witnessed the horrific instances of violence against individuals and groups and are deeply disturbed by the disregard for human life. As language educators in the U.S., we serve communities who are disproportionately impacted by poverty, racism, and discrimination. Maryland TESOL member and board are to support teachers, advocates, students and families alike during this time. We are committed to the values of multiculturalism, multilingualism, and equity for all. Educators must be able to reflect on their practice to ensure that it prioritizes inclusion and support for students who are victims of injustice. We work towards dismantling systemic structures of oppression and increasing the collective agency of our students to advocate for the world we envision, a world that affirms the dignity of every life and the opportunity for all to learn, grow, and thrive in our society.



The Reaching English Learners Act: Advocating for Future ESOL Teachers

by Grace Belz

Advocacy Chair and 5th-grade ESOL teacher in Baltimore City

Whether in-person or online, ESOL teachers hold a specific set of skills that are critical to the modern-day teacher toolbox. ESOL teacher preparation programs are tasked to provide candidates with a diverse understanding of the ever-changing language, social-emotional, political, and cultural challenges that our students face daily. The EL profile is growing and becoming increasingly complex.

The ESOL population is growing throughout the U.S. and at a particularly rapid rate in the state of Maryland. The U.S. Department of Education's Teacher Shortage Database (2020) reports that there is a shortage of ESOL teachers in Maryland in grades Pre-K through 12. Throughout the U.S., 32 states report a shortage in qualified ESOL teachers, particularly those who are bilingual.

Due to the dynamic needs of our ELs, it's increasingly apparent that our growing population requires some of the most uniquely qualified teachers. TESOL-specific training programs offer unique coursework in English language instruction, social emotional support, and intercultural communication that are not generally offered by traditional teacher preparation programs in the U.S.

Background

The number of English Language Learners in the U.S. public schools system has reached over 5 million. This means that about one in ten Pre-K through 12th-graders still require instruction in specifically targeted English language skills. While some of these students are foreign-born, many are U.S. citizens (TESOL International Association).

In addition to the growing number of ELs in the public school system, the U.S. faces a critical shortage of qualified ESOL teachers to match the need. This puts ELs at risk of falling behind their peers due to language challenges alone. In 2016, 32 states reported a shortage of ESOL-specific teachers, resulting in a learning gap in EL's progress. The International TESOL Association reports that 70 percent of ELs scored a reading proficiency of "below basic," compared to only 20 percent of non-EL peers (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). In addition, the national four-year high school graduation rate of 83% drops significantly to 65% within the EL population (National Center for Education Statistics).

The shortage of qualified ESOL teachers and the resulting underperformance of ELs has piqued the interest of Congress. Representative Jim Langevin (D-Rhode Island), who initially sponsored this legislation, stated, "This bill would address this crisis by providing resources to institutions of higher education to better train the teachers of tomorrow. As the population of English learners grows, we must ensure there are qualified educators prepared to meet the unique needs of these students and ensure their academic success" (Congressman Jim Langevin, 2018).

Summary

The passage of the Reaching English Learners Act (H.R.1153) would both provide opportunities for future teachers as well as ensure that ELs in high-need early childhood and elementary educational environments receive access to highly qualified and trained educators. .

Under Title II Part B of the Higher Education Act, the Reaching English Learners Act aims to establish a grant program through the Department of Education. Grants would focus specifically on preparing teachers to effectively educate early childhood and elementary ELs, allowing them to progress efficiently linguistically and academically at a young age. In increments of five years, grants would go directly to higher education institutions or local, early childhood educational programs in high-need areas throughout the country.

In addition to providing teachers-in-training with high quality education, this program prioritizes high education institutions that recruit underrepresented populations, which would allow former ELs and bilingual candidates to access teacher preparation programs (Reaching English Learners Act, H.R.1153).

Impact

The Reaching English Learners Act has specific goals that would have a direct impact on future Maryland teachers as well as the growing EL population in our state. This legislation intends to:

Target young children (early childhood and secondary students) in preparing for college and career as well as achieving high levels in both English proficiency and overall academic achievement.

