

Issue Brief: Teacher Qualifications, Recruitment & Retention March 2024

Guiding Questions:

1. What are the knowledge, skills, and expertise that general and special educators need to effectively teach all students, including students with disabilities?
2. How can educator preparation programs and licensure requirements for certification and recertification be better aligned to these knowledge, skills, and expertise? What is the role of Higher Education vs. LEAs in developing the required knowledge, skills, and expertise?
3. What short- and long-term strategies will enhance supply and encourage retention of general and special educators?

Background

Teachers are the most important factor affecting student outcomes—with some estimates of their effect two to three times higher than any other in-school factor.¹ For Maryland’s students with disabilities, 72% of whom spend 80% or more of each school day in general education classrooms (LRE A),² teacher quality among both general and special educators matters.

Defining the knowledge and skills necessary for general and special educators to increase the use of evidence-based best practices will also positively impact those subsets of students with disabilities that have low and stagnant rates of inclusion in general education environments—e.g., intellectual disabilities (18%), multiple disabilities (41%), autism (44%), and emotional disability (52%), and who take the alternate assessment (3%).³

Knowledge, Skills & Expertise

In 2023, an overhaul of Maryland’s regulations related to Educator Preparation Programs and Educator Licensure Requirements was approved.⁴ The revised COMAR 13A.07.06 *Programs for Professionally Licensed Personnel* includes a list of teacher competencies required to exit an educator preparation program. This list might be reviewed to ensure that it encompasses the knowledge, skills, and expertise needed for educators to effectively teach students with disabilities.

¹ Heubeck, E. (2023, Apr. 26). [Two-thirds of teachers say schools are falling short for struggling learners](#) *EdWeek*.

² See 2021-2022 IDEA Section 618 Data, Part B Child Count & Educational Environments, [Table 13](#).

³ A significant factor is MD’s historic reliance on separate schools for SWD with a consistently state ranking of 3rd/4th for rate of SWD educated in separate schools. The most recent percentage is 6.1%, trailing only DC (7.4%), CT (6.8%), and NJ (6.2%). See [44th Annual Report to Congress on Implementation of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2022](#), Ex. 62, p. 144.

⁴ [Summary of the Repeal and Replacement of COMAR 13A.12.01-.07 Educator Licensure and COMAR 13A.07.06 Programs for Professionally Licensed Personnel](#). (Dec. 5, 2023).

Research points to the need for general education teachers to be prepared for the expected diversity and variability in their classrooms and to utilize evidence-based practices including the principles and guidelines of **Universal Design for Learning (UDL)** and **Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)**, as well as the use of **assessments** and **progress monitoring data** to make decisions, **adaptation of curriculum**, and effective **multi-directional communication**.⁵

Special education teachers must be prepared to work collaboratively with general education teachers to **support evidence-based instructional practices**, **differentiation** in the general education classroom, and **modification of instructional materials and curriculum** for students with significant cognitive disability. Such support requires **knowledge of grade-level content** in core subjects.⁶

Culturally responsive teaching that reflects knowledge about and understanding of disability including the social and cultural models of disability is important for both general and special educators.⁷ And to share responsibility for all students educators need preparation for **co-planning and well-implemented models of co-teaching**.⁸

Discussion Question: What are the knowledge, skills, and expertise that general and special educators need to effectively teach all students, including students with disabilities?

Educator Preparation Programs & Licensure

Maryland currently has more than 300 traditional educator preparation programs (EPPs) at 22 institutions of higher education and 11 alternative EPPs in four LEAs (Anne Arundel, Prince George's, and Montgomery counties, and Baltimore City).⁹ Here are details on [Maryland certification types](#) and [certification areas](#), including the three age levels of special education certification and three areas of special education specialization. Consideration of whether these certification types and areas are best suited to the effective teaching of all students, including students with disabilities, may be worthwhile.

The recent COMAR revisions mentioned above present an opportunity for MSDE to conduct detailed reviews of traditional and alternative preparation programs, and re/certification requirements, and ensure alignment with the needed competencies. The [MSDE Strategic Plan](#) also calls for increasing the rigor of educator preparation programs and supporting Grow Your Own programs—more opportunities to consider how to better prepare educators to teach students with disabilities.

⁵ Byrd, D. R. & Alexander, M. (2020). Investigating special education teachers' knowledge and skills: Preparing general teacher preparation for professional development. *Journal of Pedagogical Research* 4(2), 72-82.

