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State-Level Efforts to Recruit and Retain Qualified Special Education Personnel Including Related Service Providers

by Eve Müller, Ph.D.

INTRODUCTION

Recruitment and retention of qualified education personnel remains an ongoing challenge and all 50 states have reported teacher shortages for the 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 school years. Although there was some variation from state to state in terms of which types of personnel were most difficult to recruit and retain, a shortage of qualified special education and related services personnel was common to all states.[1] According to the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality (NCCTQ, 2006), the need for qualified special education teachers will continue to rise faster than all other types of teaching personnel through 2014. The Center on Personnel Shortages in Special Education reports that this staffing crisis also extends to related service providers (COPSSE, 2004).

In response to the challenge to recruit and retain qualified special educators and related service providers, states and localities have implemented a range of recruitment and retention strategies. The purpose of this document is to describe some of the strategies states are using. A collaboration between Project Forum at the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) and the Personnel Improvement Center (PIC) at NASDSE, this document was completed as part of Project Forum's and the PIC's cooperative agreements with the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP).

DATA COLLECTION

Project Forum and the PIC developed a survey instrument to obtain information about state-level strategies for the recruitment and retention of qualified special education personnel and related service providers. During the months of July and August 2010, Project Forum and the PIC conducted the survey of all state education agencies (SEAs) using Zarca Interactive, an online survey management program. Forty-one surveys were received and the following section describes survey results.

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[1] See U.S. Department of Education website: http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/pol/tsa.pdf.

*in*Forum

SURVEY RESULTS

Of the 41 responding SEAs, all reported engaging in one or more state-level activities aimed at increasing recruitment and/or retention of qualified special education teachers, paraprofessionals and related service providers (see Tables 1 and 2). Several states noted, however, that agencies external to the SEA (i.e., other state-level entities) were responsible for most if not all state-level recruitment and/or retention activities, or that recruitment and/or retention activities were handled at the local level.

Recruitment and Retention of Special Education Teachers and Paraprofessionals

Recruitment to the Field

Thirty-nine SEAs reported engaging in activities aimed at recruiting special education teachers and/or paraprofessionals *to the field* of special education. Most commonly, SEAs reported using "Grow Your Own" programs (e.g., paraprofessional step-up programs, high school recruitment programs) (26 SEAs), promotional print materials (23 SEAs), tuition assistance (20 SEAs), and information sessions (18 SEAs). Less commonly, SEAs reported using loan forgiveness (15 SEAs), outreach to culturally and/or linguistically diverse groups (15 SEAs) and radio/television advertisements (5 SEAs). Several SEAs provided additional information about specific recruitment strategies, including the following:

- *North Dakota* produced a recruitment DVD.
- *Arizona* recruits to the field via its online recruitment system at www.teachinaz.com.
- *Kansas* assists LEAs with the development of recruitment podcasts.
- *Delaware's* State Professional Development Grant (SPDG) is used to work with Future Teachers groups in high schools.

Recruitment to Specific Positions

Thirty-five SEAs reported engaging in activities aimed at recruiting special education teachers and/or paraprofessionals *to specific positions*. Most commonly, SEAs reported using Internet-based recruitment systems (24 SEAs), job fairs (22 SEAs) and promotional print materials (17 SEAs). Less commonly, SEAs reported using in-state or out-of-state recruiters (14 SEAs), outreach to culturally and/or linguistically diverse groups (12 SEAs), loan forgiveness (11 SEAs), new social media including Facebook or Twitter (6 SEAs), signing bonuses (5 SEAs), salary increases (5SEAs) and state tax relief (1 SEA). A few SEAs provided links to their online recruitment websites:

- Alaska at http://alaskateacher.org/doku.php;
- California at http://www.edjoin.org/; and
- Kansas at www.kansasteachingjobs.com.

