



Shortage of Special Education Expertise Among Teachers and Higher Education Faculty

Special Education Teacher Shortage

- The national shortage of highly qualified special education teachers is 11.2%. In other words approximately 45,514 of those serving as special education teachers do not meet required standards (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). This shortage has persisted for decades.
- Secondary special education teachers are particularly underqualified – one report found that between 82% and 99% of secondary special education teachers are not highly qualified in the academic content areas that they teach (McLeskey & Billingsley, 2008).
- 98% of the nation’s school districts report special education teacher shortages (McLeskey, Tyler and Flippin, 2003, 2004)
- Unqualified teachers are directly related to low achievement of the students they teach (Futernick, 2007).
- The demand for special educators is expected to increase by 17% from now through 2018 – a rate greater than what is predicted for all other occupations. (Bureau of Labor Statistics, US Department of Labor, 2009).

Special Education Teacher Attrition and Retirement

- The annual attrition rate for special education teachers is 13% -- twice the rate for general education teachers (COPSSE, 2004)
- Attrition within three years of licensing is greater for short, alternative preparation routes (60%) than for standard 4 year programs (30%) or 5 year programs (10-15%; Berry, 2001; Brownell, Hirsch, Seo 2004; Darling-Hammond, 2000).
- Estimated conservatively, American schools spend between \$2.2 and \$2.6 billion annually replacing teachers who have dropped out of the profession (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2005; McKinney, Berry, Dickerson, & Campbell-Whately, 2007)
- Approximately half of the nation’s 3.2 million teachers are baby-boomers and one million may retire in the next four years. By 2014, up to a million new teachers will be needed (Duncan, 2009).

Shortage of Special Education Expertise Among General Educators

- General education teachers report lacking needed skills to effectively instruct students with disabilities (Abt Associates Inc, 2006).
- Today 55% of students with disabilities are instructed in general education classrooms 80% or more of the time. Thus, general education teachers are increasingly responsible for educating students with disabilities (Abt Associates Inc, 2005).
- Many teacher preparation programs for general educators require minimal preparation in instructing students with disabilities (GAO, 2009).
- Alternative route programs in general education may have limited application to the education of students with disabilities due to the lack of pedagogical focus (Rosenberg, Boyer, Sindelar, & Misra, 2007).

Special Education Faculty Shortage:

- In addition to the shortage of special education teachers, there is a long term shortage of special education faculty. (Smith, Pion, Tyler, & Gilmore, 2003; Smith, Pion, Tyler, Sindelar, & Rosenberg, 2001)
- The shortage of special education faculty curtails our nation's capacity to prepare both special education teachers and general education teachers so that they will have the skills to instruct students with disabilities (Smith, Robb, West, & Tyler, in press).

Impact of Federal Funding on the Special Education Faculty Shortage

- An increase of \$8 million in FY2002 for Personnel Preparation under IDEA accompanied by congressional report language targeting the new funds toward the shortage of special education faculty in higher education initiated a shift toward greater faculty production.
 - The number of graduates with special education doctorates increased from 213 in 2002 to 296 in 2007 (National Science Foundation, 2007-8).
 - The number of doctoral programs in special education increased from 82 in 1999 to 97 in 2009 – a 16% increase (Smith, 2010)
 - The percentage of doctorates in special education working in higher education increased from 49% in 2001 to 63% in 2006 (National Science Foundation, 2009).
- The only federal program that supports doctoral study in special education is the Office of Special Education's Leadership Grant program (authorized under Sec. 662 of IDEA). Doctoral students supported by these funds have a completion rate that is higher than that

for doctoral candidates supported by all other long standing doctoral programs supported by the federal government (e.g., this includes programs administered by IES, NIH, NSF, NIMH; Smith & Robb, 2009).

- Of 97 colleges and universities with doctoral programs in special education, federal support for doctoral study in special education goes to only 44 of them (Smith, 2010)

How Congress Can Help

It is clear that increased appropriations targeted to the special education faculty shortage has had an impact. Continued increases will generate increased capacity to prepare general education teachers to instruct students with disabilities, as well as special education teachers.

- Increase appropriations for special education teacher and faculty preparation (Section 662) under IDEA. The last notable increase in funding was in FY 2002 – an \$8 million increase to \$90 million. FY 2009 funding remains at \$90 million. Funding should be increased to \$180 million.
- In reauthorizing Title II of ESEA, strengthen professional development for all teachers to ensure that general education teachers have the skills they need to effectively instruct students with disabilities and work in collaboration with special educators.

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