



HECSE Supply and Demand Survey 2020

Executive Summary

Introduction

In the late 1990s Smith and colleagues launched a study aimed at documenting the “imbalance between the supply of and demand for [Special Education] leadership (doctoral) personnel” (Smith, Pion, Tyler, Sindelar, & Rosenberg, 2001). This work forecasted a future shortage for special education faculty based on anticipated retirements. Ten years later the US Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) funded a follow-up study entitled the Special Education Faculty Needs Assessment (SEFNA; Smith, Montrosse, Robb, Tyler, & Young, 2011). SEFNA data pointed to the fact that over a 10 year period, the capacity of doctoral programs and subsequent supply of leadership personnel had been positively affected by actions taken to address shortages, including the allocation of OSEP funding to support the preparation of leadership personnel. Although researchers found increases in the number and capacity of doctoral programs to prepare candidates and also the number of program graduates, concerns persisted as a result of expected retirements (increase of 21%) and an increasing demand for special education faculty.

One professional organization with a significant stake in the findings and their implications for Higher Education is the Higher Education Consortium in Special Education (HECSE). HECSE is a national organization consisting of institutions of Higher Education that grant doctoral degrees in special education or have a special education emphasis as part of a larger related doctoral degree program. The Consortium serves to advocate for the interests of these institutions in personnel and leadership preparation, and research in the field of special education. Our member institutions are major universities with national reputations for preparing teachers, related service providers, administrators, teacher educators, and researchers. Member faculty are known for their excellence in teaching, research, and service in special education and related services. HECSE as an organization supports its members by engaging in dialogue with national leaders in both houses of the Congress of the United States, with federal agencies that oversee research and training programs related to education and human services, and with professional organizations and advocacy groups that focus on topics and issues in special education and disability services.

In 2019 HECSE held its annual Winter Summit. The theme of the Summit focused on the implications of teacher and faculty shortages. Dr. Debra Smith coordinator of the SEFNA studies, presented current, updated data on the supply and demand for leadership personnel to fill University positions. In an informal follow-up, Dr. Smith investigated specific supply and

demand questions. Her initial data on doctoral programs and graduates indicated (Smith, 2019) the following:

- Since 2009, there was a 19% reduction in doctoral programs, with 8 programs closing between 2016 and 2018. Overall, fewer doctoral programs existed now than were documented in 1987.
- There was a 17% reduction in the number of doctoral graduates between 2012 and 2017

Smith also examined aspects of demand noting that as of 2018, University-based teacher education programs (n = 1,328) across the country prepared 88% of **ALL** new teachers. Of these programs, 971 prepared teachers in special education, an increase of 24 programs since 2016.

Over the years, Smith's work demonstrated the link between the numbers of well-prepared faculty and the ability to provide quality instruction to students with disabilities. Her 2001 data indicated that one faculty member impacts the preparation of 25 teachers, which in turn, affects the provision of services to nearly 400 students with disabilities. This critical pipeline is disrupted by a significant nation-wide shortage of teachers in special education. Additionally, in 2010, Universities have seen total enrollments decline with fewer students pursuing an education major (Croft, Guffy, & Vitale, 2018). In light of the critical shortage of special education teachers nationwide, university programs are faced with developing innovative strategies to recruit, prepare and help retain the future teachers needed to serve students with disabilities. Meeting this challenge requires well-prepared faculty, who possess deep content knowledge, are poised to deliver new pedagogical methods and contribute significantly to shaping the field by conducting high quality research.

Robust discussion following presentations at the 2019 Winter Summit, led to an interest in gathering additional data about supply and demand from doctoral granting institutions. Over the next year HECSE members worked on developing and field testing a survey, and distributing it to member institutions. The purpose of the survey was to explore current issues related to the preparation of doctoral students and the need for higher education faculty in special education.

Methods

The HECSE Executive Board worked with member institutions to distribute the first round of the survey in April of 2020. The second round was sent to nonrespondents three weeks later. A final individualized request was sent to institutions in June and July.