Give new teachers adequate training in social-emotional learning as well as identifying and supporting ELs with disabilities.

Create partnerships with local educational institutions in high-need areas, allowing teachers and organizations to engage in community and family support both inside and outside of the classroom (Reaching English Learners Act, H.R.1153).

While Senator Chris Van Hollen (D-Maryland) supports the companion bill, the Reaching English Learner's Act has gained little publicity in the state of Maryland. In the U.S. overall, 5% of students ages 5 to 17 are considered to have Limited English proficiency, while 9% of the 75,852 students (K-12) in Maryland were identified as ELs in the 2016-2017 school year (Migration Policy Institute Fact Sheet, 2018). The Reaching English Learners Act could have significant implications for Maryland's large and growing population of ELs.

Call to Action

This legislation is comprehensive as it provides an avenue of advocacy both for future TESOL candidates, as well as current and former Maryland ELs.

Representative Jim Langevin (D-Rhode Island) first introduced the legislation to the U.S. House of Representatives, garnering co-sponsorship and support from Representatives Will Hurd (R-Texas), Adriano Espaillat (D-New York), Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC), and Jimmy Gomez (D-California). In the U.S. Senate, Senators Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV) and John Cornyn (R-TX) co-sponsor a companion bill.

The Reaching English Learners Act has been heavily endorsed by key teaching associations, including the National Association for Bilingual Education, the American Federation of Teachers, and Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents.

How can Maryland TESOL Association Members support the Reaching English Learners Act? Consider the following:

Urge leaders to support this legislation by writing to your representatives in Congress



Create awareness about the importance of the Reaching English Learners Act on social media. Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram can help supporters reach large audiences quickly.

Visit the TESOL Advocacy Center to send a "Call to Action" message to family, friends, and colleagues to promote support of this unique legislation:

<https://www.tesol.org/advance-the-field/tesol-advocacy-action-center>

Exploring Technology with Teacher Candidates

by Loren Jones and Carmen Durham

As we shift to online instruction for PK-12 schools and universities throughout the nation due to COVID-19, educational stakeholders across contexts have been impacted. Teacher candidates who are completing their internships, along with their mentor teachers, have been given the formidable task of transitioning from face-to-face teaching to online instruction. Ferdig and colleagues (2020) have recently put forth recommendations for how teacher education programs can support teacher candidates during the ever evolving circumstances. For example, teacher educators can provide new lesson plan templates created specifically for online classes or opportunities for simulated teaching with avatars in a virtual environment. We contribute to this growing literature by sharing a project we implement with teacher candidates: a tech tips presentation. This assignment, originally meant to prepare the teacher candidates to examine new digital tools, has also supported them in using technology effectively during virtual instruction.

