



# Leverage Points to Enhance State and Local Efforts to Attract, Prepare, and Retain Effective Personnel for Children With Disabilities

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## OSEP's Initiative on Attracting, Preparing and Retaining Effective Personnel for Children With Disabilities

The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) has a longstanding commitment to ensuring personnel serving infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities have the necessary skills to improve outcomes. This commitment includes investments in personnel preparation through multiple discretionary grants (e.g., 325K, 325D) with institutions of higher education (IHE) and with States (e.g., State Personnel Development and Retention Grants). Additionally, through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), State and local education agencies (SEA; LEA) have the opportunity to invest in ongoing professional learning to meet the needs of children with disabilities. Despite this pledge, the nation faces a critical shortage of educators, with more than 300,000 teachers leaving the profession each year. As a result, over the last two years, OSEP led **an initiative on Attracting, Preparing, and Retaining Effective Personnel for Children With Disabilities** with the purpose of identifying innovative strategies that can be leveraged to mitigate broader issues impacting shortages.

Throughout the initiative, OSEP emphasized the importance of developing and strengthening the **special education workforce pipeline to address the symptom of shortages**. This pipeline includes attracting diverse personnel to pursue careers in early intervention, special education, and related service professions; effectively preparing all personnel to ensure children with disabilities achieve school and life success; and retaining educators who are equipped to meet the unique needs of children with disabilities. A key takeaway from the initiative is—**ensuring an effective pipeline maintains an effective workforce**.

OSEP's Attract, Prepare, Retain Initiative incorporated (a) multiple dissemination events to highlight and share research and practitioner perspectives on how to build an effective special education workforce pipeline; (b) multiple opportunities for the field to provide feedback and contribute to and enhance the ongoing conversations; (c) identification and confirmation of leverage points to attract, prepare, and retain personnel; and (d) products and resources to inform future efforts.

### Not Just a Special Education Issue

Children with disabilities are provided special education and related services across educational settings. From early intervention to post-secondary transition, many children with disabilities are educated alongside their nondisabled peers for the majority of their school day. Essentially, all personnel have a responsibility to educate children with disabilities—not just special educators. Therefore, general educators, school and LEA leaders, community members (including local school boards), and parents and families all play a role in strengthening the pipeline to ensure successful outcomes of children with disabilities.

### Dissemination Events

- A [three-part virtual symposia series](#) (one symposium each on the topics of attract, prepare, and retain) in 2019
- [Attract, Prepare, Retain: The OSEP National Summit on Improving Effective Personnel for Children with Disabilities](#) (virtual panel presentations) in 2020

### Feedback Opportunities

- Two in-person focus groups with Parts B and C stakeholder audiences at the 2019 OSEP Leadership Conference
- An online survey series targeted at OSEP Part D stakeholders, including

- 2019 OSEP Leadership Conference attendees;
- 2019 State Teachers of the Year;
- Visitors to the [osepideasthatwork.org](http://osepideasthatwork.org) website; and
- Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) and National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) members.

### **Leverage Point Identification and Refinement**

- Identification of **13 Leverage Points** covering strategies recognized by various stakeholders as essential to addressing critical shortages in the special education workforce
- To further refine the leverage points, OSEP held six virtual focus groups with 73 professionals representing a range of perspectives:
  - Researchers
  - Teacher educators
  - Practicing teachers
  - SEA and LEA leaders
  - Early Childhood personnel
  - Related Service providers
- OSEP also held three individual interviews with personnel with unique perspectives on attraction, preparation, and retention:
  - a local special education director in a rural western State
  - a district recruiter in a small midwestern city facing continuing population declines
  - an associate professor whose research career has spanned attraction, preparation, and retention over the past decade

### **Culminating Resources**

- A website page devoted to the [Attract, Prepare, Retain Initiative](#) that houses:
  - An archive of the 2020 National Summit
  - An archive of the 2019 OSEP Symposia Series
  - A collection of video vignettes offering the perspectives of educators and related service providers across the country
  - A [resource repository](#) of Federal center and organization, State-specific, and other organization resources devoted to attracting, preparing, and retaining personnel
- **This resource represents the culmination of the effort and highlights 13 leverage points in the form of “Leverage Briefs.”**

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## **Attraction, Preparation, and Retention: A Pressing Priority**

Critical shortages in education are occurring nationwide. These shortages are more common in special education (early childhood and K–12) and related services than in general education (National Coalition on Personnel Shortages in Special Education and Related Services, 2014;

Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016). Further, personnel of color are facing higher rates of attrition than white teachers, and many cite poor preparation as a primary factor (Dixon, Griffin, & Teoh, 2019; Gasman, 2013). The impacts of these shortages correlate with negative outcomes among our nation’s infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities (CEEDAR Center and GTL Center, 2020). As a result, a comprehensive and equitable approach to addressing these shortages is needed. Further, the approach must involve stakeholders to ensure it is not perceived as “top-down.” All stakeholders play an essential role in crafting effective solutions.

Given historical and current crises in retaining effective personnel, the problem of shortages may seem intractable. However, OSEP’s Attract, Prepare, Retain Initiative revealed a number of strategies (see Table 1) across the areas of attraction, preparation, and retention that, when leveraged together, result in more effective personnel who remain in their positions. These strategies have a symbiotic relationship: A weakness in one or more results in negative outcomes for the others. Essentially, the strategies outlined in the Leverage Briefs are not meant to be comprehensive and should not be isolated or pursued exclusively. But, the strategies should be considered as additional considerations for ongoing efforts. No individual strategy, no matter how well implemented, can by itself fix the critical shortages that communities face. **To ultimately strengthen the special education workforce, attraction, preparation, and retention should be viewed as parts of a larger whole—not just as individual parts.**

**Table 1. Strategies Highlighted in the Leverage Briefs**

Attract	Prepare	Retain
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alternative Routes to Certification</li> <li>• Changing Public Perception</li> <li>• Funding and Loan Forgiveness</li> <li>• Grow Your Own Programs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Micro-credentials</li> <li>• Practice-Based Opportunities</li> <li>• Residencies</li> <li>• Simulations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhancing Professional Leadership</li> <li>• Induction and Mentorship</li> <li>• Ongoing Professional Learning</li> <li>• Educator Empowerment</li> <li>• Supportive Workplace Environments</li> </ul>

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## An Overview of the Leverage Briefs

This series of briefs is not intended as an exhaustive resource and does not encompass all strategies that exist to attract, prepare, and retain personnel. Nor were featured strategies subject to any systematic review processes to evaluate their rigor or effectiveness. There is already a large extant body of work evaluating the approaches, and indeed many contributors to this body of work are referenced throughout the series. The series is meant to serve as an overview and starting point for stakeholder groups as they consider and craft effective solutions tailored to their communities.

Each leverage brief contains the following:

- A general description of the strategy
- A more in-depth overview of the strategy
- Research findings related to the success of the strategy
- Exemplars that have successfully implemented the strategy

- A Critical Components for Success list outlining steps to consider before implementation (Setting the Stage), during implementation (Initial Start-Up), and after implementation (Continuous Improvement and Leveraging Lessons Learned)
- Considerations for related service providers and early childhood educators
- A Stakeholder Spotlight that provides information on a stakeholder group that may not always be considered during implementation

#### Educator Shortages in Special Education Toolkit

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. This toolkit was created in collaboration between the GTL Center and CEEDAR Center to support States and districts in identifying short- and long-term evidence-based strategies for addressing teacher shortages in special education within their localities. The [facilitation guide](#) included in the toolkit provides a helpful starting point.

Some but not all of the leverage briefs include these features:

- A Resource Spotlight for particularly effective resources related to the strategy
- A description of how the strategy is part of a comprehensive approach

### Key Terms

Throughout the leverage briefs, the following terms are used:

- **Personnel** refers to classroom teachers (general and special education), related service providers, early childhood educators (general and special education), early interventionists, and other personnel filling professional roles in schools.
- **School leader** or **program-based leader** is used to refer to building principals, assistant principals, teacher leaders, instructional coaches, department chairs, and program leads.
- **Local education agency (LEA) leader** is used to refer to any personnel with decision-making authority at a level higher than the school level (e.g., superintendents, assistant superintendents, program department directors).

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## Additional Context and Considerations

Many of the strategies presented in the briefs are not new. Several have existed in different forms or have been applied in different fields for decades. For example, alternative certification has been used as a method for attracting personnel since the early 1980s. Grow your own programs and funding and loan forgiveness programs have been used successfully in health care fields that have historically faced shortages in rural areas. Likewise, practice-based opportunities were used in health care as well as in the military before being embraced more recently by education. The goal of the briefs is to provide guidance and ideas for strengthening existing attraction, preparation, and retention efforts and to increase the use of effective strategies that are not currently being employed in locations experiencing critical shortages.

While many of the strategies have a history of use, none should be dismissed as outdated. Many have been applied in different ways, and some have been more effective than others. Further, exactly replicating earlier implementations may not work. Solutions should be carefully tailored to the community or communities for which they are intended. Note that in the Research Findings section, each brief presents critical findings related to implementation. In the Exemplars section, each offers success stories and mentions barriers overcome during practical application. And in the Critical



Components for Success section, each includes ideas for maintaining and scaling up successful programs.

Some of the strategies are newer and will require a fresh perspective. Examples include making the public's perception of the education field more positive, employing micro-credentials to prepare personnel, and empowering personnel to reduce attrition. These strategies may not have extensive research support or may be pioneering exemplars, but they could have a powerful impact and substantially increase the number of educators attracted, prepared, and retained in communities desperately in need of them. The fresh perspective needed with these strategies is not only a fundamental reimagining of existing structures for attracting, preparing, and retaining educators but also a redefinition and expansion of the groups of stakeholders currently involved. Successful implementation of these strategies means meeting individuals where they are and substantively addressing their needs and concerns. Reducing the inequities currently driving underrepresented groups away from preparation programs and causing them to abandon their careers in education will make the education field more diverse and attractive to would-be educators. In each brief, the Critical Components for Success section and the Other Stakeholder Support Required section offer ideas for ensuring that all groups in a community are folded into an approach and provide guidance on how to continually meet their needs.

Lastly, it is critical to mention the context in which this series of briefs is being published. At the time of publication, the Covid-19 pandemic is still underway and there is heightened civil unrest. It is impossible to know the full implications these events will have on the field of education. We are already witnessing an intensification of the inequities and challenges that existed prior to the pandemic. The remote learning settings formed in response to the pandemic contribute their own unique set of inequities and challenges, as do educator absences as a result of illness or virus exposure (Watson, 2021). Some States are also experiencing higher attrition as personnel are electing to retire early. Whether the new inequities and challenges posed by the pandemic will be ongoing and whether new problems will arise once the pandemic ends remains unknown. The briefs in this series were intended to help remedy shortages of educators of the type that existed before the pandemic and contain research findings, solutions, and exemplars that were found to be effective prior to the pandemic. Implementing the strategies at this moment may be more challenging but it is not impossible. These are strategies identified by the field to be enduring and essential, regardless whether the setting is remote or in-person.

As mentioned, successful implementation of the strategies involves a multi-pronged approach: Attraction, preparation, and retention must all be considered and addressed to see success. In the infographic and spotlighted exemplar to come, you will see a practical and powerful application of all three strategies working in tandem within a local community.

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## How to Use the Leverage Brief Series

This series of briefs is meant to serve as an overview and starting point for stakeholder groups as they consider and craft effective solutions for their particular communities. It is also meant to serve as an inspiration for the forming of community partnerships and to challenge the status quo through innovative thinking (you'll notice call-out boxes providing ideas about how to think outside the box).

### Guiding Questions

As you review the attraction, preparation, and retention strategies outlined in the briefs, ask yourself the following questions (in no specific order):

- Are current efforts targeted at creating an *effective pipeline* to attract, prepare, and retain personnel, not just on addressing the symptom of shortages?

- What is the desired change in my community? What data support this as a priority?
- How can we ensure that the strategies we select and implement will incorporate the personnel that we seek to support over time?
- Which approaches may already be in place and how might new or additional ones be implemented?
- Which among the strategies will be most effective given the desired change and community needs?
- Are attraction, preparation, and retention strategies being considered comprehensively (as an overall approach)? Separately? Are there data-sharing and communication strategies that could be put in place to unify them?
- How will attraction, preparation, and retention strategies interact and inform one another in my community?
- Who are the individuals in my community who will be required to successfully implement this strategy? Is there any opportunity to incorporate a unique perspective not already being represented?
- How do we ensure that currently underrepresented groups are better represented? Will certain approaches be more or less effective for these groups?
- Where will funding come from?
- How might data collection and sharing be facilitated in my community?
- If the program is successful, how can funding be sustained and the program scaled up?
- If the program is successful, how might findings be shared with other communities facing the same personnel shortages?

#### Thinking Outside the Box: Data Use

Data should drive decisions related to selecting strategies to attract, prepare, and retain effective personnel.

Stakeholders convened to finalize this series recommended the following:

- Disaggregate data by race and gender to identify underlying inequities.
- Incorporate sources of data to inform district and school leaders of personnel's perspectives on the demands of their roles and the supports or resources needed.
- Apply an approach to data review and analysis of the type used in a multi-tiered system of supports framework (e.g., plan-do-study-act cycle, four-step problem-solving).

### Considerations for Use With or by Different Stakeholders

#### School Board Members or Legislators.

While the strategies should not be implemented in isolation, each strategy is available as a stand-alone resource on the [OSEP IDEAs That Work](#) website.

Stand-alone resources may serve as a mechanism to inform key stakeholders, like school board members or legislators, about current research and approaches that have proven effective in other communities facing personnel shortages without overwhelming the stakeholders with too much content at once.

#### Thinking Outside the Box: Community Stakeholders

Other professions have faced personnel shortages (e.g., public health, nursing, technology, manufacturing) and may provide a unique perspective to conversations on addressing special education and related service personnel shortages. They may also be able to share strategies that have worked in their industries, lessons learned, or ways they overcame barriers. Inviting community stakeholders to the table has potential to raise public awareness (through media campaigns) and spur larger community efforts, including incentives (e.g., discounts for local educators, reduced housing costs), to address this critical issue.



**Deans or Provosts.** To support the effectiveness of a comprehensive approach to reducing attrition in the field of education, institutions of higher education leadership must understand their connections to education beyond preparation. For example, deans and provosts can help facilitate conversations across colleges or departments to promote more interdisciplinary preparation. These leaders can also support faculty research or advocate for funding or approvals needed to establish micro-credentials, residencies, or simulations.

**Researchers.** It is important to note that some of the field’s research findings (including findings referenced in the series) are based on survey and interview data rather than on well-designed evaluations or the examination of longitudinal data. Rigor of research and data quality were identified by multiple stakeholders as an area where the field needed to improve. While survey and interview data are valuable, randomized control trials and analyses using administrative data sets tracking more than attrition (e.g., how a specific policy might affect attrition or retention) were recognized as potentially more impactful on the field’s collective understanding of how to address shortages.

**State Task Forces.** Many States have created task forces centered on personnel shortages. This series can serve as a resource for States as they convene task forces. By exploring the various strategies alongside current State data, workgroups may be able to identify specific strategies that could enhance attraction, preparation, and retention efforts as well as strategies to initiate. The exemplars may provide a helpful starting point for members as they decide on strategies to implement.

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## Strategies in Action: Decatur Public Schools

Decatur Public Schools (DPS), located in Decatur, Illinois, is a community in the central part of the State that serves approximately 9,000 students. DPS also acts as the administrative agent for the Macon-Piatt Special Education District. Like many districts across the country, DPS faces shortages, with over 20 certified roles unfilled in any given school year. To address these shortages, DPS implements various strategies to attract, prepare, and retain effective personnel, as laid out in its [Strategic Plan](#). Many of the approaches are new for the district, but preliminary data are promising. Leverage areas, as identified in the briefs, are bolded throughout this exemplar.

Many educators choose to work in the communities in which they grew up, which is also true for DPS. As a result, DPS focuses its recruitment efforts within a 125-mile radius of the district. It recognizes three recruitment “pipelines”: (1) current high school students; (2) current internal staff (e.g., paraprofessionals, teacher aides); and (3) university students.

While DPS does not formally refer to the high school student pipeline as a “**grow your own**” program, it has similar characteristics. Previously, DPS offered internships to high school students in other fields but not teaching. It did offer “exploratory” teaching opportunities, such as allowing students to serve as teacher aides, but it did not invest formally in teaching as a career path. In January 2021, DPS will pilot its first formal teaching internship program, modeled after a similar program it observed at a

### DPS Recruitment and Retention Specialist at a New Hire Event



school in Chicago. DPS is leveraging support from [Educators Rising](#) and will use grant funds to develop and implement its pipeline. The pipeline begins in ninth grade with a “Teacher Club,” where students will learn about the profession. In 10th grade, students will participate in the club and visit university preparation programs. In 11th and 12th grades, students will earn dual credit at a local university while serving as teacher assistants during a summer program. Throughout the 4 years, students will earn **micro-credentials** from [Educators Rising](#) in classroom culture, collaboration, formative assessment, and other topics. DPS will examine data on the program’s effectiveness in recruiting, better preparing, and retaining educators from the local community over time.

DPS also recognizes the value of current staff and identifies ways to support role transitions through **ongoing, job-embedded professional learning** and by offering **tuition reimbursement**. DPS has also established strong bidirectional partnerships with university preparation programs. In addition to supporting candidates’ student teaching placements, DPS staff give a presentation to university students during their classes on what DPS has to offer. DPS also sponsors a local university’s annual “Aspiring Teacher’s Conference” and participates in “bootcamps” offered to develop candidates’ interviewing skills.