Participants

A pool of 57 HECSE member institutions was targeted for the survey. Each member institution has the opportunity to enlist 2 faculty as HECSE representatives, one of whom (often the Department Head or Chair) serves as the primary representative, the target for the survey. Representatives from 46 member universities responded for an initial response rate of 80%. While all 46 provided information in the first section of the survey, only 37 completed the entire survey. Results included data from universities from across regions of the United States. The sample included only one private university, the remainder were public institutions.

Instrument

The survey questions were based in part on those included in the SEFNA study, but additional questions were drawn from discussions with HECSE member contributors. Participants (often Department leaders or program coordinators) were asked to reflect on status of their department and programs in fall of 2019.

The survey was divided into four sections. The first section focused on general demographic or descriptive data about the university/department, its faculty and its programs. In the second section, respondents provided information specific to their doctoral programs (e.g., enrollment, graduation numbers, OSEP support, recruitment and areas of preparation). The third section centered questions around the online preparation of doctoral students. Findings/data from the third section will be discussed in a separate document. The final section focused on faculty positions, addressing types of positions students accepted upon graduation, the types of special education faculty openings in the department, whether a department experienced a failed search and finally whether there was a perception of a “mismatch between the types of positions for which special education doctoral students are being prepared and current hiring needs”.

Results

As noted above, 46 respondents provided data for the first section of the survey including the types of degrees or majors offered through their department or unit. Thirty-four universities offered special education majors only, while 6 offered dual majors comprised of special education and a second area (e.g., elementary education or early childhood). Six institutions did not have a specific major in special education, but special education was an emphasis or focus within a doctoral program in another major field (e.g., Teaching and Learning). Data on numbers of full-time faculty revealed that size varied, but on an average, departments (n = 46) consisted of 6 tenured faculty members (range 0 - 14), 3 on the tenure-track (not yet tenured; range 0 - 12) and 4 clinical faculty members (range 0 – 20). The remaining questions contain data from only 37 to 39 programs, as responses dropped for the last three sections of the survey.

Overall, there were 503 full-time and 312 part-time doctoral students being prepared across 39 programs in the Fall of 2019, averaging thirteen full-time and eight part-time doctoral students per program. Respondents provided data on areas in which they prepared doctoral students (see Figure 1). Most departments reported having programs in the areas of High Incidence/Mild and Moderate Disabilities (n = 34, 87%), Autism (n = 27, 69%), Early childhood and ABA (n = 24, 62%) and low incidence/severe/multiple disabilities (n = 23, 59%). Few programs were in the areas of Deaf and Hard of Hearing (n =5, 13%) or STEM (n = 4, 10%).

