



October 16, 2013

The Honorable Jack Markell
Governor of the State of Delaware
150 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. South
2nd Floor
Dover, DE 19901

Dear Governor Markell:

My name is Sandra Spangler and I am the Education Subcommittee Chairperson of the Delaware Hispanic Commission. On behalf of the Hispanic Commission, I am writing to urge you to increase the educational support to our English Language Learners in Delaware.

Since 2003, the English Language Learner population has doubled in Delaware, with now more than 9,300 English Language Learners enrolled in our public schools. While the ELLs represent 81 native languages, approximately 77% are Hispanic. We are very concerned at the disparity between ELL and non-ELL academic achievement. According to Delaware Performance Appraisal System (DPAS) data, ELLs significantly lag behind their peers in reading (46%), math (35%), science (36%), and social studies (39%) proficiency. There is also an alarming discrepancy between ELL and non-ELL high school graduation and college enrollment rates.

While the ELL population is ballooning, with national statistics listing DE with a 249% growth rate, direct funding support to ELLs has decreased over the years. There is no longer any direct state funding for ELL programming. Some districts receive very small Title III federal grant allocations to supplement ELL programming; however, DE districts do not receive a "unit count" for English Language Learners. This makes it very difficult for districts to hire ESOL certified teachers and provide federally required services.

In addition to funding, many Delaware classroom teachers have had little to no pedagogy in educating English Language Learners. While there is a Delaware ESOL certification for ESL teachers, because of the funding structure, DE ELLs often receive instruction just a few hours per week from a certified ESOL teacher. During the majority of the school day, ELLs are in mainstream classes with teachers who have not been trained to assist them. Therefore, it is imperative that we improve our DE teacher certification requirements to ensure that all teachers are afforded a basic level of English language education.

Delaware ELLs are expected to meet the same academically challenging standards, whether they are Common Core or Next Generation Science Standards. DE ELLs are expected to be prepared for the new Smarter Balanced assessments and demonstrate that they are college and career ready. In order for our ELL's to achieve this, we must support them.

Therefore, we respectfully request your support for the implementation of an English Language Learner unit count. We believe a direct funding stream to districts, based upon ELL enrollment, is the first step to ensuring quality programming. Additionally, we hope you will advocate for improvements in DE teacher certification. We believe that increasing our classroom teachers' understanding of English language acquisition will have a significant impact on our students' achievement.

Sincerely,

Sandra C. Spangler

Cc: Mark Murphy, Secretary of Education
Merv Daugherty, Ed.D., Superintendent Red Clay Consolidated School District
Javier Torrijos, Delaware Hispanic Commission Chair