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# Recruiting and Retaining Qualified Special Education Personnel: Approaches from Eight State Education Agencies

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# Recruiting and Retaining Qualified Special Education Personnel: Approaches from Eight State Education Agencies

## INTRODUCTION

According to the U.S. Department of Education, shortages of special education and/or related services personnel continue to be a significant challenge for all states.<sup>1</sup> In response to this challenge, state education agencies (SEAs) are implementing various strategies to improve recruitment and retention efforts. The purpose of this document is to provide in-depth information on eight states' infrastructures and activities intended to address personnel shortages in the area of special education and related services. A collaboration between Project Forum and the Personnel Improvement Center (PIC) at the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE), this document was completed as part of these projects' cooperative agreements with the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). A companion document, *State-Level Efforts to Recruit and Retain Qualified Special Education Personnel Including Related Service Providers*, presents findings from a survey of all states and nonstate jurisdictions, and is available for free download.<sup>2</sup>

## DATA COLLECTION

As a follow-up to a survey conducted during the months of July and August 2010, eight states were selected to participate in in-depth interviews. These interviews were intended to obtain detailed information about state-level infrastructures and activities for recruiting and retaining qualified special education personnel, including related services providers. Project Forum and the PIC developed an interview protocol that addressed 10 recruitment and retention strategies. Selection of the 10 strategies was based on PIC work with states, analysis of existing literature regarding best practices in the field, survey responses indicating which strategies are most commonly used by states and the need for additional information about how states are implementing these strategies. Selection of the eight states was designed to ensure broad representation across all 10 strategies. States were chosen based on PIC work with states and knowledge of state practices as well as states' self-identified use of four or more of these strategies. Although Project Forum and the PIC asked states about only four of their strategies, all eight reported using additional strategies to recruit and retain qualified special education personnel.

In September, 2010, Project Forum and the PIC conducted interviews in the following eight states: *Arizona, California, Kansas, Louisiana, North Carolina, North Dakota, South Carolina* and *Utah*. Interview responses were analyzed using Weft QDA, a software program designed to assist with qualitative data analysis, and findings are reported in the following section.

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<sup>1</sup> See U.S. Department of Education website: <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/pol/tsa.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup>To download this document, go to <http://www.projectforum.org/docs/State-LevelEffortstoRecruitandRetainQualifiedSPEDPersonnelIncludingRelatedSvcProviders.pdf>.

## INTERVIEW FINDINGS

Interviewees described state-level infrastructures that support the recruitment and retention of qualified special education personnel, as well as state-level strategies for recruiting *to the field*, recruiting *to specific positions* and retaining personnel.<sup>3</sup>

### State-Level Infrastructures

#### *State-Level Advisory Boards or Working Groups*

Seven of the eight states interviewed report having at least one state-level advisory board or working group that specifically addresses the recruitment and retention of qualified special education personnel. Examples include the following:

- *California* has a State Leadership Team for the Strategic Plan on Recruitment, Preparation and Retention of Special Education Personnel. This group, inspired by California’s original OSEP-funded State Improvement Grant (SIG)(currently called the State Personnel Development Grant [SPDG]), has been meeting for 10 years and includes representatives from the SEA, institutions of higher education (IHEs), teachers’ unions, groups representing paraprofessionals and related service providers, and local general and special education administrators. Recent topics addressed have included teacher induction and the development of a statewide special education working conditions survey<sup>4</sup> and handbook.
- *Utah’s* Critical Personnel Issues in Special Education Advisory Group meets four times each year. Members include SEA staff, IHEs, district-level special education directors and related services provider representatives. The group serves in an advisory capacity to the SEA. Since 2000, it has focused on recruitment issues, including hosting symposia on recruitment strategies for district-level human resources (HR) staff and developing the Utah Education Employment Board (an online job posting site funded with SIG dollars but used by both general and special education). More recently, the group’s focus has shifted to retention (e.g., tracking retention rates for different districts and conducting exit surveys to better understand why special education teachers leave their jobs).
- *South Carolina* recently created a taskforce to develop a proposal for a special education-specific mentor training program. Representatives include SEA staff, IHE representatives, certified mentors (not necessarily special education mentors), special education teachers and paraprofessionals, and district-level special education directors. The state currently requires that all new teachers be mentored by a certified mentor, and mentor training is jointly sponsored by the SEA and the Center for Educator Recruitment, Retention, and Advancement (CERRA)<sup>5</sup>, but the grant money from the state’s Office of Exceptional Children has been earmarked specifically for the advanced training of mentors to support new special education teachers.

*“Through credentialing, legislation and regulations, we’ve been able to make some key changes that will be helpful.”*

<sup>3</sup> See the Appendix for a breakdown of which states were asked about which specific recruitment and/or retention strategies.

