



THE Shortage OF SPECIAL EDUCATION Faculty

WHY IT IS HAPPENING, WHY IT MATTERS, AND WHAT WE CAN DO ABOUT IT

A RESEARCH SUMMARY DEVELOPED FOR:

State Education Agencies
State Directors of Special Education

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This paper was developed as a companion piece to accompany the enclosed *The Shortage of Special Education Faculty: Why It Is Happening, Why It Matters, and What We Can Do About It*. The research that supports this document was comprised of four studies: 1) job searches for special education faculty during the 1997-98 school year; 2) career choices of doctoral graduates during the five year period between 1995 and 1999; 3) doctoral students enrolled in special education doctoral programs during the Spring semester of 1999; 4) doctoral programs in special education across the nation. The results listed below summarize some major findings.

KEY FINDING

A chronic and persistent shortage of special education faculty curtails the national capacity of colleges and universities to conduct research and to prepare teachers, researchers, and other leadership personnel.

ADDITIONAL FINDINGS

- Only if all people with newly awarded doctorates chose to accept positions in higher education would all available positions be filled.
- The number of special education doctorates produced annually has decreased by 30% in the last 20 years. About half of those with doctorates choose to work in higher education; the others work in leadership positions in settings such as local school systems.
- Since 1992, the number of job openings for special education junior faculty has been about 250 per year – approximately equal the number of doctorates awarded. The shortage of special education faculty contributes to the shortage of special education teachers and limits special education training available for general educators.
- One significant consequence of the decline in the production of doctorates is the critical shortage of faculty in special education in institutions of higher education.
- One-third of special education faculty openings remain unfilled every year; 20% of those positions are eliminated, thus diminishing the nation's training and research infrastructure.
- If every special education faculty slot were filled, about 3,000 more special education teachers could be trained annually. These newly qualified teachers would serve about 48,000 students annually.
- The faculty shortage limits special education leadership capacity and research efforts.

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE SPECIAL EDUCATION FACULTY SHORTAGE INCLUDE:

- The mean age of award of a doctorate is 43. At this point in a person's life, (s)he is less mobile and often not in a position to move to a university with an opening.
- The median salary for a faculty position is \$42,000 – 18% less than similar jobs in school districts.
- The entry age of most faculty in Arts and Sciences is about 30; special education doctoral graduates typically receive no credit for other work experience when working towards promotion and tenure as a beginning faculty member.

IMPLICATIONS

- Without a comprehensive strategy to address it, the special education faculty shortage will persist.
- As faculty searches continue to fail and positions are lost to departments of special education, the infrastructure for personnel development and research will continue to diminish in capacity.
- With fewer faculty members available to teach courses and supervise practicum and student teaching experiences, fewer qualified special education teachers will be produced.
- With a shortage of special education faculty and doctorates, general educators are less likely to receive training in special education.
- Without adequate faculty, there will be fewer qualified teachers and thus lower student achievement. Research has documented that students are more likely to have higher achievement when taught by qualified teachers, than when taught by unqualified teachers. As accountability for student achievement increases, the demand for qualified special education teachers will likewise increase.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Include the issue of faculty shortage in institutions of higher education, as well as a profile of demand in the state as part of the States' Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD).
- Develop and implement strategies within the states' recruitment program that address the shortage of faculty in teacher education institutions.
- Develop a scholarship program for potential doctoral students with the commitment to remain within the state and become faculty at colleges and universities.
- Use State Improvement Grant (SIG) monies to provide funding for research projects that address the shortage of higher education faculty and its impact on the shortage of classroom teachers in the state.
- Develop a loan forgiveness program for doctoral graduates who take faculty jobs at the state's colleges and universities.

This research summary was prepared by Karl Murray, Consultant.

To receive the full research report, *Special Education Leadership Personnel with Particular Attention to the Professoriate*, contact:



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