



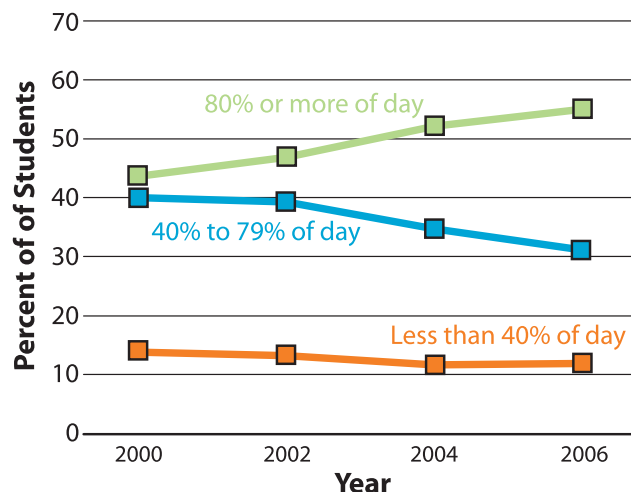
Policy Brief

Teacher Effectiveness and Professional Development

Second only to parents, teachers are the single most influential agents of change in a child’s life. Their understanding and mastery of pedagogy and subject matter, together with their ability to apply effective teaching practices, are the keys to learning for all students. The success of students with learning disabilities (LD) rests on well-prepared teachers — both general and special education — who can deliver effective instruction designed to enable these students to master grade level academic content, show mastery of state academic standards and earn regular high school diplomas that ensure they are college- and career-ready.

Yet, the national shortage of highly qualified special education teachers is 11.2%—in other words, approximately 45,514 of those serving as special education teachers do not meet required standards (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). This shortage has persisted for decades. Year after year, almost every school district—98%—report special education teacher shortages (McLeskey, Tyler and Flippin, 2003, 2004) while the demand for special educators is expected to increase by 17% from now through 2018—a rate greater than what is predicted for all other occupations. (Bureau of Labor Statistics, US Department of Labor, 2009).

Where students with LD spend their school day, 2000-2006



Source: State Reported data to OSEP (DANS), retrieved from www.ideadata.org

Today close to 60% of students with learning disabilities are instructed in general education classrooms 80% or more of the time. Although general education teachers are increasingly responsible for educating students with all types of disabilities, general education teachers report lacking needed skills to effectively instruct students with disabilities (Abt Associates Inc, 2006). Provisions incorporated into the

Higher Education Opportunity Act provide incentives to promote the preparation of teachers qualified in the identification of students' specific learning needs, particularly students with disabilities, students who are limited English proficient, students who are gifted and talented, and students with low literacy levels, and the tailoring of academic instruction to such needs.

The National Center for Learning Disabilities believes that teacher preparation, effectiveness and professional development are central to improving academic achievement for the nation's 2.5 million students with LD. NCLD also believes these elements are essential to improving early and effective interventions that work to ensure that only the most at-risk students require special education.

Policy Recommendations

- **Teacher Preparation.** General educators and special educators must be prepared together, preparing them to work together to deliver content to a diverse array of learners. This requires an understanding of both content and pedagogy and is essential for special educators as well as general educators. The role for higher education teacher preparation in partnership with K-12 schools must be strengthened in order to prepare and support effective teachers, including special education teachers. Both alternate routes to certification and traditional preparation programs should be held to the same rigorous standards. All alternate route and traditional preparation programs receiving federal resources must provide clear approaches for preparing teachers to implement evidence-based academic and social/behavioral practices with diverse learners, including those with disabilities and English language learners. Certification of special education teachers through any fast-track preparation program is not recommended.
- **Professional Development.** Ongoing professional development should target evidence-based instructional skills as well as pedagogical content knowledge for veteran general educators and special educators. Such skills and knowledge will be essential to improving their effectiveness with diverse learners and struggling students. All teachers should be familiar with the variety of curricula and instructional resources that are available so they are equipped to maximize achievement for the range of diverse learners in today's classrooms. In addition to, both teachers and school administrators should know how to implement school-wide evidence-based strategies that promote improved achievement, including universal design for learning, response to intervention and positive behavioral supports.
- **Teacher Performance and Effectiveness.** Teacher performance and effectiveness must be measured with valid and reliable assessments of teacher knowledge and classroom performance that are linked to student learning. Because most students with disabilities spend a large part of their school day working on critical academic skills with special educators, an evaluation system that incorporates how a student's achievement might be divided to account for the instruction received from a special educator and instruction received from the general educator is critical.

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The National Center for Learning Disabilities works to ensure that the nation's 15 million children, adolescents and adults with learning disabilities have every opportunity to succeed in school, work and life. NCLD provides essential information to parents, professionals and individuals with learning disabilities, promotes research and programs to foster effective learning and advocates for policies to protect and strengthen educational rights and opportunities.

For more information, please visit us on the Web at www.LD.org.