

Position Statement on Qualifications for Teachers who Teach English to Speakers of Other Languages in Florida Schools

Approved by the SSTESOL Board of Directors, Fall 2003

Sunshine State Teachers of English To Speakers of Other Languages (SSTESOL) of Florida is a professional organization dedicated to the teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages. The mission of SSTESOL is to provide educators access to professional development, resources, and interactions, and to provide leadership and advocacy in language policy issues.

Issue: Presently the Florida State Department of Education does not make a distinction between teacher certification applicants who achieve eligibility for the ESOL endorsement by completing an ESOL infused program and those applicants who have completed a **full** ESOL Endorsement program (five courses or 300 hours in-service points) as specified in the Florida Consent Decree of 1990. The state considers all applicants who receive either ESOL Endorsement equally eligible to teach ESOL students.

Issue: As a result of changes in how candidates are eligible for certification in Florida, applicants who pass an area of specialization exam become eligible for a certificate in that area. This recent ruling has impacted the field of TESOL, since presently any applicant who passes the state certification ESOL test becomes certifiable as an ESOL specialist. This creates a potential for inadequately prepared teachers to be assigned in primary language development roles with responsibilities for ESOL students.

Position: SSTESOL supports the rights of English language learners to be taught by qualified and trained ESOL specialists. ESOL specialists are those professional educators who have received extensive preparation in TESOL provided in a full ESOL Endorsement program, as outlined in the Florida Consent Decree of 1990.

Further, SSTESOL does not consider graduates from ESOL infused programs to be ESOL specialists. ESOL infused programs are designed to prepare teachers who are qualified to provide for the needs of English language learners in mainstream classrooms; these programs are not designed to prepare ESOL specialists.

Furthermore, SSTESOL does not consider candidates who have simply passed the ESOL certification test qualified to serve as ESOL specialists.

Rationale: Florida has the third largest population of English language learners in the U.S. The LULAC et al v. SBE Consent Decree (1990) sets forth specific ESOL endorsement requirements for instructional and administrative personnel. The following are the requirements for the ESOL endorsement as outlined in the Consent Decree:

- 300 in-service hours (required for Elementary, English, and Special Education teachers who teach the language arts component) OR five 3-credit hour courses, taught at the university level as part of a state approved program;
- The 300 in-service hours must include 60 in-service points in the following five specific areas: methods of teaching ESOL, curriculum in ESOL, testing and evaluation in ESOL, applied linguistics and TESOL, and cross-cultural understanding. If this requirement is met via the five university courses, a three-credit hour course is required in each of these areas.

Although the Consent Decree did not impose any direct requirements on institutions of higher education, educators involved in teacher preparation programs throughout the state, have held the position that graduates from teacher preparation programs should be fully prepared to teach English language learners in the regular classrooms. Thus, numerous teacher preparation programs have become ESOL infused models. In these programs TESOL standards are infused into the general methods' courses and clinical experiences. In addition, two (2) or more ESOL stand alone courses have been added. It is the position of SSTESOL that the intent of these programs is not to produce ESOL specialists but to produce classroom teachers who can meet the needs of English language learners in mainstream classrooms.

The Florida State Department of Education ruled that by the year 2004, all graduates from teacher preparation programs that lead to initial certification must also be eligible for the ESOL endorsement. The universities that had not submitted programs leading to the ESOL endorsement prior to this ruling are rapidly doing so. Many are employing infused models. Although a well designed and implemented infused program can provide basic ESOL preparation for mainstream classroom teachers, ESOL specialists should be required to complete, at minimum, a State Approved ESOL Endorsement program (five courses or 300 hours of in-service).