What sets apart DPS’s efforts to recruit and retain effective personnel is its **involvement of the broader Decatur community**. DPS offers a “community tour” as a part of each candidate’s individually tailored interview experience. These tours depend on DPS’s relationships with community organizations, businesses, realtors, and recreational facilities. For administrators seeking employment in the school district, DPS has partnered with local hotels and restaurants that provide lodging and meals at a discount. The goal of the community tours is to allow candidates to “see themselves” in the community prior to accepting a position.

After recognizing that negativity about DPS—and teaching in general—was primarily coming from internal staff, DPS **initiated two separate employee recognition programs**. The first, “The Heart of the District,” allows anyone external or internal to DPS to nominate an employee for demonstrating exemplary performance and support for DPS. The second, “DPS CARES,” enables peers to nominate one another for internal recognition and to improve the way in which DPS employees provide service to students, parents, and community stakeholders. These programs are shifting the DPS culture—and attitudes toward teaching—to be more positive. While intended initially as a retention strategy, DPS staff are observing impacts on their recruitment efforts as well.

#### Thinking Outside the Box: New Positions

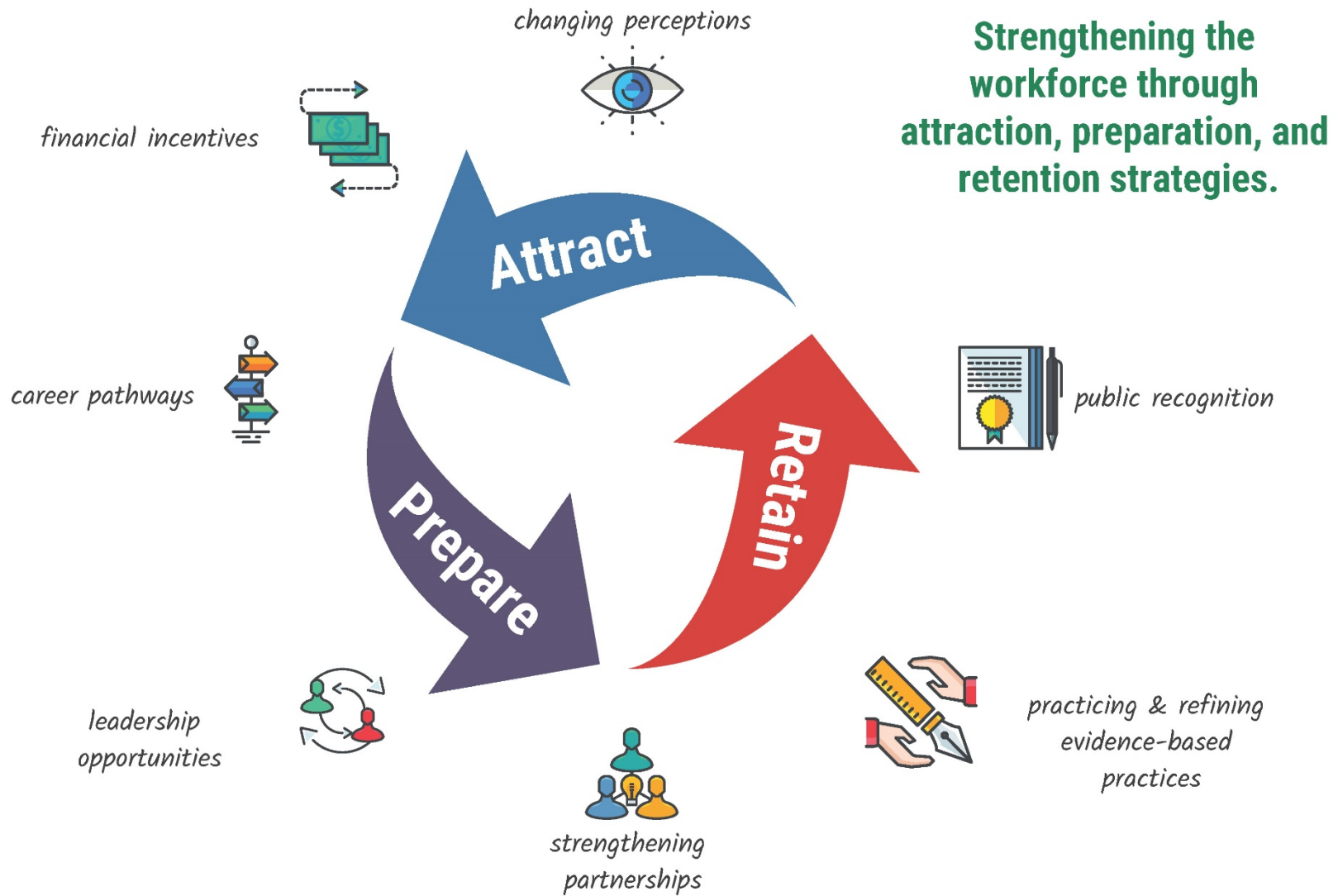
Amidst the Covid-19 pandemic, DPS is thinking more innovatively about addressing critical shortages. With virtual teaching becoming more of a norm, the districts’ recruitment and retention specialist began conceptualizing the creation of virtual teaching positions to replace positions being filled by long-term substitutes. Because Illinois offers licensure reciprocity with many other States, DPS has considered recruiting certified teachers to deliver virtual instruction to students—even after the pandemic—rather than filling roles with unlicensed, unqualified personnel to seek qualified staff for instruction.

Embedded throughout this exemplar are strategies highlighted in the Leverage Brief Series—from changing public perceptions to providing ongoing professional learning to empowering personnel and establishing a supportive work environment. We encourage you to follow DPS’s lead and implement multiple strategies to attract, prepare, and retain an effective special education workforce.



# EFFECTIVE PERSONNEL FOR ALL

Improving results for infants, toddlers, children and youth with disabilities by building a stronger workforce



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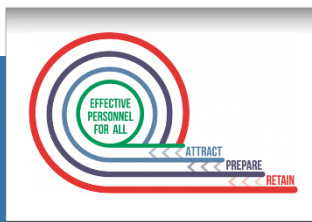
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## Leverage Briefs

## ***Attract Briefs***





# Attracting Personnel

## ALTERNATIVE ROUTES

### Description

Alternative certification routes bypass traditional preservice preparation such as 4-year undergraduate programs at institutions of higher education (Lohmann, White, & Johnson, 2019). Alternative certification routes are typically for individuals who have already obtained a bachelor’s degree and are interested in pursuing early intervention, teaching, or serving as a related service provider but do not have an education or school-based background. Often, alternative routes help candidates receive provisional certification and allow them to complete requirements for full certification while working full-time in their placements (Lohmann et al., 2019).

### Overview

New Jersey enacted the first alternative certification program in 1983 (Walsh & Jacobs, 2007). The program allowed individuals with previous higher education experience to expedite their route to the classroom by reducing or eliminating “theory” courses from training and by using teacher leaders as mentors in the first years in the classroom. The model was shown to be highly effective and helped increase the size, quality, and diversity of New Jersey’s teacher candidate pool. It was quickly adopted by other States.

Today, alternative certification routes have been **authorized in virtually every State** (Mason-Williams et al., 2020). Most States with alternative certification have **implemented policies** to establish, enhance, and fund alternative preparation programs (Woods, 2016).

The ability to **work full-time and earn a salary while completing coursework** makes alternative certification especially appealing to **career changers** and in-service practitioners interested in **transitioning from another subject area** to special education, early childhood, or related service professions (Bowe, Braam, Lawrenz, & Kirchhoff, 2011; Woods, 2016).

**Diversifying the education workforce** is an essential step to addressing the teacher shortage and to improving outcomes for students from underrepresented backgrounds. Alternative routes have a **larger impact** on diversification than **other attraction strategies because personnel of color are more likely to enter** the field of education through alternative pathways than their white counterparts (Carver-Thomas, 2016).

### Research Findings

Research on alternative certification routes for personnel has found the following:

- Nearly 20% of new personnel already enter the profession through alternative routes (DeMonte, 2015).
- The certification route chosen by new teachers, whether traditional or alternative, does not necessarily dictate the quality of their teaching.
  - Alternative routes for preparation that involve **comprehensive coursework, strong mentoring, and extensive induction supports** result in educators of the **same quality** as those trained in traditional programs (Guha, Hyler, & Darling-Hammond, 2016; Mason-Williams et al., 2020; Ronfeldt & McQueen, 2017).
- **Regular observation and ongoing support** from entry into an alternative preparation program through the individual’s early career ensure quality teaching performance (Woods, 2016).
- Alternative certification routes are the most effective recruitment strategy for **career changers** to pursue certification in special education (Rosenberg, Boyer, Sindelar, & Misra, 2007; Kimmel, Sindelar, Rosenberg, & Mason-Williams, 2020).
- Many alternative routes have attracted a wider, **more diverse pool of applicants** than their traditional counterparts (Quigney, 2010; Rosenberg et al., 2007). In fact, educators of color are nearly twice as likely to enter through alternative routes as their white counterparts (Carver-Thomas, 2016).

### Overview (Continued)

To effectively recruit, prepare, and eventually retain personnel of color, alternative preparation programs must **offer supports that are sensitive to the particular needs of personnel of color**, such as mentorship from a professional of a similar background (Chin & Young, 2007; NAAC, 2015).

### Research Findings (Continued)

While research on the effectiveness of alternative certification is not new, disaggregating findings by race or gender has not been conducted at a large scale.

## Part of a Strategic Approach

Alternative certification alone does not appear to have a significant impact on retention (Guha et al., 2016). Rather, retention seems to be **correlated with the quality of the program**. **Program quality, financial incentives, and induction supports** work in tandem to increase retention.

## Exemplars

- [Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy \(GaTAPP\)](#). This alternative preparation program aims to create a pipeline for career changers as well as recent graduates who have earned a bachelor's or a higher degree but have not yet completed a teacher preparation program. The GaTAPP program provides opportunities for candidates to develop and demonstrate competence while being supported by their own candidate support team. Special education candidate participants complete additional instruction and receive supplementary induction supports. Successful completion leads to a recommendation for certification but not a degree.
- [Maine's Alternative Certification Mentoring Program \(MACM\)](#). MACM is an alternative certification pathway to support Maine's need for highly qualified special educators. The program offers intensive, focused support and mentoring during the special educator's critical first year of practice and ensures that each new conditionally certified special educator is mentored by a trained special educator. A one-semester online graduate course designed especially for MACM participants must also be completed.

(Additional exemplars can be found on the [Attract, Prepare, Retain resource page](#).)

# KEY IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

When recruiting personnel for an alternative certification program, stakeholders should consider the following:

- Identify **responsible parties for funding** the program and **funding sources** (e.g., Title II and IDEA funds, State and Federal grants, community organizations) (Rosenberg et al., 2007).
  - To support sustainability, alternative preparation programs should be funded through multiple sources.
- **Raise awareness** of the program among all personnel (e.g., faculty, administrators, certification officers, secretaries, webmasters).
- Inform academic advisors and career support personnel across institutions of higher education (IHEs) about the program.
- **Advertise** the program in newspapers and conferences and communicate with local education agencies (LEAs) (Abell et al., 2006).
- **Contact recent graduates** through career fairs and academic advisors.
- **Maintain a strong Internet presence** to disseminate information about the program to potential candidates and ensure easy access from IHE or program provider websites and departmental homepages (Abell et al., 2006; OSEP Symposium, 2019).
- **Overcome geographic constraints** by offering the program at a distance through synchronous and asynchronous instruction (Lohmann et al., 2019; OSEP Symposium, 2019).

## Critical Components for Success

*(Lists are not sequential)*

### Setting the Stage

- Identify existing relationships between the State education agency (SEA) and IHEs.
- Examine data related to the current workforce.
- Identify gaps in personnel related to a specialty (e.g., special education) or to race/ethnicity, gender, or another characteristic.
- Begin a dialogue between SEA and IHE personnel to determine a potential focus area for an alternative route to address one or more of the gaps.
- Investigate existing alternative route programs that could serve as a model for your own (see exemplars) and how they may or may not transfer to other States.
- Identify the components of the alternative certification program that will work best for your target candidates. Options include online courses, synchronous or asynchronous learning, varied course lengths and times, and concurrent learning and teaching responsibilities.

## Related Services

Presently alternative certification routes are not common among related service professions. Research has found that alternatively certified teachers are **more likely to have received less clinical practice experience** than their traditionally certified peers (Carver-Thomas, 2016).

A 2020 focus group with researchers and practitioners from across related service fields indicated how the professions require personnel to have hands-on experience with populations with disabilities. Because alternative routes typically do not incorporate ample hands-on practice, the participants were hesitant to suggest alternative routes as a recruitment strategy. An additional concern raised was related to the **alignment of alternative routes** and State certification requirements.

## Critical Components for Success (Continued)

### Initial Start-Up

- Create a formal partnership agreement or memorandum of understanding between the SEA and IHE.
- Determine whether participants will earn credit toward a master's degree or a certificate.
- Identify which (if any) requirements participants may be able to test out of.
- Decide whether the program will be LEA or university based.
- Once an LEA has been identified (either for an LEA-based alternative route or as a partner site of the SEA-IHE partnership), select individuals who can serve in leadership roles across the LEA and IHE.
- Develop training to share with chosen LEA and IHE leaders.
- Determine all necessary supports (program, financial, induction, mentoring) for making the alternate route program attractive to candidates and effective at preparing and retaining participants.
- Identify the individuals who will assist in administering supports to the participants.
- Find individuals responsible for verifying completion of the alternative certification requirements.
- Identify potential funding sources (e.g., Federal and State grants, Title II and IDEA funds, community foundations, other local business partnerships).
- Design participant screening and selection processes.
- Identify data that may be useful in evaluating whether the target candidates are being attracted and retained.

### Continuous Improvement

- Review preliminary data to look for evidence that the program has been successful. Have any identified initial gaps been addressed?
- Schedule regular check-ins with participants to see whether they continue to feel adequately supported.
- Provide regular feedback to program participants on their performance.
- Make refinements to the program based on data and lessons learned.

### Leveraging Lessons Learned

- Evaluate program components and engage completers to ensure the program is high quality.
- Secure additional funding for the alternative route program.

## Related Services (Continued)

Through its [State School Psychology Credentialing Requirements](#) resource, the National Association for School Psychologists examines whether each State accepts a Nationally Certified School Psychologist as an alternative route and provides links to further information on its alignment with State credentialing requirements. *More information on this resource can be found on OSEP's [Attract, Prepare, Retain resource page](#).*

## Early Childhood

Early childhood special education (ECSE) and early intervention (EI) preparation programs often center on home visiting and building connections with families and communities. These populations should not be overlooked as essential stakeholders capable of **spreading awareness and aiding in the recruitment** of high-quality candidates into alternative preparation programs aimed at serving infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities.

While challenges with funding are common across alternative certification routes, ECSE and EI programs face additional fiscal challenges, as these programs are more likely to be impacted by State budget cuts than K-12 counterparts. Fiechtl and Hager (2019) suggest dealing with fiscal challenges by **identifying course content that is consistent across local alternative programs** (e.g., basic behavior management) and providing it across early childhood, ECSE, and EI alternative programs to **decrease the cost and number of faculty required** to teach courses.

ECSE alternative certification routes have grown significantly (Fiechtl & Hager, 2019), yet analyzing the effectiveness of alternative certification in attracting personnel to serve infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities is still an evolving area of study. **More research and disaggregated data analyses are needed** to determine the effectiveness of alternative certification in reducing personnel shortages.

### Critical Components for Success (Continued)

- Share success stories.
- Determine the feasibility of sustaining and/or scaling up the program.
- Identify new IHE or LEA partners.
- Develop guidance, resources, and tools.

### Stakeholder Spotlight

- **State Education Agency (SEA).** SEAs play an essential role in funding alternative preparation programs (Rosenberg et al., 2007). SEAs can designate State-allocated funds (e.g., ESSA, Title II, IDEA, SPDG) toward establishing alternative certification routes for EI and ECSE personnel. SEA licensure and certification staff are key stakeholders, as they often approve alternative preparation programs to ensure that they meet the same requirements as traditional preparation programs in the State. SEA policies may specify alternative certification routes that include clinical experiences to ensure all candidates receive high-quality and recurring practice-based opportunities throughout their preparation.

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## Attracting Personnel

# GROW YOUR OWN (GYO)

## Description

Grow your own (GYO) is an approach to developing a pipeline of educator candidates to meet specific workforce needs (Cushing, 2019).

## Overview

Communities are increasingly experiencing educator shortages, and GYO programs exist to meet the unique needs of local communities by recruiting and preparing community members to address critical shortages. Considering that 60% of personnel work within 20 miles of where they attended high school, location is becoming increasingly predictive of where personnel begin their careers. GYO programs seek to eliminate any barriers that may prevent local candidates from entering or remaining in the field (Krieg, Theobald, & Goldhaber, 2016; Reininger, 2016).

GYO programs are distinguished from other pipelines by *who* they target and *how*. GYO programs focus on **recruitment of high school students, career changers, paraprofessionals, non-teaching-school faculty, and community members** (Espinoza, Saunders, Kini, & Darling-Hammond, 2018). Districts and institutions of higher education (IHEs) **leverage close partnerships** to reduce obstacles that have historically kept these candidates from entering the profession.

GYO programs historically have found success in implementing the following elements:

- Offering **financial aid** (i.e., loan forgiveness and scholarships) to candidates completing GYO programs (PESB, 2016).
- Conducting **targeted communication efforts** to specific populations, including outreach in high schools (Texas Comprehensive Center, 2018).
- Establishing systems for candidates to receive **continuous coaching and mentoring** from entrance into the GYO program through early service (Texas Comprehensive Center, 2018; Carver-Thomas, 2018). Offering ongoing coaching and mentoring not only is important for attracting candidates of color into GYO programs but is **essential for retaining personnel of color** once they exit the program (OSEP Summit Attract Panel, 2020).

