

Alignment for Early Literacy

Review of Delaware's Prekindergarten to Grade 3 Licensure and Certification Landscape

Summary 2 of 4¹: How do Delaware's current pathways for preparation and the current regulatory structure related to licensure and certification align to best practices for supporting literacy for young children in pre-K–Grade 3?

¹ See the full report for detailed analysis as well as the associated summaries (1–4).

Key Findings

- The regulatory structure includes clear requirements for certification and role definition that align to the evidence base for preparing educators.
- The overlap among early childhood certification, Early Childhood Exceptional Children Special Education Teacher certification, and elementary certification is an area for further research due to multiple authorizing agencies for the settings in which these teachers work, the role of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) funding for serving students in the preschool space, and the differing preparation standards for professionals working within preschool up to Grade 2 to meet the large spread of developmental needs.
- The role of the reading specialist as outlined in regulations and through certification may not match duties assigned within school settings, and the duties associated with this role are currently augmented by a series of other literacy-focused professionals who are not encompassed by current regulations or formal certification pathways.

Methodology

The study utilized a mixed-methods approach with a document and data review, a research literature review, and an abbreviated interview series with key system stakeholders. To understand the gap between this regulatory and comparable model review and the identified priority for literacy improvement, the research team turned to stakeholders to share their perspectives and experiences. The portion of the study highlighted in this document is a literature review.

Relevant Report Highlights

License and Certification

Delaware educators have three “license” options: (1) initial license, (2) continuing license, and (3) advanced license. Delaware educators may hold only one license; the type of license depends on the following experience:

- Initial license: A new educator with less than 1 year of licensed teaching experience will need to apply for an initial license and then pass an approved performance assessment. If they have more than 1 year but less than 4 years of licensed teaching experience, they should also apply for an initial license and will not be required to pass a performance assessment. The following certification areas are not required to pass a performance assessment: elementary school counselor, secondary school counselor, driver’s education teacher, school nurse, school psychologist, and school social worker.
- Continuing license: If an educator more than 4 years of licensed teaching experience, they can apply for a continuing license.
- Advanced license: Educators with National Board for Professional Teaching Standards certification should apply for an advanced license.

If an applicant is applying for an initial license, they must simultaneously apply for a standard certificate. When considering early literacy certification, the early childhood (birth–Grade 2) and elementary certifications (K–6) are the primary classroom roles. However, specific certifications support lead teachers in their literacy instruction and directly support children, calling for a broader analysis of the support system within school settings. These roles include reading specialist, teacher of English learners, and special education teachers.

SB51 passed in 2013 and raised the requirements to enter teaching. As of April 2021, aspiring teachers in Delaware must pass performance and content examinations before receiving their initial licenses. In addition, candidates entering education preparation programs (EPPs) must have a 3.0 or higher grade point average or be in the top 50th percentile of the GPA distribution.

Delaware’s EPPs also need to include direct experience in a classroom setting, consisting of at least 10 weeks of full-time teaching with supervision and “instruction for prospective elementary school teachers on research-based strategies for childhood literacy,” and candidates must pass both content and performance examinations to be considered a completer of the program. SB51 requires graduates’ performance to be monitored for at least 5 years following graduation from a program. This monitoring requirement became the Teacher Preparation Program Report Cards.

HB207 was passed in June 2021, removing the requirement that applicants for initial and continuing educator licenses obtain a passing score on an approved performance assessment. Implementation details will be established in the coming months.

Legislation and Related Regulations

The study team reviewed legislation and related regulations for the following certifications: early childhood teacher (birth–Grade 2), elementary teacher (Grades K–6), reading specialist, Early Childhood Exceptional Children Special Education Teacher (birth–Grade 2), special education teacher of students with disabilities (K–12), and teacher of English learners (K–12). These roles are discussed based on their alignment to the scope of this review and do not include all roles described in regulation.

The review found that Regulation 1571, amended in 2020, delineates the requirements for a teacher to work with special education in Grades K–12. An educator must also hold at least one content area certification. The team also found that at this time, there are no statutory or regulatory requirements regarding the qualifications of reading interventionists.

School districts may also choose to employ literacy coaches or other individuals who serve to support reading services for students. A common example of additional staffing capacity to support literacy is the Reading Assist program. Reading Assist program fellows are affiliated with AmeriCorps and trained to implement a specific reading intervention program, aimed at supporting the children scoring in the bottom 10% in literacy. At this time, there are no statutory or regulatory requirements regarding qualifications for these positions. As previously noted, and further explored in the recommendations section of the report, the full support system at the school level should be further researched to understand how these myriad roles intersect currently and how they could best be leveraged as a team to address literacy challenges within school sites.

Professional Development Requirements in Regulation

For the issuance and renewal of continuing licenses, educators must complete 90 clock hours of professional development, with 45 hours directly relating to work with students and staff. For an advanced license, an educator must complete the National Board’s certification renewal process.

The types of qualifying activities and engagements to meet each of these levels are detailed within regulations 1511 Issuance and Renewal of Continuing License and 1598 Delaware Professional Development Standards. Taken together, these two regulations set out a framework and definitions for what constitutes quality professional learning in Delaware. To quote the regulations, “professional development means a combination of focused, in-depth learning, practice, feedback, reflection, and expert support experiences designed to change participants’ attitudes, insights, and perspectives and ultimately results in improved professional practice. Effective professional development programs include ample opportunities for knowledge acquisition, skill mastery, descriptive feedback, and refinement of practice in the work setting as per 14 DE Admin. Code 1598 Delaware Professional Development Standards.”

Within 1511, the types of professional development that qualify for clock hours are also well-within the bounds of what would be considered JEPD if also connected to peer–peer learning. For example, action research, mentoring, microcredential, and Professional Learning Community (PLC) follow JEPD-aligned professional development options.

Based on the regulatory structure in place, Delaware is well-positioned to pursue strong job-embedded professional development models on the site level. In addition, there are a number of new initiatives and new courses focused on professional learning pathways to support improved literacy. Many are slated to begin in Fall 2021 and are therefore included without content review or analysis by the research team. Promising initiatives planned at this time include a series of professional learning cohorts, including grants provided to schools under the Reimagining Professional Educators who complete the courses, and the corresponding microcredentials will receive professional-learning clock hours, certification as offered by the professional-learning provider, and badges for each microcredential completed.

Selected Considerations and Recommendations

- The differing roles across districts may make it difficult to provide state-level support or professional development that will impact improved literacy without a review of how these roles are utilized to meet the current student and school needs.
- Certification pathways may not be equivalent as described in regulation on the preparation side and on the placement side within a school setting, based on the number of options for each role and reports from stakeholders that duties assigned to each role has great variability across districts.
- Literacy requirements are consistently included in K–12 roles, but early childhood certificate requirements are not as explicit. Consider a further review of early literacy development within early childhood programs and their alignment to Early Learning Foundations.