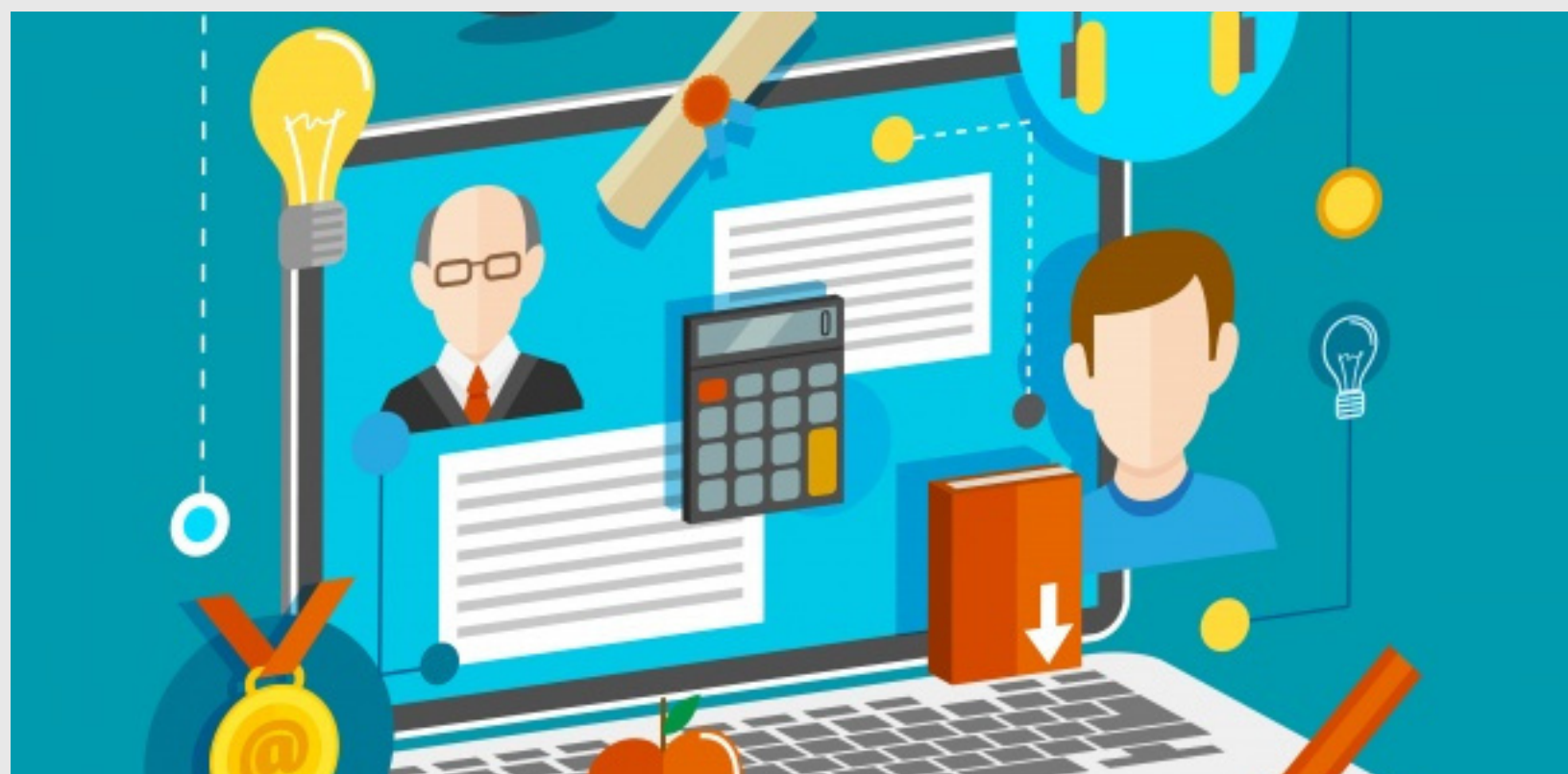
Tech Tips Presentations

The tech tips presentations occur during a seminar course that is concurrent with student teaching. The overall goal of the tech tips presentations is to inspire the teacher candidates to explore and evaluate educational technology that has the potential to enhance their teaching and their students' learning/critical thinking skills. We encourage them to find resources that their mentor teachers use effectively and/or digital tools that would be new to all of us. The teacher candidates' creative research is an important part of this project since we as teacher educators may not be familiar with new and ever evolving educational technologies.

As part of the project, each teacher candidate identifies at least one digital tool each semester of their student teaching to present in the seminar course. They reflect on the purpose and intention of the digital tool and the affordances and challenges of using the tool in addition to giving specific examples of how they might use it in their classroom. The teacher candidates then present their selected digital tools and give a brief demonstration of how to use the tool. During many of the demonstrations, the other participants act as students so that we can also preview the digital tools from a learner's perspective. The tech tips presentations foster a professional learning community for all of us as we experiment with new digital resources and collaboratively reflect on the potential of technology in the classroom.

Collaborative Resource

After the presentations, each teacher candidate adds their digital resource to a shared document. They identify their selected tool, provide an overview of it, and include a few ideas for classroom use. Table 1 is an example of the shared document created by a recent cohort of teacher candidates. Ideally, teacher candidates move forward in their induction year and are able to reference this document as they plan to incorporate technology in their lessons.



