



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:

Policy Makers

DATE:

January 10, 2002

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 prepare teachers, researchers and other leadership personnel.

ADDITIONAL FINDINGS

- 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.
- 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.
- 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. Only if all people with newly awarded doctorates chose to accept positions in higher education would all available positions be filled.
- The shortage of special education faculty contributes to the shortage of special education teachers and limits special education training available for general educators.
- 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; they 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 they are taught by qualified teachers, than when they are taught by unqualified teachers. As accountability for student achievement increases, the demand for qualified special education teachers will likewise increase.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Enhance the ability of doctorates to relocate to faculty openings in other areas of the country.
- Increase financial aid – both overall volume and the amount per student – to attract more students into doctoral programs and to enable them to attend school full-time in order to complete programs more quickly.
- Develop loan forgiveness programs for doctoral graduates who take faculty jobs.

This research summary was prepared by Dr. Jane West, Consultant.

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



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