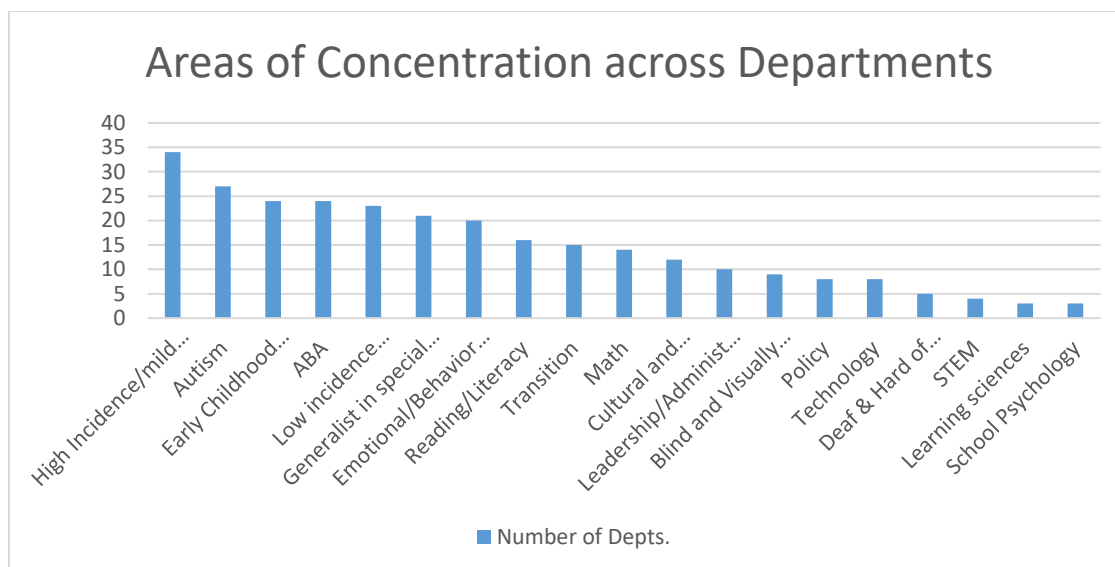


Figure 1. Number of Programs Preparing in Specific Areas of Concentration

Twenty-five of the 39 institutions reported having OSEP leadership grants. Institutions that had OSEP Leadership grants averaged 2 funded projects with a range of 1-6.

Student Recruitment

Twenty five of the 39 institutions reported difficulty recruiting students into doctoral programs, with the most frequently cited reason being a lack of or inadequate funding ($n = 12$) for students to engage in full-time doctoral study. Some of the comments related to recruitment difficulties included: “Enrollment fluctuates based on OSEP leadership grants”; “Students desire full funding to attend, and livable wages to work and go to school. Many of our students have families and often times health insurance is an issue”; “Only difficult when funding is not available”. Two programs reported problems recruiting full-time students from the US, indicating that many international students applied. Two respondent even noted problems recruiting candidates who had special education teaching backgrounds. Respondents used a variety of recruitment strategies, including word of mouth or personal contacts ($n = 13$); website/social media ($n = 13$); conferences ($n = 12$); former or current students ($n = 8$); “reputation” ($n = 5$); Ads ($n = 4$) and grant funding opportunities ($n = 4$)

Program Graduates

Across the 39 institutions, 201 doctoral candidates were in the process of completing their dissertations and ready to enter the workforce ($M = 5$; $Mdn = 4$; range: 0 - 20) during the 2019 - 2020 academic year. When asked to reflect on the number of doctoral students who graduated from their programs in the last 2 years, overall data indicated 289 graduates, averaging seven per department ($Mdn = 5$; range: 0 - 28). As would be expected, programs with OSEP leadership grants graduated the largest number of students (a total of 235 students, with an average of 9 students per program; range 2-28), while the 14 programs without grants only graduated 54 students over 2 years (mean 4; range 0-9).

The next set of questions focused on the types of positions candidates took upon graduation. In the last year, 161 graduates took jobs in higher education, approximately four per department (*Mdn* =4; range: 0 - 16). As respondents reflected on graduates from their doctoral program in the last 5 years, they indicated various types of positions were accepted (see figure 2). Out of 37 respondents, all but one program reported graduates filling positions in higher education in some form (e.g., tenure line, clinical, soft money, post-doctoral training, higher education administration, community college). Most graduates went into either teaching- or research-intensive tenure-line faculty positions and many had of graduates who chose to pursue post-doctoral training. In addition to the university setting, 32% of respondents reported their graduates took school district administrative positions. Two respondents reported graduates going into other types of positions such as business position or a “transition position in universities”. One programs noted that it was new and did not yet have graduates.