## Research Findings

Extensive research on GYO programs has found the following:

- There are strong connections between GYO programs and effectively addressing shortages in **high-need areas and subjects**, such as in **rural schools** and in **special education** (Jessen, Fairman, Fallona, & Johnson, 2020; PESB, 2016).
- By **reducing financial barriers and leveraging partnerships** with institutions that historically serve students of color, GYO programs have found success recruiting and retaining **diverse teachers** in the schools hardest to staff (Podolsky, Kini, Bishop, & Darling-Hammond, 2016; Dai, Sindelar, Denslow, Dewey, & Rosenberg, 2007).
  - For example, for its GYO program, Mississippi partnered with community colleges, where students of color make up more than 40% of the enrollment (Ma & Baum, 2016).
- GYO programs are most effective at **targeting specific populations** to enter **certain subject areas** when they consider the nuanced reasons these populations may be attracted to education, the **supports they need** to complete a program successfully, and the **culture of partnering institutions** (Texas Comprehensive Center, 2018).
- Programs that focus on recruiting candidates at the **high school level** may be **more effective than programs targeting adults** (Texas Comprehensive Center, 2018).
- GYO programs are **especially successful in rural districts**, which historically struggle to recruit teachers from outside their communities (Carver-Thomas, 2018; Texas Comprehensive Center, 2018).

## Overview (Continued)

- Providing counseling and other mental health and social-emotional supports to candidates.

Many GYO programs are still impacted by **fiscal limitations** related to **episodic funding sources**, such as limited-time Federal grants. This has prevented GYO programs from becoming more widespread (OSEP Summit Attract Panel, 2020). To ensure that programs continue past the limits brought by episodic grants, programs must explore **sustainable funding models**. Given the local nature of the programs, many diverse funding models have been adopted. Some programs, like the [TeachMaine](#) initiative, are statewide and draw on funds from **Title II and Part A of ESSA** to support the development of pathways, while others are entirely **district funded**, like Wichita’s GYO Teacher program (Wichita Public Schools, n.d.).

## Research Findings (Continued)

- In many States, GYO programs have had more success in recruiting and retaining a **larger proportion of personnel of color** than their traditional counterparts (Muniz, 2018; Carver-Thomas, 2018).

Researchers have found **mixed results** when investigating whether GYO programs yield increased retention. An Urban Institute report on a national GYO program, the Pathways to Teaching Careers Program, showed that graduates from the program remained in teaching longer than the typical beginning teacher and taught in urban and rural schools at a high rate (Clewell & Villegas, 2001). Other research, however, has not shown that GYO programs lead to greater retention than traditional preparation programs (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). The difference in the results may be due to the varied nature of the GYO programs. Whatever the reason, researchers do agree that **additional research on the topic** would be useful.

## Exemplars

- [Grow Your Own Teachers Illinois](#). This GYO program helps community members become certified teachers in their neighborhood schools to improve educational outcomes for students. The program offers tuition assistance in the form of forgivable loans, which are forgiven once a graduate has taught for 5 years in a high-needs school or a high-needs position, such as special education. The program assists graduates with job placement and continued professional learning opportunities to enhance and deepen their skills (Grow Your Own Illinois, 2020). Since 2015, 105 graduates started teaching in low-income classrooms, and 152 more are in the pipeline. Forty percent of graduates have filled bilingual and special education positions. Program graduates have been shown to teach for at least 5 years once hired, saving their districts an estimated \$20,000 per new teacher hire and reducing the 40% teacher turnover rate common in low-income schools.
- [Texas Education Agency Grow Your Own Grant Program](#). This program competitively awards State funds to districts that design solutions to develop GYO programs aimed at attracting high school students to pursue certification in high-needs subjects and areas (Texas Education Agency, 2020). In its 2018 funding cycle, the Texas Education Agency funded more than 50 paraprofessionals to become certified general and special educators.
- [Montana Schools Recruitment Project \(MSRP\)](#). The Montana Council of Administrators of Special Education (MCASE) is working with School Administrators of Montana and the Office of Public Instruction to recruit highly qualified speech–language pathologists, school psychologists, special education teachers, special education directors, occupational therapists, physical therapists, sign language interpreters, and any other personnel necessary to accommodate children with special needs in Montana public schools. Recruiters for the MSRP attend national, regional, and local conferences and career fairs; travel to universities to visit professors and students; and post openings online in the belief that the personal touch, including face-to-face contact and personal phone calls and e-mails, helps build relationships with candidates.

(Additional exemplars can be found on the [Attract, Prepare, Retain resource page](#).)

# KEY IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

## Critical Components for Success

*(Lists are not sequential)*

### Setting the Stage

- Identify existing relationships between LEAs and institutions of higher education (IHEs).
- Examine data related to the current workforce.
- Identify gaps in personnel related to a specialty (e.g., special education) or to race/ethnicity, gender, or another characteristic.
- Begin a dialogue between LEA and IHE personnel to identify a potential focus area for a GYO program to address one or more of the gaps.
- Investigate existing GYO programs that could serve as models for your own (see exemplars).
- Identify local secondary schools that GYO programs can partner with to recruit candidates at the middle and high school level.

### Initial Start-Up

- Create a formal partnership agreement or memorandum of understanding between the LEA and IHE, and as applicable with middle or high schools.
- Present the strategy to key stakeholders, including IHE administrators, school leaders, school board members, and superintendents at the LEA level, to determine their degree of commitment.
- Select individuals who could serve in leadership roles across the LEA and IHE.
- Develop training to share with chosen LEA and IHE leaders.
- Identify potential funding sources (e.g., Federal or State grants, Title II or IDEA funds, community foundations, and other local business partnerships).
- Determine new data sources that may be useful in evaluating the effectiveness of the program.

### Continuous Improvement

- Iteratively review disaggregated data to discover successes and to inform ongoing adjustments.
- Make refinements to the program based on data and lessons learned.

## Related Services

GYO Programs have become increasingly prevalent in the related service professions. Much like GYO programs focused on teachers, these programs most often **center on recruiting high school and undergraduate students** within their localities (Morrison, Davies, & Noltmeyer, 2020; Public Policy Associates, 2020).

Additionally, related service GYO programs are critical for addressing shortages of personnel serving students with disabilities in **rural and urban localities**. For example, **Iowa's Mental Health Service Professionals Demonstration Grant** aims to support innovative partnerships formed to train school-based mental health service providers for employment in schools and LEAs in rural Iowa. The 5-year grant is administered with the goal of expanding the pipeline of high-quality trained providers to address shortages of mental health service professionals in schools served by high-need LEAs. The first cohort began coursework in January 2020, and the program's goal is to place 10 school psychologists in high-need rural districts in western Iowa by 2024 (Dredge & Van Horn, 2020).

### Critical Components for Success (Continued)

- Publicly recognize personnel prepared through the program to enhance the program's prestige.

### Leveraging Lessons Learned

- Secure additional funding for the GYO program.
- Share success stories.
- Determine the feasibility of sustaining and/or scaling up the program.
- Identify new community partners.
- Develop guidance, resources, and tools.

## Early Childhood

Early childhood professions have found success in **providing targeted pathways** to certification (OSEP Symposium, 2019). One study of three early childhood personnel GYO programs found that all three achieved success in recruiting and retaining a racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse pool of educators (Gardner, Melnick, Meloy, & Barajas, 2019). These programs had **three key aspects in common: partnerships** with childcare resource and referral networks, **alignment** with recognized credentials and degrees, and **pathways** for students to **transfer** efficiently from **community colleges to State universities** (Gardner et al., 2019). As candidates in early childhood fields are more likely to pursue certification beginning at the community college (associates) level than other personnel, offering pathways for transferring to IHEs was particularly critical to the success of these GYO programs.

Because of the **variance in State-to-State accreditation** pathways and requirements for early intervention, GYO programs in this field are not as prevalent. More research on the use of the GYO strategy to address shortages of personnel serving infants and toddlers is needed.

## Stakeholder Spotlight

- **School Leaders and Faculty.** School leaders and faculty play a variety of roles in establishing GYO programs. Specifically, they can help build recruitment capacity for GYO programs to exist in their schools. One example is evidenced in GYO programs centered on attracting high school students to the profession; the school leader not only serves as the liaison between the preparation program and their school but also has the responsibility of ensuring that the appropriate school faculty are brought in to support prospective candidates. Successful GYO programs, like other nontraditional preparation programs, center on hands-on opportunities for students to learn and apply skills (Association for Career and Technical Education et al., 2009; Zascavage et al., 2008). The school administrator plays the central role in working with faculty to schedule time for the prospective educators to obtain hands-on practice and be exposed to the population that they will eventually serve. An example of this is [Leander Independent School District](#) in Texas's Grow Your Own program, which centers on building a pipeline for high school students to enter into the teacher workforce in high-needs subjects, such as special education. More information on this and similar programs can be found on OSEP's [Attract, Prepare, Retain resource page](#).

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## Attracting Personnel

# FUNDING AND LOAN FORGIVENESS

### Description

Funding and loan forgiveness programs reduce the fiscal burden on students. Depending on the program, personnel may qualify for grants while in school or for loan forgiveness or additional funding once they have graduated and are in-service. Student benefits may be greater in high-need locations and subjects.

### Overview

Two issues play a prominent role in the public discussion of personnel shortages: preparation program **affordability** and salaries.

Successful funding strategies to attract personnel to high-need fields such as special education are characterized by two main indicators: They **incentivize** working in high-need fields and schools, and they **cover a meaningful portion of preparation costs** (Espinoza, Saunders, Kini, & Darling-Hammond, 2018).

One of the most obvious barriers for potential candidates is the fiscal **burden of student loans**. More than two thirds of individuals entering the field of education borrow money to pay for their preparation (Espinoza et al., 2018). Funding and loan forgiveness programs seek to reduce the burden and remove this obstacle to attracting high-quality educators (Mason-Williams et al., 2020). Presently, the Federal government and more than **40 States offer** funding and loan forgiveness programs in education.

Funding and loan forgiveness programs have proven effective for attracting candidates in other fields. For example, **health care has long used funding and loan forgiveness** to recruit high-quality personnel in areas where critical shortages have occurred (Bärnighausen & Bloom, 2009). While this strategy has **only recently been adopted** in the education field, early findings have shown it to be **just as successful as it has been in other fields** (Podolsky & Kini, 2016).

### Research Findings

Research on funding and loan forgiveness programs suggests the following:

- When strategies **cover a significant portion** of tuition and/or living costs, they are effective in recruiting high-quality professionals into the field and communities in which they are most needed and retaining them (Podolsky & Kini, 2016).
- Funding and loan forgiveness led to increased recruitment and retention in **critical shortage areas** such as secondary math, science, and special education (Feng & Sass, 2015).
- Educators whose preparation was funded by a service scholarship note that their scholarship **influenced their commitment** to teach and remain in a **high-needs school** for the full term of their commitment (Liou & Lawrenz, 2011).
- The success of funding and loan forgiveness programs depends largely on how well they are **tailored to meet the specific needs** of candidates (Kowal, Hassel, & Hassel, 2008).
- The **higher percentage** of preparation program **tuition covered** by funding supports, **the greater the influence** the funding had on the recipients' decisions to become teachers in high-needs schools (Liou & Lawrenz, 2011).
- In some cases, funding and loan forgiveness programs were found to be ineffective if personnel are not also provided with **competitive salaries and compensation** by local education agencies (LEAs) in their regions (Maranto & Shuls, 2012).

### Overview (Continued)

These approaches are particularly important in **diversifying** the early intervention, special education, and related services workforce, as **personnel of color are more likely to struggle with costs of preparation** (Fiddiman, Campbell, & Partelow, 2019). While loan forgiveness and other fiscal supports are an essential strategy for attracting a more diverse educator workforce, it is important to note that funding and loan forgiveness programs are often **limited by State and district budgetary constraints** and the number of allocations awarded (Fiddiman, Campbell, & Partelow, 2019; Espinoza et al., 2018). This can **lead to** issues of **inequity**, not only for communities or color but for low-income and rural districts where there may be limited funds to support these programs.

Besides loan forgiveness, many States and organizations have also started implementing **salary schedules, retention bonuses**, and housing and **down payment support** as fiscal incentives to recruit prospective educators to the field and attract them to their localities.

### Research Findings (Continued)

The North Carolina Teaching Fellows Program, which recruited high-achieving high school graduates into a preparation program in exchange for a commitment to teach for at least 4 years, found not only that the program **attracted more diverse candidates** with high academic qualifications but that these individuals were **more effective teachers** and had **high rates of retention**. Many have also gone on to become superintendents in the State (Cohen, 2015; Henry, Bastian, & Smith, 2012).

## Exemplars

- [Connecticut Housing Finance Authority Teacher Mortgage Assistance Program](#). The Teacher Mortgage Assistance Program, established in partnership with the Connecticut State Department of Education, offers personnel in State-identified shortage areas (i.e., comprehensive special education, speech-language pathology, and school psychology) below-market interest rate mortgage loans to help them become homeowners in the communities where they work. To help recruit and retain minority educators, additional incentives are available for personnel prepared by a historically Black college or university or a Hispanic-serving institution.
- [Iowa Teacher Leadership and Compensation \(TLC\) System](#). The TLC System rewards effective teachers with leadership opportunities and higher pay, attracts promising new teachers with competitive starting salaries and more support, and fosters greater collaboration and mutual learning. In the program's latest available report, based on the 2018–19 school year, 89% of districts fully or mostly met their attraction and retention goals (Iowa Department of Education, 2019).
- [Minnesota Teacher Shortage Loan Repayment Program](#). This program provides student loan repayment assistance to educators giving classroom instruction in areas with an identified teacher shortage, such as special education. Of the 2018 award recipients, nearly all elected to reapply. The average award paid to 2018 award recipients was \$1,000, and awardees are limited to \$5,000 in total repayment assistance (FitzGibbon & Moua, 2020).

(Additional exemplars can be found on the [Attract, Prepare, Retain resource page](#).)

# KEY IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

## Critical Components for Success

*(Lists are not sequential)*

### Setting the Stage

- Identify existing relationships between State education agencies (SEAs), LEAs, institutions of higher education (IHEs), and/or policy makers.
- Examine data related to the current workforce.
- Identify gaps in personnel related to a specialty (e.g., special education) or to race/ethnicity, gender, or another characteristic.
- Begin a dialogue between SEA, LEA, and IHE personnel to select a potential focus area for a funding and loan forgiveness model designed to address one or more of the gaps.
- Investigate existing funding and loan forgiveness programs to determine whether they are successful and could serve as models (see exemplars).
- Confirm which program or programs are the most effective—programs that provide additional funds to teachers (directly or indirectly), programs that offer loan forgiveness, programs that provide scholarships, or programs that combine two or more types of support.
- Establish what, if any, requirements or metrics participants in the program will need to follow. Examples include high academic performance, positive impact on student outcomes, acceptance of an appointment in a critical shortage area, and a minimum appointment length.
- Identify any additional supports that may work in tandem with funding and loan forgiveness to increase the attraction and retention of participants.

### Initial Start-Up

- Create a formal partnership agreement or memorandum of understanding between the SEA, LEA, and/or IHE.
- Identify individuals who could serve in leadership roles across the SEA, LEA, and/or IHE to oversee the program.
- Develop training to share with chosen SEA, LEA, and/or IHE leaders.
- Select the individuals who will assist in administering funds and any additional supports to be provided to participants.

## Related Services

As many related service preparation programs are only available at the post-baccalaureate level, preparation for related service personnel **can often be more costly** than teacher preparation. Fiscal supports and loan forgiveness have been cited as effective methods of addressing shortages **across all related service professions**, particularly in hard-to-staff localities and for recruiting and retaining a diverse workforce (NCPSSERS, 2014; ODE, 2019; Public Policy Associates et al., 2020).

While local and Federal funding for loan forgiveness programs is less common for related service professions than for teaching, **professional organizations** can serve as a resource to attract individuals to pursue certification. For example, the **American Physical Therapy Association** provides a [resource hub](#) for funding and student loan supports. Many of these resources are directly aimed at aiding physical therapists who work in educational settings.

### Critical Components for Success (Continued)

- Identify potential funding sources such as Federal or State grants, Title II or IDEA funds, community foundations, or other local business partnerships.
- Determine any financial limits of the program for participants (funding limits per year and over time on an individual basis) based on total program funding.
- Design participant screening and selection processes.
- Clarify how and when funds will be disbursed to participants.
- Confirm data to gather that may be useful in evaluating whether the targeted personnel are being attracted and retained.

### Continuous Improvement

- Review preliminary data to see whether the program has shown signs of success. Have any identified initial gaps been addressed?
- Schedule regular check-ins with participants to see whether they continue to feel adequately supported.
- Make refinements to the program based on data and lessons learned.

### Leveraging Lessons Learned

- Secure additional funding for the funding and loan forgiveness program.
- Share success stories.
- Determine the feasibility of sustaining and/or scaling up the program.
- Develop guidance, resources, and tools.

## Early Childhood

Research has found that providing fiscal incentives and supports, such as funding and loan forgiveness, is **one of the most effective strategies to address shortages** of early childhood and early intervention personnel (Kucskar, Buchter, Oh-Young, & Weglarz-Ward, 2017).

In contrast to related service professions, prospective candidates are able to begin pursuing certification in early childhood fields at the **community college (associates) level** (OSEP Symposium, 2019). As preparation at the 2-year **associates level is less costly** and more accessible to individuals from local communities, it has been **effective in attracting individuals of color and English-language learners** into the field of early childhood (Eberly, 2018; OSEP Symposium, 2019). To continue attracting this critical population, it is imperative that States, districts, and professional organizations ensure that funding incentives and loan forgiveness programs are **available at the community college and 2-year institution level**. They must also **concurrently offer funding pathways** for individuals completing these 2-year programs to **transition into 4-year and postgraduate programs**.

