

Two Ideas for Addressing Special Education Teacher Shortages Hiding in Plain Sight

Research One-Pager

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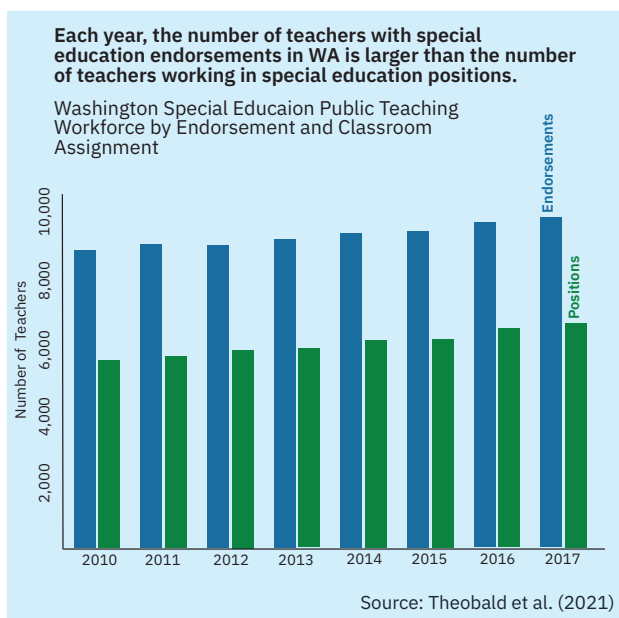
IN BRIEF

- Schools are struggling to find and keep special education teachers.
- This isn't a new problem, but the stakes are higher in the wake of the pandemic.
- Recent research evidence from CALDER suggests two potential solutions might be hiding in plain sight.

Many teachers with special education credentials currently work in the system, just not in special education.

Our recent analysis of Washington State's teacher workforce suggests that many teachers have special education credentials but not working in a special education position (e.g., they have a dual endorsement in special education and another subject but are not using their special education endorsement).

The upshot: in any given year, there may be far more teachers in the workforce with special education credentials than there are special education positions.



Indeed, we found that less than half of teachers who graduated with a special education credential in 2010 were working in a special education position by 2016.

Student teaching experiences that provide SPED mentorship also help keep teachers in SPED positions.

When we analyzed teachers' pre-service experiences, we found that special education teacher candidates were more likely to end up in special education positions if their student teaching placements were with a mentor who had a special education certificate.

The Bottom Line

Schools are struggling to find and keep special education teachers. Our recent analysis of job postings in found vacancy rates for special education positions were four times the rates for elementary positions. Special education positions also took longer to fill than elementary positions.

Promising strategies for addressing the problem include recruiting and incentivizing teachers already in the system and developing strong partnerships with teacher prep programs to ensure that special education teacher candidates have mentors with special education expertise.

Go Deeper: www.caldercenter.org

Theobald, R., Goldhaber, D., Naito, N., & Stein, M. (2021). The special education teacher pipeline: Teacher preparation, workforce entry, and retention. *Exceptional Children*, 88(1), 65-80.

Goldhaber, D., Brown, N., Marcuson, N., & Theobald, R. (2022). School district job postings and staffing challenges throughout the second school year during the COVID-19 pandemic. CALDER Working Paper No. 273-1022.