Digital Resources Guide

DIGITAL RESOURCE	DIGITAL RESOURCE DESCRIPTION	USES IN THE CLASSROOM
<p>HTTPS://WWW.TEXTHELP.COM/EN-US/PRODUCTS/READ-WRITE/</p>	<p>Read&Write is a literacy support tool available as software, an app, and as a browser extension. It provides a customizable toolbar with many features to assist students with reading and writing within common applications. It's available to teachers for free with unrestricted access to all features.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Listen to longer passages• Orally take notes and dictate writing• Improves writing with tools like word prediction• Practice Reading Aloud feature can be a tool for students to independently improve their reading fluency and can be used as proof of new skills
<p>WWW.FLIPGRID.COM</p>	<p>FlipGrid is a free online resource and app for teachers and students. Teachers can create a "grid" for each class or ESOL group and upload prompts in the form of videos, pictures, or text. Students record and submit a video in response to the prompt. Additional supports (ie. sentence frames) are available. After submitting responses, students can view their classmates' videos and leave an additional video response.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Differentiate prompts for different levels/groups• Use pre-created prompts that other teachers have uploaded to FlipGrid• Supports (images, sentence frames)• Respond to classmates (accountable talk)• Focus on academic vocabulary (compare/contrast, describe)• Preps students for speaking with a computer for WIDA ACCESS• Adjust the required speaking length for students' videos
<p>HTTPS://WWW.GOSOAPBOX.COM</p>	<p>GoSoapBox is a free, online platform for anonymous formative assessment in the classroom! Students can access a class page of polls, quizzes, and discussions that are easy to create and unlock via the teacher view.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students can submit answers anonymously• Confusion meter lets teachers know when to slow down and review• Quiz results can be downloaded into an Excel sheet for easy recording of grades• Can be used to create separate pages for different small group assignments
<p>WWW.THINGLINK.COM</p>	<p>ThingLink is a free tech tool that students or teachers can use. Users can make images or videos become interactive by embedding audio, visuals, text, links, and more. The functions are very user-friendly, and you can choose from pre-made templates or create your own from</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Interactive images and videos• Students or teachers can make a project• Pre-made templates or real-life images• Real-world connections

<https://diversebookfinder.org/>

Diverse Book Finder (DBF) is “a comprehensive collection of children’s picture books featuring Black and Indigenous people and People of Color (BIPOC).” The site allows users to review a catalogue of children’s picture books published since 2002 and includes data about the representation of different racial and ethnic communities. There are also a number of blog posts designed to help educators authentically diversify their texts.

- Search the database for books addressing specific communities or topics
- Critically analyze representation of BIPOC communities
- Submit their classroom library to the CAT tool to receive an analysis of how it lines up with demographic representation nationally and within the community

<https://www.pixton.com>

Pixton is an online tool that allows students to make their own graphic stories. Students can choose from a variety of settings, characters, emoPixton is an online tool that allows students to make their own graphic stories. Students can choose from a variety of settings, characters, emotions, and actions. They can even create an avatar that looks like them! While the free version is somewhat limited, teachers can purchase the specific content pack they need for a small price or they can choose a monthly/yearly subscription. tions, and actions. They can even create an avatar that looks like them! While the free version is somewhat limited, teachers can purchase the specific content pack they need for a small price or they can choose a monthly/yearly subscription.

- Creative writing--students create their own story
- Recreating or retelling a story read in the classroom (i.e. make a graphic story of Romeo and Juliet)
- To practice conversation--students manipulate gestures, expressions, etc. in accordance with what is being said
- To explain a concept

Conclusion

While the tech tips presentation began as an assignment that we implemented prior to COVID-19 to help teacher candidates examine new educational technologies, it has taken on new meaning with the move to online instruction. We have come to realize the importance of supporting teacher candidates in exploring new tools that can be used in a variety of contexts to enhance their instruction. Digital tools are becoming increasingly important in classrooms (e.g., Fishman & Dede, 2016), especially within virtual instruction during the pandemic. Teacher educators can find creative ways to support teacher candidates in discovering, experimenting with, evaluating, and even creating new digital tools.