<sup>4</sup> For more information on California’s Special Education Supports Module (SESM), a new component of the California School Climate Survey, see [http://cscs.wested.org/survey\\_content/sesis](http://cscs.wested.org/survey_content/sesis).

<sup>5</sup> To learn more about CERRA, go to <http://www.cerra.org/home.html>.

- *North Carolina's* Cooperative Planning Consortium brings IHEs together with SEA staff twice a year. One of the goals for this group is to develop plans for recruiting special education personnel. A second group, the Title II<sup>6</sup> Audit Stakeholder Group, includes representatives from the SEA, local education agencies (LEAs) and IHEs. It has recommended that personnel preparation programs offer more dual certification (i.e., general and special education certification) opportunities as a way of addressing noncompliance issues relating to the state's Title II audit.
- *Louisiana's* Low Incidence Disability Consortium has used IDEA funds to develop a brochure listing all special education certification options in the state. The consortium has also worked to create more online programs offering coursework in the areas of low incidence disabilities.

Two of the seven states noted that their SIG/SPDG workgroups address special education recruitment and retention issues at the state level. For example:

- *North Dakota's* SPDG Advisory Committee includes representatives from the SEA, IHEs and North Dakota Education Standards and Practice Board. SPDG projects related to recruitment and retention involve the preparation of speech-language pathologists (SLPs) and resident teacher programs. Prior to the SPDG Advisory Committee, *North Dakota* had a taskforce that worked closely with the PIC to develop a special education mentoring toolkit, brochure, exit survey and recruitment and retention DVD.
- *Arizona's* SPDG Goal I group addresses the recruitment and retention of highly qualified special education teachers and SLPs. Members of the Goal I group include representatives from IHEs and the Arizona Future Educators of America (FEA). Related SPDG projects include the development of afternoon and evening coursework for school-based SLP candidates, mentoring of new special education teachers and recruitment of high school students to the field of special education via the FEA.

*"[State-level] approaches need to be based on a response to the needs of the field."*

Although *Kansas* does not have an advisory board or working group specific to the recruitment and retention of special education personnel, the SEA solicits information on this topic from the State Advisory Council on Special Education.

#### *State-Level Plans*

Only *California* reported having a written plan that guides state-level activities relating to the recruitment and retention of qualified special education personnel. The state updated its Strategic Action Plan for the Recruitment, Preparation and Retention of Special Education Personnel<sup>7</sup> in 2007, after working with NASDSE's previously-funded project, The Personnel Center, for several years to develop the original plan. The plan includes induction activities such as support for new special education teachers via the Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA)<sup>8</sup>, online recruitment of special education teachers to the field via TEACH California<sup>9</sup>, and the Special Education Supports Module (SESM) (a statewide working conditions survey for education personnel serving students with disabilities).

<sup>6</sup> Title II of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act addresses improving teacher quality.

<sup>7</sup> To read California's plan, go to [http://www.calstat.org/pdf/CA\\_Strategic\\_Jan30\\_07.pdf](http://www.calstat.org/pdf/CA_Strategic_Jan30_07.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> For more information about the BTSA, go to <http://www.btsa.ca.gov/>.

<sup>9</sup> For more information about Teach California, go to <http://www.teachcalifornia.org/>.

Three additional states—*Arizona*, *Kansas* and *North Dakota*—noted that their SPDGs serve as the “blue print” for state-level activities relating to the recruitment and retention of qualified special education personnel. For example:

- *Kansas*’ SPDG addresses the establishment of a special education induction/mentoring program (i.e., *Kansas eLearning and eMentoring Supports [KELEMS]*), building capacity of the state’s professional development system to produce an adequate supply of teachers in the area of low incidence disabilities (i.e., “the Low Incidence Consortium, which brings together SEA and IHE representatives, and Project ALIVE [All-State Low Incidence Virtual Endorsement]) and partnering with the state’s online recruitment and retention website (i.e., *Kansas Education Employment Board [KEEB]*).<sup>10</sup>

“The biggest challenge at the state level is data—having accurate, real time data.”

*Louisiana* noted that Part D of its Race to the Top application articulates the state’s plans for recruiting and retaining highly qualified teachers. Although *Louisiana* did not receive Race to the Top funds, it is committed to recruiting and retaining qualified teachers, including special education teachers. LEAs

that signed on for Race to the Top have been included in a Trailblazer initiative that assists with placing the most qualified teachers in the lowest performing schools. This includes special education teachers.

#### *Legislative Mandates and/or Policy Guidance*

One state interviewed reported passing legislation and/or issuing policy guidance pertaining to the recruitment and retention of qualified special education personnel:

- *Utah* requires mentoring of all new teachers by trained mentors, and provides guidance to LEA-level special education induction coordinators regarding the mentoring of new special education teachers. *Utah* also launched a pilot program this year, involving approximately 35 new special education teachers, to determine whether assigning special education mentors who provide active, in-class coaching results in improved teacher efficacy and retention.

