

# SPECIAL EDUCATION WORKFORCE *watch*

INSIGHTS FROM RESEARCH

## Special Education Administrators What Should Districts Know About New Candidates?

### IN THIS WATCH

Special education administrators—Do you know how they are prepared and licensed?

The number of vacancies and unfilled positions nationwide indicates that districts are experiencing a shortage of special education administrators. Further, it is estimated that more than 20 percent of district-based special education administrators are not fully certified.

The supply of special education administrators is insufficient to meet current needs. Fewer than one percent of all administration graduates with masters or doctoral degrees specialize in special education administration. Moreover, there are special challenges associated with recruiting individuals into special education administration programs. Because candidates tend to be older, have families, and are further along in their careers, entering a special education administration program can represent a significant financial and personal sacrifice.

If the trend continues, a significant number of special education administrator positions will remain unfilled in the coming years because there will not be enough qualified candidates to fill them. As districts look to fill vacant positions—special education director, supervisor, assistant supervisor—the emphasis will be on finding satisfactory candidates who meet district qualifications.

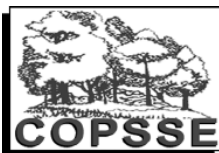
What should you know when determining the quality of applicants? Read on to find insights from the research.

### ***Do You Know the Type of Preparation the Administrator Received?***

Preparation programs for special education administrators first came on the scene in the 1960s, and many disappeared or were absorbed by educational administration programs during the 1970s. Today, only a small number of institutions of higher education offer advanced training in special education administration. Those that do typically:

- Require two to four courses in special education (e.g., legal principles, special education supervision), with only a handful of programs requiring upward of nine courses.
- Require two to six courses in educational administration and additional courses in research and content areas.
- Require an internship for candidates who are pursuing certification or an advanced degree in educational administration.

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There currently are no national standards for special education administrators. Course content varies from program to program; however, most preparation programs are linked to state certification requirements.

Although litigation remains a pri-

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Newly developed competencies will soon be used by the National Council of Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) to accredit special education administrator training programs. It will behoove school districts to understand the basis for the new standards—do they reflect unified systems of education, or do they reflect the existence of the dual systems of general and special education?

mary focus in most coursework, some administrator preparation programs are beginning to emphasize the integration of knowledge, skills, and dispositions from special education, general education, and educational administration. In addition, specific themes that reflect the changing roles of special education administrators in the context of school district reform are being introduced into some prepara-

tion programs. They include:

- Knowledge and skills related to culturally and linguistically diverse populations.

- Participation of students with disabilities in the general education curriculum.
- Collaboration and teaming.
- Alignment of curricular programs with state standards.

### Do You Know the Basis for the Administrator's Certification or Licensure?

States vary in how they define competencies and expectations for special education administrators. While some states have been quite rigorous in crafting their definitions, others have no definitions or guidelines.

As a result, states vary in how they license or certify special education administrators. Some states offer special education administrator endorsements—these are either in conjunction with the receipt of a general education administrative certificate or they are a separate endorsement altogether. The number of endorsements has grown over the years.

In recent years, some states have instituted alternative paths to certification and licensure. Such arrangements range from alternative programs in institutions of higher education to on-the-job training. Caution is warranted, as research is not available to document the efficacy of alternative

programs in delivering services to students with disabilities and in retaining special education personnel.

### For More Information

Information reported in this brief was based on the COPSSE issue brief, *Special Education Administration at a Crossroads: Availability, Licensure, and Preparation of Special Education Administrators*, by Carl Lashley and Mary Lynn Boscardin. This document can be found on the COPSSE web site at [www.copsse.org](http://www.copsse.org).



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#### About COPSSE

The Center on Personnel Studies in Special Education is funded by the Office of Special Education Programs of the U.S. Department of Education [cooperative agreement #H325Q000002]. COPSSE research is designed to inform scholars and policymakers about beginning teacher quality, effective initial preparation, and the effects of preparation alternatives. The Center is directed by Drs. Paul Sindelar and Mary Brownell. The policy briefs were produced by Warger, Eavy & Associates.

University of Florida, 300 Norman Hall,  
P.O. Box 117050, Gainesville, FL 32611  
352-392-0701 (X283), [www.copsse.org](http://www.copsse.org)



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