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Carmen Durham is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Teaching and Learning, Policy and Leadership in the College of Education at the University of Maryland, College Park. She has worked in various capacities with pre-service and in-service world language and ESOL teachers. Her dissertation centers around preparing teachers to use digital tools in ways that are equitable in order to address the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse learners.



Educator Spotlight

Amanda Kremnitzer is an English teacher and Literacy Specialist in Frederick County Public Schools. She also coordinates the Project LIT club at Tuscarora High School, an organization “committed to increasing access to diverse books and promoting a love of reading.” She sat down with Maryland TESOL for an interview on the why and how of meaningful diverse literature for ESOL students.

Why is it important for English learners to read diverse literature or literature produced by diverse voices?

It's important for any student to read stories that they can relate to, but also have no experience with or as. However, for English Learners, diverse literature provides a gateway into the nuances of American society where there really are so many diverse experiences. We talk so much about students being good readers of books, and then we focus on social emotional learning. If a book can help students become more proficient in a language and help them navigate their social lives, then it becomes a valuable resource for building their own character. English learners can think more critically about what is happening inside and outside of the classroom because they have a variety of lenses to use when thinking.

Describe your experiences with teaching diverse literature in the classroom or as an extracurricular activity.

I didn't recognize the power of diverse literature until I was teaching our current junior class in their 8th grade year. I had students who had gotten through without reading in years, and left "Long Way Down" by Jason Reynolds sitting on my desk. One student picked it up and started reading it. He didn't move when classes changed. In fact, he didn't move until school ended. I should have sent him out, but a student who said they would never read in my class had read for almost two hours straight. He saw people he knew in that book and an author who looked like him. And I realized that I needed to do more.

So I began a Project LIT book club at the high school after moving up with them and began to implement more independent reading in class. The conversations my students were having as a result of their books was impeccable. Our book club wanted to advocate more for others. It's been a powerful ride through inaction and action, all driven by words on a page.



Immigrant students might not have been taught U.S. history, and therefore might not understand the historical reasons for the racial injustice we see today. How should a classroom teacher approach that?

This is a tough question, but I believe it needs to be explicitly taught. There are so many resources available right now that can show what happened, but students don't actually become aware until they discuss and reflect on it. Those scaffolds need to be provided because when things get uncomfortable it is human nature to avoid or shy away.

What are some good entry level books or graphic novels for teachers who want to incorporate more critical stories of race and diversity?

Picture Books:

Sulwe, Lupita N'yongo
Fry Bread, Kevin Noble Maillard
My Papi Drives a Motorcycle, Isabel Quintero

Novels:

Long Way Down, Jason Reynolds
The Poet X, Elizabeth Acevedo
Dear Martin, Nic Stone
Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter, Erika Sánchez
Educated, Tara Westover
Born a Crime, Trevor Noah
And I also love the Fresh Ink anthology!

Graphic Novels:

The Prince and The Dressmaker, Jen Wang
Hey Kiddo, Jarrett J. Krosoczka
I am Alfonso Jones, Tony Medina
New Kid, Jerry Craft
March series (John Lewis)



What are some kind of extension projects or activities students can do after they read a book?

I prefer that they write in some way. I use a lot of the AVID one-page projects because they provide a ton of flexibility in terms of how to present the information you want to share. I also love a word art summary challenge, because it empowers students to condense a story to one word, or for them, one take-away. That's a hard skill. But then the at reinforces the elements of the story that led them to that choice.

How can ELs engage in service learning?

Reading and writing with younger students is an amazing service opportunity. It also helps younger students see older students successfully navigate the world around them. When students can discuss the stories with younger students, it models conversations we expect to have in the "adult world" when we talk about movies, music, etc.

What should a teacher do if a student disagrees, or a parent/guardian raises an objection, or an administrator questions the choice of book? Do you experience push back and if so, how have you handled it?