In addition, *North Carolina*, *South Carolina* and *Kansas* reported having state-level mentoring requirements for *all* new teachers, but these requirements do not specifically address the mentoring of special education teachers.

#### *Dedicated Personnel and/or Funds*

Seven of the eight states interviewed reported having dedicated state-level personnel and/or funds that specifically address the recruitment and/or retention of special education personnel. Full-time equivalency (FTE) for these personnel ranged from 0.25 FTE to 5.0 FTE. Examples include the following:

- *Arizona* dedicates approximately 1.25 FTE staff members to the recruitment and retention of special education personnel. Staff activities include organizing and promoting the state’s annual job fair (the Great Arizona Teach-in)<sup>11</sup>, developing a network of local special education directors and HR directors for technical assistance purposes and presenting at various state and national conferences.

<sup>10</sup> To visit KEEB, go to <http://www.kansasteachingjobs.com/>.

<sup>11</sup> For more information about the Great Arizona Teach-in, go to <http://www.teachinaz.com/GATI/ecf.html>.

- *Kansas* has 5.0 FTE staff dedicated to recruitment and retention of special education personnel. Tasks include operation of the KEEB Recruitment and Retention Project and the state special education mentoring (KELEMS) project.
- The *California* Department of Education has two part-time staff members (the equivalent of 1.0 FTE) who address recruitment and retention of special education personnel, although most state-level activities relating to mentoring and induction are handled via a separate entity, the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing.<sup>12</sup>
- *North Dakota's* Department of Public Instruction has a 1.0 FTE staff member who addresses recruitment and retention activities, including recruiting at conferences, distributing recruitment DVDs and promoting the Resident Teacher Program, Traineeship Scholarship, Speech Language Pathology and Speech Language Pathology Paraprofessionals Scholarships.
- *South Carolina* dedicates approximately 1.0 FTE to recruitment and retention of special education personnel. The staff member is housed at CERRA. Related tasks include speaking to teacher cadet classes at high schools throughout the state about careers in special education.

*Louisiana*, the eighth state, recently reorganized its Department of Education, and although it no longer includes a special education division, it now has a Division of Certification, Preparation and Recruitment that addresses both general and special education personnel. The Division includes 5.0 FTE staff members who regularly contact LEAs regarding their immediate and upcoming vacancies and use the Teach Louisiana website,<sup>13</sup> in conjunction with prescreening of applicants in order to identify highly qualified candidates. In addition, the Division is planning to help build districts' capacity to do their own recruiting in high need areas, including special education.

## Recruitment to the Field

### *Information Sessions*

Three of the states interviewed were asked to describe how they use information sessions to recruit individuals to the field of special education. Their responses include the following:

- *Louisiana*, as part of its new Division of Certification, Preparation and Recruitment, ensures that staff members present regularly at IHEs about add-on certification for special education as well as how to use the Teach Louisiana website to apply for jobs.
- *North Dakota* staff attends conferences and speaks at LEA special education directors' meetings in order to promote the state's scholarship programs for special education personnel. For example, staff presents at paraprofessional conferences throughout the state in order to promote the state's Speech Language Pathology Paraprofessionals Scholarship and the Resident Teacher Program.
- *Utah* holds numerous information sessions for high school students around the state, most of whom are working as peer tutors for students with disabilities, in hopes of

<sup>12</sup> For more information about the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, go to <http://www.ctc.ca.gov/>.

<sup>13</sup> To visit the Teach Louisiana website, go to <https://www.teachlouisiana.net/Default.asp>.

recruiting them to the field of special education. For several years, *Utah* also sponsored a very successful peer tutor conference that included a session on special education, but because of budget cuts, this conference no longer takes place. With support from the PIC, state staff has also sponsored information sessions promoting financial incentive programs for paraprofessionals.

*Grow Your Own Programs*

Three states were asked to describe how they use grow your own programs as a means of recruiting to the field of special education. Their responses include the following:

- *North Carolina* has a long history of community-based recruitment programming. For example, as part of the North Carolina Teacher Cadet Program,<sup>14</sup> which prepares high school students for a career in teaching, high school juniors and seniors participate in a five-unit course—one unit of which highlights careers in special education. *North Carolina* has established several cooperative partnerships that enable individuals attending community colleges to transfer into teacher preparation programs after earning a certain number of credits.
- *Arizona* described several grow your own programs, each developed in response to local needs. The first, a SPDG partnership with Central Arizona College, supports paraprofessionals to become special education teachers. After attending a community college for two years, teacher candidates transfer to Central Arizona College to complete their degrees in special education. LEAs may refer interested paraprofessionals to the program and the SPDG pays for their tuition. The program has been in place for approximately eight years and prepares between 35-40 new teachers each year. Other grow your own programs include capacity building grants that LEAs can use to pay for paraprofessionals' college tuition, tuition assistance for which LEAs can apply to support individuals training to become orientation and mobility (OM) specialists, and tuition and intensive instructional support for individuals participating in the Arizona Teach Interpreters Program (ATIP). All four programs include a requirement to teach in *Arizona* public schools. In addition, the SPDG now provides \$1,000 scholarships to high school participants in the Arizona Future Educators Association (FEA)<sup>15</sup> who are committed to a career in special education and win a competition that includes writing a research paper and creating a DVD on special education, as well as working with students with disabilities. The FEA recently added a component on careers in special education to its curriculum and statewide FEA conferences regularly include sessions on special education.
- *North Dakota* sponsors several grow your own programs for which districts are required to document their need for personnel and refer program participants. The Trainee Scholarship Program,<sup>16</sup> funded with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part B funds, enables LEAs with a need for special education personnel to refer applicants to the program so they can earn a master's degree in special education. There are approximately 30 participants per semester and they are funded for up to three years or nine semesters (\$750 per semester for part-time or \$1,500 per semester for full-time). Another program, the Speech Language Pathology Paraprofessional (SLPP) Program, covers the cost of online coursework for

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<sup>14</sup> For more information about the North Carolina Teacher Cadet Program, go to [http://www.ncteachercadet.org/NCTC-Org/About\\_Teacher\\_Cadet.html](http://www.ncteachercadet.org/NCTC-Org/About_Teacher_Cadet.html).

<sup>15</sup> For more information about the Arizona FEA, go to <http://www.ade.state.az.us/cte/fea/>.

<sup>16</sup> For more information about the Trainee Scholarship Program, go to <http://www.dpi.state.nd.us/speced/teacher/trainee/index.shtm>.

up to 10 aspiring SLPPs each year. A third program, the Resident Teacher Program in Special Education funded through the SPDG, is designed to attract and keep teachers in rural schools by preparing teachers and/or paraprofessionals with a bachelor's degree in general education to become certified special education teachers. The program includes a full-year internship at a local school under the joint supervision of experienced special educators and IHE faculty.

#### *Outreach to Diverse Groups*

Two of the states interviewed were asked to describe their outreach to diverse groups (i.e., ethnic or cultural minorities). Their responses include the following:

- *Arizona's* SEA regularly sends recruiters to present and/or exhibit at the U.S. Department of Education-sponsored National Minority Careers in Education Expo–Job Fair and the National Indian Education Association (NIEA)<sup>17</sup> convention. SEA staff partner with Teachers of Color Magazine to recruit ethnically diverse teachers. The SEA has designed a recruitment packet that includes a description of the ethnic diversity of Arizona's K-12 student population and is working with IHE partners to develop their "diversity plans" for recruiting and retaining culturally diverse candidates to personnel preparation programs. For example, one IHE now gives extra points towards acceptance into its teacher preparation program to applicants coming from culturally or linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- *California's* Special Education Internship Credential, an alternative route to certification, provides financial support for individuals seeking special education certification. Outreach is done within communities, and typically attracts a high number of men as well as individuals from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

#### *Supporting Personnel Preparation Program Partnerships*

Three states were asked to describe how they support personnel preparation program partnerships such as working with IHEs to provide more accessible models of course delivery. Efforts include the following:

- *Utah* offers discretionary grants to IHEs based on identified shortage areas in the field of special education. Participating IHEs must form advisory boards made up of representatives from participating LEAs. Candidates apply through their LEAs, and once the LEAs have approved their applications, they are forwarded to the IHE. For the past 10 years, more than \$1 million per year has been allocated using Part B discretionary funds. The request for proposal (RFP) stipulates that participating IHEs identify innovative ways of providing instruction. Utah State University (USU) offers distance education using interactive streaming video at various satellite sites throughout the state, online courses and hybrid courses (which combine online with face-to-face components). The University of Utah provides interactive online coursework that students can access from their home computers. A master's program for SLPs at USU combines campus-based coursework during the summer and distance education during the academic year.
- *California's* distance education system includes CalState TEACH<sup>18</sup>, which makes all coursework for an elementary credential available via online, CD-ROM and print materials. *California* recently allowed LEAs and consortia, in addition to IHEs, to apply for accreditation of personnel preparation programs in order to better meet

<sup>17</sup> For more information about NIEA, go to <http://www.niea.org/>.

<sup>18</sup> For more information about CalStateTEACH, go to <http://www.calstateteach.net/>.

their unique needs for education personnel. The approach was piloted in the Los Angeles Unified District which offered an LEA-based mild/moderate special education credential. Since then, at least eight special-education specific programs have been approved for implementation by LEAs or consortia. Related to this, the Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA),<sup>19</sup> the state's induction program for new teachers, can be managed by IHEs, LEAs or as an IHE/LEA partnership.