⁶ NCTQ, (2020). [Special Education Preparation Policy: Content Knowledge](#). Maryland does not meet this goal.

⁷ Thurber, A., & Bandy, J. (2018). [Creating Accessible Learning Environments](#). Vanderbilt Univ. Center for Teaching.

⁸ High-Leverage Practices for Students with Disabilities, [Co-Teaching](#).

⁹ [Teacher Preparation and Program Approval](#) has lists of current approved programs.

The development of a **unitary system** for preparing new general and special educators to effectively teach all students has been proposed in the past. This recommendation was made in 2003 by the Special Education Leadership Project at the Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council, calling for “a unified system that encourages cross-training and general educator responsibility education agencies for the success of all students.”¹⁰ Another approach toward the same end is the recently launched graduate certificate program at the University of Maryland, College of Education—[Special Education for General Education Teachers in Inclusive Classrooms Graduate Certificate](#).

Discussion Questions: How can educator preparation programs and licensure requirements for certification and recertification be better aligned to these knowledge, skills, and expertise? What is the role of Higher Education vs. LEAs in developing the required knowledge, skills, and expertise?

Staffing Shortages: Encouraging Recruitment and Retention

Teacher shortages have been a growing crisis for years with declining enrollment in traditional teacher preparation programs and steady (and slightly growing) rates of teacher attrition. Special educator vacancies are disproportional to overall vacancies.¹¹ Maryland also has persistently high shortages of highly qualified (i.e., fully certified) special education teachers.¹² Recent data reviewed at the February 2024 meeting of the Professional Standards and Teacher Education Board indicates that 21% of conditionally certified Maryland teachers are special educators (1,135 of 5,304)¹³ and that about 25% of educators in Maryland’s nonpublic special education schools are conditionally certified. Recent efforts to address teacher shortages include the Maryland Educator Shortage Act of 2023¹⁴ and the Blueprint’s focus on *High Quality and Diverse Teachers and Leaders*.¹⁵

¹⁰ Special Education Leadership Project, [Inclusive Education in Maryland: A Blueprint for Change](#) (2003).

¹¹ In July 2022, 3.2% vacancy rate for teaching positions statewide (1,922). While students with disabilities are about 12% of all students, special educator positions are about one-quarter of these vacancies (447) See Maryland’s Teacher Workforce: Supply, Demand, and Diversity, presented to MSBE, July 26, 2022, slide 15, <https://www.marylandpublicschools.org/stateboard/Documents/2022/0726/TabGBlueprintAndDataDeepDiveTeacherPipelineAndDiversity.pdf>

¹² Peyton, D. J., Acosta, K., et al. (2021). Special education teacher shortage: Differences between high and low shortage states. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, 44(1), pp. 5-23.

¹³ This data was discussed at the [February 8, 2024, meeting of PSTEB](#).

¹⁴ This legislation allows more undergraduate/graduate students to qualify and target their service to high needs schools, or in grade levels or content areas with shortages and (2) a 6-year pilot program for teacher development and retention that will incentivize a cohort of students with stipends.

¹⁵ Pillar II calls for recruitment and support of high-quality and diverse teachers to meet workforce needs, increasing rigor of teacher preparation programs and licensure requirements, implementing comprehensive in-service-educator training, and establishing new statewide educator career ladder and professional development system.

Addressing these shortages will require a multi-faceted approach. Well-prepared, effective teachers are more likely to stay in the classroom.¹⁶ Some short- and long-term strategies that could enhance supply and foster retention include, for example:

Short term:

- incentives for teachers to enter special education
- incentives for the large number of special education certified teachers who are teaching in general education to teach special education
- “incentives for general education teachers to add special education licensure”
- “intensive induction experiences for those with expedited preparation”

Long term:

- “high quality induction and mentoring policies and programs”
- “professional learning for general and special education teachers in collaborative design and implementing instruction.”¹⁷

The impact of working conditions must also be considered, including a serious look at how high caseloads/workloads impact special educators and related service providers. Pupil-teacher ratio for both general education instruction and special education instruction should also be reviewed. Finally, overwhelming paperwork is often cited by educators as a burden impacting their ability to directly serve students and hurting retention. The challenge is how to reduce these demands while ensuring accountability, meeting all federal reporting requirements, and without negatively impacting student outcomes.

Discussion Question: What short- and long-term strategies will enhance supply and encourage retention of general and special educators?