I have been pretty fortunate to have a very limited experience in this aspect of education. When it has happened, I ask that the student be involved in the conversation - especially when it is about an independent reading book. Why do they want to read it? What do they hope to get out of it? And then I ask the guardian for their major concerns.

Last year, I did have a parent who was unhappy with all of the options presented, most of which were county-approved (I had sent a permission slip for a county-approved text that required it). Her reasoning made sense - all of the texts offered by the county had a negative take on the experiences a person of color might endure. So I tried to supplement the texts with experiences that were just "everyday" experiences. Not every story has to be traumatic to be warranted in the classroom. It doesn't make it more meaningful. So we need to present diversity without trauma more often than not.



Community Organization Spotlight:

Casa de Maryland

Xiomara Rivera recently sat down with Shannon Wilkes de Benetiz who serves as the Community Education Manager at Casa de Maryland to talk about some of the resources they offer

Tell me about your organization.

We are a membership organization. We have over 100,000 members in Maryland, Virginia and Pennsylvania. Predominantly where we have our offices. We are the largest immigrant and Latino serving advocacy organization in the Mid-Atlantic region. CASA, we have been around since the mid 80s. Formed by what we now refer to as our members. At the time it was largely comprised of immigrants coming to the United States from Central America, fleeing the Civil War occurring in their countries. They found that when they came here to the United States, a lot of the support services that they were in need of did not exist at the time and so they organized themselves to create a space for those needed services. In particular we began with day laborers who organized to create a safe space to create employment opportunities where they could receive safe work in accordance with the law. Surrounding employment making sure they weren't being taken advantage of. That is where we started and from there it has expanded into areas such as legal services, health services education services. We do a lot with immigrant integration, citizenship, legal residency. We were initially 501c3 CASA still is, but we also have CASA in Action which is a c4. Most organizations do services or advocacy. We do both with our membership. We see where there is a need for that service. Provide that service as needed and where the service does not exist that's where we get into the advocacy end of it. Whereas a c4 is about electioneering for specific candidates that either have a track record for supporting the issues that are near and dear to CASA or are moving in that direction.



How did you get involved with CASA?

I started as a teacher. Little after finishing college as a part time job I got involved with CASA teaching English classes and it was a part time evening position that I had while doing other work in the community development and nonprofit sector. Specifically, I went more and more towards the education side and then just transitioned into working at CASA full time. So, I had been the coordinator of our evening program and then later became the manager of our Adult education.

What services do you offer for language learners? How has CASA made adjustments for Covid 19?

With Adult ESOL we have two class tracks. One is our workforce ESOL program and that is where our ESOL got started. We have our employment centers where we offer employment services. We do drop in ESOL classes where our day laborers at those centers and so those classes are very specific to the language needs of the day laborers. Language that they will need out on the job they are receiving. From there it expands into ability to obtain more stable income and employment opportunities. At that point they can transition into our Life skills ESOL program. That's more of a traditional structured class where we have set registration, we'll do a placement assessment and those classes talk about English for the workplace in a more general sense but they also cover all the different practical setting where people would want to be using English (ex. shopping or trying to figure out how to open up a bank account, interacting with their kids teachers as school, everyday life activities). For those classes we offer levels from beginning ESOL (little to no English), Basic level is a literacy course to support baseline literacy skills while learning oral communication simultaneously. These courses go all the way up to advanced courses for people who can speak English, but they may not be reading and writing at the level that they need in order to go to community college or vocational training course, GED, whatever the next step may be.

Facebook live classes, every first and 3rd Sunday of the month (series on how to request ppe)

Anything for kids?

The biggest chunk of what we do is for adults. A few years back we started a program called Mi Espacio in Langley Park. That actually had been going on as well, even before then, it was in the Baltimore area. That is an afterschool program for students to get help with homework support, but also developing leadership skills, career planning. Within this last year there was an ESOL component as well but we really created more structure in the program since this past Spring. That course is geared towards high schoolers. Before the pandemic everything was done in person. Since the pandemic all of our services have shifted to a virtual setting. We haven't taken any break we've just moved online.

Covid adjustments?

