

October 2011



# SEFNA

**The Impending Shortage of Special Education Faculty:  
A Summary**



***Disclaimer.***

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## Forward

This document highlights the major findings of a four-year study about the supply and demand of special education college and university faculty. The Special Education Faculty Needs Assessment (SEFNA) project concluded its data collection efforts in July of 2011. This national study continued the work of previous efforts that found the shortage of faculty was, in part, responsible for the persistent shortage of effective teachers. SEFNA is the most comprehensive study to date. Over 300 program administrators and almost 1,900 then-current doctoral students and recent graduates assisted with this national effort.

Findings of the SEFNA project show that the federal role in preparing doctoral students is important. Despite being responsible for a substantially increased supply of new doctoral graduates, upcoming retirements will cause a shortage of special education faculty of the magnitude never seen before. In this document, we suggest solutions, but most importantly we call for action now.

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# ABOUT SEFNA

The Special Education Faculty Needs Assessment (SEFNA) brought together scholars from Claremont Graduate University (CGU) and across the nation to evaluate the supply of and demand for special education (SE) faculty, including implications for SE teachers entering the workforce. Seven tasks were associated with this project:

1. Assess the status and capacity of special education doctoral programs;
2. Assess the demographics, career goals, and characteristics of current special education doctoral students;
3. Determine career paths, demographics, and other characteristics of two cohorts of special education doctoral graduates: five years of graduates who participated in *The 2001 Special Education Faculty Shortage Study* and five years of recent graduates;
4. Determine basic characteristics of university-based special education teacher education programs;
5. Determine the graduation rates of OSEP-funded doctoral students through a follow-up study;
6. Conduct a comparison of funding levels for doctoral students across federal agencies; and
7. Triangulate data by examining job searches advertised in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* from June to October 2010.

SEFNA is premised on the fact that college and university faculty fulfill two critical roles for the field of SE. They are responsible for:

- 1) Conducting research that produces validated instructional and behavioral practices for use in classrooms and
- 2) Preparing highly effective general and SE professionals.

These teachers, principals, and paraprofessionals, in turn, use validated practices to improve the outcomes of students with disabilities.

The direct relationship between the shortage of SE faculty and the shortage of SE teachers is well established. Unfortunately, SE has faced a chronic and persistent shortage of college and university faculty for decades—too few doctoral graduates are produced.



The result is an insufficient supply of new faculty, which negatively impacts the preparation of all educators. A concern about the long-term effects of the faculty shortage led to the funding of SEFNA.

# STUDY METHODOLOGY

Table 1 highlights the methods used by the SEFNA project. A more detailed explanation of study methodology is included in Appendix A of the *SEFNA Final Report*, which can be downloaded from the Web site at [www.cgu.edu/sefna](http://www.cgu.edu/sefna)

<b>Task</b>	<b>Sample</b>	<b>Response Rate</b>
1	97 SE doctoral training programs	97% (n=94) of doctoral programs
2	1,779 SE doctoral students	71% (n=1,263) of SE doctoral students (1999–2009)
3	870 SE doctoral program graduates from 66 programs	72% (n=626) of SE doctoral program graduates (1997–2007)
4	76 SE teacher preparation programs from 12 states in six U.S. regions	78% (n=59) of surveyed programs from 12 states in the six technical assistance and dissemination regions
5	30 OSEP leadership preparation projects (FY 2000 & 2001)	100% (n=30) of OSEP leadership preparation projects
6	85 active OSEP leadership projects in Spring 2009 and extant IES, NSF, & NIH data	95% (n=81) of active OSEP leadership projects in spring 2009
7	43 advertisements for SE positions posted in <i>The Chronicle of Higher Education</i> from June 2010 through October 2010	79% (n=34) of position coordinators