- *South Carolina's* Office of Exceptional Children funds Project CREATE,<sup>20</sup> which offers free online courses to teachers seeking advancement in the field of special education. Almost 2,000 scholarships have been awarded, resulting in more than 500 newly certified special education teachers.

## Recruitment to Specific Jobs

### *Financial Incentives*

Three states were asked to describe how they use financial incentives as a means of recruiting special education personnel to specific jobs, although most of the incentive programs described are available to *all* teachers, not just special educators. Their responses include the following:

- *North Dakota* offers a loan forgiveness program for as much as \$5,000 for both general and special education personnel teaching in the state's public schools. A second grant, the Teacher Shortage Loan Forgiveness Program,<sup>21</sup> offers up to \$3,000 per teacher serving in shortage areas such as special education.
- The *South Carolina* Teacher Loan program provides loan forgiveness of up to \$3,000 per year for up to three years in exchange for a commitment to teach in critical subject areas and critical geographical school districts. Another program, Project Speech-Language Pathologist–Recruitment and Retention in Schools (SLP-RRS)<sup>22</sup> is designed to address the state's shortage of school-based SLPs. The program provides tuition reimbursement, reimbursement for the PRAXIS, sign-on bonuses, reimbursement for state and national conferences, licensure reimbursement and graduate courses for educator certification renewal. In addition, Project SLP-RRS addresses working conditions by encouraging districts to base their workload system on weighted caseloads. A third program, South Carolina Teacher Advancement Program (TAP),<sup>23</sup> provides incentives for good teaching. TAP schools enable teachers, including special education teachers, to move up the career/salary ladder while remaining in the classroom. South Carolina TAP is funded via a U.S. Department of Education grant.
- *Louisiana* sponsors a program called Local Teacher Quality,<sup>24</sup> a state grant program that provides funds to districts and eligible nonpublic schools/systems to support

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<sup>19</sup> For more information about BTSA, go to <http://www.btsa.ca.gov/>.

<sup>20</sup> For more information about CREATE, go to <http://www.sccreate.org/>.

<sup>21</sup> For more information about the Teacher Shortage Loan Forgiveness Program, go to <http://www.ndus.nodak.edu/students/financial-aid/details.asp?id=430>.

<sup>22</sup> For more information about Project SLP-RRS, go to <http://ed.sc.gov/agency/Standards-and-Learning/Exceptional-Children/Speech-Language-Impairment/ProjectSpeech-LanguagePathologistRRS.html>. An article about the program is also available at <http://speech-language-pathology-audiology.advanceweb.com/Article/Project-SLP-RRS.aspx>.

<sup>23</sup> For more information about TAP, go to <http://www.tapsystem.org/action/action.taf?page=fag>.

<sup>24</sup> For more information about the Local Teacher Quality program, go to <http://www.doe.state.la.us/LDE/pd/2147.html>.

teachers in becoming certified and highly qualified. The Hurricane Educator Assistance Program (HEAP)<sup>25</sup> provides incentives for teachers who commit to work for at least three years in an area deemed a major disaster area as a result of Hurricane Katrina or Hurricane Rita. Fifty *Louisiana* schools are also participating in the federally funded *Louisiana* TAP program.<sup>26</sup>

### *New Technologies*

Four states interviewed were asked to describe how they use new technologies (e.g., online recruitment sites and/or social media such as Facebook and Twitter) as a means of recruiting qualified special education personnel to specific jobs:

- The *Arizona* Department of Education, Exceptional Student Services sponsors the Arizona Education Employment Board (AEEB),<sup>27</sup> an online system enabling districts to post job vacancies and interested individuals to search and apply for jobs. AEEB currently has approximately 40,000 registrants. Teach in Arizona<sup>28</sup> is another website designed to recruit to the field of education and it highlights careers in special education and the related services. Arizona Promising Practices,<sup>29</sup> also funded by Exceptional Student Services, publishes an online newsletter and posts teaching tools and lesson plans for free download, many targeting special education teachers. Approximately 33,000 teachers subscribe to Arizona Promising Practices. The websites for AEEB, Teach in Arizona and Arizona Promising Practices are linked to each other. *Arizona* uses Facebook<sup>30</sup> and Twitter<sup>31</sup> accounts to publicize new jobs available on AEEB and the state also promotes its Great Arizona Teach-in using Facebook, Twitter and a blog at Jobing.com.

