



Overview of the Federal Investment in Special Education Personnel Preparation

Our kids can only learn when they are taught by excellent teachers, and those teachers can only teach well when they have been taught by special education faculty who are themselves excellent teachers and researchers. Over the years, these teachers and leaders have been instrumental in bringing new evidence-based practices to our schools and families, particularly in areas such as assistive technology, autism, behavioral challenges, and instruction that supports all students with disabilities in meeting national and state standards.

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The Good News

IDEA and Gains for Students

- 95% of all students with disabilities attend their neighborhood schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2010)
- 60% of these children access the general education curriculum for more than 80% of the school day (U.S. Department of Education, 2011)
- Over the past 10 years, 16% more of these students graduate with a standard high school diploma, 21% fewer drop out of school, and more than 33% attend post-secondary education institutions
- Improved outcomes for students with disabilities are linked to well-prepared teachers and leaders and advancements in special education research (Goldhaber, 2007; Montrosse, 2009; Smith, 2012)

Personnel Preparation under the IDEA

- Federal investments in personnel preparation have resulted in an increase in the supply of doctoral graduates in special education since 2002 (Smith, 2012)
 - There are 16% more doctoral programs in 2009 than there were in 1999 (Smith, 2012)
 - There were 28% more graduates of special education doctoral programs in 2007 than 2002 (Smith, 2002)
- Doctoral students and faculty from federally-funded projects have researched and promoted practices that are now widely used, including collaboration, inclusion, early childhood intervention, accessibility, technology, and positive behavior and multi-tiered systems of support (Burke et al., 2013)

- Federal grants help to expand IHE capacity by providing tuition support and stipends for qualified scholars
- At least 65% of grant funds to IHEs go directly to doctoral scholars
- The Federal service obligation requires that grantees work as special education faculty and leaders, for two years for every year of funding they receive in doctoral programs

Remaining Challenges and Needs

Poor outcomes for students with disabilities

- Access and outcomes have improved, but students with disabilities still perform well below their non-disabled peers on most standardized measures.
- A recent report shows that only 11% of students with disabilities scored “proficient” or above in 4th grade reading, and only 16% in 4th grade math (2011 National Assessment of Educational Progress, NAEP)
- Dropout rates among youth with disabilities have decreased, but 23% of youth with disabilities still drop out: a rate that is twice as high than their peers without disabilities (IDEAdata.org; Wolanen & Steele, 2004)
- The employment rate for individuals with disabilities continues to be significantly lower than any other minority group

Persistent shortages of special education teachers

- 49 states report a shortage of special education teachers/related service personnel for 2013-2014 (NCPSSERS, 2014)
- Special education teachers leave the teaching profession at nearly double the rate of their general education colleagues (12.3% vs. 7.6%) (NCPSSERS, 2014)
- 51% of all school districts and 90% of high poverty school districts report difficulty attracting qualified special education teachers (NCPSSERS, 2014)

Increasing shortages of special education faculty

- Special education faculty are retiring: Turnover rates due to retirement will likely increase 21% annually over the next five years (Smith, 2012)
- Doctoral programs are likely to lose between 388 and 582 doctoral faculty over the next five years (Smith, 2012)
- Shortages of special education faculty are directly related to shortages of special education teachers; it is likely that faculty shortages will lead to 50% fewer special education teachers and school leaders prepared (Smith et al., 2010)
- Impending shortages of special education faculty will outstrip previous gains in supply, at the same time that the need for special education teachers and leaders is expanding (Smith, 2012)

Decreases in funding and number of available personnel preparation grants

- Federal funding of personnel preparation has diminished considerably over time when controlled for inflation (Kleinhammer-Tramill, 2003)
- Since 2010, funds for Personnel Preparation have been reduced from \$92 million to \$83.7 million (FY 2015)
- The number of personnel preparation grants has also decreased, from 22 in 2010 (pre-sequester) to 15 in 2015

Critical Role of the Federal Government

- HECSE strongly supports a return to at least the pre-sequester level of \$90 million for personnel preparation grants, with assurances that an adequate portion of these funds are allocated to support personnel preparation grants in the area of special education leadership.
- **The federal investment in special education is needed to restore capacity and to continue to yield:**
 - **A strong cadre of young higher education faculty** who will conduct the next generation of research and prepare the next generation of teachers
 - **A strong cadre of pK-12 leaders** who will work to ensure that students with disabilities achieve college and career ready standards and readiness for employment
 - **A strong set of leaders in special education who will ensure collaboration with general education and effective inclusion**

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