Special Education Students’ Success in World Language

by

Constance A. Regan

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of
Wilmington University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education

in

Innovation and Leadership

Wilmington University

April 2018
Copyright 2018, Constance A. Regan

This document is copyrighted material. Under copyright law, no parts of this document may be reproduced without the expressed permission of the author.
Abstract

This study examined the success rates, as measured by grades, of first-time 9th grade students enrolled in Level I world language (WL) classes in one school district in the State of Delaware from 2014-2017. Special education students’ grades were compared with their grades in English/Language Arts (ELA) classes, where additional assistance such as support facilitation (push-in co-teaching), co-teaching, and academic support classes were available, and with the success rates of their non-disabled peers. Student success rates were also compared with their teachers’ confidence level, as measured by a teacher survey. Across the four years of the study, students with disabilities (SWDs) performed significantly worse in WL than their non-disabled peers, although an additional finding of the study was that SWDs in a resource setting performed significantly better than those in inclusion classes. When comparing grades between WL and ELA classes, the researcher found that SWDs during the first two years of the study performed significantly worse in WL, although the gap closed in the last two years. Non-disabled students showed no significant difference in grades between WL and ELA. Teachers with special education certification self-reported higher levels of confidence than those certified only in their content area, and ELA teachers overall reported higher confidence levels than WL teachers. Only eight teachers assented to being identified, but their self-reported levels of confidence in working with SWDs correlated negatively (-0.75) with the grades earned by SWDs in their classrooms.