

Position Statement on Immigration Reform in Georgia and the United States

Georgia Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (GATESOL) is a non-profit organization whose goals are to encourage professional development, participation, and leadership within the state of Georgia; to provide opportunity for study and research; to work cooperatively toward the improvement of instruction in all programs which seek to provide students with an opportunity to acquire English language skills and proficiency; and to promote an understanding of the cultures of non-native speakers of English.

As teachers of English language learners, we observe first hand the impact the current immigration debate and resulting furor are having on our students and their families. Innocent children are under enormous stress, expressing fears of deportation and uncertainty about their futures. Learning is obviously hindered by their preoccupation with these issues. Additionally, hard-working families are afraid to drive to markets, their jobs, or even places of worship because of recent well-publicized raids on immigrants. Moreover, measures such as HR 4437, which would criminalize undocumented immigrants and those offering assistance to them, cause further anxiety to both students and teachers. English language educators should not be focused on determining the legal status of students, but on developing better-educated people possessing the English language skills necessary to acculturate and become productive members of society.

Our state and nation have become more diverse, and the world is increasingly more interdependent. In keeping with our mission statement, GATESOL values respect for diversity, multiculturalism, and collaboration in a global community. Georgia and the entire United States have greatly benefited and continue to benefit from the tremendous cultural, economic, and linguistic contributions of immigrants. Therefore, we believe in embracing the immigrant community as an integral part of our nation, and we support policies that protect the human and civil rights of all immigrants and their families.

GATESOL supports comprehensive immigration reform on the federal level that

- respects the human and civil rights of immigrants
- creates opportunities for immigrants to learn English
- sustains and reunites families
- protects workers
- provides access to citizenship for immigrants who uphold American values, and
- ensures national security.

Additionally, GATESOL supports immigration policies on the state level that

- create a more educated Georgia
- protect free K-12 education to all residents as mandated by the US Constitution, and
- make higher education affordable and accessible to all residents.