*"One challenge is helping SEA and LEAs understand that in this climate, recruiting has to be ongoing. It can't just happen in Spring. It has to be a year round effort."*

- The *Kansas* Educational Employment Board (KEEB), sponsored by the Special Education Services Department of the *Kansas* Department of Education and funded by IDEA, provides a one-stop, online job application system. Using KEEB, it is possible to track how many people applied for each job and whether KEEB helped fill the position. KEEB staff works with districts to develop recruitment podcasts which they can post on KEEB as well as the district's website. Since 2007, 6,000 jobs have been listed on KEEB, including 800 special education positions. Jobs available via KEEB are also posted to Facebook, Twitter and through Really Simple Syndication (RSS). SEA staff also hosts virtual recruitment fairs using Second Life, a free 3D virtual world where users can connect using free voice and text chat, and provides technical assistance to district HR representatives who wish to host a recruitment booth at the virtual fair.
- *Utah* uses Teachers-Teachers.com as its primary online job application site. The state also hosts a blog for new teachers located on its Running Start Utah<sup>32</sup> site. As part of

<sup>25</sup> For more information about HEAP, go to <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/heap/index.html>.

<sup>26</sup> For more information about Louisiana TAP, go to <http://www.doe.state.la.us/ide/tap/tap.html>.

<sup>27</sup> To access AEEB, go to <http://www.arizonaeducationjobs.com/>.

<sup>28</sup> To access Teach in Arizona, go to <http://www.teachinaz.com/>.

<sup>29</sup> For access Arizona Promising Practices, go to <http://azpromisingpractices.com/>.

<sup>30</sup> For more information about Facebook, go to <http://www.facebook.com/>.

<sup>31</sup> For more information about Twitter, go to <http://twitter.com/>.

<sup>32</sup> To visit the blog at Running Start Utah, go to [http://www.runningstartutah.org/?page\\_id=68](http://www.runningstartutah.org/?page_id=68).

Running Start Utah, coaches (mentors) were recently given flip video cameras and asked to videotape their interactions with new teachers and select video clips illustrating praise and recommended error correction procedures. These clips are then posted to the website. *Utah* coach/teacher teams have also recently begun using Skype with Bluetooth wireless phones and cameras situated within the classroom to provide remote, play-by-play coaching. Running Start Utah is linked to both Facebook and Twitter.

- *South Carolina's* CERRA, the state's online recruitment site, posts job openings to Facebook and Twitter. Part of CERRA's site encourages interactive dialogue among mentors and mentees. More than 2,000 Facebook users "like" the CERRA site. In addition, *South Carolina's* Teacher Cadets<sup>33</sup> website enables high school-aged cadets to learn more about special-education as a career via YouTube<sup>34</sup> links to related videos and other online resources.

*In-State and/or Out-of-State Recruiters*

Three of the states interviewed were asked to describe how they use in-state and/or out-of-state recruiters as a means of securing qualified special education personnel. The following are examples:

- *Utah* pays for one out-of-state recruiter to exhibit at the Council for Exceptional Children's (CEC) annual conference.
- *Kansas* conducts in-state special education recruitment via information sessions and technical assistance to early career principals. Because rural parts of the state have more difficulty filling special education positions, KEEB project staff makes sure that whenever someone with special education certification and within a certain geographical radius registers with KEEB, their profile is automatically sent to the LEA in need of personnel.
- *Arizona* staff coordinates the annual Great Arizona Teach-in, an event with more than 70 district exhibitors and 700 job seekers. Candidates come from all around the state and even from outside the state. SEA staff recruits at conferences throughout the state and nation, including efforts to recruit culturally and ethnically diverse special education teachers, and has put together a recruitment packet that includes information on the appeal of various regions of the state.

**Retention**

*Mentoring and e-Mentoring*

Four states were asked to describe how they use mentoring and/or e-mentoring to retain special education personnel. Their responses include the following:

- *North Dakota* prepared a special education mentoring toolkit<sup>35</sup> that is available on the Department of Public Instruction's website and was distributed to local special

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<sup>33</sup> For more information about the Teacher Cadets program, go to <http://www.teachercadets.com/>.

<sup>34</sup> For more information about YouTube, go to <http://www.youtube.com/>.

<sup>35</sup> To access the special education mentoring toolkit, go to <http://www.dpi.state.nd.us/speced/general/chpt1.pdf> for Chapter 1, <http://www.dpi.state.nd.us/speced/general/chpt2.pdf> for Chapter 2, <http://www.dpi.state.nd.us/speced/general/chpt3.pdf> for Chapter 3, <http://www.dpi.state.nd.us/speced/general/chpt4.pdf> for Chapter 4,

education directors. The toolkit includes guidelines for developing a district mentoring plan, information about the coaching model, a mentoring log and tips for how to tailor the mentoring program to various personnel (e.g., teachers versus paraprofessionals).