## Stakeholder Spotlight

- **State Agencies.** To adequately fund loan forgiveness programs and other funding sources, an SEA can partner with other State agencies. For these collaborations to be successful, States must first identify an incentive, program, or strategy to implement and then select a partner agency within the State that serves stakeholders in that population. Once an SEA identifies opportunities for alignment with that agency, financial departments from both agencies can collaboratively plan funding mechanisms. One example is the Connecticut State Department of Education's partnership with the **Connecticut Housing Finance Authority** to fund the Teacher Mortgage Assistance Program, shared above. Another example is **Arizona Department of Health's** First Things First Early Childhood Therapist Incentive Program, which has found success partnering with localities in the State, including tribal communities, to recruit related service and early childhood candidates into high-needs areas. More information on these and similar programs can be found on OSEP's [Attract, Prepare, Retain resource page](#).



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## Attracting Personnel

# CHANGING PUBLIC PERCEPTION

## Description

The public perception of educators refers to (a) society's view of the role of educators within a greater societal context, (b) the perceived prestige of the profession within the field and externally, and (c) perceptions of how accessible it is to enter the field (OSEP Summit Attract Panel, 2020). Changing the public's perception to be more positive is likely to increase the attraction and retention of personnel.

## Overview

Despite the importance of teaching, the supply of new teachers across the United States is at a historic low and continues to decline—signaling a **diminishing interest** in teaching among young people (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016). Over the past decade enrollment in teacher preparation programs has greatly decreased, as more than one-third fewer students enrolled in preparation programs in 2018 than in 2010 (Partelow, 2019).

While teaching is acknowledged by society as important, careers in the field of education have low social standing (Han, Borgonovi, & Guerriero, 2018). A 2018 national poll found that over half of respondents would not want their children to teach in public schools, down significantly from 70% in 2009 and 75% in 1969 (PDK International, 2018). Responses indicate that in **current public opinion** the profession is associated with **low salary, poor working conditions, and a lack of respect and professional autonomy** (PDK International, 2018). Recent reports from practitioners indicate that society's negative view of education is a growing concern for early intervention (EI) professionals as well.

The reported sources of **stress** related to working conditions felt by teachers are numerous. They include ensuring that students meet **testing standards**, collaboration with **parents**, growth in **class sizes**, and personal **financial pressures**. Further, both practitioners and nonteachers believe that teachers are **unsafe** in the workplace (Walker, 2018). These stressors preceded the current stress caused by the pandemic and civil unrest teachers are currently facing.

## Research Findings

While practitioners, researchers, and policy makers agree that public perceptions around education and EI must shift, little research has been conducted on the topic.

Existing research and dialogue on the **public's perception** of education have found the following:

- In addition to fiscal considerations, **feelings of "disrespect"** from administrators and families contribute to preventing prospective educators from pursuing careers in schools (USA Today, 2019).
- One study reported that high schoolers identified **societal respect as important as salary** in deciding whether to pursue a career as an educator (Han et al., 2018).
- More college graduates choose to become teachers if they believe that educator **salaries are competitive** (Mason-Williams et al., 2020).
- The perceived attractiveness of the profession reflects individuals' **perceptions of the working conditions** that educators face (Mason-Williams et al., 2020).
- The majority of high schoolers who explicitly aspired to careers in education perceived the field as **providing opportunities for career growth**.

A 2020 study compared States with low special education shortages and States with high special education shortages. It found that in States that **invest more in the well-being** of their students and teachers, the public had a **higher opinion** of the teaching profession, and critical personnel **shortages were fewer** (Peyton et al., 2020).

## Overview (Continued)

It is clear that addressing the **role of current educators** in influencing youth to pursue the profession is an important first step to addressing barriers to recruiting educators. This is particularly true for **attracting students of color** to pursue careers in teaching (OSEP Summit Attract Panel, 2020). As educators of color are more likely to report unfavorable working conditions than their white peers, this can lead to educators' expressing disenchantment with the profession to students, which in turn damages their students' perception of the field (Dixon, Griffin, & Teoh 2019; OSEP Summit Attract Panel, 2020).

Additionally, the **perceptions that families and caretakers** have of the field of education and early intervention also affect the educator pipeline (OSEP Summit Attract Panel, 2020). Much like in-service educators, families and caretakers play an essential role in **persuading or dissuading** prospective educators from pursuing careers in the field. One major way in which education is presented to families is through the **media**, which often blames educators for perceived shortcomings in educational settings (Shine, 2020). To take advantage of the important role of families and caretakers, public awareness and outreach campaigns should also address how educators are depicted in all forms of media. Sharing success stories of personnel and the impact they have had in their communities can lead to improved perceptions (OSEP Symposium, 2019).

## Research Findings (Continued)

These States typically have higher expenditures per pupil, higher teacher salaries, and greater preparation capacity. They also tend to produce more special education graduates.

Analyzing public perceptions of the field of education and their effect on attracting, preparing, and retaining personnel is an evolving area of study. More research on the strategy of trying to improve public perceptions is needed to determine its long-term effectiveness for addressing shortages of personnel to serve students with disabilities.

## Exemplars

- [Texas Education Agency \(TEA\) #IAmTXEd Campaign](#). #IAmTXEd is a TEA-led social media campaign intended to improve the perception of the field of education by sharing ongoing success stories of Texas practitioners. The State campaign collects and disseminates the stories of educators whose work is leading to improved student outcomes and achievements. Social media posts are shared statewide weekly via Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram and have generated a lot of engagement and interaction with followers.
- [Teach Palm Beach](#). This social media and video vignette campaign on Twitter is designed to improve the public perception of teaching by highlighting stories of local teachers who have made a difference in the Palm Beach, Florida, community.
- [Council of Chief State School Officer's \(CCSSO\) National Teacher of the Year](#). CCSSO's National Teacher of the Year Program is a prestigious teacher recognition program that has operated for almost 70 years. The program provides a platform for exceptional educators to elevate issues that affect teachers and students, expand their leadership roles, and influence policy and practice. It also celebrates teachers as among the most impactful figures in the life of every student. After a teacher receives the award, State education agencies (SEAs) and local education agencies (LEAs) can arrange for the teacher to share effective teaching strategies, either through social media or speaking engagements.

(Additional exemplars can be found on the [Attract, Prepare, Retain resource page](#).)

## Resource Spotlight

[Power to the Profession](#). This national collaboration between 15 organizations aims to empower the professions of the early childhood workforce by establishing a framework and setting a vision for how to drive the significant and sustained public investment that will allow all children, birth through age 8, to benefit from high-quality early childhood education provided by well-prepared, diverse, supported, and compensated professionals.

# KEY IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

## Critical Components for Success

*(Lists are not sequential)*

### Setting the Stage

- Identify a broad stakeholder group to include SEA, LEA, and IHE personnel, policy makers, community leaders, practitioners, families, students, and public relations, marketing, and media specialists.
- Examine data related to the current workforce, including data from personnel, students, families, and communities (e.g., working conditions surveys, school climate surveys, community focus groups, exit interviews).
- Use data to identify areas of strength and areas in need of improvement.

### Initial Start-Up

- Identify potential funding sources (e.g., Federal or State grants, Title II or IDEA funds, community foundations, other local business partnerships).
- Convene stakeholders to identify focus areas for a public awareness program designed to highlight strengths and shift perceptions of education and the role of personnel.
  - Determine the target audience for the campaign (e.g., parents, community members, students, millennials).
  - Determine the short- and long-term goals of the public awareness program.
  - Align strategies to goal areas, with personnel at the forefront of driving solutions.
  - Determine what platform(s) the public awareness campaign should use to most effectively reach the target audience (e.g., website, social media, news/radio, community outreach).
- Empower stakeholders to share meaningful and compelling messages and create connections within the community.

### Continuous Improvement

- Review preliminary data to see whether the program has shown signs of success.
- Examine progress toward short- and long-term goals and make refinements based on data and lessons learned.
- Share success stories.
- Develop guidance, resources, and tools.

## Related Services

A 2019 OSEP survey highlighted the important role educators play in changing youths' perceptions of the field. The same is true for related services, as **in-service** professionals often **provide youth with their first exposure** to related service professions (NCPSSERS, 2014).

It is important for State, LEA, and school leaders to **build the visibility** of their related service providers, such as school social workers, occupational therapists, speech-language pathologists, and physical therapists, to present these roles to students and their caretakers as viable career options (NCPSSERS, 2014). Leaders must combine this with **explicit encouragement** for students to pursue careers in these areas.

Additionally, general education teachers can encourage students to pursue school-based professions. The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) has found success in leveraging high school health science teachers to **bring awareness and reverence to the roles and responsibilities** of school-based speech-language pathologists and audiologists (OSEP Symposium, 2019).

## Early Childhood

Early childhood special education (ECSE) and early intervention (EI) also face challenges related to public perceptions of these fields. ECSE and EI professionals, because of their direct work with parents, families, and community agencies, are in a unique position to help shift perceptions to be more positive. These professionals can communicate openly about the beneficial impact of their work on infants, toddlers, and children with disabilities and their families.

## Stakeholder Spotlight

- **Professional Associations.** Professional associations can play an important role in improving public perceptions of education personnel, particularly related service providers. Professional associations are not only public-facing advocates for the professional status of school-based related service providers but can also improve public perceptions of the professions through recruitment efforts and public awareness campaigns. An example of this is the **American Occupational Therapy Association's [Student Recruitment Campaign](#)**. More information on this campaign can be found on OSEP's [Attract, Prepare, Retain resource page](#).



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## *Prepare Briefs*



# Preparing Personnel SIMULATION

## Description

Simulation allows candidates to have repeated trials in high-stakes situations without being placed in an actual setting. This gives them an opportunity to make mistakes that they can learn from without risking the loss of valuable resources such as money, time, and people (Dieker, Rodriguez, Lignugaris/Kraft, Hynes, & Hughes, 2014).

## Overview

As technology evolves, educator preparation programs must adapt to emerging technologies to improve teacher candidates' **opportunities for practice**. Simulation can be used to provide **low-risk** experiences for teacher candidates to **practice critical teaching skills** throughout their preparation without the risks associated with in-person field placements (OSEP Summit Prepare Panel, 2020).

When incorporating simulation into a special education preparation program, stakeholders must consider the following components: the **platform** (e.g., Mursion, TeachLivE), the simulation **scenarios**, the **participants** (e.g., preservice candidates, paraprofessionals), and the **population** of students served (e.g., students with disabilities) (Dieker, Hynes, Hughes, Hardin, & Becht, 2017; Ely, Alves, Dolenc, Debolt, & Walton, 2018). Preparation programs should strategically plan for the **recurrence** of simulation throughout preparation along with the accessibility of the digital platform to candidates.

Simulation is particularly impactful in addressing **inequitable barriers** that **rural areas** and **high-poverty communities** face related to teacher preparation (Dieker et al., 2017). A larger proportion of personnel in rural districts are prepared through **alternative preparation** and **grow your own** programs than their suburban peers. Participants in alternative preparation programs **often complete coursework while working full time** in school settings. Simulation allows candidates to **gain experience** practicing skills with **different student populations** than those they work with during the school day (Dieker et al., 2014; Bove, Braam, Lawrenz, & Kirchhoff, 2011; Woods, 2016). Since simulation experiences can be conducted at any time of day, preparation programs can easily design their programs to allow candidates to participate in simulated experiences **in the evening** or **during free periods** during the daytime **without leaving their work settings**.

## Research Findings

Research has highlighted the benefits of using **simulation** to--

- help preparation programs pursue specific educational objectives (Dieker et al., 2014);
- prepare candidates to deal with a variety of high-stakes situations that are **specific to students with disabilities**;
- allow personnel preparation programs to **lower costs** associated with extending candidate practice time in the field and labor costs (Badiee & Kaufman, 2015; Dieker et al., 2014);
- help candidates refine **their classroom management skills and ability to deliver systematic instruction** to diverse learners (Hudson, Voytecki, Owens, & Zhang, 2019); and
- allow administrators to prepare new teachers during the summer to ensure their readiness to **address challenges and scenarios that are common or specific** to their school (Dieker et al., 2014, 2017).

A 2011 quasi-experimental study at a midwestern university on the simulation platform **simSchool** found that candidates who received preparation through simulation rated their problem-solving skills and confidence to work with students with different needs as improved as a result of their use of simulation (McPherson et al., 2011).

It is important to note that the use of simulation in educator preparation is most effective when **paired with strong evidence-based instruction** and **comprehensive practice-based clinical experiences** (Benedict et al., 2016; OSEP Symposium, 2019).

### Research Findings (Continued)

As research on simulation is still emerging, most current research on simulation focuses on the use of specific platforms in teacher preparation, such as TeachLivE and Mursion. To better understand the impact of simulation on the effective preparation of a diverse workforce to serve students with disabilities, more research needs to be conducted on the impact of simulation on other school-based personnel, early interventionists, and related service providers. Additionally, research disaggregating findings by race or gender has not been conducted on a large scale.

## Exemplars

- [Western Oregon University](#). This university uses the simulation program Mursion to prepare special education and general education preservice teachers to use high-leverage practices and collect and use data to make instructional decisions.
- [TeachLivE™](#). This mixed-reality classroom has simulated students, which allows teachers to develop their preservice skills within a safe environment that does not place real students at risk. A wide range of literature exists on the effectiveness of TeachLivE, including how it benefits the instruction of students with disabilities.

(Additional exemplars can be found on the [Attract, Prepare, Retain resource page](#).)

# KEY IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

## Critical Components for Success

*(Lists are not sequential)*

### Setting the Stage

- Select a simulation platform to incorporate into educator and related service provider preparation that is accessible to all preservice candidates.
- Identify funding sources for the platform cost and fees (e.g., ESSA, Title II).
- Determine essential learning objectives for all students across the course of preparation.
- Build partnerships between local education agencies (LEAs) and preparation programs.
- Have LEAs inform partner preparation programs of challenges that novice educators or service providers are facing in their schools.
- Establish a State education agency (SEA) system that allows preparation programs to communicate data related to preparation through simulation back to the State.
- Identify a framework for observing candidate practice within simulation and for providing feedback.
- Plan for the reoccurrence of simulation.

### Initial Start-Up

- Identify a “champion” who will oversee the virtual platform’s use in the institution and will serve as the primary communication liaison with the platform manager.
- Train faculty on how to use the platform and the framework for observing candidate practice.
- Convene preparation program faculty to establish collaboratively where simulation can be used to pursue certain learning outcomes and which outcomes require in-person clinical experiences.
- Select scenarios and populations of students served to integrate into the platform.

### Continuous Improvement

- Identify new data sources to evaluate the effectiveness of the program.
- Locate funding opportunities to expand the use of simulation.

## Related Services

Researchers and practitioners from across related service fields indicate how the emergence of telepractice in professions such as speech-language pathology, occupational therapy, orientation and mobility services, and physical therapy reflects the growing capacity for preparation programs to implement simulation into personnel preparation. While simulation is not widely practiced, in contrast to the simulation in teacher preparation that often occurs in school settings, related service preparation must embed simulation in a variety of settings, including simulated home settings.

Although it has not become common practice in school-based contexts, professions such as physical and occupational therapy have long incorporated practice through simulation into personnel preparation (Imms et al., 2017; Moyer et al., 2017). Institutions of higher education (IHEs) that already embed simulation into non-school-based preparation can leverage these existing simulation experiences and partner with other programs to expand simulation into school-based preparation. As these physical and occupational therapy programs already have personnel within their institution with knowledge of these platforms, school-based preparation providers can collaborate to pilot simulation experiences for school-based preparation as well.



### Critical Components for Success (Continued)

- Convene preparation program faculty to address changes that need to be made during implementation.
- Collect program completion data to analyze the impact of simulation on novice teachers' perceptions of their ability to address challenges and scenarios that are common or specific to their school.
- Engage former candidates and their administrators to find gaps in preparation that can be addressed through increased use of simulation.
- Collaborate with other institutions that incorporate simulation into their preparation programs to share lessons learned and areas for improvement.

### Leveraging Lessons Learned

- Convene preparation program, SEA, and LEA personnel to determine the feasibility of sustaining and/or scaling up the use of simulation in educator preparation.
- Identify new partnerships between preparation programs and LEAs.
- Share success stories.
- Develop guidance, resources, and tools.

## Early Childhood

Through their field experiences, early childhood and early intervention (EI) candidates often work with extremely vulnerable populations (Gardner et al., 2019; OSEP Symposium, 2019). While not a common practice, embedding virtual simulation experiences into the preparation of personnel who will serve infants, toddlers, and young children with disabilities is one way to reduce the risk to these highly vulnerable populations. Simulation techniques have long been used as training and feedback tools in fields, such as aviation, where real-world practice is dangerous, costly, or difficult to organize (Badiee & Kaufman, 2015). Much like aviation training, early childhood and EI preparation programs can use simulation to allow candidates to translate course content into practice in extremely high-risk scenarios without actual risk being placed upon any real infants, toddlers, and young children, allowing the candidates the flexibility to make and learn from mistakes.

## Stakeholder Spotlight

- **IHE Leadership (e.g., Deans, Associate Deans, and Department Chairs).** IHE leaders are in a unique position to support faculty from across colleges and departments by investing in technologies with broad applicability, like simulation. Some IHEs have found success in partnering with OSEP-funded technical assistance centers, such as Western Oregon's collaboration with the CEEDAR Center to embed simulation into their preparation programs. Professional associations can also serve as a source of fiscal support for IHE leaders who intend to embed simulation into their programs. Members of the [American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education](#) (AACTE) can partner with an organization to embed the Mursion virtual platform into their program at a discounted rate.
- **Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs).** Inequity in preparation program funding across IHEs continues to be an issue. This is especially true among HBCUs and MSIs, which are traditionally more underfunded than their non-HBCU/MSI contemporaries (Williams & Davis, 2019). Addressing funding inequity is particularly important when considering simulation, given the associated upfront costs. To address financial barriers, HBCU and MSI leaders may consider partnering with other institutions or LEAs to offset costs, increase collaboration, and promote ongoing professional learning through preservice and in-service settings.