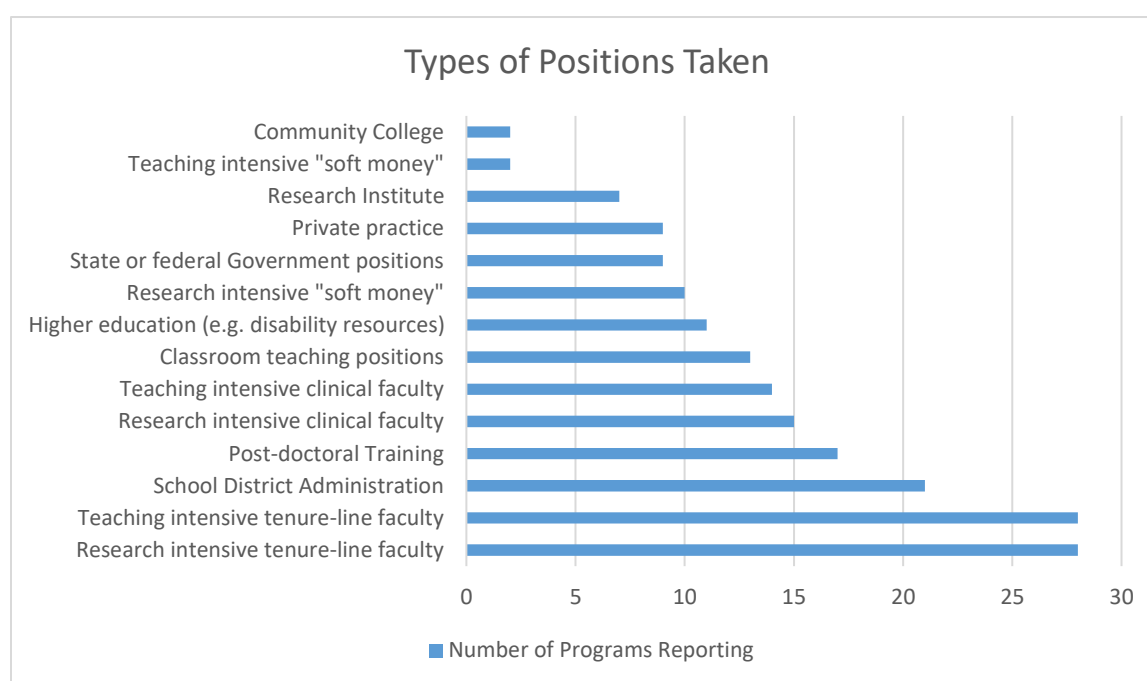


Figure 2. Program reports of types of positions taken by graduates over a 5-year period

Faculty Searches

To determine demand, respondents were asked a series of questions related to faculty searches and their success in filling openings. A total of 94 open positions were reported over the past 3 years, on average 2 (range 0-6) were tenure-line positions and 1 (range 0-5) constituted clinical or specialized faculty lines. When asked whether their department or unit experienced a failed search in the last 3 years, 35% ($n = 13$) of the 37 respondents experienced a failed search. Failed searches were in an array of areas: Early Childhood Special Education, High incidence, STEM, ABA, multi-cultural, autism, Visual Impairments and Orientation and Mobility. Two failed searches were more broad: open ranked and open specialization and general. In reviewing data on why searches failed, no real discernable patterns could be found (see Figure 3), although the

most common **reason** was an *inadequate pool of candidates* (n = 8, 36%) followed by *candidate took a different position* (n = 5, 23%) and *salary offered* (n = 4, 18%).