- California's mentoring program, the Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA), is included as a requirement for the new special education credential. Although the BTSA program is designed for all new teachers in the state, it includes the matching of mentors and mentees by content specialization and customized learning materials (including the Formative Assessment for California Teachers [FACT]<sup>36</sup>) for specialty areas such as special education. LEAs are required to provide all new teachers, including special education teachers, with two years of mentoring. It is up to each LEA how it chooses to use state funding to implement BTSA (e.g., for stipends and/or training of full-time or part-time mentors).

- North Carolina plans to pilot a mentoring program targeting several LEAs that are having difficulty recruiting and retaining highly qualified special education personnel.

"[In a local control state], we can provide [LEAs] with all of these materials, but what they do with it is their choice."

The program would be based on the New Teacher Center (NTC)<sup>37</sup> model and funded as part of the state improvement project. The program will likely include an e-mentoring component in order to match mentors and mentees by content area, grade level and disability category. North Carolina also sponsors a tuition

reimbursement program for related service providers (i.e., SLPs, occupational therapists [OTs] and physical therapists [PTs]) committed to working in public school settings for a minimum of two years and part of this program includes mentoring by state-level SLP, OT and PT consultants.

- Louisiana used to sponsor the Louisiana Teacher Assistance and Assessment Program (LATAAP)<sup>38</sup>. The program offered mentoring or e-mentoring to all new teachers, including special education teachers, for their first two years in the field. LATAAP was repealed by the state legislature, however, and mentoring is now managed at the local level. The state is currently developing mentoring guidelines that will include a section on special education mentoring.

#### *Administrative Support*

Three states interviewed were asked to describe how they use strategies related to administrative support to retain qualified personnel, including special education personnel. Their responses include the following:

- Kansas supports administrators in their recruitment and retention efforts by working directly with the Kansas Association of Special Education Administrators (KASEA),<sup>39</sup> including sharing data with administrators from the statewide attrition study. Kansas

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<http://www.dpi.state.nd.us/speced/general/chpt5.pdf> for Chapter 5, and <http://www.dpi.state.nd.us/speced/general/chpt6.pdf> for Chapter 6.

<sup>36</sup> For more information about FACT, go to <http://www.btsa.ca.gov/FACT/default.html>.

<sup>37</sup> For more information on NTC, go to <http://www.newteachercenter.org/index.php>.

<sup>38</sup> For more information about LATAAP, go to <http://www.doe.state.la.us/lde/pd/623.html>.

<sup>39</sup> For more information about KASEA, go to <http://www.ka-sea.org/>.

also hosts KEEP,<sup>40</sup> a website dedicated to the retention of special education teachers. A portion of the site targets administrators and provides information on how to support new special education teachers.

- *South Carolina* encourages administrators to participate in state-sponsored mentor training, which enables administrators to better understand how to support special education personnel.
- *Louisiana* sponsors the Louisiana Educational Leader Induction Program,<sup>41</sup> a program to support new administrators, although funding for the program will soon end. A grant from the Wallace Foundation has enabled the SEA to work with LEAs and IHEs on developing a comprehensive system for leadership support. For example, the High Performing and High Priority Schools<sup>42</sup> program has followed a cohort of high achieving principals serving in high poverty schools in order to identify key elements of success. In 2006, the state also redesigned its educational leadership certification structure to offer position-specific endorsements in order to better prepare administrators.

#### *Improved Working Conditions*

Three states interviewed were asked to describe how they use strategies related to improving working conditions as a means of retaining qualified special education personnel. Their responses include the following:

- *North Carolina's* Comprehensive Exceptional Children Accountability System (CECAS)<sup>43</sup> streamlines the special education paperwork process. The SEA also conducts webinars to support special educators working in general education settings and support is available for teachers, especially special education teachers, preparing for the PRAXIS and seeking content certification and/or dual certification. The SEA encourages LEAs to subsidize coursework and PRAXIS test preparation for special education teachers seeking to become highly qualified.
- *Kansas* sponsors the Technical Assistance System Network (TASN),<sup>44</sup> which provides special education-specific technical assistance and professional development. The state also uses \$3.2 million of its IDEA funds to provide subgrants to LEAs. LEAs submit applications outlining their "Targeted Improvement Plans" and may request funds for a variety of activities, including professional development (addressing topics such as co-teaching, differentiated instruction and positive behavior interventions and supports [PBIS]), the development of a web-based IEP system, or release time and extra duty stipends.
- *California* recently added the Special Education Supports Module (SESM)<sup>45</sup> to its bi-annual California School Climates Survey (CSCS)<sup>46</sup> and California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS).<sup>47</sup> Last year, respondents to the SESM totaled more than 47,000. The

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<sup>40</sup> For more information about KEEP, go to <http://www.kansasteacherretention.com/>.

