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Special Education Teacher Recruitment and Hiring

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The *Twenty-Third Annual Report* may be downloaded from:

<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/OSEP/Products/OSEP2001AnlRpt/index.html>

THE UNITED STATES IS EXPERIENCING A CRITICAL SHORTAGE OF PERSONNEL to meet the needs of children with disabilities. In 1998-99, approximately 387,284 teachers were employed to provide special education services to students with disabilities. However, 39,466 of those teachers were not fully certified for their positions.

Ensuring an adequate supply of high quality personnel to serve students with disabilities is important to meeting the letter and spirit of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). During the last reauthorization hearings for IDEA, Congress heard testimony from numerous stakeholders emphasizing the need for highly qualified service providers. In amending IDEA in 1997, Congress reasserted its support for high quality, intensive professional

development that will give personnel the knowledge and skills they need to help students meet challenging educational goals and lead productive, independent lives (Section 601{c}{5}{E}).

Since the early 1970s, Congress has provided a variety of funds to State educational agencies (SEAs), institutions of higher education, and other non-profit institutions for personnel preparation. For example, Congress has consistently made the Personnel Preparation Program the most highly funded discretionary program under Part D of IDEA, appropriating \$82 million for the program in fiscal year 2001. The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) awards competitive grants to assist States in meeting their identified personnel needs. As further evidence of its concern about the commitment to ensuring an adequate supply of high-quality personnel to serve students with disabilities, OSEP awarded a contract to Westat to conduct the national Study of Personnel Needs in Special Education (SPeNSE).

Description of SPeNSE

SPeNSE was designed to address concerns about nationwide shortages in the number of personnel serving students with disabilities and the need for improvement in the qualifications of those employed. SPeNSE will describe the adequacy of the workforce and attempt to explain variation in workforce quality based on State and local district policy, working conditions, preservice education, and continuing professional development.

SPeNSE includes personnel from a nationally representative sample of districts, intermediate educational agencies, and State schools for students with visual or hearing impairments. In spring and fall of 2000, approximately 8,000 local administrators, preschool teachers, general and special education teachers, speech-language pathologists, and paraprofessionals participated in a telephone interview. (Additional information on the study can be found on the study's web site: <http://www.spense.org>) Special education administrators of 358 school districts, intermediate educational units (IEUs), and State schools for students with hearing or visual impairments were interviewed.

Information from the survey of administrators on the demand for special education teachers, and local administrators' efforts to fill job openings for teachers have been analyzed; nationwide estimates based on their responses are presented in this module. Additional analysis and publications that will be available in the near future will examine the relationship between these factors and the extent to which personnel are adequately prepared to serve students with disabilities.

The Demand for Special Education Teachers

For the 1999-2000 school year, special education administrators (Note 1) reported 69,249 job openings for special education teachers. These open positions included 5,914 teachers of preschool students; 12,013 teachers of students with emotional disturbance; and 48,584 other special education teachers. It should

Note 1. These individuals include school district special education directors, IEU special education directors, and representatives of State schools for students with visual or hearing impairments.

be noted that these reported openings may represent multiple openings for one or more positions. For example, if a special education teacher moves from one district to another, he/she may be

counted twice as an opening because he/she filled one job opening while creating another. Almost 97 percent of districts had at least one special education opening during 1999-2000. On average (using the mean), districts (Note 2) reported having openings for less than one preschool teacher (0.58) and teacher of primarily students with hearing and visual impairments (0.27). One vacancy per district was the mean for teachers of primarily students with emotional disturbance, and on average, districts needed five other special education teachers during 1999-2000. Thus, the average district had approximately 7 openings for special education teachers during the school year.

The administrators also indicated that, as of October 1, 1999, there were 12,241 funded positions that were left vacant or were filled by substitutes because suitable candidates could not be found. Among this total were 612 teachers of preschool students; 385 teachers of students with hearing or visual impairments; 2,970 teachers of students with emotional disturbance; and 8,274 other special education teachers.

As of October 1, 1999, administrators reported that there were 50,310 newly hired special education teachers across the country, including 3,354 preschool teachers; 1,407 teachers of students with hearing or visual impairments; 8,027 teachers of students with emotional disturbance; and 37,522 other special education teachers. While administrators across the country were able to hire only some of the new teachers they needed, they felt that 85 percent of all newly hired teachers and service providers in the last three years were excellent at the time they started. The proportion viewed as excellent, however, was negatively related to the size of the district (Note 3). That is, administrators from small districts judged a greater proportion of their special education personnel to be excellent than did administrators from larger districts (see Table 1).

