

To the Professional Standards Board:

I am writing to express my opposition to one of the proposed changes to the requirements for the certification of Reading Specialists in Delaware Schools.

My name is Dr. Nigel Caplan and I am an associate professor and the coordinator of the Additional Certification in ESL program at the University of Delaware.

Currently, Reading Specialists take a 3-credit course in Teaching English as a Second Language. Under the proposal, this would be replaced by a single course: "Teaching diverse reading profiles, including teaching English as a Second Language (3cr)".

This change effectively reduces English learners to a brief mention in a course which, presumably, will focus on students with reading disabilities and other "diverse reading profiles". English learners and other multilingual students may struggle with reading in ways that can appear similar to other students but they do so for different reasons and require different interventions and support that is tailored to their unique challenge of learning English, learning through English and learning about English. And their numbers are growing, in fact faster in Delaware than any other state. There are now over 15,000 ELs, a proportion of whom will need extra help with reading. Reading Specialists are vital members of ELs' educational teams, but to be effective, they need *more* not less preparation in ESL. They need to understand methods of teaching ESL, trajectories of typical second language acquisition, differences between second language acquisition and learning disability, the implications of bilingualism and multilingualism, and biliteracy and multiliteracy, as well as cultural and linguistic diversity and assessment of ELs. I teach many of these topics in our certification and master's programs, and they *cannot* be adequately addressed as a small portion of a single class. The phrase "including English as a Second Language" in no way does justice to the depth of knowledge that Reading Specialists require and is a disservice to them and to as much as 20% of Delaware's school population (active English learners, former English learners, and other multilingual students).

ELs are themselves a highly diverse group of learners, not a homogenous group. They include newcomers to our country, students with limited/interrupted formal education, migrant students, long-term English learners (many of whom were born here in Delaware), and ELs with learning disabilities. The wording of the proposed regulation implies that English as a Second Language is a single topic, whereas in reality, it addresses the different needs thousands of students, from those encountering English for the first time, to those who began learning English in kindergarten, to those who have spoken English and other languages all their lives and yet still struggle with reading. It is essential that Reading Specialists be knowledgeable about and advocate for all these English learners.

Therefore, I urge the Professional Standards Board in the strongest terms to retain the designated coursework in Teaching English as a Second Language for certification as a Reading Specialist.

Sincerely,

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