Retention

All 41 responding SEAs reported engaging in activities intended to improve retention of special education teachers and/or paraprofessionals. Most commonly, SEAs reported using professional development opportunities (38 SEAs), mentoring or coaching (33 SEAs), induction programs (18 SEAs) and administrative support (17 SEAs). Less commonly, SEAs reported using e-mentoring (11 SEAs), improved working conditions (e.g., reduced

paperwork, release time for collaboration with colleagues) (10 SEAs) and support for retaining teachers from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds (9 SEAs). Several SEAs provided additional information about specific retention strategies, including the following:

- *Ohio* uses teacher recognition programs such as the Ohio Teacher of the Year program.
- *Massachusetts* offers stipends for Nationally Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs).
- *Kansas* supports its novice teachers via its Early Career Educator Portal (www.kansasteacherretention.com).
- *Wisconsin* and *Pennsylvania* both mandate induction and mentoring programs for all local education agencies (LEAs) although programs are implemented at the local or regional level.

Collaboration with Teacher Preparation Programs

Thirty-eight SEAs reported employing strategies for working with teacher preparation programs in order to promote the recruitment and retention of special education teachers and/or paraprofessionals. Most commonly, SEAs reported supporting partnerships between LEAs and institutions of higher education (IHEs), such as working with IHEs to provide more accessible models of course delivery (e.g., development of distance education or evening courses). Twelve SEAs reported providing support for interested individuals to take the PRAXIS-I Preprofessional Skills Test (PPST) for entry into teacher education programs. Several SEAs also provided additional information about specific collaborative activities:

- *Kansas*, *Massachusetts* and *Wisconsin* support IHE-based alternative certification programs in their states.
- *Maryland* has a website that promotes state-approved alternative preparation programs in special education.
- *Georgia's* SEA, in collaboration with the Georgia Board of Regents, offers mini-grants to IHEs that partner with LEAs to ensure adequate supplies of certified teachers.

Recruitment and Retention of Related Service Providers

Recruitment to the Field

Thirty-six SEAs reported engaging in activities aimed at recruiting related service providers, including occupational therapists (OTs), physical therapists (PTs) and speech language pathologists (SLPs) *to the field* of special education (See Table 2). Most commonly, SEAs reported using tuition assistance (21 SEAs), "Grow Your Own" programs (17 SEAs) and promotional print materials (16 SEAs). Less commonly, SEAs reported using information sessions (15 SEAs), outreach to culturally and/or linguistically diverse groups (11 SEAs), loan forgiveness (9 SEAs) and radio/television advertisements (3 SEAs). Several SEAs provided additional information about their specific recruitment strategies. For example:

- *California's* SEA sponsors TEACH California (www.teachcalifornia.org), an online system that promotes recruitment to the field and includes information on related service providers.

- *Massachusetts* offers additional compensation for OTs, PTs and SLPs who provide wrap-around services at turn-around schools.

Recruitment to Specific Positions

Twenty-nine SEAs reported engaging in activities aimed at recruiting related service providers *to specific positions*. SEAs reported using job fairs (19 SEAs), promotional print materials (15 SEAs), in-state or out-of-state recruiters (12 SEAs), Internet-based recruitment systems (12 SEAs), outreach to culturally and/or linguistically diverse groups (9 SEAs), loan forgiveness (8 SEAs), new social media (5 SEAs), signing bonuses (5 SEAs), salary increases (3 SEAs) and state tax relief (1 SEA). Several SEAs provided additional information about their specific recruitment strategies. For example:

- *North Carolina* provides LEAs with subscriptions to *Teachers-Teachers.com* to aid in the recruitment of related service providers.

Retention

Thirty-seven SEAs reported engaging in activities intended to improve retention of related service providers. These activities included professional development opportunities (35 SEAs), mentoring and coaching (16 SEAs), administrative support (14 SEAs), e-mentoring (6 SEAs), improved working conditions (5 SEAs), induction programs (5 SEAs) and support for retaining teachers from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds (4 SEAs). Several SEAs provided additional information on specific retention strategies, including the following:

- *California* includes related service providers in its Strategic Plan for Recruiting, Preparing and Retaining Qualified Special Education Personnel.
- *Wisconsin* mandates that some related service providers receive mentoring and induction at the LEA level.

Collaboration with Teacher Preparation Programs

Thirty-six SEAs reported supporting partnerships between LEAs and IHEs, such as providing more accessible models of course delivery (e.g., development of distance education or evening courses), as strategies for promoting the recruitment and retention of related service providers.

