



Recruiting and Retaining Special Education Teachers—A Resource Brief

This brief is part of [a seven-part series](#) on challenges related to recruiting and retaining teachers from underrepresented backgrounds or with certain certifications. This series was developed as part of the R9CC Teacher Recruitment, Retention, and Recognition project with Illinois.

Tackling the Special Education Teacher Shortage

Attracting and retaining excellent educators is one of the most important drivers of a well-functioning education system—a system that must prepare diverse students with complex needs to participate in today’s knowledge-driven economy. However, a recent surge in the demand for teachers, alongside a diminishing supply and a steady rate of teachers leaving the profession, threatens students’ academic and economic welfare.¹ Teacher turnover adversely impacts student achievement, school finances, and school improvement efforts.² Specific, targeted supports can help recruit and retain teachers in your district.

Special education teachers ensure equitable access to education for 7.2 million public school students with disabilities.³ According to the January 2022 results of the National Center for Education Statistics school survey, 45% of responding schools reported that special education was identified as the teaching area with the most vacancies.⁴

This brief provides resources that highlight examples of strategies, programs, and initiatives that help states, local education agencies, and school districts address the shortage of certified special education teachers. This brief also includes general resources related to recruiting, retaining, and supporting teachers.

Highlighted Resources

This section highlights examples of strategies, programs, and initiatives that help states, local education agencies, and school districts address the shortage of certified special education teachers.

Title	Summary
Educator shortages in special education: A toolkit for developing local strategies (2019)	<p>This toolkit is organized around the guiding principle that short-term strategies to meet immediate demand must be intentionally paired with long-term, systemic strategies to attract, prepare, and retain effective special education teachers to create comprehensive shortage solutions. The toolkit is a collaboration between the Center on Great Teachers and Leaders (GTL Center) at AIR and the CEEDAR Center.</p>
Short-term strategies for dealing with shortages of special education teachers (2020)	<p>Research has demonstrated that special education teachers who have gone through a full preparation program are more likely to provide effective instruction, increase student achievement, and remain in the classroom. This brief from the CEEDAR Center and the GTL Center at AIR outlines short-term strategies that, when paired with long-term comprehensive strategies, can be employed to hire, prepare, and support teachers in schools and districts facing special education teacher shortage crises.</p>
Leverage points to enhance state and local efforts to attract, prepare, and retain effective personnel for children with disabilities (2020)	<p>This resource from the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Special Education Programs is meant to serve as an overview and starting point for stakeholder groups as they consider and craft effective solutions to attract, prepare, and retain special education educators. Each leverage brief contains a general description and in-depth overview of the strategy; research findings related to the strategy’s success; exemplars that have successfully implemented the strategy; a list of critical components for success with steps to consider before implementation (setting the stage), during initial implementation, and afterward (continuous improvement and leveraging lessons learned); considerations for related service providers and early childhood educators; and a stakeholder spotlight that provides information on a group that may not always be considered during implementation. It is also meant to inspire the forming of community partnerships and challenge the status quo through innovative thinking.</p>
Solving the teacher shortage: How to attract and retain excellent educators (2016)	<p>This Learning Policy Institute report describes several policies that have the potential to improve the recruitment and retention of excellent educators, including teachers in hard-to-staff schools; it offers a set of recommendations, informed by a review of the factors influencing</p>

Title	Summary
	<p>teachers’ decisions to enter and exit the workforce, as well as research on existing efforts to address these causes. The recommendations are broken down into five categories: salaries and other compensation, preparation and costs to entry, hiring and personnel management, induction and support for new teachers, and working conditions (including school leadership, professional collaboration, shared decision-making, accountability systems, and resources for teaching and learning).</p>
<p>A framework for change: Investing ESSER funds to prepare and support teachers of students with disabilities (2022)</p>	<p>This resource brief provides an overview of strategies for preparing and developing highly qualified general and special education teachers, and how states and districts can invest Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds to address the current shortage and growing need for educators to support students with disabilities. This brief shares challenges and outlines recommended strategies and actions for states, districts, and educator preparation programs.</p>

Additional Resources

Teacher recruitment and retention is a challenge across teacher subgroups. These resources offer a more general overview of strategies to combat the teacher shortage.

CEEDAR Center and Center on Great Teachers and Leaders at the American Institutes for Research (AIR). (n.d.) *Preparing and retaining effective special education teachers: Short-term strategies for long-term solutions*. <https://cedar.education.ufl.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/CEEDAR-GTL-Shortages-Brief.pdf>

Center on Great Teachers and Leaders at AIR: <https://gtlcenter.org/>

Duncan, E. (2022). *Addressing teacher shortages in the short and long term: What states and districts can do*. Education Trust. <https://edtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Addressing-Teacher-Shortages-in-the-Short-and-Long-Term-May-2022.pdf>

Konoske-Graf, A., Partelow, L., & Benner, M. (2016). *To attract great teachers, school districts must improve their human capital systems*. Center for American Progress. <https://americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/HumanCapitalSurvey-report.pdf>

Podolsky, A., Kini, T., Bishop, J., & Darling-Hammond, L. (2016). *Solving the teacher shortage: How to attract and retain excellent educators*. Learning Policy Institute.

https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Solving_Teacher_Shortage_Attract_Retain_Educators_REPORT.pdf

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). (n.d.). Ideas that work: Attract, prepare, retain resource database.

<https://osepideasthatwork.org/federal-resources-stakeholders/topical-issues/attract-prepare-retain-resource-database>

Other Briefs

This section includes links to other briefs in the series.

[Bilingual Teachers](#)

[New Teachers](#)

[Rural Teachers](#)

[STEM Teachers](#)

[Teachers in Low-income and Low-performing Schools](#)

[Teachers of Color](#)

Endnotes

¹ Sutchter, L., Darling-Hammond, L., & Carver-Thomas, D. (2016). *A coming crisis in teaching? Teacher supply, demand, and shortages in the U.S.* Learning Policy Institute.

² Podolsky, A., Kini, T., Bishop, J., & Darling-Hammond, L. (2016). *Solving the teacher shortage: How to attract and retain excellent educators*. Learning Policy Institute.

³ National Center for Education Statistics. (2022). Students with disabilities. *Condition of education*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cgg>

⁴ <https://ies.ed.gov/schoolsurvey/>