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# Preparing Personnel RESIDENCIES

## Description

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) describes a “teacher residency program” as a school-based teacher preparation program in which a *prospective* teacher teaches alongside an *effective* teacher while receiving concurrent instruction in the content area in which the teacher will become certified or licensed (ESSA Sec. 2002). Recently, the definition of residency programs has expanded to include programs for other personnel.

## Overview

Residency programs recruit candidates to work as **paid apprentices** while completing **integrated coursework** (Arundel, 2020). In contrast to traditional 4-year preparation programs that culminate in a semester-long field experience, residency models **embed clinical experiences** throughout every level of preservice preparation (OSEP Symposium Prepare Panel, 2020).

Most residencies last **the equivalent of one school year**, with a candidate working alongside a **cooperating mentor** throughout the program (Silva et al., 2014). Programs often differ in whether they match candidates with a single mentor for the full year or give candidates experience learning from several mentors (Silva et al., 2014). Additionally, residency programs are characterized by **strong partnerships** between preparation programs and local education agencies (LEAs) as well as other stakeholders (NCTR, 2018).

While 60% of personnel work within 20 miles of where they attended high school, recent data indicate that student teaching placement is more predictive of where novice teachers begin teaching, which often is not in their hometowns (Goldhaber, Krieg, & Theobald, 2017). Residency programs can address this evolving trend by giving teacher candidates the opportunity to gain a strong footing in the **local context** where they will eventually teach.

Residency programs are different from other strategies because the candidates are paid. This helps address the **barrier of affordability** that greatly contributes to shortages of personnel to serve students with disabilities. By addressing the cost barrier, residency programs appeal to a larger prospective candidate pool than “traditional” preparation programs.

## Research Findings

Research on residency programs suggests the following:

- Residencies bring **greater gender and racial diversity** into the teaching workforce (Guha & Kini, 2016).
- Teacher candidates who complete clinical experiences through residency models report **greater capacity to work with students with diverse learning needs** than their nonresidency peers.
- Residencies allow candidates to experience **extensive clinical practice**, which is essential to novice teacher effectiveness (AACTE, 2018).
- Through residencies, preservice candidates can gain a deeper understanding of and are better able to implement **evidence-based classroom practices** (Ross & Lignugaris/Kraft, 2015).
- Residency programs were one of several alternative preparation programs that found **success** in recruiting, preparing, and retaining high-quality **Black male special educators** (Scott, 2017).
  - **Stipends** associated with residency programs proved **especially impactful** for Black male special educators preparing to enter the workforce (Scott, 2017).
- The **average retention rate** for educators prepared through a residency program, including those serving students with disabilities, is **greater than** the retention rate for educators from nonresidency programs (NCEE, 2015).

## Overview (Continued)

They are also particularly important for **diversifying** the education workforce, as **personnel of color are more likely to struggle with the costs of preparation** (Fiddiman, Campbell, & Partelow, 2019). Preparing more personnel to serve students with disabilities has a far-reaching impact, as extensive evidence shows that **students of color** experience **positive academic outcomes** when served by personnel of color (Dixon, Griffin & Teoh, 2019).

## Part of a Strategic Approach

In a study of 30 residency programs, novice personnel who completed residency programs generally reported feeling **more satisfied with their training** and their jobs than other novice personnel (Silva et al., 2014). Feelings of satisfaction among educators are **linked to increased retention** among novice personnel (Podolsky, Kini, Bishop, & Darling-Hammond, 2016). Additionally, in 2017, the National Center for Teacher Residencies found that in participating schools, teachers prepared through residencies reported **increased ability to address the rigors of high-need schools, increased student achievement, and increased teacher retention** (NCTR, 2017).

## Exemplars

- [Boston Teacher Residency Program](#). This year-long AmeriCorps program places apprentices with experienced mentor teachers while they complete master's level coursework. An in-depth study of the Boston Teacher Residency Program found that 80% of residency graduates were still teaching in their third year, compared with 63% of nonresident teachers (Guha, Hyler, & Darling-Hammond, 2016).
- [University of North Dakota's Special Education Resident Teacher Program](#). This 1-year residency program prepares candidates to work in rural localities in North Dakota and western Minnesota by placing future educators with an experienced mentor who serves students with mild or moderate disabilities. In this residency model, the school district or special education unit provides funding for teachers in residence who will be placed in their district or unit.

(Additional exemplars can be found on the [Attract, Prepare, Retain resource page](#).)

# KEY IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

## Critical Components for Success

*(Lists are not sequential)*

### Setting the Stage

- Institutions of higher education (IHEs) identify programs of study for pilot educator residency programs.
- Each preparation program recruits and selects a trusted community partner to serve as the pilot program's site, as well as other stakeholders to involve in planning the residency program.
- With input from preparation program faculty, LEA and State education agency (SEA) personnel establish a rigorous selection process and criteria for the mentor teachers and the teachers in residence.
- The LEAs implement professional development programs for the mentor teachers.
- The preparation programs identify a validated framework for both program faculty and mentor teachers to observe the teachers in residence practice and to provide feedback accordingly.
- The SEA identifies funding sources (e.g., ESSA, Title II, Federal grants) to incentivize the creation of residency programs.
- The SEA establishes competitive grants to encourage partnerships between preparation programs and LEAs.

### Initial Start-Up

- The preparation programs identify and create a formal partnership agreement or memorandum of understanding with the LEAs or schools.
- Programs establish a structure for teachers in residence to receive pay for their role in the schools.
- Convene leaders and faculty to restructure the preparation programs to address essential learning outcomes through residencies.
- Develop training to share with chosen LEA and preparation program leaders.
- Each program brings together the full school community to ensure all personnel are aware of the program, their role in supporting residents, and any impacts on school schedules or routines.
- The programs identify data sources to evaluate program effectiveness.

## Related Services

Unlike teacher preparation contexts, residency programs in related service preparation have **not** been widely practiced. Related service professionals work across a large range of ages and student populations, and their preparation programs typically include **internships**. Internships may span across multiple years of a program and occur **in a variety of diverse settings** (Finigan-Carr & Shaia, 2018; Phillippo, Kelly, Shayman, & Frey, 2018). Successful completion of an internship is a program requirement across related service disciplines. Unlike residency programs, **internships are unpaid**. These differences are likely why residency programs have not gained traction among related service preparation programs.



## Critical Components for Success (Continued)

### Continuous Improvement

- Once successfully piloted, the preparation programs scale up to additional community partners.
- Programs engage former candidates and their administrators to identify gaps in preparation to address through coursework.
- Collaborate with other residency programs to share lessons learned and areas for improvement.
- The LEAs and SEA formally recognize successful residency program mentors as advanced teachers or as teacher leaders and increase compensation accordingly.

### Leveraging Lessons Learned

- Convene preparation program, SEA, and LEA personnel to determine the feasibility of sustaining and/or scaling up the use of residencies in educator preparation.
- Share success stories.
- Develop guidance, resources, and tools.

## Early Childhood

Alternative routes to certification have been gaining popularity in the early childhood field for some time (Fiechtl & Hager, 2019). Yet, residency programs have only recently begun to be adopted in early childhood contexts. Most of these residency programs are **only available at the master's level**, whereas most early childhood providers begin their careers at a lower level. Many candidates **begin pursuing certification** in early childhood fields at **the community college (associate's) level** (OSEP Symposium, 2019). The contrast between the level at which residencies are offered creates barriers for residency programs to attract candidates.

Additionally, a 2020 focus group with researchers and practitioners from across early childhood professions indicated that residency programs face further barriers.

The focus group highlighted that since residency programs typically take place in a **single clinical setting**, the multiple settings of early childhood and early intervention preparation **may make the residency model harder to adopt**. Such settings include **home visits** and settings in which personnel **serve infants** with disabilities. However, focus group participants noted that residency programs can be used for clinical experiences in which candidates serve populations from **ages 3 to 5** (OSEP Summit Prepare Panel, 2020).

## Other Stakeholder Support Required for This Strategy

- **Policymakers.** Policymakers at both the **State and local levels** play a key role in building the capacity of preparation programs to create residency opportunities. Often, policy issues create a large barrier to the implementation of residency programs. For example, several States and localities have legislation that makes it difficult for educator candidates to complete certification requirements while in a paid clinical setting. Policy makers can support the expansion of personnel residencies by passing legislation to remove such barriers as well as legislation that provides additional funding to residency programs. The **National Center for Teacher Residencies** offers a [set of recommendations for State policy makers](#) on how to support residency programs. The recommendations focus on four policy areas: (1) partnership and stakeholder collaboration, (2) recruitment and selection, (3) coaching and feedback, and (4) assessment and evaluation. More information on this and similar reports can be found on OSEP's [Attract, Prepare, Retain resource page](#).

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## Preparing Personnel

# MICRO-CREDENTIALS

## Description

Micro-credentialing, a rapidly expanding practice in the field of education, is a form of digital certification indicating an educator has demonstrated a specific competency in a very targeted area (Kerr-Vanderslice, LaTurner, & Nelson, 2020). Although micro-credentialing has not been widely adopted, systems of micro-credentialing offer formalized recognition that an educator or educator candidate has developed particular skills or masteries within a larger skill set (Harvey et al., 2020) and may provide an efficient way to increase knowledge of noncertified teachers or enhance additional certification efforts of current teachers.

## Overview

A micro-credential is a self-directed, competency-based **demonstration of expertise** in a single target area, assessed through a portfolio of evidence, submitted through an online system, and evaluated by a qualified assessor (Berry, Airhart, & Byrd, 2016; Grunwald Associates & Digital Promise, 2015). This personalized and targeted learning process is supported by strong **coaching** and **collaboration**, and it enables the continuous identification, support, and recognition of **best practices** (BloomBoard, n.d.; Grunwald Associates & Digital Promise, 2015). Once an individual completes a micro-credential, they receive recognition often through a digital “badge.”

Institutions of higher education (IHEs) continue to explore micro-credentialing to improve teacher preparation (OSEP Summit Prepare Panel, 2020). Many **pilot programs** are being developed to implement micro-credentialing as part of educator preparation and development. Many IHEs have created **partnerships** with local education agencies (LEAs) to identify **specific skills or competencies** that could form the foundation for micro-credential development (OSEP Summit Prepare Panel, 2020).

Currently, micro-credentials are individually recognized by different LEAs and States, with **little to no reciprocity** between localities (Kerr-Vanderslice et al., 2020). Micro-credentials exist in approximately 24 States—that is, States where at least one IHE offers micro-credentials to educators (Kerr-Vanderslice et al., 2020). In 11 of these States, individual LEAs offer micro-credentials for their in-service teachers. While approaches to micro-credentialing are still developing, most programs are hosted **online** (Kerr-Vanderslice et al., 2020).

## Research Findings

As micro-credentialing is a new practice, there is limited research and supporting evidence on the impact of micro-credentials on educator preparation and effectiveness.

However, the existing research and literature on **micro-credentials** has shown the following:

- Like all other forms of educator preparation and professional learning, micro-credentialing **is not a one-size-fits-all approach** (Acree, 2016).
- The **instructional design** and **online platform** of micro-credentials are strong indicators of the success of the micro-credential programs (Acree, 2016).
- There is a need to **provide (limited) choice** in the development and skills built through micro-credentials (DeMonte, 2017; Gamrat, Zimmerman, Dudek, & Peck, 2014).
- Micro-credentials are most effective when **aligned with local and State standards** and requirements (Gamrat et al., 2014).

As this is an expanding field, most available information on micro-credentials in teacher preparation and development is based on feedback from practitioners on their own use of micro-credentials (DeMonte, 2017). Large-scale research needs to be conducted on micro-credentials to determine the long-term impact of micro-credentials on educator preparation and retention.

## Part of a Strategic Approach

Micro-credentials have emerged as a successful practice in large part because they **empower** personnel and candidates to take **autonomy** over their own professional learning. Many States and districts have also used micro-credentials to **incrementally** prepare personnel to **take on leadership roles** (Kuriacose & Warn, 2018). The impact that micro-credentials have on personnel empowerment and leadership suggests that micro-credentials have **implications for teacher retention**, as both empowerment and leadership have been shown to be linked to teacher retention. States, preparation programs, and LEAs can **leverage this connection to build coherent approaches** to the attraction, preparation, and retention of personnel to serve students with disabilities.

## Exemplars

- [Micro-Credentials in Kettle Moraine School District](#). This Wisconsin school district offers educators personalized opportunities to earn micro-credentials in specific skills and competencies that, once demonstrated, can lead to increased salary and compensation.
- [University of Texas' Children's Learning Institute \(CLI\) Early Childhood Specialist Micro-Credentials](#). The University of Texas' CLI Engage initiative is implementing a system for early childhood specialists to earn micro-credentials as part of an early childhood competency framework. The competencies involved in these micro-credentials have been identified as essential for all early childhood specialists, such as coaches, trainers, and assessors. CLI Engage identifies a cohesive set of skills for each role that candidates would need to demonstrate to earn these micro-credentials in the form of digital badges.

(Additional exemplars can be found on the [Attract, Prepare, Retain resource page](#).)

## Resource Spotlight

- [IRIS Center Micro-Credentials](#). Through collaboration with Digital Promise, the IRIS Center offers focused and intense courses to develop discrete instructional skills and practices. Once participants successfully complete a course, they receive a digital badge to document their receipt of an IRIS micro-credential.

# KEY IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

## Critical Components for Success

*(Lists are not sequential)*

### Setting the Stage

- Identify existing relationships between LEAs, educator preparation programs, policy makers, and/or any relevant stakeholders or organizations.
- Examine data related to the current workforce.
- Select specific competencies or populations of candidates for piloting a micro-credential program.
- Determine a digital platform for micro-credentialing to embed in educator and related service provider preparation.
- Find funding sources for the platform cost and fees.
- Establish a system for evaluation and requirements for a qualified assessor.
- Identify a framework for observing practice and analyzing evidence.

### Initial Start-Up

- Train appropriate staff in use of the micro-credentialing platform.
- Design screening and selection processes for assessors.
- Identify an accountability or quality control system for micro-credential allocation.
- Select key stakeholders to crosswalk the micro-credential program with local and State standards to ensure alignment.

### Continuous Improvement

- Convene partners to address changes that need to be made during implementation.
- Identify data sources to evaluate the effectiveness of the program.
- Engage former candidates and their administrators to recognize successes and shortcomings of the micro-credentialing program.
- Collaborate with other LEAs that incorporate micro-credentialing into their preparation to share lessons learned and areas for improvement.

## Related Services

Some micro-credentialing systems have expanded to include related service providers, such as **Kettle Moraine School District's** micro-credentialing program (see exemplar above), which now offers micro-credentials to **speech therapists and audiologists** (Kettle Moraine School District, 2019). Yet, in comparison to its use in teacher preparation and professional learning, micro-credentialing has **not been widely adopted** in related service professions.

Even so, micro-credentialing continues to be a rapidly expanding strategy that related service professions are considering. In an open letter to the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education at the U.S. Department of Education, the **American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA)** **recognized micro-credentials** as an effective best practice for professional learning (ASHA, 2020).

## Early Childhood

Much like their K–12 counterparts, IHEs continue to explore micro-credentials within their early childhood programs of study (OSEP Summit Prepare Panel, 2020). One example of an institution implementing micro-credentials is the **University of Virginia (UVA)**. UVA first began exploring micro-credentials in early childhood education by **partnering with a local district to pilot a micro-credential** (UVA, 2016). Once supporting children's reasoning and problem-solving skills was identified as the **targeted area**, faculty at the university identified systems for **observing and evaluating** that competency so that candidates could receive a digital badge recognizing their proficiency in that area. This **pilot proved successful**, and UVA has since **expanded** micro-credentials to several areas within early childhood education and early childhood special education with a variety of partnering LEAs (OSEP Summit Prepare Panel, 2020).



### Critical Components for Success (Continued)

- Have LEAs and/or State education agencies (SEAs) formally recognize the micro-credential program and increase teacher compensation accordingly.

### Leveraging Lessons Learned

- Identify new partnerships between preparation programs and LEAs.
- Share success stories.
- Develop guidance, resources, and tools.

## Stakeholder Spotlight

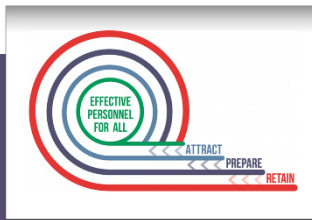
- **Local Education Agency (LEA) Leaders.** LEA leaders, such as district superintendents and charter management organization directors, play a key role in integrating systems of micro-credentials into their localities (Kerr-Vanderslice et al., 2020). LEA leaders serve this role in three key ways: (1) by **collaborating with local IHEs** to establish a micro-credential program, (2) by **working with SEAs** to formally **recognize and establish policy** around micro-credentials, and (3) by providing **incentives** for personnel in their localities to earn micro-credentials. Leaders in **Juab School District in Utah** have found success in improving the preparation and retention of personnel by offering salary-based incentives for their micro-credentialing system (Kuriacose & Warn, 2018). More information on the role of micro-credentials in addressing the personnel pipeline can be found on OSEP's [Attract, Prepare, Retain resource page](#).

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## *Preparing Personnel*

# ONGOING PRACTICE-BASED OPPORTUNITIES AND FEEDBACK

## Description

Practice-based opportunities allow candidates to integrate content and pedagogy acquired through coursework into practice through strategically aligned field experiences (Benedict, Holdheide, Brownell, & Foley, 2016). They should occur throughout personnel preparation, with candidates reflecting on what they learned, coupled with regular feedback from preparation program faculty.