State-Level Infrastructure and Capacity-Building Activities

The following section describes state-level infrastructure and/or capacity-building activities that can help in the recruitment and retention of qualified special education personnel, including special education teachers, paraprofessionals and related service providers.

Advisory Boards and Work Groups

Twenty-one SEAs reported having an advisory board or work group tasked with developing a comprehensive plan that addresses recruitment and retention of qualified special education personnel. Of these, 13 focus exclusively on the recruitment of special education personnel and eight focus on the recruitment and retention of both general and special education personnel.

Licensure Reciprocity

Nine SEAs noted that issues of licensure reciprocity for special education personnel have a negative impact on their state's recruitment and hiring efforts, while four SEAs noted that licensure reciprocity has had no or relatively little impact on their recruitment and hiring efforts. Examples of information provided by SEAs regarding licensure reciprocity challenges included the following:

- *North Dakota* has difficulty recognizing other states' licenses because many endorsement requirements are written into state law making it difficult to reconcile the different licensing requirements.
- *New York* has encountered difficulties issuing initial certification to its residents who are graduates of online programs offered by out-of-state IHEs because of *New York's* requirement for three years of teaching experience in the other state.
- *Michigan* remains disability-specific in the endorsement areas for special education, which creates challenges when it comes to reciprocity.
- *Kansas* administrators share information on reciprocity challenges with the SEA's Teacher Licensure Director.

Identification of Barriers to Retention

Fourteen SEAs reported working with LEAs to identify barriers to retention and improve working conditions in order to retain special education personnel. Most commonly, SEAs reported conducting surveys to identify barriers to retention and/or reasons for teacher attrition (5 SEAs). Several SEAs reported that identification of barriers to retention was handled by the state's Special Education Advisory Council.

Streamlining Hiring Efforts

Fourteen SEAs reported working with LEAs to streamline their hiring efforts. Most commonly they described SEA-sponsored job websites or online recruiting systems (13 SEAs).

Other State-level Recruitment and Retention Activities

Twenty-two SEAs described additional activities sponsored by the SEA in order to support recruitment and retention of special education personnel and related service providers at the LEA level. Some of these address only special educators, whereas other activities appear to address both general and special educators. For example:

- *Louisiana* funds regional certification counselors in all regions of the state to assist local human resources (HR) directors and directors of special education in recruiting personnel.
- *North Dakota* gives recruitment presentations at its state paraprofessional conference.
- *Minnesota* completes a recruitment and retention report through its licensing department.
- *Arizona's* annual conferences for principals and local special education directors address recruitment and retention strategies.

- *South Carolina* instituted an advanced mentor training initiative to help mentors support new special education teachers.
- *Kansas'* SEA staff moderates a monthly blog for LEA administrators and mentor early career administrators on effective teacher recruitment and retention.
- *Oklahoma* recently implemented the Bug-in-Ear program, which enables mentors to provide virtual support to rural special education teachers via state-of-the-art technologies.

Funding

Thirty-six SEAs described one or more funding sources for activities intended to promote the recruitment and/or retention of qualified special education personnel. Most commonly mentioned were State Professional Development Grants (SPDGs) (22 SEAs) and IDEA Part B funds (including Section 619, 611 and discretionary monies) (17 SEAs). Other sources included state funds and/or state funded grants (5 SEAs); American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds (4 SEAs); Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), Title VI B Rural Education funds (3 SEAs); ESEA Title II Teacher Quality Enhancement grants (2 SEAs); IDEA Capacity Building Grants (1 SEA); and Head Start funds (1 SEA).

Barriers

Twenty-seven SEAs identified one or more barriers the SEA has faced in providing supports to LEAs in their efforts to recruit and retain qualified special education personnel. Examples of barriers include:

- limited staffing capacity and/or funding (e.g., for salary supplements, hiring bonuses or other financial incentives) (9 SEAs);
- challenges in getting IHEs to respond to state/local personnel preparation needs and/or prepare sufficient numbers of qualified personnel in shortage areas (3 SEAs);
- recruitment and retention in high needs school districts and/or rural communities (3 SEAs);
- lack of qualified applicants (2 SEAs);
- problems with licensure reciprocity (2 SEAs);
- lack of instate programs for SLPs (1 SEA);
- lack of funding for substitute teachers to enable professional development of special education staff (1 SEA);
- lack of resources to provide training in low incidence areas (1 SEA);
- difficulty getting local human resources directors to promote their LEAs and communities (1 SEA);
- high cost of living in some parts of the state (1 SEA);
- lower teacher salaries relative to neighboring states (1 SEA);
- class size/case load requirements being the same for both general and special education (1 SEA); and
- lack of adequately prepared secondary special education teachers (1 SEA).

