

## Exemplary Features of Special Education Teacher Preparation Programs

### IN THIS WATCH

Exemplary features of special education teacher preparation programs—  
Have you considered how you might enhance your program?

Teacher education programs play a significant role in producing qualified teachers. Positive correlations exist between teacher certification—a typical outcome of quality teacher education programs—and student achievement. Research has documented the presence of certain features in exemplary general education preparation programs.

But, what about exemplary features of special education teacher preparation programs? What do effective special education teacher programs look like?

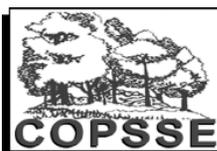
A framework based on the general education research was developed and used to analyze special education program elements. A thorough review of the special education personnel preparation literature base was undertaken to identify program features that matched those features cited as exemplary in the general education research base. Knowledge of these exemplary features may assist special education teacher education faculty in enhancing their preparation programs. Read on to gain insights from the research.

### **Have You Considered Effective Teacher Preparation Program Features?**

Teacher preparation is labor intensive in both special and general education. At its best, it is carefully crafted, focused on connecting theory and practice, collaborative, and invested in creating teachers who can respond to the needs of children and youth—particularly those with diverse needs. Special education teacher preparation programs share the following features with exemplary general education teacher education programs.

**Extensive, well-planned field experiences.** Teacher education candidates benefit from supervised opportunities to apply content and practice skills they have learned in their coursework. Collaboration between teacher preparation faculty and school personnel ensures high quality experiences. Teacher education programs tend to emphasize one to two practicum experiences and a semester- or year-long student teaching placement.

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**Collaboration across disciplines.** Teacher education is best when faculty work closely with colleagues in other disciplines (e.g., general education works with special education, content area works with teacher education) to integrate program content, plan coursework, co-teach courses, and work with teacher candidates in the field.

**Focus on diversity and inclusion.** In recent years, teacher preparation programs have emphasized coursework and field experiences that help teacher candidates develop skills and knowl-

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Although special education personnel preparation program elements vary, many were found to share features with exemplary general education programs.

edge about working with students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Attention also has been given to inclusive practices, although special education programs tend to emphasize this area more than their general educa-

tion colleagues.

**Routine assessments of candidates' learning.** Typically, assessments are based on well-articulated standards of practice and tend to make use of multiple evidence sources, as well as pre- and post-assessments.

**Well-articulated program orientation.** Exemplary general education teacher preparation programs espouse a theoretical orientation that underlies course content and experiences. Special education programs are less likely to have a strong programmatic vision or they blend different orientations in developing their programs (e.g., constructivist, positivist, blending of the two).

### Have You Considered Features of Exemplary General Education Preparation Programs Not Typically Found in Special Education Programs?

General education teacher preparation programs typically place a heavy emphasis on subject matter pedagogy and its interface with educational theory and field experience. This differentiates most general programs from special education teacher preparation programs, the latter of which tend to focus more on generic pedagogy (e.g., instructional methods, assessment, individualized education plans, and collaboration). However, there are exceptions. In a few programs, subject matter pedagogy is integrated with special education and classroom practice. In most of these cases, special education competencies are infused into subject specific pedagogical coursework or teaching courses in integrated blocks.

### For More Information

Information reported in this brief was based on the COPSSE research synthesis, *Critical Features of Special Education Teacher Preparation: A Comparison with General Education Teacher Education*, prepared by Mary T. Brownell, Dorene D. Ross, Elayne P. Colón, and Cynthia L. McCallum. This document can be found on the COPSSE web site at [www.copsse.org](http://www.copsse.org).



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#### About COPSSE

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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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