

## **HECSE-TED POLICY BRIEF**

### ***The Capacity of Special Education to Produce Highly Qualified Teachers***

*The Higher Education Consortium for Special Education (HECSE) and the Teacher Education Division (TED) of the Council for Exceptional Children represent thousands of special education professionals who work in public schools, colleges and universities, state and federal agencies, training and technical assistance centers, and research institutes across the United States. Most members are engaged in preparation and/or supervision of special education teachers, school administrators, teacher educators, and field researchers. Members study the classroom performance of students with disabilities, other children and youth at risk for school failure, and the teachers who educate them. Together, HECSE and TED are dedicated to effective teaching and learning that ensures all students, including students with disabilities and others at risk, receive the educational support they need to achieve positive academic outcomes.*

### **The impact of NCLB and IDEA '04 on the ability of teacher preparation programs to produce new “highly qualified” special education teachers**

The term “highly qualified teacher” (HQT), as defined in Title IX, Section 9101(23) of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB), is complex, controversial, possibly misunderstood, and certainly difficult to achieve. When the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004* (IDEA) was signed into law on Dec. 3, 2004 by President George W. Bush, the special education law was aligned with many components of NCLB, the elementary and secondary education act. Both laws now require teachers to be highly qualified, demonstrating subject matter competency and effective pedagogy. These laws also require practicing teachers to implement “evidence-based practices,” which implies knowledge of current research and skills to implement effective interventions with fidelity. The nation faces an intractable and chronic special education teacher shortage along with a critical shortage of special education faculty, a factor contributing to the teacher shortage. Some critical questions must be better understood: Does the nation have the capacity to prepare sufficient numbers of highly qualified special education teachers? Can the current mix of full and part-time faculty produce sufficient numbers of highly qualified special education teachers who are able to improve the results of students with disabilities? Is the knowledge base being taught current and reflective of effective or promising practices? Has the shortage of college and university special education faculty been reduced since the publication of *The Faculty Shortage Study*? Do the nation’s doctoral programs have the capacity to prepare more highly qualified faculty to work in teacher education programs? Or, must alternative strategies be developed not only to staff the nation’s teacher education programs, but also to ensure that new teachers are prepared to meet these increasing requirements and demands?

### **Rationale for Action**

The results of students with disabilities are not at levels either desired or achievable. The connections between the preparedness of new teachers and the quality of their instruction are not clear. However, a number of factors that impede the infrastructure for a sufficient

workforce that can produce gains in learning outcomes for students with disabilities are not well identified. The following summary of new knowledge helps to provide context for our recommendations for action.

- ***Trained teachers improve the results of students with disabilities and others at risk for school failure***
  - Darling-Hammond and her colleagues report findings that certified teachers consistently produce significantly stronger student achievement gains than do uncertified teachers (AERA, April 26, 2005)
  - Trained teachers produce better achievement gains in their students than those who are untrained (Futernick, 2006)
  - Students of uncertified teachers make about 20% less academic growth per year than do students of teachers with regular certification; authors' conclusion: allowing uncertified teachers to work with our "most difficult-to-teach-children" is harmful (Laczko-Kerr & Berliner, 2002)
  
- ***Shortage of SE faculty is directly associated with a shortage of SE teachers***
  - A chronic supply and demand imbalance of at least 130 new special education graduates to fill open, advertised faculty positions hinders the field's capacity to produce a sufficient supply of highly qualified special education teachers
  - Conservatively, for every unfilled IHE faculty position, 25 SE teachers go "untrained" each year (Smith, Pion, Tyler, Sindelar, & Rosenberg, 2001).
  - The result of this shortage means: 400 students with disabilities (a 16:1 student/teacher ratio) are "underserved" by less than fully qualified teachers.
  - Shortages of special education teachers lead to increased case loads for existing teachers, which in turn lead to reduced quality of services, decreased teacher satisfaction, and increased teacher attrition (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1997).
  - Shortages of highly qualified special education teachers will lead to decreased levels of student achievement (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1997)

### **Policy Recommendations and Future Steps**

Policy makers, professionals, and parents need to better understand the current context of the requirements of NCLB and IDEA '04 for all teachers to be highly qualified. They also need to better understand the qualifications needed by those who prepare special education personnel to implement evidence-based practices that improve the results of each individual student with a disability. For these reasons, we recommend that a "comprehensive needs assessment" that addresses the following questions be conducted:

- *What were the outcomes of The Faculty Shortage Study (Smith et al. 2001; Smith, Pion, Tyler, & Gilmore, 2003) on the supply of special education faculty?*

This study revealed a chronic and serious shortage of faculty available to prepare the next generation of special educators. A number of factors contribute to the problem, including: small enrollment in special education doctoral programs, average age of doctoral students (in the pipeline), at least one-half of doctoral graduates seeking non-faculty positions, and ability or willingness of graduates to relocate to fill faculty vacancies. Almost 10 years have passed since the data collection efforts were initiated. The initial study did produce documented results: OSEP's leadership (doctoral) training program remains solidly in place and federal appropriations for the program have increased. Furthermore, some evidence, primarily anecdotal, indicates that recruitment of new doctoral students now targets those with career aspirations of becoming college and university faculty and that some programs now specifically prepare candidates for these roles. However, the magnitude of programmatic changes, whether student demographic data have changed, or if the faculty shortage has been reduced are all unknown.

