

SPECIAL EDUCATION WORKFORCE *watch*

INSIGHTS FROM RESEARCH

An Insufficient Supply and a Growing Demand for Qualified Special Education Teachers

What School Districts Can Do

- Some 98 percent of the nation's school districts report shortages of special education teachers.
- Special education is the area with the greatest shortage of teachers in 200 of the largest cities in the United States.
- During the 2000-2001 school year, approximately 47,500 special education positions were filled by uncertified personnel—a 23 percent increase from the previous year.
- During the 2000-2001 school year, approximately 808,000 students with disabilities were taught by personnel who were not fully certified.

that more than 20 percent of special education teaching positions are filled by noncertified individuals.

- **Within state**—with high poverty, urban areas reporting high turnover rates and unfilled openings compared to their suburban counterparts, who may have waiting lists of possible candidates.
- **By job description**—with the area of emotional disturbance experiencing the greatest need nationally, followed by the areas of specific learning disabilities, multiple disabilities, and mental retardation. [Note: All areas of disability show shortages.]
- **By diversity of teaching staff**—with estimates ranging from a five to a 12 percent diversity rate among the teaching force in the coming years (2005 - 2009), compared to 40 percent of the student population.

There is a severe, chronic shortage of special education teachers in the United States. Retaining certified and qualified personnel in special education is an increasing challenge for school district administrators. Are you prepared to ensure a quality special education teacher workforce? Read on to gain insights from the research.

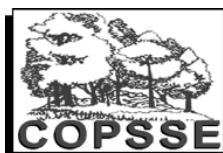
Shortages Vary—Is Your District at High Risk?

Some states and districts may be hit harder by shortages than others. For example, shortages vary:

- **By state**—with some states reporting

Student enrollment figures prominently in predicting teacher shortages. During the 1990s, the number of students with disabilities increased by 20.3 percent, and that growth pattern is expected to continue during the next decade. Indeed, if student growth trends continue, the number of special education teaching positions will increase by 33.7 percent, requiring an additional 135,793 teachers by the year 2008.

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Prospects for meeting the demands are not encouraging. Currently, the nation is experiencing a decrease in the number of graduates from special education

WATCH THIS...

One-third of newly hired special education teachers are not fully certified. While quality is certainly at issue, it is questionable whether this practice actually addresses shortages because uncertified teachers are three times more likely than certified teachers to leave their positions.

grams who delayed entry into the profession—is not sufficient.

Local District and Administrative Support To Address Teacher Shortages

Attrition is a major contributing factor in the demand for special education teachers. Overall, the annual attrition rate for special educators is estimated at 13.5 percent, compared to 6.4 percent for general education. This results in an annual loss of approximately 22,000 special education teachers.

Special educators report a variety of reasons for leaving the profession that are specific to teaching conditions in their field. These include:

- Role overload—paperwork burdens, heavy caseloads, limited resources, lack of planning and meeting time.

- Student characteristics that place significant demands on teaching and learning practices (e.g., lack of progress, behavior management issues).
- Limited collegial support from administrators and teachers.

Factors that affect general education teachers' decisions to remain in the field—higher salaries, entering the profession prepared and certified, a collaborative, supportive school climate, etc.—also influence special educators.

Even if you are not currently experiencing shortages, retaining qualified special education teachers makes good sense. Administrative support is critical to retention and to improving teacher ability to have a positive effect on outcomes for students with disabilities. Following are recommendations that local district administrators may consider to attract and retain special education teachers:

- Reduce isolation by increasing contact and participation with other school staff members.
- Keep avenues of communication open. Engage special education teachers in making decisions that affect their work.
- Provide opportunities for ongoing professional development. Implement beginning teacher induction programs.
- Provide support, especially in areas where teachers report they do not feel supported (e.g., IEP development and monitoring, dealing with behavioral problems, selecting and implementing curriculum).
- Provide the resources teachers need to do their jobs—planning and collaboration time,

instructional materials, manageable caseloads.

- Offer incentives such as signing bonuses, moving expenses, salary supplements, and higher beginning salaries for certified teachers.

For More Information

Information reported in this brief was based on two COPSSE papers:

- *The Supply and Demand for Special Education Teachers: A Review of Research Regarding the Nature of the Chronic Shortage of Special Education Teachers*, by James McLeskey, Naomi Tyler, and Susan Flippin.

- *Special Education Administration at a Cross-roads: Availability, Licensure, and Preparation of Special Education Administrators*, by Carl Lashley and Mary Lynn Boscardin.

These documents can be found on the COPSSE web site at www.copsse.org.



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About COPSSE

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