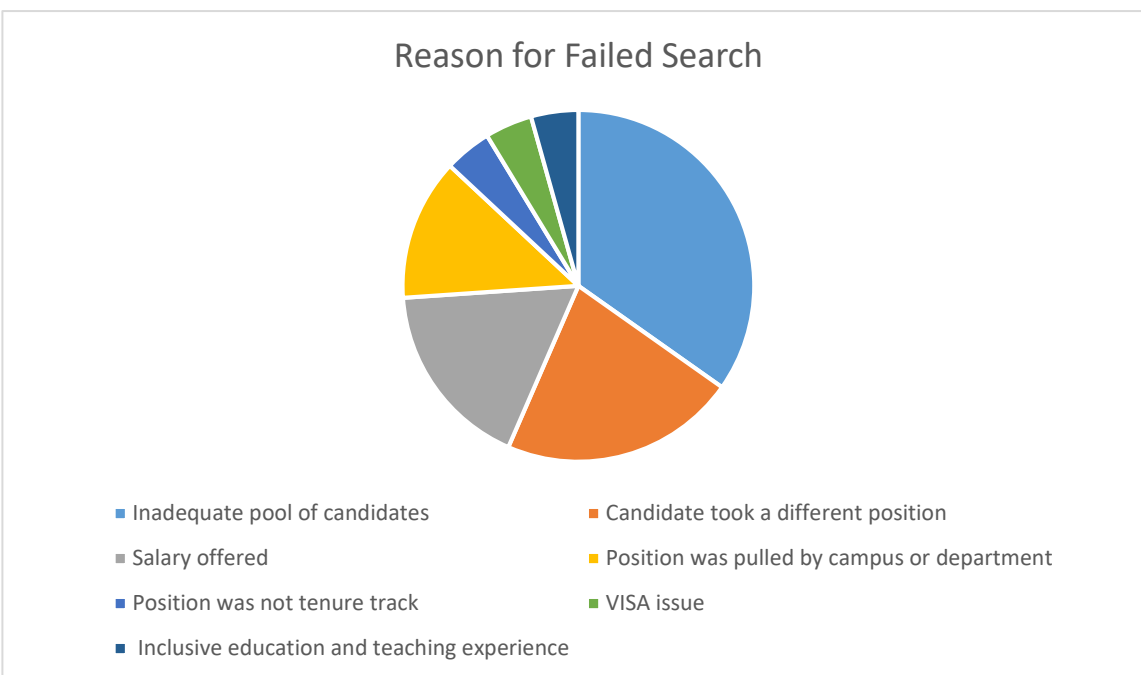


Figure 3. Reasons Faculty Searches Failed

Finally, 78% of the 37 respondents did not observe a mismatch between areas of doctoral student preparation and department or unit hiring needs. Those who did find a mismatch (22%) offered the following perspectives:

- “We need candidates trained in intervention research with a focus on equity, rural, and urban needs.”
- “We are looking for pragmatic skills in effective instruction and positive behavior supports, and the pragmatic ability to teaching and supervise students to build these skills, plus quantitative research skills with focus on intervention research. It seems that these focuses are somewhat out of fashion among some doctoral preparation programs.”
- “We need to be sure to prepare candidates for teaching intensive positions in addition to research intensive. So many of the leadership grants go only to research programs; however, by and large, we need more faculty who can teach and supervise clinical experiences.”
- “We require more candidates to have training in securing external funding.”
- “Yes - we are working on shifting our program to prepare more in-field leaders.”
- “A lot of disability studies candidates without P-12 teaching experience; which is required for teacher preparation positions.”

Discussion

Overall the results of this survey indicate that HECSE institutions are preparing special education leadership personnel who by and large are seeking positions in higher education. In general, our findings indicate that programs are preparing doctoral students in a wide range of specialty areas with high incidence disability being the most reported area, followed closely by autism, Early childhood, ABA and low incidence disabilities. It appears that OSEP funding is critical to maintaining an adequate supply of high quality graduates. Programs with OSEP leadership personnel preparation grants graduated approximately 4 times more doctoral students over a 2 year period than those without OSEP funding. Furthermore, OSEP funding was deemed important for providing recruitment and support for students in programs.

Regarding demand for faculty, while most of the respondents indicated they were able to fill open positions over the past several years, about one third reported failed searches. An inadequate pool of candidates was offered as the most common reason for a failed search. While we cannot make a direct link between supply and demand based on our small data set, it is apparent that efforts to support quality leadership programs is essential to the future of doctoral programs in special education across specialty areas.

Finally, it is important to note that the participating HECSE institutions are just a subset of universities that provide doctoral training in special education. The data gathered in this report may not be representative of all doctoral training programs. Further, these data do not provide a true picture of demand, as Universities without doctoral programs are not represented in the data. Moreover, data cannot be directly compared to the national data set analyzed in the SEFNA study. Regardless, the same rationale linking well prepared graduates of our doctoral programs to the subsequent preparation of special education teachers and resulting impact on students with disabilities, is in play. It is critical that we continue to support and grow high quality doctoral programs in order to keep the vital pipeline flowing.

References

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