Administrators were also asked how many person days of substitute teaching they used in a typical week for special education teachers. For the nation, slightly over 50,000 (50,024) person days of substitute teaching were used each week. Assuming 36 weeks in the typical school year, the total number of person days of substitute teachers needed in a school year would be 1,800,864. This is the equivalent of 10,048 full-time substitute teachers each year across the country.

Note 2. For purposes of this module, the term 'district' will refer to the school districts, IEUs, and State schools represented by the administrators interviewed.

Note 3. Analyses by size of district excluded IEUs. Very large districts are defined as districts with total enrollments of over 50,000 students. Large districts have enrollments of from 10,000 to 50,000 students. Medium districts have enrollments from 2,500 to 10,000 students, and small districts have enrollments under 2,500 students.

Table 1. Proportion of Administrators Viewing New Special Education Hires To Be Excellent Personnel, by Size of School District

<u>Size of District</u>	<u>Mean Proportion (a)</u>
Very large	62.3
Large	75.0
Medium	80.9
Small	89.2

Note: All differences between groups are significant at $p < .05$ except large and medium districts. (a) $F = .000$; means of large and medium-sized districts were not significantly different.

Source: SPeNSE Administrator Survey, Item MD8.

In the original report, this was Table III-9

Teacher Recruitment Efforts

Administrators reported using a variety of methods to recruit special education teachers; most were traditional methods, while others involved new technology and activities. As can be seen in Table 2, almost all of the administrators recruiting special education teachers and related service providers in the last three years used local publications, contacted educators in other schools, or contacted colleges and universities. Over half of all administrators recruiting special education teachers contacted teacher organizations (55 percent), while only 23 percent advertised in national publications. Other methods of recruitment were reported by 92 percent of administrators and included listing job openings on a web site, participating in job fairs, and working with their State departments of education or using State resources to recruit candidates.

Table 2. Percent of Districts Using Different Methods to Recruit Special Education Teachers and Related Services Providers

<u>Recruitment Method</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Std Error</u>
* Advertise in national education publications	22.6	3.5
* Advertise in local publications	96.8	1.4
* Contact educators in other schools and agencies	97.2	1.5
* Contact teachers' organizations	54.8	4.6
* Contact colleges and universities	98.0	1.5
* Use any other special recruitment efforts	92.2	74.5

Source: SPeNSE Administrators Survey, Item MB8
In the original report, this was Table III-10.

Advertisements in local publications, contacts with educators in other schools, and contacts with colleges and universities were used uniformly across districts in different regions (Note 4), of

different sizes, or different metropolitan status (Note 5), and with different levels of poverty (Note 6). Contacting teacher organizations was less frequently used by districts, but no differences existed across districts based on region, size, metropolitan status, or level of poverty. Small and medium-sized districts were less likely to advertise in national publications than were larger districts. Metropolitan status, poverty, and region did not have an impact on the use of national publications.

Another recruitment tool that has been promoted by some educators is the use of incentives such as signing bonuses, placing newly hired personnel on a higher step of the salary schedule, providing an increase in base salaries or other raise in salary through reclassification, or providing additional fringe benefits. Administrators were asked if they used these types of incentives to recruit or retain special education teachers and service providers for the 1999-2000 school year. Only 15 percent indicated that they had used such incentives. Among these districts, bonuses were used most frequently; however, the districts using bonuses represented only about 7 percent of the number of districts nationwide.

Smaller districts were less likely to use incentives than larger districts, with very large districts most frequently using incentives. Perhaps surprisingly, district poverty had little impact on the use of incentives; that is, wealthier districts were no more likely to use incentives than were poor districts.

Some school districts offered other benefits to entice teachers to take jobs in their districts. For example, some districts offered free training to prepare staff members to become special education teachers or to obtain additional certification, licensure, or endorsement. Nationwide, 46 percent of district administrators maintained that such training was available. However, this training was offered more frequently by districts in the Mid-South than by districts in the Northeast, Great Lakes, Mountain Plains, and Western Regions. Small districts were less likely to offer free training than were very large and medium districts.

Note 4. Region is defined in terms of the six Regional Resource Centers funded by OSEP.

Note 5. The variable used is defined by the U.S. Census Bureau; it includes a central city of a metropolitan statistical area (MSA), an MSA but not a central city, and outside an MSA.

Note 6. Poverty was operationalized using the Orshansky index (percent of students below the Federal poverty level as a proportion of all students enrolled in the district). These data were obtained from the January 2000 Quality Education Data (QED) file. Districts were assigned a relative poverty index (1-4) based on the quartiles of the range of Orshansky scores.