Our classes are all being taught on Zoom. At the Welcome Centers where people are coming to look for employment. Those are still open they were doing it virtually over the spring and summer and then in the fall they opened it back up in person. Everything is being done with social distancing. But the ESOL classes are done on Zoom so we have workers who are sometimes logging in from home and other times they are at the welcome centers logging in from there but the Life skills classes, Mi Espacio, is done from wherever the learner might be. Some people get off of work, jump in the car and log in and other people are doing it from their home.

What has the participation been like since Covid 19?

Interesting in that actual attendance rates have improved because it seems that without having the commute, childcare, by being able to log in wherever you are at it has eliminated one barrier for people but then the actual enrollment numbers have decreased. I think it's just the bigger issue of access to technology and the digital literacy. We've seen a real shift in people that we were serving previously just aren't comfortable with the online format so we're been getting learners that might not have been interested in it before because the commute was too much but now they're able to. There definitely seems to be a connection between people's English language proficiency and their digital literacy. In the past we had a lot of students who were in lower levels up to intermediate and less so in advanced. Whereas now there's been a shift where most of our students are intermediate or advanced. And you worry about those that are beginners, but they just don't have the access to wifi or they're not comfortable using ZOOM.



What locations in MD?

Headquarters is in Langley park, Hyattsville address. The majority of our students attending evening classes are in Silver spring (Wheaton area). Welcome center doing the morning classes the center in silver spring, in Wheaton in Rockville in Baltimore. Our Baltimore center, just as Covid was happening, we opened up a large center in Baltimore close to where we had been but now we are able to offer a lot more services and so the idea is to, once we can be back in person to expand what we are doing with ESOL there so if there was a smaller morning program there pretty soon it will be offering evening and Saturday classes.

CASA is Spanish for home; do you offer services for speakers of other languages?

When we first started, the majority of the members were Spanish speakers predominantly from Central America. Now we definitely serve a huge sector of Latino and Spanish speaking community, but in the last 10 years we have gotten a ton of new membership from largely from West Africa, countries like Cameroon, Chad, Congo but really west Africa at large. A lot of French speakers we do see members from East Africa and Asia as well. In our welcome centers with our day laborers that receive employment services depends on the center but right now it's pretty much a 50/50 split between Latinos and Africans who are coming to the centers. I'd say in our workforce ESOL program at least half if not more are French speakers. But our services, we are a trilingual organization, but we serve beyond immigrants at this point. A lot of working-class families we have partnerships with community colleges in the area, Prince George's Community College, Montgomery Community College to provide vocational training classes and so we get nonimmigrants who are participating in those programs in a lot of our health services. We have a trilingual health hotline, we support people in enrolling for affordable care act and for a wide variety of social services. So many people who are not necessarily immigrants take advantage of those services also our tax services, we do free services in supporting the filing of your taxes every spring.

As the academic calendar year begins what do you think is important for people to know about the services you all have to offer?

Know that is it all done virtually. The immigrant community, people of color in this area a large number of Latinos who are disproportionately affected by Covid 19. For us it has been very important to keep people's health in mind and not do anything that was unsafe or do anything that would put them unnecessarily in unsafe positions, so everything is done virtually. Also, our classes, we are unique in that we do short intensive sessions, we've always done a heavy instructional load. We offer classes four times a week, 8 hours of instruction per week but we used to run longer sessions like we used to run 12 weeks sessions but with family and work responsibilities it is a lot so we cut them down, now they are 8 week sessions. So people can get all that language content in smaller chunks. you know you use it right away and if they want to, we do four sessions per year. So, we're about to wrap up our first fall session and we'll roll right into a second fall session. And then winter spring we'll do a back to back so some people have got the time they want to learn

English quick, they do them back to back go from one session to the next and other people it just doesn't meet their schedule, their other responsibilities so maybe they'll take 8 weeks, they'll take a break and then they don't have to wait a ton a time before they can jump back in to do another session.



What opportunities does CASA have for classes in the summer?

