



SPECIAL EDUCATION RESOURCES

Special Education and Related Services Staffing Strategies: Attract/Prepare/Retain

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DPI's mission is to ensure that every child, regardless of zip code, has access to quality public education programs, enrichment opportunities, and special education opportunities, so that all our kids can be successful.

The key to quality education is a quality educator in every classroom.

The Challenge

- Forty-eight states and the District of Columbia currently report special education teacher shortages (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Tomas, 2016).*
- Certain populations of students are more disadvantaged by shortages— students in high-poverty urban schools, remote rural schools, and students with serious emotional and behavioral disorders (Albrecht, Johns, Mounstevan, & Oloranda, 2009; McClesky, Tyler, & Flippin, 2003).*
- Shortages are exacerbated by high rates of attrition of special education teachers found to be 2.5 times more likely to leave the profession as teachers in general education (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004).*
- Teachers who have received extensive preparation are more likely to use effective practices and to stay in their positions than are those who have minimal preparation. While teachers who have minimal preparation are more likely to leave than are their more extensively prepared peers and, therefore, might need intensive support.**
- New special educators are more likely than are experienced teachers to leave their jobs. Some estimates suggest that up to 50% of new teachers leave in the first several years.**
- Teachers who are assigned to jobs that match their training, experience, and preferences are more likely to stay.**
- Teachers need support as they begin to apply what they learned in pre-service programs in the real world of teaching and special education teachers need mentors who work in similar roles, grade levels, and content areas.**
- Special education teachers leave positions for three reasons:
 - Attrition: leave the field of education for non-education work (e.g., change careers, stay home with children, retire from profession)
 - Transfers: transfer from special education to general education positions
 - Migration: move to another special education position**

Attract Solutions

- When hiring, cast a wide net by advertising in local newspapers, radio, and television; participating in job fairs; utilizing teacher Websites and national publications (e.g., CEC); using technology (e.g., social media sites, virtual job fairs, electronic bulletin boards); or hiring an external recruiter.
- When hiring, reach out to institutes of higher education (IHEs) representing educators of color.

- When hiring, recruit the candidates with the most potential: experience with children, individuals with disabilities, in schools and as paraprofessionals.
- Connect with IHEs to accept student placements for practicum, clinical, student teaching, and internships requirements.
- Provide incentives, such as stipends, for experienced educators to accept student placements for practicum, clinical, student teaching, and interns.
- Connect with local technical colleges to recruit current students or recent associate degree graduates interested in being educational assistants or interested in short-term substitute jobs.
- Leverage the License with Stipulations¹ for interested individuals holding a bachelor's degree.
- Leverage the [Wisconsin Improvement Program \(WIP\)](#) to recruit interns for hard to fill positions.
- Offer paid release time to pursue licensure or other professional development (e.g., attend classes, meet with a mentor or coach, attend just-in-time professional learning opportunities).
- Provide financial incentives by reviewing and strengthening compensation scale; offering signing bonuses; granting salary advancements to cover tuition costs accrued prior to initial pay period.
- Provide financial incentives by offering scholarships and loan forgiveness; paying for tuition for coursework or degree completion; paying for expenses related to pathway to licensure (e.g., CCCs for speech/language pathologists) and offering housing assistance.
- Leverage attractive school or work calendar (summers off); highlight attractive benefits and opportunities for induction, mentoring and professional learning, including release time.
- Leverage community engagement through relocation reimbursement, housing assistance, and other community perks.
- Reduce class sizes, caseloads, and workload for new teachers.
- Establish middle and high school student opportunities to work with students with IEPs; (e.g., youth programs, Special Olympics; Best Buddies, etc.)
- Partner with IHEs and community organizations to develop a Grow Your Own (GYO) program.
- Establish a tuition free agreement for those pursuing a teaching degree or adding certification.
- Create a teacher residency program.
- Establish a local chapter of [Educators Rising](#)

Prepare Solutions:

- Match new and Tier 1 licensed teachers with a mentor within the same certification area and offer paid release time to further coursework or other professional development (e.g., attend classes, meet with a mentor or coach, attend just-in-time professional learning opportunities).
- For new and Tier 1 licensed teachers of color provide opportunities to network and collaborate with other educators of color; utilize virtual opportunities as needed.
- Leverage [Wisconsin's Educator Effectiveness](#) to support and develop Tier 1 licensed teachers.
- Use virtual supports, such as e-mentoring, video-based coaching and/or PLCs, to deliver job-embedded professional development.
- Provide release time for new and Tier 1 licensed teachers to observe and collaborate with veteran special education experienced with diverse learners.
- Provide practicum or clinical students, student teachers and interns with strong supervising teachers with exemplary practices and attitudes in supporting SWDs.
- Explore [Wisconsin's pathways](#) to gain full licensure.
- Provide teacher induction to assist new and Tier 1 licensed teachers
 - [Mentor Handbook: Supporting Beginning Special Education Teachers](#)
 - [District Induction Manual: Supporting Beginning Special Education Teachers](#)
- Leverage [Wisconsin's Educator Effectiveness](#) to support teacher development and create a “Just in Time Learning Plan” with opportunities differentiated based on the needs of the special educator. Resources include:
 - [DPI Comprehensive Evaluation](#)
 - [DPI College and Career Ready IEPs](#)
 - [DPI Monitoring Progress of IEP Goals](#)
 - [IRIS Center Resources and Modules](#)
 - [High-Leverage Practices in Special Education](#)
 - [Introducing High-Leverage Practices in Special Education: A Professional Development Guide for School Leaders](#)
 - [Explicit Instruction Modules 5-8](#)

Retain Solutions

- Once hired, ensure a good job match with the educator’s skills and strengths, provide a job description, and outline clear job roles and responsibilities.
- Consider the six elements (direct student services; evaluations; IEPs: preparation time; indirect services; directing paraprofessionals; consultation with general education and other assignments) of a special educator’s workload rather than number of students when determining caseloads.

- Minimize non-teaching responsibilities and other duties to offer manageable workloads for new and Tier 1 licensed teachers.
- Ensure appropriate teaching conditions by providing the necessary materials, technology, etc. to meet the needs of students with IEPs.
- Establish clear lines of supervision (between Director of SE/PS and principal) and administrative support; ensure that those supervising and evaluating are professionally trained to build capacity to meet the needs of students with IEPs.
- Provide financial incentives by paying for tuition for coursework or degree completion; paying for expenses related to pathway to licensure (e.g., CCCs for speech/language pathologists) and ongoing professional development.
- Offer paid release time to further coursework or other professional development (e.g., attend classes, collaborate with jobs alike, attend just-in-time professional learning opportunities).
- Use virtual supports, such as e-mentoring, video-based coaching, online cohorts, to deliver job-embedded professional development.
- Include special educators in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs).
- Provide release time for special educators to observe and collaborate with other special education experienced with diverse learners.
- For special educators of color, provide opportunities to network and collaborate with other educators of color; utilize virtual opportunities as needed.
- Provide teacher induction to assist new and Tier 1 licensed teachers
 - [Mentor Handbook: Supporting Beginning Special Education Teachers](#)
 - [District Induction Manual: Supporting Beginning Special Education Teachers](#)
- Leverage [Wisconsin's Educator Effectiveness](#) to support teacher development. Offer and differentiate professional learning throughout teachers' careers (i.e., lifelong learning).
- Leverage [Wisconsin's Educator Effectiveness](#) and align educator evaluation with the knowledge and skills to establish and maintain inclusive classrooms.
- Establish a positive, welcoming, and collaborative school climate. Hire effective principals and assistant principals with demonstrated capacity to establish and maintain inclusive buildings and classrooms.
- Provide opportunities for leader and administrator candidates to gain experience in special education and in supporting SWDs.
- Align leader evaluation systems with the knowledge and skills to establish and maintain inclusive buildings and classrooms.
- Provide professional learning and support to leaders on how to provide high-quality instructional coaching in High Leverage Practices (HLPs) and Evidence Based Practices (EBPs): [Introducing High-Leverage Practices in Special Education: A Professional Development Guide for School Leaders](#)

For more information: [Attract Strategies Role Guide](#) and [Strategies Funding Guide](#)

The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) and the [CEEDAR Center](#) collaborated with national partners and practitioners to produce a free 12-part webinar series focused on evidence-based strategies to strengthen and diversify the special education workforce. From supporting new educators to implementing inclusive leadership plans, you'll walk away with evidence-based strategies you can actually use and put into practice to start combatting special educator shortages in your states, schools, districts, and educator preparation programs. For more information and registration go to the [CEC Combatting Shortages of Educator Serving Students with Disabilities webpage](#).

**Preparing and Retaining Effective Special Education Teachers: Short-Term Strategies for Long-Term Solutions: A Policy Brief.* Prepared by: The CEEDAR Center & The Center on Great Teachers and Leaders

***The IRIS Center. (2013). Teacher retention: Reducing the attrition of special educators.* Retrieved from <https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/tchr-ret/>



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