In addition, many States currently utilize a combined general and special education web-based statewide recruitment approach. Many States report that the web-based approach has been highly effective. The web-based approaches frequently include:

- * A single application that can be submitted to some or all districts;
- * Links to local newspapers and cultural resources;
- * Links to State certification offices; and
- Links to higher education programs

Criteria Used in Hiring Teachers

Research demonstrates that teacher shortages may not be due to insufficient numbers of individuals seeking teaching positions. Instead, such shortages may be the result of an insufficient supply of teachers with the qualities sought by school districts (Boe, Bobbitt, & Cook, 1996). To examine the qualities sought by administrators in hiring special education teachers, the SPeNSE questionnaire asked about the criteria used to evaluate teaching applicants.

Several evaluation criteria were used by more than 80 percent of districts nationwide (Table 3). These criteria included full certification for the students, subjects, and grade levels to be taught; at least an emergency or temporary State certification or endorsement for the specific teaching assignment; graduation from a State-approved teacher education program; a college major or minor that matches the teaching assignment; and passing a State test of basic skills.

About 75 percent of all agencies reported that they use passage of a State test of subject knowledge; 56 percent used passage of the National Teachers Examination (NTE) or the Praxis Series Core Battery Test of Professional Knowledge. Eighteen percent of administrators reported using other criteria, such as prior experience/professional background; references and recommendations or referrals; and academic performance. Nearly all administrators (96 percent) reported that they often obtain an appraisal from an applicant's former principal, supervisor, or supervising teacher before making a job offer.

Virtually all administrators (99.9 percent) reported using full standard State certification as a criterion for evaluating job candidates. Graduation from a State approved program, possession of at least an emergency or temporary State certification or endorsement, and having a major or minor that matches the teaching assignment were also widely used by districts, regardless of region, size of district, metropolitan status, or level of district poverty. Districts in the Northeast and Mid-South were more likely to consider passage of the NTE or Praxis than were districts in other regions. The Mountain Plains region was less likely than the Mid-South region, Southeast, Great Lakes, and Western Regions to use basic skills tests. These last two findings are undoubtedly a function of the certification policies of individual States.

Table 3. Percent of Districts Using Different Selection Criteria
For General and Special Education Teachers

<u>Selection Criteria</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Std Error</u>
* Full standard State certificate for the students, subjects, and grade levels to be taught	99.9	0.00
* At least an emergency or temporary State certificate or endorsement for the teaching assignment	86.7	2.9
* Graduation from a State-approved teacher education program	88.8	2.8
* College major or minor that matches the teaching assignment	88.2	2.9
* Passage of State test of basic skills	82.5	3.0
* Passage of State test of subject knowledge	74.7	3.3
* Passage of NTE or the Praxis Series Core Battery Test of Professional Knowledge	55.9	4.0
* Any other criteria	18.0	3.4

Source: SPeNSE Administrators Survey, Item MD1.

In the original report, this was Table III-11.

Barriers to Hiring Teachers

Many researchers and policy makers have speculated as to why it is so difficult to recruit special education teachers. Suggested explanations range from low salaries and lack of qualified candidates, to constraints posed by unions, schools' control over hiring, and affirmative action. Through the SPeNSE survey, local administrators have provided the first national look at the barriers they faced in recruiting special education teachers over the last three years.

Table 4 indicates that some factors were viewed by the majority of administrators as significant barriers to hiring, while others were not. More than 80 percent of administrator concluded that the shortage of qualified applicants was a great or moderate barrier to hiring special education teachers, confirming the findings of Boe and his colleagues (1996). The only other factors considered moderate or great

Table 4. Percent of Districts Viewing Factors as a Barrier to Obtaining Qualified Special Education Teachers in the Last Three Years

Barrier	%	Not At All		To a Small Extent		To a Moderate Extent		To a Great Extent		Mean Value (1-4)
		SE	%	SE	%	SE	%	SE	%	
Shortage of qualified applicants		4.4	2.0	12.1	3.3	32.0	3.9	51.5	4.5	3.3
Insufficient salary and benefits		21.5	3.4	19.6	3.5	41.9	4.4	17.0	3.3	2.5
Inability to offer job security		68.9	3.9	22.1	3.3	7.2	2.3	1.8	1.7	1.4
Unwillingness to teach the types of students in your district		55.1	4.2	20.0	3.4	18.7	3.6	6.3	2.3	1.8
Perceptions of the working environment in your district		54.0	4.3	29.6	4.3	10.6	2.8	5.7	2.3	1.7
Difficulty identifying applicant with the best qualifications		59.8	4.2	25.1	3.8	12.8	2.8	2.3	1.4	1.6
Openings becoming available too late		27.4	4.1	28.5	3.8	30.2	3.9	13.9	3.5	2.3
Schools having too much control over hiring decisions		76.8	3.8	17.0	3.2	6.2	2.2	.03	.009	1.3
Constraints imposed by unions or associations		69.4	3.9	17.5	3.2	11.9	2.6	1.2	.5	1.4
Constraints imposed by affirmative action		85.9	2.8	12.9	2.7	1.2	.9	.03	.01	1.2
Geographic location of school		25.9	3.4	23.6	3.4	29.4	4.1	21.0	4.0	2.5

SE = standard error

Source: SPeNSE Administrators Survey, Item MB11.