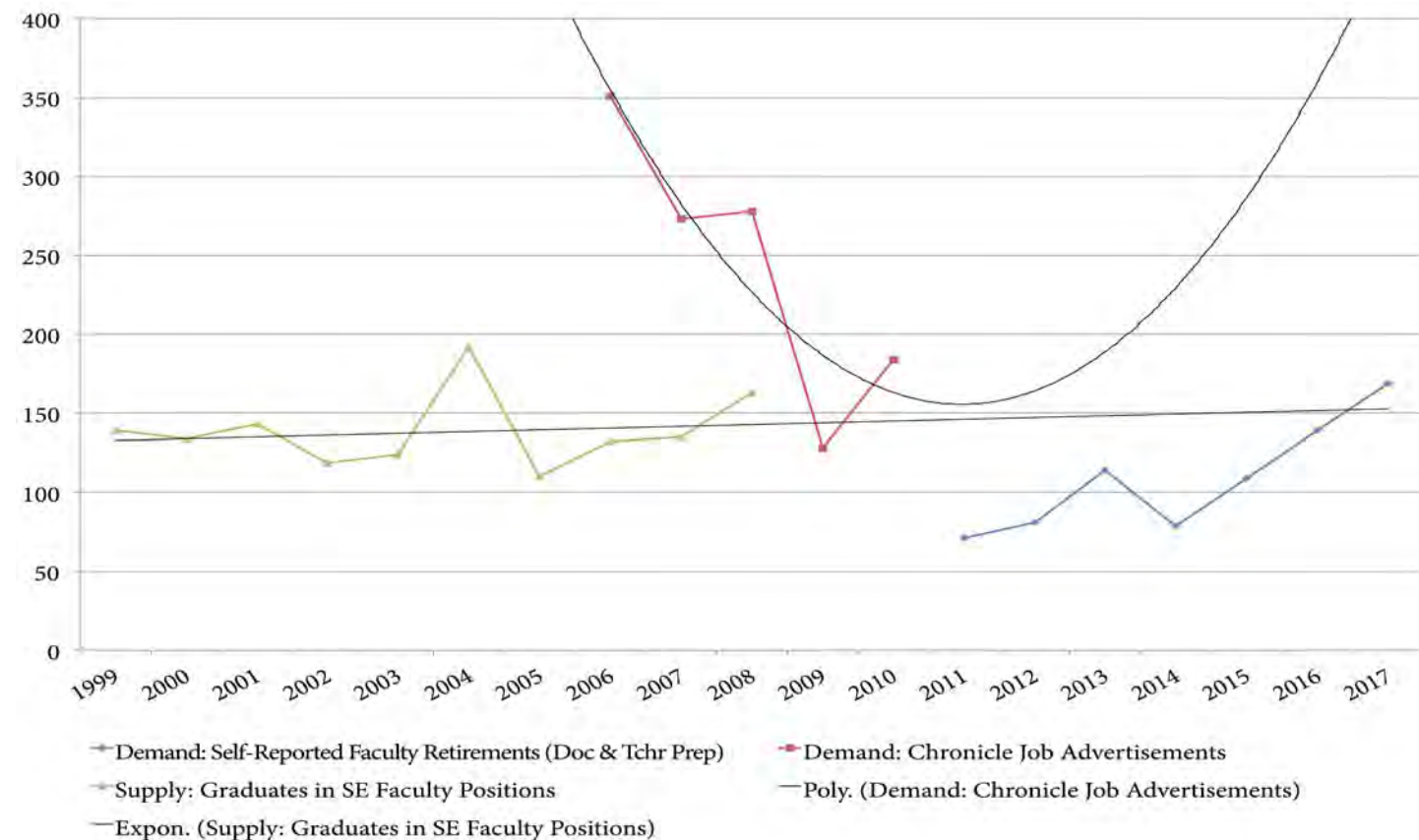
# OVERARCHING FINDINGS

1. Federal and stakeholder actions have contributed to considerable progress addressing the SE faculty shortage.
2. In today's challenging economic times, we might expect a difficult job market to balance prior supply/demand disproportionality. This is not the case in SE. The demand for SE faculty continues to outstrip the supply.
3. Job prospects and job security for SE doctorates remain high and stable.
4. Key markers or predictors of doctoral students who become IHE faculty include intent to pursue a faculty career, financial support (e.g., TA, RA, traineeship or fellowship), age when enrolling in a doctoral program, reduced time to complete the doctoral degree, and willingness to relocate after graduation for employment.
5. All universities with an SE doctoral program also have an SE teacher education program. Compared to those only offering an SE teacher education program, these universities represent just 9% of the population. These 97 SE doctoral programs supply new faculty to the nation's approximately 1,100 SE teacher preparation programs.
6. During the next five years, doctoral granting IHEs—those producing the teacher educators who will produce the next generation of teachers—will lose 1/2 to 2/3 of their faculty to retirement alone. On average, each of these programs has eight full-time equivalent (FTE) faculty, indicating that between 388 and 582 doctoral faculty will be lost in the coming years.

