



Network of universities collaborate to solve special educator shortages

In an effort to increase the number of fully prepared and licensed special education teachers and to increase the diversity of educators, 10 universities across the country are working together to conduct research and share solutions to teacher shortages.

This collaboration, [Reducing the Shortage of Special Education Teachers Networked Improvement Community](#), is a new initiative from the [American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education](#) with support from the [CEEDAR Center](#).

"Of the teacher shortage areas the field is facing, the special education teacher shortage is largest and the need is most critical," said Caitlin Wilson, AACTE's director of Program Improvement and Practice.

Enrollment in teacher preparation programs for all different types of education concentrations fell by 35 percent from SY 2010-11 to SY 2016-17, according to U.S. Education Department [data](#).

Nearly every state has a shortage of special education teachers, and special education teachers leave the teaching profession at twice the rate of their general education colleagues (12.3 percent compared to 7.6 percent), according to the [Council for Exceptional Children](#).

The 10 universities working on the NIC, including the [University of Central Florida](#) and [Cleveland State University](#), have an ambitious task: To identify best practices and strategies and then to document and analyze the impact of the strategies used. That work is expected to conclude by fall 2022.

Tachelle Banks, associate dean for Faculty and External Affairs, said fully prepared teachers are more effective in the classroom and are more likely to stay in the profession.

Undergraduate teacher candidates at CSU have clinical rotations in nearby schools starting in their sophomore year. Those rotations are built around themes such as assessments and curriculum, allowing the teacher candidates to practice as they learn.

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"We want to make sure our candidates are acquainted with the demands of the job," Banks said. "It's our job to immerse them in that."

AACTE's Wilson said having CSU and the nine other institutions of higher education work together on finding solutions to teacher shortages will help in the comprehensive knowledge of how different strategies work, for whom, and under what circumstances.

"By better understanding what works in a particular context and comparing how it is similar or different at another university helps us to learn and share with the field how that particular strategy or promising practice might be adapted depending on local conditions," Wilson said.

The large collection of professionals working on this problem also will accelerate learning and problem-solving, Wilson said.

ED's [Office of Special Education Programs](#) is also working to improve the recruitment, preparation, and retention of special educators. ED Press Secretary Angela Morabito said OSEP is asking the public for [input](#) on evidence-based practices and is planning to develop a webpage with resources. ED also is planning an Attract, Prepare, and Retain Summit for spring 2020.

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