## Overview

Practice-based opportunities have proven effective for preparing candidates in other fields. For example, both **health care and the military** have found success in aligning learned skills with opportunities to practice in real-time settings to **improve the use of evidence-based practice** (Benedict et al., 2016; OSEP Summit Prepare Panel, 2020; Sookermany, 2012). Like education, these other fields have found that opportunities for practice are **particularly effective** when **coupled with feedback or critiques** (OSEP Summit Prepare Panel, 2020; Sookermany, 2012).

In an education context, practice-based opportunities are most effective when they are--

- carefully **planned and interwoven** with coursework,
- implemented in **high-quality** settings, and
- **reoccurring** to ensure multiple and varied opportunities for feedback (Brownell, Chard, Benedict, & Lignugaris-Kraft, 2018).

These experiences allow candidates the essential opportunity to identify and reflect on ineffective practice (OSEP Summit Prepare Panel, 2020).

In a 2016 brief, the CEDAR Center highlighted that **focus, duration, and alignment** with coursework are three of the most impactful considerations for the successful development of practice-based opportunities in educator preparation (Benedict et al., 2016).

## Research Findings

Research on practice-based opportunities indicates the following:

- Opportunities to practice and receive feedback throughout personnel preparation better expose candidates to children and students with **varying levels of instructional support needs**, including those with disabilities (Benedict et al., 2016).
- Practice-based teacher education leads to candidates having an increased capacity to **adapt** and thus better serve all learners in an educational setting (Janssen, Gross, & Westbroek, 2015; Sayeski et al., 2019).
- Opportunities to practice specific skills and pedagogy are linked to **increased problem-solving** capabilities (Sayeski et al., 2019).
- Practice-based opportunities improve the capacity of candidates to **collaborate** with other practitioners (Leko, Brownell, Sindelar, & Kiely, 2015).
- Practice-based opportunities allow **both general and special education** candidates to function effectively in a **multi-tiered system of supports framework** (Leko et al., 2015).
- Practice and feedback delivered through diverse methods such as **peer coaching** and **bug-in-ear coaching** have been found not only to be more **cost-effective** but also to positively impact candidates' efficacy and in some cases **student achievement** (Brownell et al., 2019).

### Overview (Continued)

To effectively implement practice-based opportunities, preparation providers should familiarize candidates with knowledge about evidence-based practices and provide feedback through a set of **validated frameworks** for describing and observing such practices (OSEP Summit Prepare Panel, 2020). This feedback should be **goal oriented** and be focused on **balancing direct critique** and building the **capacity of candidates to practice self-reflection** (Cornelius & Nagro, 2014).

### Research Findings (Continued)

Evidence shows that candidates who have experienced practice-based opportunities aligned with coursework are more likely to use **evidence-based practices with fidelity** than peers who did not experience similar opportunities (Chorzempa, Smith, & Sileo, 2019; Mason-Williams, Frederick, & Mulcahy, 2015; OSEP Summit Prepare Panel, 2020).

## Part of a Strategic Approach

As personnel preparation continues to evolve, many diverse methods of incorporating practice-based opportunities and feedback have emerged. Methods built into traditional preparation programs include **bug-in-ear coaching** and **virtual simulation** opportunities, while some nontraditional programs, such as **residency programs**, provide reoccurring opportunities for practice and feedback within educational settings (Benedict et al., 2016; OSEP Summit Prepare Panel, 2020).

## Exemplars

- **Project VIDEO.** This OSEP-funded fellowship administered by the University of Virginia's Curry School of Education and Human Development supports 75 special education and speech–language pathology candidates in serving students with learning disabilities by providing practice-based opportunities and aligned coursework.
- **Project CREED.** Project CREED (Culturally Responsive Exceptional Educators for Diversity) is an OSEP-funded project at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical (A&T) University, where scholarship-funded special education teacher candidates are given the opportunity to practice delivering evidence-based practices and receive ongoing feedback throughout their preparation in a variety of settings, including in high-poverty and low-performing rural and urban settings. By providing opportunities to practice pedagogy and receive feedback in these diverse settings, North Carolina A&T helps preservice candidates become culturally competent educators.

(Additional exemplars can be found on the [Attract, Prepare, Retain resource page](#).)

## Resource Spotlight

- **[Learning to Teach: Practice-Based Preparation in Teacher Education.](#)** This brief from the CEEDAR Center presents an overview of the essential features of high-quality, structured, and sequenced opportunities to practice in teacher preparation programs. *Learning to Teach* analyzes four innovative methods of providing practice-based opportunities that can be embedded in coursework by teacher educators (microteaching, case-based instruction, virtual reality, and lab-like experiences) and four field-based, practice-based experiences (video analysis, tutoring, lesson study, and coaching). This brief also highlights additional exemplars from institutions of higher education (IHEs) that have effectively integrated practice-based opportunities and feedback into their programs.

# KEY IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

## Critical Components for Success

*(Lists are not sequential)*

### Setting the Stage

- Identify essential learning outcomes for all students across the course of the preparation program.
- Select evidence-based practices and pedagogical techniques that candidates will be expected to learn and apply before exiting the program.
- Identify criteria to determine whether candidates successfully implemented these evidence-based practices and pedagogy.
- Use a validated framework for observing candidate practice and provide feedback accordingly.
- Work with local education agency (LEA) partner(s) for high-quality and reoccurring field placement settings.
- Have LEAs select high-quality teachers who can serve as cooperating teachers or mentors for candidates during their clinical experiences.
- Determine if the State education agency (SEA) requires evidence that practice-based opportunities are embedded in the preparation programs.
- Have the SEA establish a system for preparation programs to communicate data related to practice-based opportunities back to the State.
- Ensure that the SEA identifies funding sources (e.g., ESSA, Title II, IDEA) to incentivize local or district partnerships with preparation programs.

### Initial Start-Up

- Convene preparation program faculty to collaboratively align syllabi to emphasize repeated opportunities for practicing critical content and pedagogy throughout the program.
- Consider the focus of the practices emphasized, their duration, and their alignment with coursework across the program.
- Train preparation program faculty in the use of the observation and feedback framework.
- Ensure that cooperating teachers in field placement settings can model and provide coaching and feedback on the evidence-based practices emphasized in the coursework.

## Related Services

Practice-based opportunities coupled with feedback have long been implemented as part of related service personnel preparation. Preparation programs across all related service professions place emphasis on providing candidates with opportunities to engage in field experiences in a **variety of educational contexts and student populations** (OSEP Symposium, 2019). Exposing candidates to various contexts offers them an opportunity to gain experience in adapting evidence-based practices to be **responsive to all populations served**. Feedback to candidates about their implementation of evidence-based practices should reflect the appropriateness and effectiveness of the adaptations.

As enrollment in related service personnel preparation programs continues to increase and become more diverse, many programs have started implementing practice-based opportunities in inventive ways (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 2019). One innovative program that integrates ongoing practice-based opportunities and feedback into related service preparation is [Project LinkS](#). This OSEP-funded grant at the University of Kentucky aims to improve speech–language pathology preparation by providing explicit training in **telepractice** for the delivery of speech–language services while concurrently embedding ongoing clinical experiences in rural schools through **teleconferencing**. Over the course of the 5-year grant, Project LinkS intends to prepare 40 master’s-level speech–language pathologists who will commit to a 3-year service obligation delivering supports to students with disabilities. More information on this and similar programs can be found on OSEP’s [Attract, Prepare, Retain resource page](#).

## Critical Components for Success (Continued)

### Continuous Improvement

- Collect program completion data to analyze the effectiveness of practice-based opportunities.
- Begin identifying indicators of proficiency for practices that candidates struggle to master.
- Convene preparation program faculty to address these indicators and restructure the program as needed.
- Ensure that schools in which field placements take place provide regular and structured feedback to the preparation program.

### Leveraging Lessons Learned

- Convene preparation program leadership, SEA, and LEAs to determine the feasibility of sustaining and/or scaling up effective practice-based opportunities across the State.
- Identify new partnerships between preparation programs and LEAs.
- Share success stories.
- Develop guidance, resources, and tools.

## Early Childhood

While practice-based opportunities in early childhood special education (ECSE) and early intervention (EI) preparation are still emerging, practice-based opportunities and feedback continue to be widely implemented in early childhood fields (OSEP Symposium, 2019). ECSE and EI professionals work in a **variety of settings, including nonschool settings**. Therefore, preparation providers must ensure that their programs feature practice-based opportunities and feedback **across settings** (e.g., home, childcare, preschools). A study of ECSE candidates found that those who had several field experiences **felt better prepared** to serve infants, toddlers, and young children with disabilities (Recchia & Puig, 2011). As adequate feelings of preparedness are linked to **increased job satisfaction**, which in turn is linked to **increased retention** of novice personnel, offering opportunities for practice and feedback in various early childhood settings is **essential to address shortages** of personnel serving students with disabilities (Podolsky, Kini, Bishop & Darling-Hammond, 2016). To reduce shortages, preparation program leaders must **collaborate with faculty** to identify all necessary settings **where practice-based experiences** must be **embedded**.

## Stakeholder Spotlight

- **Preparation Program Faculty.** As the party responsible for introducing evidence-based practices to candidates, preparation program faculty play a key role in facilitating opportunities for candidates to apply those practices in their clinical experiences. McDonald, Kazemi, and Schneider Kavanagh (2013) introduced a **framework** for implementing core practices and activities into personnel preparation that many preparation providers have adopted when implementing instruction on evidence-based practices. This framework consists of a cycle: **introducing the practice** to candidates, **preparing candidates** to embed the practice in their clinical experience, the **candidates implementing the practice** with students, and the **instructor analyzing and providing feedback** to the candidates on their implementation of the practice. More information on the role of personnel preparation program instructors in enhancing the availability of effective personnel through ongoing practice-based opportunities and feedback can be found on OSEP's [Attract. Prepare. Retain resource page](#).



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## ***Retain Briefs***



## *Retaining Personnel*

# ENHANCING PROFESSIONAL LEADERSHIP

## Description

**Promoting professional leadership** is a strategy that involves formally or informally recognizing individuals who influence, mobilize, and guide personnel in their school or district and in the field itself (Danielson, 2006; Center on Great Teachers and Leaders [GTL Center], 2019). These leaders often take on duties in addition to their current role to improve instructional practice in schools. **Formal professional leadership** requires the implementation of structures and programs that recognize, incentivize, compensate, and encourage leadership roles.

## Overview

**Formal endorsements of teacher leadership have been found to contribute to teacher retention and improved student outcomes** in general education (OSEP Summit Retain Panel, 2020). Teacher leaders can be called *content experts, professional development leads, lead or master teachers, peer observers, mentors or coaches, cooperating teachers, teach to lead/special initiative team members, community of practice participants, and teachers on special assignment* (GTL Center, 2019). It is important to clearly define teacher leadership roles to address retention goals directly and promote sustainable organizational improvement (GTL Center, 2019). **Special educators** often take on a variety of informal leadership roles in their instructional setting. Unlike many of their general education counterparts, they often are not formally designated as **teacher leaders**. Creative funding strategies are sometimes used to address this, which often involve reallocating resources that are already available to prioritize compensating teacher leaders with appropriate pay and formal acknowledgement in position titles (OSEP Summit Retain Panel, 2020). Typically, local and State education agencies (LEAs and SEAs) are responsible for establishing systems for teachers to become recognized as teacher leaders (Kraemer, 2016). States can be powerful partners for districts and schools that are implementing teacher leadership systems (GTL Center, 2019).

## Research Findings

There is a positive link between personnel leadership opportunities and job satisfaction and retention (Wixom, 2016).

- **Successful teacher leadership initiatives center on collaboration between administrators and teachers**, with administrators increasingly delegating decision-making responsibilities as the teachers amplify their leadership capacities (GTL Center, 2019; Hunzicker, 2017; Kraemer, 2016).
- Teachers in schools with strong teacher leaders have reported a **reduction in role confusion and ambiguity**. This is especially important in the field of special education, as role ambiguity is one of the main causes of special educator attrition (Rock et al., 2016).
- While the strategy of fostering teacher leaders has been widely adopted to support the retention of general educators, **little research exists on the need and experiences of teacher leaders within special education** (Bagley & Tang, 2018) and **related service** professions.

## Exemplars

- [Indiana Teacher Leaders Bootcamp](#). This program focuses on helping Indiana develop and retain high-quality educators across the State by creating a pathway for practicing teachers to grow into teacher leaders. Although not specifically targeted at special education, this bootcamp has many special educator participants.
- [District of Columbia's Leadership Initiative for Teachers \(LIFT\)](#). This program includes a five-stage career ladder aimed at retaining teachers in high-need areas, including special education, by providing high-performing teachers with opportunities for career advancement while remaining in their roles inside the classroom. Each stage of the career ladder involves additional leadership responsibilities and compensation, and at the culmination the participants assume a teacher leader role and are referred to as *expert teachers*.
- [Opportunity Culture](#). In this program, teachers' roles are restructured so that the teachers can serve as teacher leaders and extend their reach to more students—for additional pay but still within existing school-level budgets. Opportunity Culture has been adopted in 37 districts across the country, and evidence shows that this strategy has led to improved teacher retention in the participating schools (Opportunity Culture, 2020).

(Additional exemplars can be found on the [Attract, Prepare, Retain resource page](#).)

# KEY IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

## Critical Components for Success

*(Lists are not sequential)*

### Setting the Stage

- Formalized leadership roles that support retention require systems of career advancement. Implementing these roles cannot be done without increasing teacher leader compensation. It is important to strategically reallocate existing funds and budgets (OSEP Summit Retain Panel, 2020).
- Establish goals for your teacher leadership initiative and articulate the rationale.

### Initial Start-Up

- Clearly define formal teacher leadership roles and responsibilities within your school or district. Refer to Resource 2 in the *Teacher Leadership Toolkit 2.0* (GTL Center, 2019) as a starting point.
- Ensure that these roles and responsibilities are effectively communicated within your school or district.

### Continuous Improvement

- Identify new data sources to evaluate the effectiveness of the program.
- Locate funding opportunities to expand teacher leadership and career advancement programs.
- Collect data to analyze the impact of teacher leadership programs on special education teacher retention.
- Collect data on special education teachers' perceptions of opportunities for attaining a leadership role or for career advancement as well as their perceptions of current roles and responsibilities.
- Engage former candidates and their administrators to identify gaps in retention strategies that can be addressed through increased career advancement structures and formally defined leadership opportunities.

### Leveraging Successes

- Identify partners.
- Ensure that States, LEAs, and SEAs participate in the development of formalized teacher leadership strategies.
- Share success stories.
- Collaborate with other institutions that incorporate teacher leadership into their retention programs to share lessons learned and areas for improvement.

## Related Services

Related service professions commonly require an advanced degree for entry into the field (e.g., master's, PhD) as well as more intensive clinical experience than provided by traditional teacher preparation programs. As a result, some LEAs may opt to provide a higher base salary to differentiate the experience level that related service providers have upon entry into the field. This can help recognize personnel as experts from the onset of their careers. When staff feel valued, they are more likely to stay (OSEP Summit Retain Panel, 2020).

Incentivizing leadership roles across personnel may require creative allocation of funds. Salary increases help roles remain competitive and increase retention. [Minneapolis Public Schools](#) in Minnesota is an example of a district that financially recognized speech-language pathologists (SLPs) for obtaining of a certificate of clinical competence from the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA). Prior to the recognition, SLPs were not monetarily incentivized, while classroom teachers were recognized for national certification. For more examples of ways LEAs have found to provide monetary rewards and salary increases for school-based SLPs, refer to ASHA's guide to [Increasing Salaries in Schools](#) (ASHA, n.d.).

### Critical Components for Success (Continued)

- Determine the feasibility of sustaining and/or scaling up teacher leadership structures.
- Develop guidance, resources, and tools.

## Early Childhood

It is difficult to retain early childhood personnel because **salaries are generally low**. Often, personnel who serve younger children (i.e., early interventionists) are paid less than their counterparts (Austin, Edwards, Chavez, & Marcy, 2019.) Additionally, early childhood personnel of color are especially underpaid. This has significant implications for efforts to diversify the early education workforce, maintain quality services, and increase retention. Personnel with adequate training may seek new positions where they can apply their skills, continue to grow, and are acknowledged formally for the leadership roles they undertake. Creative strategies such as the **reallocation of existing funds** may benefit those who accept extra work by **recognizing they are compensated in both title and pay** (OSEP Summit Retain Panel, 2020). School leaders also can incentivize leadership by **funding professional memberships or annual licensing**. Funding may vary across the early education workforce; Head Start, for example, would rely on Federal funds while another childcare center might rely on parent fees (Austin, Edwards, Chavez, & Marcy, 2019).

## Stakeholder Spotlight

- **Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) Teams.** While implementation varies, educational settings across the nation are implementing an MTSS framework to proactively and preventatively support students. MTSS implementation leverages a team to examine LEA, school, and student data with the goal of reducing poor academic, social, and behavioral outcomes. This team approach may require additional training in evidence-based practices, validated intervention programs, formal progress monitoring, and data literacy. For personnel who demonstrate knowledge and expertise in MTSS, teams may consider formalizing team leadership roles or offering additional compensation (e.g., stipends or honoraria) for efforts above and beyond contract hours.

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## *Retaining Personnel*

# ONGOING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

## Description

Ongoing professional learning is continuous, targeted development aimed at enhancing skills and practice among teachers, interventionists, educational support personnel, and related service providers. To increase the effectiveness of personnel, ongoing professional learning must be deeply embedded in their daily work.

## Overview

When special education teachers begin their careers, they often think they **are given fewer professional learning opportunities to develop their capabilities** than their general education counterparts (Leko & Brownell, 2009; Ondrasek, Carver-Thomas, Scott, & Darling-Hammond, 2020). Beliefs about **inadequate professional development are linked to high rates of special education teacher attrition** (Ondrasek et al., 2020). It is important to implement systems of ongoing professional learning, especially for special education teachers, to address challenges with retention. Schools that provide personnel with **access to professional learning materials** have a lower risk of attrition (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019). Effective professional learning should build on knowledge obtained during initial induction and should continue throughout the career, providing personnel opportunities to gain new knowledge and enrich their current skills.