Resources/Optional Reading

- [Recommendations related to Teacher Quality](#) from workgroups, task forces and commissions in Maryland, 2002–2019.
- Recent special education reform efforts in other states include recommendations regarding what teachers need to know to meet the needs of students with disabilities in, for example, California, Ohio, and Virginia.
 - CA Department of Education. (2021). [ONE SYSTEM: Reforming Education to Serve ALL Students, Report of California’s Statewide Task Force Report \(Five Years Later\)](#), Educator Prep. & Professional Learning, pp. 10-13.
 - Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission, (2020). [K-12 Special Education in Virginia: Report to the Governor and the General Assembly of Virginia](#),

¹⁶ CEEDAR Center, (Oct. 2016). [Teacher Shortages: Meeting the Demand Without Sacrificing Quality Preparation and Support](#).

¹⁷ See other examples here: CEEDAR Center. [Preparing and Retaining Effective Special Education Teachers: Short-Term Strategies for Long Term Solutions](#).

Recommendation 15 (teacher preparation) and Recommendation 16 (license renewal), pp. ix-x.

- Ohio Department of Education, [Each Child Means Each Child: Ohio's Plan to Improve Learning Experiences and Outcomes for Students with Disabilities](#), (2021 Focus B. Professional Learning, pp. 27-28.)

- Collaboration for Effective Educator Development, Accountability, and Reform Center ([CEEDAR Center](#))

The CEEDAR Center is an OSEP-funded technical assistance center focused on helping “State Education Agencies (SEAs), Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs), and Local Education Agencies (LEAs) create aligned professional learning systems that provide teachers and leaders effective opportunities to learn how to improve core and specialized instruction in inclusive settings that enable students with disabilities to achieve college and career ready standards.”¹⁸

CEEDAR can provide assistance to state agencies, teacher educators, and educator preparation programs to develop courses and programs that train general and special education teachers in the use of High Leverage Practices (HLPs) and Evidence Based Practices (EBPs) that are critical for developing a more integrated view of inclusive instruction for students with and without disabilities.

- Brownell, M. T., Holdheide, L., Kamman, M. L., & McCray, E. D. (2021). [Systemic support for special education: Making it a more integral part of general teacher preparation](#), *American Educator*, 44(4).

Discusses the work of the CEEDAR Center, specifically the *Content of the Reform* that they help states develop and the *Process of Improvement* that they promote.

Excerpts: “To become effective teachers, candidates need access to extended, high-quality, deliberate practice opportunities in which they can learn to use instructional strategies that have been demonstrated effective in improving student outcomes. It is only through high-quality opportunities to practice research-based instructional skills, in preparation programs and throughout their careers, that general and special education teachers can learn to implement strategies in ways that are responsive to how students with and without disabilities learn. To help states develop these high-quality practice opportunities, we develop research-based resources that assist preparation programs and state education agencies in ensuring that their programs and policies, respectively, address the instructional practices pre-service and in-service teachers should learn and provide effective opportunities to learn them.”

“Efforts to improve the content of teacher education and induction programs are not easy given the historic differences between general and special education regarding philosophical underpinnings of instruction. For instance, general education teacher educators often privilege student-led instruction in their coursework. In this instruction, students’ interests, questions, and ideas play a prominent role. Teachers are facilitators of student-to-student conversations.

¹⁸ <https://cedar.education.ufl.edu/cedar-technical-assistance/>

In special education, however, teacher educators promote teacher-led, explicit instruction that gives students multiple opportunities to practice concepts, strategies, and skills with repeated feedback. Navigating these differences has been challenging. State departments of education, colleges of education, and school districts are different organizationally and culturally. Further, people working within these organizations have different roles and responsibilities. These differences can present barriers to establishing a professional learning system, one where policy and practice are mutually reinforcing. Thus, we embrace a systemic approach that emphasizes collaboration and alignment of efforts to reforming teacher education and induction.”

Professional Learning:

- Darling-Hammond, L., Hyler, M. E., Gardner, M. (2017). [*Effective Teacher Professional Development*](#). Learning Policy Institute.
- Hill, H. C. & Papay, J. P. (2022). [*Building Better PL: How to Strengthen Teacher Learning*](#). Research Partnership for Professional Learning.

Staff Shortages:

- The CEEDAR Center. [*Preparing and Retaining Effective Special Education Teachers: Short-Term Strategies for Long Term Solutions*](#).