Previously we've always taken a break in the summer. When the weather gets hot, many of our students that's when they have the most work opportunities. We would see attendance go down the hotter it got so we didn't do classes in the summer before but when we moved our classes online this past summer we did our first summer session and it was pretty well attended so we'll see... We might do it again. We are also doing Facebook Live classes. For people who aren't enrolled in the more traditional classes every 1st and 3rd Sunday of the month at 6pm. We do a mini Facebook live lesson. One we recently did was about the negotiating a payment plan with your landlord. Practical lessons that you would need right now. When the pandemic first started, we did a lesson on how to request PPE from an employer those types of thing. Available to anyone who follows us on Facebook or checks us out at the time it's occurring.

As the 2020 election comes up, what services or information do you think it is important for people to know your organization offers?

We are a very politically active organization. Us being a membership organization we really are in tune with what our members have a need for and so that has always guided our political campaigning. If you check out the CASA webpage and the CASA in action webpage, you will see what we are doing. Right now, looking at our Facebook page will also give you a good idea. We've been very much involved with the rent moratorium. Also, if you go to casa in action webpage you can see what political candidates, we are endorsing for the 2020 election. We do discuss the national level, but we also do a lot of work locally. I think especially at a time that we're living like right now that the national news can get you feeling really down and out it can be refreshing to see that there have been a lot of positive things going on at the local level. The CASA legal program is very much involved in litigation to help the community, the rent moratorium, TPS has been something we've been very involved in DACA, all the different fee hikes that they've been having they're basically putting a wealth test on immigration policy that's something we've been litigating as well. If you check out the website, you can get a more in depth understanding of that type of stuff. I would say on the health side something that we've been involved in is vaccines, the trial for the vaccines making sure that people of color are participating in those different trials. So if anybody is interested in participating in the vaccine trials that's something also that they can connect with us through the CASA website and get enrolled. We are working on that with the University of Maryland.

What policies or legislation do you think people should be aware of that may affect multicultural/language learning students?

The rent is something really important right now. I think a lot of times people say things that are meant to intentionally intimidate people. Thinking "Oh if I'm undocumented then I don't apply for this, I don't apply for that" but somebody making a statement is not the same thing as an actual policy.

And on the local level, Montgomery County, there's been a lot done to help support our undocumented community members who were intentionally left out of federal stimulus checks, so people are aware of that. If they do need different rent assistances. The rent moratorium on rent collection it doesn't have anything to do with your immigration status. People should be aware that having a moratorium isn't having rent forgiveness so connecting with CASA so they find out how they can have a payment plan is really important.

Connecting with our health hotline to understand what health services are available to them. I think a lot of what has been said about public charge and undocumented community members accessing different health benefits or social services, it's just a lot of fear mongering to keep people from participating in those really critical services. Now that we're in the middle of a pandemic that's especially important that people continue to speak out if those services are needed.

So, I would encourage them to give a call to our health hotline if they're not sure what could be applicable to their particular situation.



What additional support for your organization could you use from the community?

Now more than ever people are transitioning to this virtual setting. In some ways it may seem like it's cheaper in other ways there are more overhead costs. Zoom licenses, teacher training. People who were great teachers before for an in person class are not necessarily prepared or the best fit for a virtual class. Even those who do have that capacity need some intensive training on how to get up to speed on that type of stuff. Spreading the word about the classes. Just because the physical class location is on hold for right now doesn't mean that there aren't these classes available. Since everything is done virtually. In the past, we could go out stand by the bus stop go to the laundromat, inform people about the classes that way. And for health reasons we're not doing that right now. So, finding people while navigating through the virtual environment.

How can people learn more about your organization?

Our website, Facebook and Twitter. Centers are open but as much as possible we're trying to get people to get in touch with us by email or over the phone. So, they don't have to be out traveling unnecessarily.

Facebook twitter website phone email

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Upcoming Events

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EMPOWERMENT *and* MOMENTUM

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DR. LOURDES ORTEGA

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We strongly encourage presentation proposals from professionals at all stages of their careers, from graduate student to seasoned professional. The conference environment is supportive and welcomes broad participation from all ESL professionals.

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