**Many stakeholders have a role in supporting the ongoing professional learning of special educators**, including State education agency (SEA) personnel, local education agency (LEA) personnel, and school leaders and administrators. **Administrators** can support ongoing professional learning by establishing comprehensive personnel evaluation systems (OSEP Summit Retain Panel, 2020). When employers help employees improve their practice, employees feel valued and are therefore more likely to stay (Workman & Wixom, 2016). For schools, **the right teacher evaluation system can help to align professional development initiatives with educator goals** by tracking teacher progress and identifying learning needs (Workman & Wixom, 2016).

## Research Findings

Research on special educator retention clearly shows that **intensive, ongoing professional learning experiences reduce turnover** among novice and midcareer educators (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019).

- Special educators who report they intend to stay in the field **feel more support from their administrators** regarding their professional development than those who plan to leave (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019).
- Professional learning is key for novice teachers, who are often **underprepared** for special education demands (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019).
- **Collaborative learning communities are an effective means** of promoting ongoing professional learning. When educators participate in collaborative professional learning communities (PLCs) or communities of practice (CoPs), they report **both higher job satisfaction and improved student outcomes** (Wei, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009).

Much of the research to date uses surveys or qualitative methodologies; thus, findings are oriented toward personnel perspectives. To determine features of ongoing professional learning within early childhood and K-12 education that lead to effective practice and outcomes, research should begin to incorporate more experimental designs. Additionally, researchers may elect to investigate how policy changes at the national, State, and local levels correlate with retention outcomes to better inform long-term solutions through policy.

## Overview (Continued)

Effective evaluation systems focus on supporting personnel in their growth rather than on removing those who underperform (Workman & Wixom, 2016). Use of such systems **increases teachers' perceptions of administrative support and positively influences personnel retention** (CEEDAR Center, 2020; Jones, Youngs, & Frank, 2013). However, it is critical that evaluation systems consider the specific skills that differentiate special education and related service delivery from general education **methods to decrease the likelihood of misalignment between evaluation and ongoing professional development needs** (Morris-Mathews, Stark, Jones, Brownell, & Bell, 2021).

## Exemplars

- [Rhode Island Professional Learning Standards \(RIPLS\)](#). The RIPLS provide specific descriptors to guide LEA and school leaders in improving professional learning for educators. The standards are designed to ensure professional development opportunities are of high quality, defined in the RIPLS as “a set of coherent learning experiences that are relevant, purposeful, systematic, and structured over a sustained period of time with the goal of improving and building upon educators’ practices and student outcomes.”
- [Virginia’s Pilot to Support First-Year Special Education Teachers](#). This program **improves teacher retention by offering free membership to the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC)**, ongoing professional development, and access to professional learning materials for first-year special educators in the State of Virginia. Evidence of the effectiveness of this program is not yet available, but CEC has expanded the program to additional States.
- [The IRIS Center](#). This OSEP-funded center disseminates free professional development materials, research, and modules that can assist professional learning providers who deliver training services to education staff working in school settings. Additionally, the IRIS Center offers professional development certificates for teachers and a school and district platform to help school leaders organize and track their teachers’ ongoing professional learning activities.

(Additional exemplars can be found on the [Attract, Prepare, Retain resource page](#).)

## Resource Spotlight

- [State Personnel Development Network’s Resource Library on Evidence-Based Professional Development](#). This collection of resources is used by many State Personnel Development Grant recipients as they develop, integrate, and evaluate ongoing professional learning. An observational checklist of high-quality professional development in education is available for download.

# KEY IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

## Critical Components for Success

*(Lists are not sequential)*

### Setting the Stage

- Clearly define professional learning goals and objectives.
- Collect data in your school or district to determine specific professional learning needs and areas where personnel feel unprepared.
- Cross-reference data from personnel evaluations to determine areas in need of ongoing professional learning, including in relationship to evidence-based practice implementation.
- Determine methods for ongoing professional learning (e.g., in-person, online, self-paced, micro-credentialing).
- Select ongoing professional learning providers.
  - Consider if external providers should be established on an “vendor list” or otherwise recognized for their demonstration of high-quality professional learning.

### Initial Start-Up

- Create a schedule for ongoing professional learning.
- Ensure personnel in your school and district are aware of development opportunities, including experiences that result in relicensure credits or other incentives.
- Implement professional learning opportunities for personnel at all levels and articulate a well-defined path for professional growth.
- Establish a clear connection between your professional learning initiative and personnel roles and responsibilities in your school or district.

### Continuous Improvement

- Collect data on the efficacy of your professional development programs as a strategy to address retention challenges.
- Organize and track personnel progress, goals, and professional development activities.

### Leveraging Successes

- Identify partners. State-level personnel, LEA personnel, and school leaders and administrators all play a crucial role in the development and implementation of professional learning programs.
- Share success stories.

## Related Services

Evaluation and specific feedback are key for supporting personal growth. Professional development goals should directly align with personnel need. To follow the critical components for success and accurately **evaluate related service personnel** to provide substantial support in professional development, **leadership must understand the roles of each provider**. One strategy for supporting related service providers is to facilitate their involvement in relevant professional learning communities. This offers an opportunity for collaboration, which increases engagement, and gives them the ability to exercise agency in their professional growth. Professional learning communities positively influence retention by increasing intent to stay in the field overall (Cancio, Albrecht, & Johns, 2013).

## Early Childhood

Early childhood personnel who serve infants, toddlers, and young children with disabilities require specific expertise related to the developmental age of the students they serve. **Professional development should be specialized** to reflect the unique nature and depth of information that will help personnel achieve success. Head Start provides a [series of resources](#) that outline necessary staff skills and competencies specific to various profiles, such as preschool classroom, infant/toddler classroom, family and disability services, home visitors, and support staff (ECLKC, 2020).

### Critical Components for Success (Continued)

- Collaborate with other institutions that integrate professional learning into their retention initiatives to share lessons learned and areas for improvement.
- Determine the feasibility of sustaining and/or scaling up your professional learning programs.
- Develop guidance, resources, and tools.

### Stakeholder Spotlight

- **Paraeducators.** Paraeducators who serve children with deafblindness are an example of a group of professionals who require targeted and unique professional development to meet role expectations. To support paraeducators with appropriate training, leadership must understand the skills required for success. As a starting point, leaders can refer to the [Specialty Set: Special Education Paraeducator Intervener for Individuals With Deafblindness \(PDBI\)](#) (CEC, 2015). For standards outlining expectations in other special education, related service, and early childhood roles, refer to the CEC collection of [Specialty Sets](#).

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# *Retaining Personnel* **SUPPORTIVE WORK ENVIRONMENTS**

## **Description**

Educators are more likely to continue in the field when they experience positive working conditions (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019). A supportive work environment is characterized by positive school climate, manageable demands placed on teachers, administrative social supports (e.g., clear role definitions, collaborative workplace culture), and administrative logistical benefits (e.g., planning time, curricular and professional development resources).

## **Overview**

Typically, school leaders are the primary agent responsible for establishing a supportive work environment for personnel serving infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities (OSEP Summit Retain Panel, 2020). Despite their important role, special educators and related service providers are more likely than their general education counterparts to report feeling unsupported by administrators and unclear about job expectations (Mason-Williams et al., 2020; Rock et al., 2016). Leaders can address these concerns by implementing a “service-leadership” approach. **A service-leader views their primary role as being responsible for ensuring their faculty have the support they need to serve all students** (OSEP Summit Retain Panel, 2020). To create leaders who take this approach, initial leadership preparation and ongoing professional development should center on equipping leaders with the necessary skills to support personnel. Principals, for example, should receive ongoing training to successfully demonstrate staff value through one-on-one interactions and to facilitate collaboration among personnel (OSEP Summit Retain Panel, 2020).

A conceptual framework devised by Bettini and colleagues (2016) shows how **administrator support and school climate influence the instructional quality** of personnel serving students with disabilities by facilitating opportunities to learn, to plan, and to teach. Administrators can ensure these opportunities by **providing material resources, planning time, instructional grouping, instructional time, and collegial support** (Bettini et al., 2016).

## **Research Findings**

For decades, research on retention has focused on work environment conditions experienced by personnel serving students with disabilities (Zabel & Zabel, 1982).

Recent research on supportive work environments has found the following:

- Creating a **positive school environment** through administrative support (e.g., clarifying roles, assisting with paperwork, providing ongoing professional learning) **correlates with reductions in personnel turnover** (Arundel, 2020).
- **Lower faculty attrition rates** are associated with principals who serve as facilitators and collaborators and who create shared ownership (Learning Policy Institute, 2017).
- Multiple studies have shown that in high-poverty schools, **personnel’s positive perception of their school leaders** was a dominant factor in their decision to remain in their school (Learning Policy Institute, 2017).
- A school is more likely to effectively reach organizational goals when personnel positively rate working conditions and indicate they **feel supported by both the school and the community** (Billingsley et al., 2020).
- When **administrators understand personnel’s roles and orient school structures** (e.g., schedules, curricular resources, and social supports) **around those roles**, educators and **students with disabilities benefit** by improved academic outcomes (Mason-Williams et al., 2020).



## Overview (Continued)

Additionally, school leaders can establish positive work environments by supporting and rewarding **effective instruction and use of evidence-based practice** (Billingsley, Bettini, Mathews, & McLeskey, 2020). Leaders also can advocate for and later offer **ongoing professional learning that supports personnel in meeting their individual needs** within the work environment (Stark, McGhee, & Jimerson, 2017). Finally, leaders should implement strategies that promote **staff well-being**. These may include **mental health supports** (e.g., adult social-emotional learning, daily mindfulness routines), encouraging **collaboration**, and **reducing workloads** associated with paperwork and other noninstructional tasks (Billingsley et al., 2020; Holt, Wang, & Gershenson, 2020).

## Research Findings (Continued)

Research has also posited that supportive work environments are especially critical for retaining a diverse workforce. For example, personnel of color are more likely to be retained when working in an environment in which **school leaders honor and are supportive of personnel's expression of their racial and ethnic identities** (Dixon, Griffin, & Teoh, 2019). Additional research has determined that Black educators are more likely to be retained in work environments where **teacher autonomy and their contributions are valued by leaders and colleagues** (Carver-Thomas, 2016; Evans & Leonard, 2013).

## Exemplars

- [A Framework for Safe and Successful Schools](#). A joint statement from the American School Counselor Association, National Association of School Psychologists, School Social Work Association of America, National Association of School Resource Officers, National Association of Elementary School Principals, and National Association of Secondary School Principals outlines evidence-based policies and practices for improving school safety and increasing access to mental health supports for children and youth. The framework includes components related to improving staffing ratios, providing ongoing professional learning, ensuring staff have time for planning and problem-solving, and engaging families and communities.

(Additional exemplars can be found on the [Attract, Prepare, Retain resource page](#).)

## Resource Spotlight

- [National Center on Safe Support Learning Environments \(NCSSLE\)](#). NCSSLE offers information and technical assistance to States, districts, schools, institutions of higher education, and communities focused on improving school climate and conditions for learning. NCSSLE's [School Climate Resource Package](#) includes a variety of resources to meet a range of needs that stakeholders interested in improving school climate might have.
- [Educator Resilience and Trauma-Informed Self-Care: Self-Assessment and Planning Tool](#). The Center on Great Teachers and Leaders released this resource in April 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The resource includes a self-care self-assessment with key strategies for fostering resilience and a self-care planning tool to assist educators in identifying areas of strength and growth related to self-care and the development of self-care plans.
- [Module on Teacher Retention for Special Educators](#). The OSEP-funded IRIS Center offers a module for school administrators who seek to support personnel serving students with disabilities and increase their retention. This module includes a variety of resources, research takeaways, and practical tips centered on the importance of building positive work environments for educators to support retention. Additionally, this module offers exemplars and resources related to establishing successful work environments through strong mentoring and induction programs as well as tips and resources on how to facilitate effective ongoing professional development for all personnel.

# KEY IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

## Critical Components for Success

*(Lists are not sequential)*

### Setting the Stage

- School leaders identify measures for assessing the work environment, including perceptions of administrative support, school climate, and manageable workloads.
- School leaders reflect on the roles of all faculty members in the school building and ensure that all roles are clearly defined.
- School leaders identify areas in which related service personnel can demonstrate their expertise and increase their visibility within the school community.
- School leaders clearly define school improvement goals and include teachers and related service providers in the process to establish a shared vision.
- Local education agency (LEA) and State education agency (SEA) personnel analyze current policy related to demands placed upon educators, including paperwork requirements and caseloads.
- LEAs establish a system for collecting data on personnel perceptions of working conditions, school climate and culture, and supports needed.
- The SEA develops a system for LEAs to communicate data related to personnel perceptions of their work environment back to the State.
- The SEA locates funding sources (e.g., School Climate Transformation Grants, ESSA, Title II) to incentivize LEA and school collaboration around establishing supportive work environments.

### Initial Start-Up

- School leaders collect survey evidence and have conversations with faculty regarding their perceptions of administrative support, school climate, and manageable workloads.
- School leaders identify gaps in the above areas and collaboratively work with all faculty to discuss how these gaps can be addressed.
- School leaders select criteria to determine whether the above areas are being successfully supported.
- School leaders create a regular schedule for assessing personnel perceptions.
- School leaders ensure that preparation program faculty and preservice personnel completing their clinical experiences are involved in the data collection.
- School leaders collaborate with organizations and relevant parties to ensure personnel have an opportunity to voice their concerns and influence decisions at all levels.

## Related Services

As recent trends have seen increasing rates of inclusion in general education settings for students with disabilities (Williamson et al., 2020), personnel must be supported to collaborate across settings to ensure the needs of students with disabilities are met. This is an important role for related service providers, as they work with students across a variety of settings. Yet, these professionals often report feeling isolated from their peers (OSEP Summit Retain Panel, 2020). School leaders must **establish environments that encourage connections between related service providers and their colleagues**. As role ambiguity within a school environment greatly contributes to personnel attrition, facilitating interdisciplinary collaboration may provide needed role clarification, ensuring students' needs are met in the most efficient way possible (Jones, Young, & Frank, 2013).

Additionally, school and LEA leaders should **honor related service personnel as experts** by including them on leadership teams and by recognizing the role they can play in the ongoing professional learning of their colleagues.

## Critical Components for Success (Continued)

### Continuous Improvement

- School leaders collect personnel attrition and retention data at the end of the school year and determine if efforts to establish a supportive work environment have had an impact on retention.
- After data are collected and reported, school, LEA, and SEA leaders convene to discuss any policy or funding changes needed to enhance work environments.
- School leaders collect data on the efficacy of these changes.
- School and district or leaders continue to collect data from their school or district to analyze teachers' perceptions of administrative support, school climate, and manageable workloads.
- Leaders continue to involve teachers in school improvement efforts (through direct consultation or by forming relevant teams) to foster feelings of ownership and to promote retention.

### Leveraging Successes

- Identify partners.
- Share success stories.
- Collaborate with other institutions that incorporate strategies to establish supportive work environments into their retention programs to share lessons learned and areas for improvement.
- Determine scale-up feasibility and sustainability of strategies.
- Develop guidance, resources, and tools.

## Early Childhood

To support personnel retention in early childhood fields, school or program-based leaders must establish supportive work environments (Gardner, Melnick, Meloy, & Barajas, 2019). Practitioners, researchers, policy makers, and professional organizations have all advocated for the role of school and program-based leaders in establishing a positive work environment for personnel serving infants, toddlers, and young children with disabilities. In a 2015 position paper, the Division of Early Childhood (DEC) of the Council for Exceptional Children called for high-quality leaders to **establish collaborative organizational cultures and to advocate for the needs** of the early childhood special educators and early interventionists within these cultures (DEC, 2015).

## Stakeholder Spotlight

- **School Social Workers.** The role of the school social worker in establishing a supportive work environment for all individuals serving students with disabilities is often overlooked. Specifically, school social workers play a key role in two aspects of a supportive working environment, facilitating a positive school climate and ensuring that manageable demands are placed on all personnel. School social workers often play an important role in facilitating collaboration between school faculty to promote student mental health, which is a key factor in building a positive school climate. Additionally, school social workers are trained mental health professionals who can assist with mental health and behavioral concerns; provide positive behavioral, academic, and classroom support; and consult with teachers, parents, and administrators (SSWAA, n.d.). Leaders must both position school social workers as experts in these roles and allow their autonomy to ensure that teachers and other related service providers do not become overwhelmed by trying to take on these roles by themselves. Conversely, leaders must ensure that this does not result in the responsibility being placed solely on school social workers.
- **SEA and LEA Leaders.** While school leaders typically are the primary agents in developing a supportive work environment, State and local leaders also are key contributors (Arundel, 2020). State and local leaders can provide policy, fiscal, and other direct support to school leaders as they reduce faculty's caseloads and paperwork, support mental well-being, and encourage collaboration among personnel serving students with disabilities (Billingsley et al., 2020). This support to school leaders is essential to ensure that all personnel have supportive work environments in which they can serve students with disabilities. Additionally, changes made at the State or local policy and fiscal levels are essential to securing the long-term sustainability of initiatives aimed at supporting educator retention (Arundel, 2020; OSEP Summit Retain Panel, 2020). More information on the retention of personnel serving students with disabilities as it relates to SEA and LEA leaders can be found on OSEP's [Attract, Prepare, Retain resource page](#).

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## *Retaining Personnel*

# PROFESSIONAL EMPOWERMENT

## Description

**Professional empowerment** occurs when personnel perceive that their input and contributions positively impact organizational goals and outcomes and that they have the freedom to exercise agency over their own development by collaborating with colleagues and employing ownership over their individual professional growth (Harper, 2017; Imants & Van der Wal, 2019; OSEP Summit Retain Panel, 2020).

