

EDUCATOR SHORTAGES

Overview

The nation continues to face a critical shortage of special educators, which includes teachers, early interventionists, specialized instructional support personnel (SISP), administrators, faculty in higher education, and paraeducators. A renewed commitment to ensuring special educators have the knowledge, skills, and abilities to meet the unique needs of infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities in urban, suburban, and rural areas is essential to addressing these shortages. Now more than ever, a comprehensive workforce pipeline must be developed to attract diverse personnel into all areas of special education, effectively prepare personnel to provide opportunities for positive outcomes and post-school success and retain special educators for long-term overall impact.

Members of Congress are Urged to:

► **Cosponsor S. 1341/H.R. 2992, the EDUCATORS for America Act.**

This bill would strengthen the educator pipeline by attracting, preparing, and retaining effective educators. It targets shortage areas and supports comprehensive preparation, provides funding for states to create plans to meet their specific personnel needs, improves workforce, and reduces barriers to entry into the profession.

Bill sponsors: Sen. Jack Reed (D-RI); Rep. Alma Adams (D-NC)

► **Cosponsor S. 3681/H.R. 4550, the Preparing and Retaining All (PARA) Educators Act.**

Paraeducators provide essential supports that enable children with disabilities to participate in inclusive settings and are the most diverse category of school personnel. The PARA Educators Act would support efforts to attract and retain paraeducators in preschool and K-12 settings.

Bill sponsors: Sen. Ed Markey (D-MA); Rep. Ann Kuster (D-NH)

► **Cosponsor S. 2605, the Supporting Teaching and Learning through Better Data Act.**

While schools, districts, and states experience the daily challenges of educator shortages, data is lagging, incomplete, and hard to compare across states, failing to reflect the urgency of the issue. This bill would require a National Center for Education Statistics study on current data collections and make recommendations for improvements.

Bill sponsor: Sen. Tim Kaine (D-VA).

FAST FACTS ON EDUCATOR SHORTAGES

- According to the U.S. Department of Education, 7.7 million (roughly 15%) of individuals with disabilities were served under IDEA during the 2023-2024 school year.
- 53% of public schools reported feeling their school was understaffed entering the 2022-23 school year. Of these schools, 65% reported being understaffed in special education teachers. (National Center for Education Statistics)
- Total enrollment in teacher preparation programs fell 16% between 2009 and 2020. (U.S. Department of Education) Similarly, 85,000 fewer teacher candidates were enrolled in teacher preparation programs in 2020-21 than in 2012-13. (Learning Policy Institute)
- Approximately 50 percent of special education teachers leave the teaching profession within their first five years. (U.S. Department of Education)
- For the 2023-24 school year, 43 States, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia projected a shortage of qualified teachers in special education, more than for any other teacher shortage area by an eight-state margin (U.S. Department of Education)