# OVERARCHING FINDINGS (CONT.)

7. Teacher education programs are expanding (e.g., early childhood, blended general/special education). The roles of SE faculty have increased to include the preparation of general education teachers in areas such as multi-tiered interventions (e.g., response to intervention [RTI], positive behavioral interventions and supports [PBIS]), differentiated instruction, and universal design for learning [UDL]).
8. Despite progress, the supply of new SE doctorates does not yet meet the demand for IHE faculty. Figure 1 illustrates the number of graduates who reported pursuing degrees in academe (National Opinion Research Center [NORC]) between 1999 and 2007, the number of entry level faculty positions advertised in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* between 2006 and 2010, the expected number of faculty retirements at IHEs between 2011 and 2017, and projections for new doctoral graduates who will accept faculty positions through 2017. The combined data and projections indicate that the supply/demand imbalance will continue in the future.

Figure 1. Supply and demand: History and projections.



# SUPPLY FINDINGS

The last 10 years have seen a substantial increase in the number of new SE doctorates, particularly those with a career path to higher education. We believe that the role of the federal government and other stakeholders in providing solutions to the special education faculty shortage identified in 2001 contributed greatly to the increase in the supply of new doctorates found by the SEFNA project.

## *Increased number and capacity of SE doctoral programs*

- There were 16% more doctoral programs in 2009 (n=97) than in 1999 (n=82).
- There were 7% more enrollments in 2009 (n=1,779) than in 1999 (n=1,659).
- There were 28% more graduates in 2007 (n=296) than in 2002 (n=213).
- There was a 20% increase in program capacity in 2009 (n=56) over 1999 (n=45).





## *Increased number of doctoral graduates*

- Among new enrollees in doctoral programs, there was a 12% increase in those seeking a career as SE faculty in 2009 (n=775) over 1999 (n=558).
- The number of graduates over a five-year period (2002–2007) increased by 28%.
- More graduates accepted faculty positions (63%) than had been the case in previous studies (less than 50%).

## *Diversity status of doctoral graduates*

- The number of graduates with disabilities represents almost 7% of all SE doctoral graduates. This is significant considering that only 1.5% of all doctoral recipients and 2.6% of doctoral recipients in education report having a disability (Table 25 of NSF/NIH/USED/NEH/NASA, 2009 Survey of Earned Doctorates).
- Some 20% of all SE graduates reported being members of a historically underrepresented group (compared to 17% of current IHE SE faculty and 14% of SE teacher preparation faculty). Of the 20% of SE graduates

from a racial minority group, 9% self-identify as Black or African American, 7% as Asian, 3% as Bi- or Multi-racial, and less than 1% as Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander or as American Indian or Alaska Native. Further, some 26% of SE doctoral students in the pipeline report being a member of a historically underrepresented group, suggesting that the percentage of diverse faculty might increase as these students matriculate from their doctoral programs.

- In terms of diversity related to ethnic identity, 6% of recent graduates self-identify as Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino.



## *Key predictors of an academic career path*

- Career intentions
  - Entering a doctoral program with plans to become faculty increases the odds of becoming a faculty member nine times.
- Age
  - Every additional year of age among those beginning a doctoral program decreases the odds of that person becoming a faculty member by 2.6 times.
- Time to graduation
  - A one-year increase in time between enrollment and completion decreases the odds of becoming a faculty member by 2.3 times.
- Willingness to relocate for employment
  - Such a willingness increases the odds of becoming a faculty member nine times.
- Having a teaching assistantship, a research assistantship, a traineeship, or a fellowship
  - Such support increases the odds of becoming a faculty member almost two times.