- *What are the nation's current special education faculty needs?*

The results of *The Faculty Shortage Study* revealed a severe shortage of full-time, tenure-track faculty and that shortage had a direct impact on the attrition rates and insufficient supply of special education teachers. Whether the chronic shortage of full-time faculty has abated is unknown. The "graying" of the current faculty workforce is oft-observed; however, it is not known whether looming retirements will significantly influence demand and what, if any, impact that factor might have on the production and attrition of qualified special education teachers. In addition, it is not known whether doctoral programs have the capacity; especially in high need areas like California, to increase their production of highly qualified faculty to work in teacher education programs. Further, it is not known whether the knowledge and skills being taught in preparation programs reflect effective practices. Neither is it known how teacher education programs are currently staffed (full-time tenure track PhD faculty, adjunct MA/PhD instructors, a mix) or if accountability systems are in place across programs to ensure that all who prepare the next generation of special educators are themselves of high quality.

- *What systems are in place to ensure that a sufficient number of HQT teachers are available to meet the demand and also the requirements of IDEA '04?*

The implications of the implementation of the requirements for HQT are not clearly understood. For example, it is not known whether these regulations for HQT or the mastery of evidence-based practices are uniformly interpreted. Little is known about who is preparing the next

generation of teachers. Do they meet some criterion to be considered “highly qualified?” What accountability systems are in place for full-time teacher education faculty and for adjunct faculty who are responsible for the preparation of new special educators?

- *Were some strategies effective in resolving the supply and demand imbalances revealed in The Faculty Shortage Study available to affect more changes or are the nation’s special education doctoral programs at capacity?*

The nation’s special education doctoral programs traditionally have provided the capacity and the infrastructure to produce leadership personnel, who in turn, fill a variety of roles. For a variety of reasons, including learning how to affect change in higher education, it is important to learn whether particular strategies were effective and helped to resolve the faculty shortage identified in 2001. Fiscal responsibility also demands that it be determined whether a current shortage exists or if one is predicted and whether the capacity to increase the supply of highly qualified new faculty exists.

### **Key References and/or Policymaker Resources**

American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE). This website provides information to promote the learning of all PK-12 students through high-quality, evidence-based preparation and continuing education for all school personnel.

Center for Personnel Studies in Special Education (COPSSE) [www.copsse.org](http://www.copsse.org) This website provides research-based information regarding chronic and pressing special education issues related to beginning teacher quality, effective initial preparation, and the effects of preparation alternatives.

Center for Teaching Quality (CTQ). [www.teachingquality.org](http://www.teachingquality.org). This website provides resources to improve student learning through developing teacher leadership, conducting practical research and engaging various communities.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2005). *Correlation Between Teachers and Student Achievement*. Presentation at The American Education Research Association (AERA). Montreal, April, 2005.

Futernick, K. (2006). A possible dream: Retaining California teachers so all students learn. Sacramento: CSU Center for Teacher Quality.

Laczko-Kerr, I. & Berliner, D. (2002, September 6). The effectiveness of “Teach for America” and other under-certified teachers on student academic achievement: A case of harmful public policy. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 10, (37).

Retrieved 4/7/04 from <http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v10n37/>

National Association of Special Education Teachers (naset). [www.naset.org](http://www.naset.org). This website provides support, information, and resources to those preparing for, or teaching in the field of special education.

National Commission on Teaching and America's Future. (1997). *What matters most: Investing in quality teacher*. New York, NY: Author.

National Education Association (nea) [www.nea.org](http://www.nea.org) This website provides resources to increase excellence in education through research based information and advocacy.

Smith, D.D, Pion, G.M., Tyler, N. C., & Gilmore, R. (2003). Doctoral programs in special education: The nation's supplier. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, 26, 172-181.

Smith, D.D., Pion, G., Tyler, N.C., Sindelar, P., & Rosenberg, M. (2001). *The study of special education Leadership personnel with particular attention to the professoriate*. Final report to U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services, Office of Special Education Programs. (Award Number: H920T9700067-00A)

Wrightslaw [www.wrightslaw.com](http://www.wrightslaw.com). This website provides accurate, reliable information about special education law, and advocacy for children with disabilities.