



Higher Education Consortium for Special Education

FACT SHEET
January 2020

The Shortage of Special Education Teachers and Higher Education Faculty

- In 2015-16 there was a national shortage of about 60,000 teachers.
- While STEM fields and foreign languages experience significant shortages, special education is the field with the greatest shortage, with 48 states and DC reporting shortages.
- Between 2005 and 2012 there was a 17% decline in the number of special education teachers and a simultaneous increase (by 400,000 students) in the number of students receiving special education services.
- As a result of the special education teacher shortage, some districts are employing totally unqualified substitutes in special education teaching positions, sometimes on a long-term basis; some districts are using Kelly Temp workers.
- Some states are lowering teacher certification standards as a result of the shortage, at times so neither a BA nor any teacher preparation is required.
- Ninety percent of high poverty schools experience teacher shortages.
- In the last 5 years enrollment in teacher preparation programs nationally is down 35%; in some states there is a 60% decline.
- There is a significant lack of diversity among special educators, just as there is among all educators.
- Teachers of color leave schools and the teaching profession at a rate higher than white teachers: 18.9% v. 15% respectively.
- Those prepared through alternate pathways that require less coursework and student teaching experiences are 25% more likely to leave their teaching positions and the profession than those who are well prepared.
- Reasons for teachers leaving include poor compensation, lack of administrative support, dissatisfaction with working conditions, dissatisfaction with testing and accountability pressures and lack of opportunities for advancement.
- A shortage of special education faculty in higher education contributes to the special education teacher shortage and further limits the capacity of higher education to address this significant problem.
- Between 2012 and 2017 there was a 17% reduction in the production of new special education doctoral degrees.
- Since 2009 there has been a 19% reduction in the number of special education doctoral programs.