



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:**

Parents

DATE

January 8, 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

An insufficient number of special education doctoral graduates are available to staff the nation's special education teacher preparation programs. This supply and demand imbalance is chronic and persistent.

ADDITIONAL FINDINGS

- One significant consequence of the decline in the production of doctorates is the critical shortage of faculty in special education preparing personnel to serve children with disabilities.
- 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 impairs special education leadership capacity and research efforts.
- The decrease of special education doctorates means that fewer faculty members are available to generate new knowledge, such as vital research about how to best meet educational needs of students with disabilities.

IMPLICATIONS

- The faculty shortage has a direct impact on children with disabilities because a shortage of faculty at colleges and universities to prepare special education teachers causes subsequent shortages in the classroom.
- 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.
- The special education teacher shortage, in turn, limits special education expertise available to general educators.
- 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.
- Without a comprehensive strategy to address it, the special education faculty shortage will persist.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR PARENTS

- As the number of special education faculty decreases, fewer children with disabilities can be adequately served: fewer faculty means fewer teachers.
- Faculty shortage leads to special education teacher shortage leads to students taught by unqualified personnel.
- Quality of leadership training programs is affected.

RECOMMENDATIONS

National

- Support IDEA appropriations for doctoral-level personnel preparation.

Regional & State

- Insist that qualified faculty are hired to prepare the next generation of teachers.
- Insist on highly qualified and trained teachers.
- Provide advocacy and support for doctoral programs with colleges, universities, and state legislators.

This research summary was prepared by Linda Shepard, Consultant.

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



Deborah Deutsch Smith, Ed.D.
Vanderbilt University
Prosser College Box 160
Nashville, TN 37203
dsmith@vanderbilt.edu