



SPECIAL EDUCATION PERSONNEL SHORTAGES FACTSHEET

Is there a shortage of special education and specialized instructional support personnel (SISP)? **YES!**

- 49 states report a shortage of special education teachers/related service personnel for 2013-2014¹
- Special education teachers leave the teaching profession at nearly double the rate of their general education colleagues (12.3% vs. 7.6%)²
- 82% of special educators and SISPers from across the nation report that there are not enough professionals to meet the needs of students with disabilities³
- 51% of all school districts and 90% of high poverty school districts report difficulty attracting highly qualified special education teachers⁴
- 47% of speech language pathologists report shortages in their schools. Reported shortages were greatest in the Pacific states (67% and least reported in the Mid-Atlantic region (24%)⁵
- There will be a shortage of almost 15,000 school psychologists in the US by 2020⁶
- The ratio of students to school counselors (471:1) is almost twice the recommended ratio (250:1)⁷
- The state average ratio for school nurses vary widely across the country from 1 nurse for every 396 students to 1 nurse for every 4,000 students. The recommended ratio is 1 nurse for every 750 students.⁸

Why do personnel shortages exist?

Personnel shortages in special education specialized instructional support services are the result of recruitment and retention challenges. There is both a shortage of professionals to fill available positions and a shortage of positions to meet the growing demand for services for America's six million children and youth with disabilities who receive special education services.

Challenges include:

- Poor working conditions lead to professionals leaving special education (e.g. excessive paperwork, inadequate support, professional isolation);
- Insufficient funding for incentive programs designed to entice new graduate students and support them as they gain their professional training (e.g., loan forgiveness, personnel preparation grants);
- Fewer qualified faculty and increasing higher education costs;
- Limited supply of qualified professionals willing to work in certain communities (rural, high poverty, high crime);
- Credentialing barriers in some states limit opportunities for re-specialization, re-licensure, or alternative routes to licensure of otherwise qualified personnel.

What is the impact of these shortages?

Shortages of fully certified personnel and unfunded positions impede the ability of students with disabilities to reach their full academic potential and hinder the work of districts to prepare all students to be college and career-ready. The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future estimates that the national

¹ http://personnelcenter.org/documents/2011-12%20Special%20Education%20&%20Related%20Services%20Shortage%20List_summary.pdf

² Keigher, A. (2010). *Teacher Attrition and Mobility: Results From the 2008-09 Teacher Follow-up Survey* (NCES 2010-353). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved September 12, 2013

³ <http://www.specialedshortages.org/Budget-Cuts-Survey-Press-Release>

⁴ IDEA Implementation Study <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/20114026/pdf/20114027.pdf>

⁵ American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (2012). *SLP workforce/workload conditions* Rockville, MD: Author. American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (2012). *Schools Survey report: Trends in educational audiology 2010-2012*.

⁶ National Association of School Psychologists

⁷ American School Counseling Association

⁸ National Association of School Nurses



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cost of public school teacher turnover could be over \$7.3 billion a year.⁹ As a result of high turnover, high-need urban and rural schools are frequently staffed with inequitable concentrations of under-prepared, inexperienced teachers and few, if any, specialized instructional support personnel. The constant retraining of new staff means that high-needs schools can neither close the teacher quality staff nor the student achievement gaps.

What can school local, state and federal policymakers do to remedy these shortages?

1. **Identify Needs:** Improve the ability of local and state educational agencies to identify the needs of students relative to these shortage issues and to advocate for needed resources and systems change.
2. **Increase Professional Recruitment Strategies:** Enhance state and federal funding sources and programs that assist higher education institutions in recruiting students, especially minority and bilingual candidates, into high-need professions, Programs include loan forgiveness, personnel preparation grants, and alternate routes-to-certification, as well as incentives to recruit qualified higher education faculty.
3. **Align Licensure/Accreditation with Professional Standards:** Encourage states and districts to develop a cohesive professional licensure system to align licensure and program accreditation requirements with professionally recognized standards. Standardization of the licensure requirements for each state would allow special education personnel to apply for existing jobs, and increase job mobility.
4. **Increase Support for Recruitment/Retention Activities:** Increase direct technical assistance and federal funding to assist local educational agencies in recruiting and retaining qualified personnel through improved workplace conditions, professional support including teacher induction, mentoring, and other incentives.
5. **Expand Opportunities for Collaboration between Special and General Education:** Support programs and legislative initiatives that provide special and general educators with an understanding of the needs of children and youth with disabilities through preparation and professional development.
6. **Increase Funding to Support Special Education Personnel:** Support through local, state, and federal funding the creation of positions to ensure that the specialized support staff are serving appropriate numbers of students
7. **Comprehensively Address Shortages through Legislative Vehicles:** Increase federal funding to support states and districts in creating new positions and programs to meet student needs and improve academic outcomes. Specifically, build the capacity of districts, states and higher education institutions to address special education shortages through the Higher Education Act, Perkins and Stafford Loan Programs, Elementary and Secondary School Counseling Program, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

Additional resources about special education personnel shortages, including shortage data, reports, and evidence-based recruitment and retention strategies can be found by visiting:

www.specialedshortages.org

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⁹ Carroll, T. G. (2007) "Policy brief: The high cost of teacher turnover." National Commission on Teaching and America's Future.