Also, *North Dakota*, *Ohio*, *Wisconsin*, and *North Carolina* noted that because they are all local control states, the SEA cannot mandate recruitment and/or retention efforts at the LEA level.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

With special education and the related services being one of the most frequently reported personnel shortage areas nationwide, innovative and effective strategies are being implemented at the state and local levels to address this need for qualified personnel, especially in rural and urban areas. States are using an array of funding sources to provide state-level support, yet many LEAs still need assistance in implementing those strategies that have the greatest impact. The need for IHEs to work with SEAs and LEAs to develop effective strategies is clear. Comprehensive planning and implementation of strategies that involve all three of these partners (SEA, IHEs and LEAs) will be essential to solving the personnel needs of local districts.

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IDEAs that Work
U.S. Office of Special Education Programs

Personnel Improvement Center
National Center to Improve Recruitment and Retention of Qualified Personnel for Children with Disabilities

www.personnelcenter.org

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To order a hard copy of this document or any other Forum publications, please contact Nancy Tucker at
NASDSE, 1800 Diagonal Road, Suite 320, Alexandria, VA 22314
Ph: 703-519-3800 ext. 326 or Email: nancy.tucker@nasde.org

Table 1 – State-Level Strategies for Recruiting and Retaining Special Education Teachers and Paraprofessionals

State	Tuition Assistance	Loan Forgiveness	Promotional Print Materials	Radio/TV Ads	Information Sessions	Grow Your Own Programs	Outreach to Diverse Groups	Loan Forgiveness	State Tax Relief	Salary Increases	Signing Bonuses	Online Recruitment System	New Social Media	Job Fairs	Promotional Print Materials	Outreach to Diverse Groups	Recruiters	Induction Programs	Mentoring or Coaching	E-Mentoring	Support for Diverse Groups	PD Opportunities	Admin Support	Improved Working Conditions
	Recruitment to the Field							Recruitment to Specific Positions										Retention						
AL	x		x		x		x					x		x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
AK		x	x	x		x	x			x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		
AZ	x		x		x		x					x	x	x	x	x	x		x			x		
AR	x		x		x	x						x		x	x							x	x	
CA					x	x	x											x	x					x
CO			x	x	x	x	x							x	x	x	x					X		
DE						x																X		
FL	x		x			x		x	x			x		x	x	x	x	x	x			X		
FSM	x	x			x			x		x												X	x	
GA																						X		x
Guam														x					x					
IL														x				x	x	x		X		
KS	x	x	x		x			x		x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x		X	x	x
KY	x	x	x			x	x							x		x	x	x	x			x		
LA				x	x										x					x		x	x	
ME		x	x		x	x		x		x		x		x	x		x	x	x			x	x	
MD	x		x									x		x	x	x		x	x		x	x		
MA	x		x	x	x	x	x					x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	
MI		x						x											x			x		
MN	x					x	x					x	x			x						x		
MO	x	x	x																			x		
NE		x																x				x		
NV		x	x			x		x											x	x		x	x	x
NJ		x				x	x					x			x			x	x			x		x
NM						x	x					x		x			x		x				x	x
NY	x		x		x	x	x					x		x	x	x	x		x		x	x		
NC	x					x						x		x				x	x			x		x

