

The ESL Department at Modesto Junior College is very concerned with the recommendations in **Chapter Five** of the Student Task Force Report. Earlier drafts of the report directly recommend the **elimination of all ESL credit courses at community colleges** more than two levels below transfer (this would mean the elimination of the ESL program at Modesto Junior College). While such direct language is missing in the current draft, given much of the communication in meetings and online forums, the intent remains that ESL be eliminated from the mission of community colleges. The language in the latest draft of the recommendations has been changed to indirectly recommend that ESL programs seek other means of funding (e.g. non-credit/pay-for-credit). The most recent version specifically states that the decision to **move programs below transfer level, including ESL, to adult education** be placed in the hands of legislators. The department would like to address concerns related to current recommendations as well as to implied information in the task force report.

1. The “either/or” perspective of redirecting funds for ESL instruction into adult education or community college (page 43) is helpful to no one especially in areas where there are very limited resources and students depend on a variety of programs to gain essential language skills. To illustrate, in Stanislaus County, **both the adult education and community college ESL programs serve valuable purposes in their respective communities** and work together to support a common goal. To discontinue services of either would reduce access for students in the communities where those services are offered and most needed.
2. **A decision made unilaterally for the entire state does not take into consideration the variability of program efficacy in different regions.** In other words, one region of California may have a strong community college ESL program in both non-credit and academic credit ESL, whereas the adult education program is weak and vice versa. Making a blanket shift of ESL programs from either adult education to community college or community college to adult education is unwise; some communities will lose valuable and effective services and possibly redirect resources to institutions unprepared to provide quality language instruction that adequately prepares students to matriculate into a college setting. If resources must be redirected from one institution to another, this decision should be region specific and the process competitive to ensure program quality and viability.
3. Furthermore, the department would like to debunk the notion that ESL students are unsuccessful at the community college. First, **student success is not measured solely in terms of acquisition of an associate’s degree or transfer to university programs.** ESL students, like many students in the community college system, have a variety of goals that do not always include obtaining a degree or transferring to a university. Although many of our students transfer to a university, there are others that complete an ESL sequence and acquire necessary language skills in order to earn certificates in Career and Technical Education programs and obtain jobs at a living wage in the community. These same students often return to the college years later to continue their education and complete academic degrees. Furthermore, **our ESL programs at MJC, along with many others across the state, already successfully produce strong student outcomes.** According to the most recent ARCC data, our retention and success rates are among some of the highest as well as most improved. From 2007-2008 to 2009-2010, the MJC ESL success rate was 67.7%. This is an improvement rate of over 14% from 2005-2006 to 2007-2008. We not only measure student success in completion rates but also in learning gains through the use of standardized pre and post-testing in our courses. We have been focused on student success, and the above data speaks to that. The assumption that there is a need to “refocus” on student success is patronizing and redundant. We are already dedicated to the success of our students by employing many of the same kinds of best practices the Task Force recommends.

4. While the task force may be concerned about the number of below transfer-level classes a college institution is offering, it is important to note that ***ESL is not remedial or developmental education***. ESL courses are closer in nature and methodology to transferable foreign language courses than to our Basic Skills counterparts. The curriculum is rigorous and academically challenging. When native English speakers take the same level courses in a foreign language, these same kinds of courses are considered transferable at the university level.
5. The intention of the Task Force is to make college more accessible to language learners when in reality, ***by removing ESL programs from the community college system, we are forcing our students to overcome yet more barriers to their education***. Why transition them to college from adult education when they are already embedded in the college system as students and not only take ESL courses but also utilize counseling services and take other college level courses? Why take away important financial support from the most marginalized students? Moreover, our students directly feed into other college programs. Taking this student population out of the community college weakens the ability of students to complete their academic goals, which is supposed to be the intent of the Task Force recommendation, and reduces the number of students matriculating into other college courses and programs, both at the transfer level and in Career and Technical Education.
6. It seems to be the opinion of the task force that ESL instruction can be truncated through more accelerated courses, the use of online instructional modules, increased tutoring, or more professional development on the part of instructors in other disciplines. While all of these practices can enhance instruction and are currently being implemented in many ESL programs, they should not completely supplant the kind of instruction currently offered by trained language teaching professionals. In addition, the current research that supports the supplanting of these courses only includes native-English speaking students, not language learners. Before the legislature makes a blanket recommendation for all ESL programs in California, more research, input, and time is needed before forcing such drastic measures on our students and schools. It is also important to note that ***no ESL professionals were included in this task force, whereas math and English faculty were called upon for input***. If the legislature is to decide where ESL instruction is taught, shouldn't ESL experts from community colleges be included in the discussion?
7. In specific regard to academic ESL, ***adult education in general is simply not equipped for the preparation of adult students in an academic setting***. The minimum qualifications required for adult education instructors are less than master's-level work in the area of academic language preparation. However, community college ESL instructors must have masters' degrees in TESOL or the equivalent, which includes language-specific instruction and instruction in the pedagogy of language teaching. Moreover, there is no recent precedent in the adult education system to offer academically focused ESL courses. The curriculum is typically focused at a much lower level. Many times, students at the highest levels in adult school programs place into our lower to intermediate levels of ESL at the community college. It is simply not within the capacity of adult schools to address the needs of college-bound language learners.

While we understand the Task Force's concern about implementing state-wide cost-saving measures, it is short-sighted to assume that these recommendations in Chapter 5 will actually increase student success and access to college for the language learner. In fact, they do the opposite. They restrict student access to both academic language preparation and other college level courses in the community college system. In reality, ***the recommendations further educationally and economically marginalize an already vulnerable student population***.