In the original report, this was Table III-12.

barriers to hiring by more than 40 percent of administrators were geographic location (50 percent); openings becoming available too late in the year (44 percent); and insufficient salary and benefits (59 percent). Examining the mean value of the administrators' responses, the relative rankings of the barriers were the same. However, few administrators reported that other institutional barriers were problematic. Inability to offer job security (9 percent), schools having too much control over hiring decisions (6 percent), constraints imposed by affirmative action (1 percent), and constraints imposed by unions or associations (13 percent) were not generally seen as great or even moderate barriers to recruiting special education teachers.

Very large districts were more likely than small and medium-sized districts to see the shortage of qualified applicants as a problem. Districts in the Northeast were less likely to report this as a barrier than were districts in the Southeast, Great Lakes, and Mountain Plains regions; this may be a function of the large number of teacher training institutions in the Northeast region. Insufficient salary and benefits were more often viewed as a barrier by the poorest districts than by more wealthy districts. Metropolitan statistical area (MSA) suburban centers were less likely to view insufficient salary and benefits as a barrier than were non-MSA districts.

Small districts viewed the geographic location of the school as a barrier to hiring to a greater extent than did large districts. Relatedly, districts outside MSAs were more likely to report geographic location as a barrier than were districts within MSAs. Districts in the Northeast were less likely than those in the Southeast, Great Lakes, and West to report openings becoming available too late as a barrier; this again may be related to the large number of teacher training programs in the Northeast.

Conclusions

Across the country, administrators responding to the SPeNSE survey reported having almost 70,000 openings for special education teachers at some time during the 1999-2000 school year. Virtually every district, IEU, and State school for students with hearing impairments or visual impairments had an opening for a special education teacher. On average, there were seven openings per district.

The SPeNSE administrator survey provides some explanations and potential solutions to shortages of special education teachers. When asked about barriers to finding teachers, administrators noted that the most significant barriers were related to the supply of quality teachers and to salary and benefits, rather than to institutional barriers such as job security, schools' control of the hiring process, and the impact of unions and affirmative action. This suggests that policymakers should put additional efforts into increasing the supply of quality teachers, working to raise teacher salaries and benefits, and attempting to equalize salaries across school districts.

Perhaps two of the most problematic hiring barriers cited by administrators are the district's geographic location and the fact that openings become available too late in the year. New approaches to recruitment may help to overcome these barriers. Administrators noted that they overwhelmingly used traditional methods of finding new teachers, such as advertising in local newspapers and contacting local colleges and universities. Relatively few administrators reported using methods such as posting job openings on the World Wide Web. The lack of success that administrators reported in finding qualified teachers, and the number of positions left vacant or filled by substitutes, suggests that new methods of recruitment need to be more widely utilized. For example, the Mountain Plains Regional Resource Center at Utah State University and the Kansas State Department of Education have developed and implemented an Internet-based system that allows school administrators to post regular and special education job openings and provide information about the school and community. Applicants can submit applications and resumes to the school district online. The system has been extended to other States, and those using it have reported success in recruiting regular and special education staff. Their experience suggests that a nationwide system of online recruitment might prove helpful in hiring teachers who are interested in various geographic locations and available late in the hiring season.

While administrators across the country were generally pleased with the teachers they recruited, many openings remained at the beginning of the school year, and some administrators reported that the applicants they hired were not excellent teachers. Some openings were filled by substitutes, while others were left vacant because administrators were unable to hire teachers with the qualities they sought. These findings suggest that greater efforts need to be made to ensure congruence between teacher training programs and the qualities that administrators seek in special education teachers.

Future SPeNSE publications will examine the extent to which special education personnel are adequately prepared to serve students with disabilities, variation in personnel preparation, and factors that explain that variation. Results from those analyses will provide additional information to guide policy development at the national, State, and local levels to ensure an adequate supply of highly trained personnel to serve students with disabilities.

Reference

Boe, E. E., Bobbitt, A. S., & Cook, L. (1996). *Whither didst thou go? Retention, assignment, migration, and attrition of special education and general education teachers in national perspective*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania, Center for Research and Evaluation in Social Policy.

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