

Diversifying the Special Education Workforce

District Recruitment and Retention Strategies

IN THIS WATCH

*H*ave you considered recruitment strategies to increase the diversity of the special education faculty in your district?

The number of teachers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds is declining in the schools, while demographics point to an increasingly diverse student population. Consider these facts:

- Today, only 14 percent of special education teachers are from culturally and linguistically diverse groups, compared to 38 percent of their students.
- African American males comprise only 0.4 percent of elementary special education teachers and 2.3 percent of secondary special education teachers.
- Forty percent of schools nationwide have no teachers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds on their faculties.

Supply is insufficient to accommodate the demands for a culturally and linguistically diverse teaching faculty. Only 14 percent of candidates in special education teacher preparation programs are from diverse backgrounds. The vast majority of institutions of higher education anticipate no change in the number of candidates from diverse backgrounds in their programs. Further, it is estimated that only three of every four graduates of special education preparation programs enter the workforce, with the number for

individuals from diverse backgrounds being lower than their White counterparts.

Attrition may or may not be a factor, as evidence is often contradictory. While generally teachers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds leave the profession at high rates—with estimates as high as 41 percent—some research suggests that more than 80 percent of special education teachers from diverse backgrounds plan on staying. Attrition tends to be higher in urban districts where conditions can be more challenging.

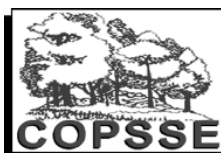
These trends are expected to continue well into the next decade. How can districts recruit and retain sufficient numbers of qualified special education teachers with diverse backgrounds? Read on to gain insights from the research.

Have You Considered Recruitment and Retention Support Strategies?

The literature points to a number of strategies that have proven successful in recruiting and retaining special education teachers from diverse backgrounds. Consider the following examples:

- **Provide incentives.** Low salary has been shown to be an important variable—both preventing teachers from

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diverse backgrounds from entering teaching and encouraging their decision to leave. As teacher shortages become more pronounced, districts are offering incentives to recruit teachers.

- **Improve working conditions.** Incentives may not be enough to keep teachers if working conditions are unpleasant. Work-related stress often arises with paperwork burdens, child behavior challenges, and limited opportunities for planning with colleagues.
- **Ensure administrative support.** Personal job satisfaction can have a positive effect on teachers' decisions to stay in the profession. Retention of faculty and staff members from diverse backgrounds is greater with the presence of leadership from similar backgrounds.
- **Provide support to new teachers.** Inadequate preparation and the fact that new hires often receive the most difficult teaching assignments contribute to the high attrition rate observed during the first years of teaching.

Have You Considered Alternative Certification? What You Should Know About It

One of the ways that some districts have responded to the need for teachers from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds is through alternative certification routes. The intent is to fill classrooms with *qualified* personnel and reduce the need for emergency certificates.

One of the most encouraging features of alternative certifica-

HAVE YOU CONSIDERED...

That Diversifying Your Teaching Faculty:

- Is the equitably correct thing to do?
- May result in fewer inappropriate referrals and placements of students from diverse backgrounds?
- May increase academic achievement for students from diverse backgrounds?
- Can provide closer links between the school, home, and community?
- Can enhance multicultural communication skills of all children?

tion programs is their apparent success in recruiting and certifying significantly larger percentages of candidates from diverse backgrounds. Overall, alternatively certified teachers represent about 10 percent of all newly certified teachers—yet it is estimated that about 40 percent of those individuals come from diverse backgrounds.

Several large urban districts that experience extreme shortages of certified teachers report success in recruiting and certifying individuals from diverse backgrounds via alternative certification programs. For example, the Los Angeles Unified School District prepares 96 percent of all the alternative certification teachers in California, which averages about 300 candidates annually. Approximately one third of those individuals come from diverse backgrounds, compared to 13 percent from the state university system.


Factors that may contribute to the attractiveness of alternative certification programs for candidates from diverse backgrounds include:

- Convenient location of programs.
- Financial aid provided to candidates.

- Infusion of practical methods, including intensive on-the-job supervision and mentoring.

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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