State	Recruitment to the Field							Recruitment to Specific Positions										Retention						
	Tuition Assistance	Loan Forgiveness	Promotional Print Materials	Radio/TV Ads	Information Sessions	Grow Your Own Programs	Outreach to Diverse Groups	Loan Forgiveness	State Tax Relief	Salary Increases	Signing Bonuses	Online Recruitment System	New Social Media	Job Fairs	Promotional Print Materials	Outreach to Diverse Groups	Recruiters	Induction Programs	Mentoring or Coaching	E-Mentoring	Support for Diverse Groups	PD Opportunities	Admin Support	Improved Working Conditions
ND	x	x	x		x	x		x				x			x				x			x		
OH			x			x						x						x	x			x	x	
OK	x					x				x		x		x					x	x		x		
OR						x																		
Palau			x	x								x		x								x	x	x
PA			x		x		x							x	x	x		x	x	x		x	x	
SC	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x			x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	
SD																			x	x		x		
TN	x	x	x	x	x	x		x				x		x					x			x		
UT	x		x	x	x	x					x	x		x			x	x	x			x	x	
VA	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x			x	x		x	x	x	x		x		x	x	x	x
WA					x							x							x	x	x	x	x	
WV	x		x		x							x							x	x	x	x	x	
WI		x						x										x	x			x		
WY					x						x								x			x		
Totals	**20**	**15**	**23**	**5**	**18**	**26**	**15**	**11**	**1**	**5**	**5**	**24**	**6**	**22**	**17**	**13**	**14**	**18**	**33**	**11**	**9**	**38**	**17**	**10**

Table 2 – State-Level Strategies for Recruiting and Retaining Related Service Providers

States	Recruitment to the Field							Recruitment to Specific Positions										Retention						
	Tuition Assistance	Loan Forgiveness	Promotional Print Materials	Radio/TV Ads	Information Sessions	Grow Your Own Programs	Outreach to Diverse Groups	Loan Forgiveness	State Tax Relief	Salary Increases	Signing Bonuses	Online Recruitment System	New Social Media	Job Fairs	Promotional Print Materials	Outreach to Diverse Groups	Recruiters	Induction Programs	Mentoring or Coaching	E-Mentoring	Support for Diverse Groups	PD Opportunities	Admin Support	Improved Working Conditions
AL	x						x							x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x		
AK					x	x	x				x	x		x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	
AZ	x		x		x	x						x	x	x	x	x	x							
AR	x				x									x								x		
CA					x																			x
CO			x	x	x		x					x		x	x	x	x						x	
DE						x																	x	
FL	x		x						x						x								x	
FSM	x	x			x	x		x		x													x	x
GA																							x	
Guam	x					x				x				x							x	x	x	
IL																								
KS	x	x	x		x			x		x	x	x	x	x	x		x						x	x
KY			x			x								x		x						x	x	
LA																							x	
ME	x				x	x		x						x		x			x				x	x
MD			x											x	x								x	
MA	x		x		x	x	x					x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	
MI																								
MN							x							x		x							x	
MO	x	x																					x	
NE		x																					x	
NV	x	x				x		x											x	x			x	x
NM						x	x					x		x		x	x	x						
NY	x		x		x	x	x					x		x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	
NC	x											x		x									x	
ND	x	x	x		x	x		x							x						x	x		

States	Recruitment to the Field							Recruitment to Specific Positions										Retention						
	Tuition Assistance	Loan Forgiveness	Promotional Print Materials	Radio/TV Ads	Information Sessions	Grow Your Own Programs	Outreach to Diverse Groups	Loan Forgiveness	State Tax Relief	Salary Increases	Signing Bonuses	Online Recruitment System	New Social Media	Job Fairs	Promotional Print Materials	Outreach to Diverse Groups	Recruiters	Induction Programs	Mentoring or Coaching	E-Mentoring	Support for Diverse Groups	PD Opportunities	Admin Support	Improved Working Conditions
OH	x					x																x		
OK	x											x		x								x		
OR						x																		
Palau			x	x								x			x		x					x	x	x
PA			x		x		x							x	x			x	x	x		x	x	x
SC		x	x		x		x	x						x	x			x	x			x	x	
SD	x																		x	x		x		
TN	x	x	x	x		x						x										x	x	
UT	x			x	x							x	x	x								x	x	
VA	x	x	x		x		x	x		x	x			x	x	x	x		x			x	x	x
WA					x										x							x		
WV	x		x												x				x			x		
WI																		x	x			x		
WY			x		x			x			x											x		
Total	**21**	**9**	**16**	**3**	**15**	**17**	**11**	**8**	**1**	**3**	**5**	**12**	**5**	**19**	**15**	**9**	**12**	**5**	**16**	**6**	**4**	**35**	**14**	**5**