## Overview

When employees feel valued, they are more likely to stay in their positions (OSEP Summit Retain Panel, 2020). Personnel serving students with disabilities need to believe that their **efforts matter**, that their voices are heard, and that they have the **support and ability to exercise agency** over their own **professional growth** (Imants & Van der Wal, 2019; OSEP Summit Retain Panel, 2020). To ensure that personnel see the positive impact of their efforts, leaders should **celebrate individual achievements** to illustrate the **direct connection between the work and the lives of the students** (Center on Education Policy, 2016; OSEP Summit Retain Panel, 2020).

Furthermore, **local education agency (LEA) and school leaders** are in an especially unique position to invite educators and related service providers to the table when **organizational goals** are discussed (Ladd, 2011; NEA, 2015). This gives personnel an opportunity to practice **self-advocacy**, feel heard by leadership, and see the connection between their **input and organizational decisions**. This also may positively impact the **quality of services** that students with disabilities receive. Additionally, special educators and related service personnel are the primary advocates for students with disabilities in a school setting (Morningstar & Benitez, 2013; Whitby, Marx, McIntire, & Wienke, 2013). By inviting educators and related service providers to the table, leaders **recognize them as experts in their content areas** and **honor their decisions** on how to best serve students with disabilities. This will have important implications for **student outcomes**, as personnel are thus empowered to **promote effective practice** for students with disabilities.

## Research Findings

Research on teacher empowerment has found the following:

- There are positive implications for teacher retention when personnel believe they are **making meaningful contributions** to their schools.
  - Research has found that personnel and related service providers specifically want to **make a meaningful difference** in their student's lives and report that this is the **most rewarding part** of their work (Center on Education Policy, 2016).
- Schools that have a **culture of collective responsibility** among staff have higher rates of special education teacher retention (Billingsley et al., 2020; Conley & You, 2017).
- When administrators foster teacher empowerment, **understand the roles** of special education teachers, and **orient school structures** around the needs of the special educators, schools **retain these educators** and report **positive outcomes for students** with disabilities (Mason-Williams et al., 2020; McLeskey, Waldron, & Redd, 2014).
- Administrators play an important role in facilitating **professional learning communities** within school structures. This collaboration **reduces feelings of role ambiguity** in special education teachers, which is important in retention efforts (Jones, Youngs, & Frank, 2013; Waldron & McLeskey, 2010).



### Overview (Continued)

To increase retention, **leaders must support personnel decision-making** by ensuring staff have the resources, time, and freedom to exercise agency over their professional growth and work environments (Harper, 2017; Imants & Van der Wal, 2019). Strategies to promote agency among all personnel include the facilitation of **collaborative learning environments** and the inclusion of both new and seasoned staff in the **development of professional learning programs** (Harper 2017; Imants & Van der Wal, 2019; Morningstar & Benitez, 2013).

### Research Findings (Continued)

Extensive research has found that using learning communities is one of the most promising practices for leaders to empower personnel. Professional learning communities positively influence retention by **increasing intent to stay** in the field overall and **fostering positive views of the school** itself (Cancio, Albrecht, & Johns, 2013). When educators are given the opportunity to collaborate (study, practice, and research together), their **ability to innovate** and support each other increases (Wei, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009).

## Exemplars

- [California Instructional Leadership Corps \(ILC\) Project](#). This project at Stanford University fosters a professional development (PD) model for teachers in California, in which in-service practitioners establish and lead their own systems for PD. This is an example of teachers exercising professional independence to engage in meaningful learning with colleagues and actively address goals specific to the contexts in which they serve.
- [Midwest School Transformation Project](#). This project aims to empower teachers in several midwestern States to take a leading role in the transformation of their school environments during a 3-year period. Through this project, educators are supported by coaches and school leaders as they are empowered to take ownership of the practices, skills, and mindsets that their schools implement. The participating schools in this project vary in size, geography, student demographics, type of community, and governance (charter, district, private).
- [Hope Street Group Teacher Fellows Network](#). This initiative provides training and support to educators across five States to increase their understanding of and impact on policy decisions. Fellows represent general and special education across different LEAs, grade levels, and content areas. The fellows work collaboratively to create teacher-driven solutions to present to State education agency (SEA) policy makers and State board members.

(Additional exemplars can be found on the [Attract, Prepare, Retain resource page](#).)

# KEY IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

## Critical Components for Success

### Setting the Stage

- Seek expertise of experienced personnel to establish clear roles and expectations built on standards for professional practice.
- Ensure leaders understand the unique roles and expertise of special educators and related service providers, including their professional obligations to ethical practice.
- Define clear and concrete school improvement goals and include personnel in the process to establish a shared vision.
- Seek input from seasoned personnel to give them an opportunity to use their educational expertise to advocate for organizational decisions that are best for the students.
- Invite both new and seasoned personnel to the table when identifying and addressing professional development needs.

### Initial Start-Up

- Collaborate with organizations and relevant parties to ensure personnel have an opportunity to voice their concerns and influence decisions at all levels (NEA, 2015).
- Promote personnel leadership opportunities and professional development, which are directly connected to increased teacher empowerment (Harper, 2017).
- Establish a committee of practitioners to pursue school, LEA, and SEA goals collaboratively (NEA, 2015).

### Continuous Improvement

- Survey personnel to gain an understanding of the organization's culture. Is it collaborative? Do staff believe they have an impact on student outcomes? Do personnel feel heard by leadership?
- Collect data to analyze personnel perceptions of their influence on goals, initiatives, policies, and decisions.
- Continue to involve teachers in improvement efforts (through direct consultation or by forming workgroups) to foster feelings of ownership and to promote retention.
- Share success stories.
- Determine the scale-up feasibility and sustainability of teacher empowerment strategies.
- Develop guidance, resources, and tools.

## Related Services

School personnel and leadership are not always equipped with a good understanding of related service roles or how they connect to the big picture. As school-based related service providers are often the **only members** of the school **faculty in their role**, they are often isolated from their peers (OSEP Summit Retain Panel, 2020). This must be addressed to facilitate successful collaboration. Administrators should deliberately **design systems** for related service providers to **receive the time and space** needed to effectively **collaborate with special and general education** faculty.

Additionally, related service providers often report **lack of autonomy** as a primary factor leading to attrition (Public Policy Associates et al., 2020). Leaders and other school personnel must empower related service providers to build autonomy and position them as the **foremost experts** in the school **in their content area**. A 2019 survey of nearly 8,000 related service providers in Ohio found that **decision-making ability** was an important factor in respondents' intentions to stay in the field (ODE, 2019).

## Early Childhood

As early childhood professionals and early interventionists serve students with disabilities in a wide variety of settings, professional empowerment **must be approached differently** than it is in K–12 contexts. While early childhood providers play an extremely **active role in advocating** for the needs of infants, toddlers, and young children with disabilities, they also serve as **advocates for the families and caretakers** of these students (OSEP Symposium, 2019). In their role of **liaison to families and caretakers**, early childhood and early intervention professionals must be empowered as expert decision makers. Positioning how the expertise of early childhood and early intervention providers is presented to families and caretakers is the **responsibility of educational leaders** and technical assistance providers, such as OSEP-funded Parent Centers. Parent Center staff must consistently **honor the knowledge and skills of early educators** while working with families of infants, toddlers, and young children with disabilities. Moreover, to improve the retention of personnel, educational leaders must continue to **empower early childhood professionals** in educational settings as well.

## Stakeholder Spotlight

- **Preparation Program Faculty.** Preparation program faculty are often overlooked for the important role that they play in the empowerment of personnel serving students with disabilities. While professional empowerment often begins once an educator enters the profession, preparation program faculty can begin the process of positioning personnel as self-advocates during preservice. Preparation program faculty must build candidate autonomy and develop educators' confidence in their expertise. This must not only occur in course content but also should be embedded in candidates' clinical experiences. As candidates build these skills during their clinical experiences, faculty must establish lines of communication with candidates' field placements to receive feedback on their self-advocacy skills. As faculty support candidates in gaining content expertise through knowledge and use of evidence-based practices, they must help the candidates understand their roles, how to communicate their learned expertise to school leaders, and how to effectively advocate for the needs of their students. More information on the role of preparation program faculty in retaining teachers can be found on OSEP's [Attract, Prepare, Retain resource page](#).

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## *Retaining Personnel*

# INDUCTION AND MENTORING

## Description

Induction is a system of coordinated and aligned supports designed to support new educators with a systematic pathway into the profession (GTL Center, 2018). Mentoring refers to one-on-one support and feedback provided by an experienced veteran professional to novice personnel (GTL Center, 2018; Schmidt, Young, Cassidy, Wang, & Laguarda, 2017).

## Overview

Novice personnel are at highest risk for attrition during their first 3 years in the field. Induction and mentoring address this challenge by providing strong in-service supports as personnel become acclimated to their new role (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016). This assistance typically includes the following: (a) **professional development systems** established by administrators to provide targeted learning; and (b) **mentoring partnerships** in subject areas or disciplines (e.g., early intervention, special education, related services) in which novice personnel are working.

Additionally, novice personnel who are not adequately prepared are at higher risk for attrition. Induction and mentoring programs are structured to combat this by offering **targeted feedback and support** to address gaps in preparation (GTL Center, 2018; Koetje, 2019).

When establishing a system for induction and mentoring in educational settings, stakeholders must plan for a **systematic and organized approach** to ensuring new personnel have **adequate resources** to be effective in their role (Potemski & Matlach, 2014). While formal mentoring is recognized as a critical support, participants of a 2020 OSEP focus group also recognized the benefit of informal mentorship for special education and related service personnel. Because these personnel collaborate frequently, additional informal mentorship from general educators or other school personnel (e.g., department chairs, grade-level teams) may help ensure **these personnel are integrated into school or organizational structures**. Informal mentoring opportunities should not replace formal mentorship systems that exist to provide feedback and support related to instruction and intervention that ensure personnel are effectively meeting student needs.

In a 2019 OSEP survey of more than 1,500 practitioners, hundreds of respondents cited strong mentorship and induction in early career **as the most effective method of improving teacher retention** they have observed or experienced themselves.

## Research Findings

Research on induction and mentoring shows the following:

- Strong induction programs of the sort that promote retention and effective teaching rely on **well-trained mentors**, offer **ongoing professional learning**, and encourage **collaboration** (Billingsley, Griffin, Smith, Kamman, & Israel, 2009).
- It is particularly important that beginning teachers have access to **special education mentors** who understand the needs of teachers serving students with disabilities (GTL Center, 2018).
- Novice special educators benefit from programs that are centered on supports **specific to working with students with disabilities** and that involve **collaboration between a variety of stakeholders** (GTL Center, 2018).
- These programs effectively **offset** the increased likelihood of attrition caused by **poor preservice preparation** (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Mason-Williams et al., 2020).

There is a wide range of evidence that the **quality** of induction for novice special educators is a powerful predictor of their intention to stay in their schools and the profession overall (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Jones, Youngs, & Frank, 2013).



## Exemplars

- [eMentoring for Student Success](#). This Kansas-based induction and mentoring program aims to reduce attrition in special education by giving novice teachers one-on-one or small-group virtual mentoring and targeted induction supports. Data collected through this program are presented in Kansas's annual math, science, and special education attrition reports.
- [Minnesota Mentor Program for Special Educators](#). This program pairs special education candidates with a mentor who is certified in the same licensure area and delivers ongoing mentoring and induction support beginning in preservice and continuing through early career teaching.
- [Oklahoma Teacher Induction Program](#). This induction program, which provides ongoing professional learning for both novice teachers and school-based mentors, focuses on using evidence-based practices, elevating student learning, and navigating the challenges of starting in the profession or a new role.

(Additional exemplars can be found on the [Attract, Prepare, Retain resource page](#).)

## Resource Spotlight

- [Center on Great Teachers and Leaders Mentoring & Induction Toolkit 2.0](#). This toolkit is a ready-to-use resource for States working closely with districts to build strong mentoring and induction programs. The toolkit provides tools, resources, and supports to design and implement effective, high-quality mentoring and induction programs. It also summarizes research and best practices, highlights relevant examples, and provides streamlined processes for action planning.
- [National Association of Elementary School Principals Archived Webinars](#). NAESP has numerous free professional development webinars publicly available for download on its website. Induction and mentoring are recurring webinar topics. Some of the webinars present specific examples of how elementary school principals can support mentoring and induction of special education teachers and related service personnel.



# KEY IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

## Critical Components for Success

*(Lists are not sequential)*

### Setting the Stage

- Examine data on the novice teacher workforce as well as professional development effectiveness.
- If a mentoring and induction program already exists, reflect on data gathered from past mentors and mentees (e.g., surveys, interviews).
- Survey current local education agency (LEA) personnel about supports they needed when entering the field and the types of mentoring and induction they found most relevant and impactful.
- Establish selection criteria and training systems for individuals to serve as effective mentors for novice personnel.
- Determine how to incentivize veteran and effective personnel to serve as mentors (e.g., compensation, recognition, credits toward licensure renewal, stipend).
- Begin a dialogue between relevant leaders (e.g., State education agency (SEA), LEA, or school leaders) to select a focus area for induction and mentoring models to address identified areas of need.
- Locate funding sources (e.g., ESSA, Title II, IDEA Part B or C) to fund induction and mentoring programs.
- Identify a framework for mentors to observe and deliver feedback to novice teachers as well as a framework for school leaders to observe and give feedback to mentors.

### Initial Start-Up

- Use data to develop and pilot an induction program centered on ongoing professional learning and one-on-one mentoring.
- Use selection criteria to choose teacher leaders and veteran related service providers in a school or district setting to serve as mentors for novice teachers.
- Establish and communicate clear expectations for individuals serving as mentors.
- Determine criteria and methods for matching mentors with novice educators.
- Train mentors in the use of the selected observation and feedback framework.
- Work with mentors and novice teachers to identify a schedule for modeling, practice, observation, and feedback.

## Related Services

While teacher induction and mentoring commonly establish mentoring pairs in the same building, this is not always a possibility for related service personnel. Many related service professionals provide supports to students **across schools within the same LEA or community**. LEAs may identify veteran related service providers working at different locations to mentor novice providers. These formal mentoring relationships may be connected to broader LEA mentoring and induction initiatives. In some States, related service providers receive induction through the SEA. Delaware offers a 4-year [Mentoring and Induction Program](#) to school nurses, counselors, and psychologists.

For personnel serving rural communities or working alone across an LEA or region, mentoring and induction pose additional challenges. In response, an SEA may offer mentoring and induction supports. An example is [the Colorado Department of Education's School Nurse Mentor Program](#), which is available to any school nurse employed as the only nurse in a district, region, or charter school.

Many related service providers' professional standards of practice include interdisciplinary collaboration (e.g., [National Association of Social Workers](#)). LEAs may consider structuring mentoring and induction differently, through **cross-discipline mentoring teams**, to allow related service personnel from different disciplines to more effectively collaborate. This strategy may require LEA and school leadership to allocate additional time to collaborative mentoring opportunities.

### Critical Components for Success (Continued)

- Ensure that mentors and professional development providers model and offer coaching or feedback on evidence-based practices.
- Convene administrators, instructional coaches, LEA personnel, and teacher leaders to collaboratively align schoolwide professional development with ongoing professional learning.
- Consider the focus of emphasized practices, their duration, and their alignment with the needs of the population of students being served by the novice teachers.

### Continuous Improvement

- Collect data on novice teacher practices as well as the effectiveness of the induction and mentoring system.
- Begin identifying areas in which the mentoring and induction program did not noticeably improve teacher effectiveness.
- Convene appropriate stakeholders to address these indicators and restructure the induction and mentoring system as needed.
- Collect regular and structured feedback from participants in the induction and mentoring program on the program's usefulness and its impact on the novice teachers' satisfaction.
- Engage former teachers to identify gaps in preparation that can be addressed through increased use of simulation.
- Collaborate with other schools and localities that have established successful induction and mentoring programs to share lessons learned and areas for improvement.

### Leveraging Successes

- Convene school-level, LEA, and possibly SEA leaders to determine the feasibility of sustaining and/or scaling up the induction and mentoring program.
- Identify new partnerships within the district and the State.
- Share success stories.
- Develop guidance, resources, and tools.

## Early Childhood

Mentoring and induction in early childhood education, early childhood special education, and early intervention programs face challenges similar to those described for related service providers, as personnel may work across settings. This is especially true for early interventionists, who can deliver services across home, childcare, and community settings (Langdon et al., 2016).

OSEP funds the Early Childhood Personnel Center (ECPC) and the Early Childhood Technical Assistance (ECTA) Center. These centers collaborated to develop the Personnel/Workforce component of their [System Framework](#), which provides guidance to States when planning, developing, and implementing a comprehensive system of personnel development (CSPD). The system framework and CSPD are intended for use across early childhood systems and are delivered collaboratively. **Job-embedded, supportive mentoring** is recognized as an indicator of quality within the system framework.

## Stakeholder Spotlight

**Researchers and Policy Makers.** Induction and mentoring, while different, still take on many of the characteristics of ongoing professional learning. Induction, mentoring, and ongoing professional learning (including coaching) commonly are evaluated in isolation. Researchers are in a unique position to examine the impact of each strategy on personnel effectiveness, including isolating the factors that result in more effective practice and improve student outcomes. Additionally, researchers can help the field differentiate mentoring from instructional coaching by formally investigating the roles of mentors and coaches and determining any differential impacts on outcomes (e.g., well-being versus instructional competence). Mentoring, in particular, is an area that policy makers can easily influence by establishing policies that--

- ensure personnel serving as mentors are compensated (e.g., salary increases, stipends) or otherwise incentivized (e.g., relicensure credits, negotiated contract hours);
- build time in existing schedules for planning, observation, and mentoring meetings; and
- partner mentors and mentees on the basis of characteristics that are known to influence personnel retention (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender, age, area of specialization).

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