

Diversifying the Special Education Workforce

It Starts with Recruitment into Teacher Preparation Programs

Recruiting and retaining teachers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds continues to be a national concern. And, there is good reason for that concern. The number of teachers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds is declining, while demographics point to an increasingly diverse student population. Today, only 14 percent of special education teachers are from diverse backgrounds, compared to 38 percent of their students.

Supply is insufficient to accommodate the demand for a diverse teaching faculty. Only 14 percent of candidates in special education teacher preparation programs are from diverse backgrounds. Further, the vast majority of teacher preparation programs anticipate no change in the number of candidates from diverse backgrounds in their programs.

This trend is expected to continue well into the next decade unless something can be done to address the challenges faced by individuals from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds as they attempt to enter the special education workforce. And the effort to produce sufficient numbers of qualified candidates to fill shortages begins in special education teacher preparation programs.

Have you considered strategies that might increase recruitment and retention of individuals from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds in special education teacher preparation programs? Read on to gain insights from the research.

Have You Considered the Challenges Associated with Entering Teacher Education Programs?

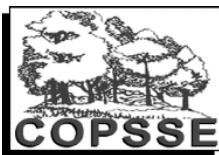
An understanding of the factors that act as deterrents to entering teacher education programs may provide insights into what might be done to help individuals from diverse backgrounds address challenges—both in pursuing higher education and in doing well once they are enrolled. Factors include:

- **Effects of poverty.** More than two-thirds of those living in poverty are from diverse backgrounds. Living in poverty can adversely affect one's education and preclude one's entry into a teacher education program. Schools in communities with high rates of poverty are more likely to experience shortages of qualified teachers, which can result in inadequate academic preparation of students.
- **Lack of financial assistance.** Higher tuition costs, coupled with fewer

IN THIS WATCH

Few students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds enter special education teacher preparation programs—Have you considered strategies to increase recruitment?

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available federal grants, have made a college education unaffordable for many students.

- **Test requirements.** With the exception of Asian Americans, students from diverse backgrounds generally tend to achieve lower scores on undergraduate and graduate entrance exams than their Caucasian counterparts. Further, many students from diverse backgrounds are screened from the profession by their scores on certification exams.

Many individuals from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are discouraged by family members and friends from selecting teaching as a career. The benefits of diversity have become appreciated by other professions that offer prospective candidates more perceived prestige and greater financial rewards.

WATCH THIS...

Forty percent of schools nationwide have no teachers from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds on their faculties.

Many individuals from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are discouraged by family members and friends from selecting teaching as a career. The benefits of diversity have become appreciated by other professions that offer prospective candidates more perceived prestige and greater financial rewards.

Have You Considered Recruitment and Retention Support Strategies?

The literature points to a number of strategies that have proven to be successful in recruiting and retaining students from diverse backgrounds to preparation programs. Consider these examples:

- **Initiate early opportunities to learn about teaching.** Recruit students early (e.g., high school) when their initial interest is strong.
- **Provide financial assistance.** Financial supports (e.g., fellowships, stipends, contingency funds) are helpful. So
- **Cultivate word-of-mouth recruitment techniques.** One-on-one interactions with prospective students can provide the best recruitment opportunities. Recruiting methods should be directed to students, graduates, and faculty from diverse backgrounds. Examples include campus visits for students and parents, a toll-free telephone number for questions, exposure to teacher preparation programs, media campaigns, speakers bureaus, published success stories, passes or tickets to college activities and resources, and promotion of campus features (e.g., organizations for diverse students).
- **Make test preparation courses available.** Instruction that focuses on test-taking skills has been used to increase recruitment and retention. Courses focused on preparation for college entrance exams and state teacher licensing exams have been successful in increasing exam pass rates.
- **Offer academic support.** In addition to a supportive campus and classroom environment, strategies used to assist students include study skills seminars, assistantships, student advising and tutorial programs, special labs, and test-taking workshops. Students also may benefit from programs that provide assessment and support in reading skills, writing skills, and English language proficiency.
- **Review materials and courses.** Textbooks, instructional materials, and syllabi should be free
- **Ensure role models.** A significant predictor of enrollment and graduation is the presence of faculty from diverse backgrounds. Similarly, mentor programs in which students from diverse backgrounds have the opportunity to study with professors who share a common interest, and cohort programs (i.e., being part of a group that proceeds through the program together) have been successful in retaining students.

For More Information

Information reported in this brief was based on the COPSSE research synthesis, *Diversifying the Special Education Workforce*, prepared by Naomi Tyler, Zina Yzquierdo, Norma-Lopez-Reyna, and Susan Saunders. This document can be found on the COPSSE web site at www.copsse.org.



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About COPSSE

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