## *Graduates entering academic careers:*

**Are younger**

**Are more likely to be female**

**Are more willing to relocate**

**Graduate faster**

**Have more funding**

**Have faculty aspirations**

**Are less diverse**

## *Action taken by OSEP after the 2001 Faculty Shortage Study positively affected supply*

- The percentage of graduates in faculty roles has increased.
  - Between 1989–1999, less than 50% of graduates became faculty members.
  - As a result, OSEP increased appropriations to its Leadership Competition and added guidelines specifying preference to fund students who aspired to faculty careers in academe.
  - In 2009, 63% of graduates accepted faculty positions.
- Graduates are younger.
  - The average age at graduation of those receiving a doctorate between 2004 and 2008 is, on average, five years younger than those who earned a doctorate between 1998 and 2003.
- Five percent more graduates had funding in 2009 than 1999.
- Of those who planned to pursue non-academic positions upon entering graduate school, 31% changed their career aspirations and entered the academic workforce.

## *OSEP-funded students' graduation rates are high*

- OSEP-funded students have higher completion rates than do students in other federally sponsored programs (i.e., NSF, NIMH).
  - OSEP-funded students' completion rates exceed 70%, with projections of 90% because many were completing dissertations at the time of data collection.
  - Some agencies' (i.e., NSF, NIMH) completion rates fall below 50%.



## *The federal role in the preparation of SE doctorates*

- OSEP is the primary source of support in the preparation of SE doctorates, researchers and teacher educators whose focus is on students with disabilities.
- OSEP-funded students receive 2/3 less assistance than do students supported by other agencies.
- Considerable inconsistencies in funding levels exist across OSEP projects, even at the same IHEs.



## *Capacity for additional funding*

- The majority of active doctoral programs (55%) have OSEP-funded doctoral preparation projects.
- About one-quarter of the SE programs (24%) ranked in the top 25 by *U.S. News and World Report* do not have leadership-preparation projects.

## *Faculty enjoy excellent job security*

- The number of graduates who assume faculty positions has increased by almost 11% over the last 10 years.
- Consistently across a 20-year span, 90% of IHE faculty members work on a full-time basis.
- Only 10% of IHE faculty are working part-time. Many are retired but continue to work to ensure program continuity because replacements for them have not yet been found.

# DEMAND FINDINGS

## *Expanding roles for SE faculty*

- More general education teacher preparation programs are addressing how teachers support the needs of all struggling learners, including students with disabilities, and SE faculty are increasingly assisting with this instruction.
- SE faculty predominately handle training for general educators on practices and frameworks that originated in SE (e.g., progress monitoring, multi-tiered interventions such as RTI and PBIS).

## *Expanding programs*

- A strong trend exists for more blended special and general education preparation programs.
- More early intervention and early childhood programs are being developed.





## ***Robust SE job searches***

- About 75% of faculty searches are successfully concluded at the end of one year, with more recent estimates indicating this percentage rose to 79% during the 2010–2011 academic year.
- Unlike in *The 2001 Faculty Shortage Study* (Smith et al., 2001), none of the unsuccessful searches lead to the elimination of the faculty line. Most (67%) anticipate continuing the search for unsuccessfully filled positions during the 2011–2012 academic year.

## ***Impact of the recession***

- Job searches for SE faculty positions dropped from 224 in 2007 to 110 in 2009 (down 54%).
- SE job searches rebounded to 170 in 2010 and appear to be increasing (up 55%).
- Because of continued demand, and unlike other programs affected by the recession, SE personnel-preparation programs are not closing.
- The temporary reduction in job opportunities did not result in a balance between supply and demand.

## *A unique subset: IHEs with SE doctoral programs*

- Only a small subset of IHEs that offer SE teacher preparation also offer SE doctoral preparation. However, these programs have almost three times more faculty and offer more concentrations.
- IHEs with SE doctoral programs are recovering from the economic downturn more quickly than SE programs that only prepare teachers.
- Although they represent only 9% of all SE preparation programs, 33% of the 2010-2011 searches came from doctoral granting IHEs.
- Over the next five years, doctoral granting programs expect to lose somewhere between one-half and two-thirds of their faculty to retirements alone.



## *Future demand issues*

- For at least the next five years, all special education personnel preparation programs will experience an annual turnover rate of 21%.
- Because of massive retirements, it will be necessary to replace SE faculty who will be leaving both SE doctoral programs and teacher education programs over the next five years.
- It is estimated that doctoral granting universities will need to produce a total of at least 856 graduates per year.
- In other words, to create a sufficient supply doctoral granting universities will need to have an average annual production rate of nine graduates who will pursue an academic career.
- To meet predicted demand, doctoral programs will need to almost triple their current production rates.

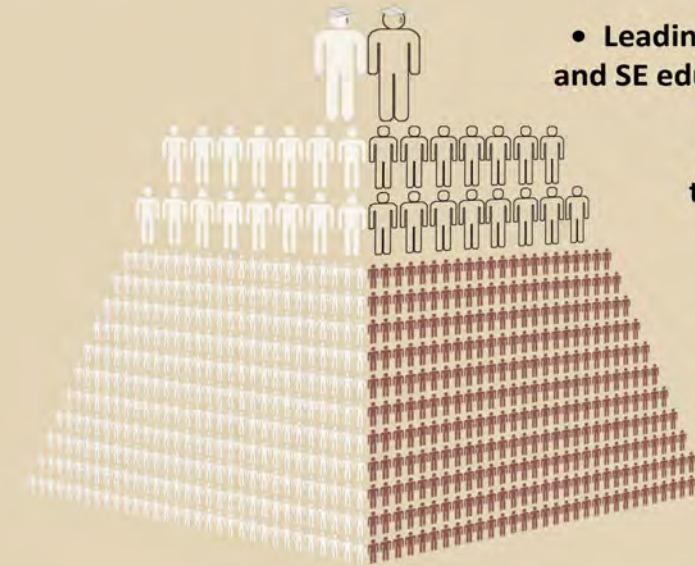
# IMPROVING THE SUPPLY/DEMAND IMBALANCE

Although the supply of new SE doctorates has improved, the demand for new SE faculty is increasing, exacerbating the long-term shortage of SE faculty. As shown in Figure 2, the predicted shortage of faculty will result in a substantial percentage of students with disabilities being underserved. Even without predicted retirements, a gap between the supply of new graduates and the demand for SE faculty will continue for years to come unless action is taken.

## Doctoral Granting Universities (DGUs)



- Retirements expected for 1/2 to 2/3 of faculty at DGUs between 2011 and 2017



- Leading to a 50% reduction in teacher educators and SE educational leadership faculty

- Resulting in a 50% reduction of new SE teachers and SE school leaders

- Subsequently causing an estimated 300 underserved students with disabilities per each missing faculty member

Figure 2. The impact of a shortage of SE faculty at doctoral granting universities on the number of SE teacher educators to prepare a sufficient supply of SE teachers necessary to provide appropriate SE services to students with disabilities.

# RECOMMENDATIONS (CONT.)

- The federal role in the preparation of SE leadership personnel is critical and needs to continue. The federal support (e.g., tuition, stipends, number of projects funded) of doctoral students through OSEP must increase—allowing students to study full-time—in order to reduce time-to-graduation, a key marker of those who become university faculty members.
- Because funding is critical, a careful review of the OSEP leadership-preparation initiative is warranted, with close attention paid to its structure and the variability of student-funding packages.
- Concurrently, IHEs should consider committing to realistic minimum levels for student-funding packages.
- Given the expansion in the field, both in terms of programs and faculty roles, there must also be federal and IHE support for the development of blended teacher preparation programs. Care should be taken, however, not to exacerbate the pending supply/demand imbalance.
- Additional efforts must be made to recruit culturally and linguistically diverse doctoral students interested in becoming IHE faculty members.
- IHEs in partnership with the federal government, must strategize how best to address the impending SE faculty shortage.

For more information about this study and to obtain a copy of *The Final Report* please visit the SEFNA Web site at [www.cgu.edu/sefna](http://www.cgu.edu/sefna)