<sup>41</sup> For more information about the Louisiana Educational Leader Induction Program, go to [http://www.leadlouisiana.net/edu\\_leadership\\_induction\\_programs.asp](http://www.leadlouisiana.net/edu_leadership_induction_programs.asp).

<sup>42</sup> For more information about the High Performing and High Priority Schools program, go to [http://www.leadlouisiana.net/edu\\_leadership\\_support\\_programs-high\\_performing\\_and\\_high\\_priority\\_schools.asp](http://www.leadlouisiana.net/edu_leadership_support_programs-high_performing_and_high_priority_schools.asp).

<sup>43</sup> For more information about CECAS, go to <http://www.nccecas.org/>.

<sup>44</sup> For more information about TASN, go to <http://ksdetasn.org/cms/>.

<sup>45</sup> For more information about SESM, go to [http://cscs.wested.org/survey\\_content/sesis](http://cscs.wested.org/survey_content/sesis)

<sup>46</sup> For more information about CSCS, go to <http://cscs.wested.org/>.

<sup>47</sup> For more information about CHKS, go to <http://chks.wested.org/>.

state has issued a workbook on improving school climate, which provides guidance to LEA-level personnel on interpreting and responding to survey results. One section of the workbook specifically addresses special education. In addition, the California Comprehensive Center has launched an LEA-level demonstration site and will facilitate the district's use of survey data to improve working conditions. Title II of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) requires SEAs to monitor LEA progress on plans to address recruitment and retention, including LEA plans to support new teachers and to ensure that all teachers of record become highly qualified.

## Barriers

Interviewees described several barriers to state-level support for recruitment and retention of highly qualified special education personnel. For example:

- a need for ensuring that online job sites include proper information about necessary certification and/or other qualifications;
- a lack of teaming and cross-training at the local level to ensure continuity of initiatives over time;
- difficulty of hiring and retaining SEA staff who are well-versed in best practices and specific regional needs;
- a lack of up-to-date workforce data enabling IHEs to conduct targeted recruitment for personnel preparation programs;
- a lack of adequate funding (e.g., the economic recession and resulting budget shortfalls have prevented many initiatives from being fully realized); and
- an inability to provide state-level support and/or guidance in local-control states.

*"I think one of the things that we're trying to move away from is having the SEA be seen as an agency of compliance. We've always promulgated laws, templates, rules, forms. The thing that would be the biggest change is the fact that we're supposed to be more of a support-oriented agency."*

## Recommendations

Interviewees identified several critical elements to successful SEA-level support for the recruitment and retention of qualified special education personnel. Recommendations included:

- working closely with LEAs in order to be responsive to the needs of the field;
- communicating with IHEs to be sure they are preparing teachers to meet state personnel needs;
- nurturing relationships between LEAs and IHEs;
- developing local business partnerships to improve community infrastructure and support for teachers (e.g., providing housing options, discounts on utilities and rent, reallocating resources in order to increase teachers' salaries);
- making data-driven decisions (e.g., using data gathered via states' online recruitment systems);
- being knowledgeable of, and promoting, best practices;
- providing a foundation for recruitment and retention based on well-crafted laws and effective regulations (e.g., credentialing legislation); and
- gaining LEAs' buy-in and trust as states move from a compliance model to a support model.

## SUMMARY

Although recruitment and retention of qualified special education personnel, including related service providers, remains an ongoing challenge for states, the eight SEAs included in this study are each spearheading a number of efforts to meet this challenge. In terms of state-level infrastructure, most states interviewed have state-level advisory boards or working groups that address special education-specific recruitment and retention efforts, as well as dedicated personnel to oversee state-level activities. State-level plans, legislative mandates and policy guidance are less common. In terms of recruitment *to the field*, grow your own programs and support for personnel preparation program partnerships seem to be the most thoroughly developed strategies, although the grow your own programs described were not all special education-specific. Information sessions and outreach to culturally and linguistically diverse groups seem to be less well-developed. In terms of recruitment *to specific jobs*, financial incentives and new technologies appear to be the most well-developed strategies described, with in-state and/or out-of-state recruiters being less well-developed. Significantly, although technologies such as online recruitment systems and use of new social media like Facebook and Twitter are used to recruit *all* teachers, several initiatives are funded exclusively or in part by the SEA's special education units, many of those through the SPDG. In terms of *retention*, mentoring and e-mentoring of new special education teachers appear to play a significant role in states' induction efforts, and administrative support and improved working conditions also play a role. The eight states stressed the importance of making personnel preparation decisions based on up-to-date workforce data, being responsive to LEAs needs and nurturing open lines of communication among key stakeholders, namely the SEA, LEAs and IHEs.

*"It's critical that [recruitment and retention] be brought together in a comprehensive, rather than piecemeal, way."*

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### *California*

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### *Kansas*

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### *Louisiana*

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*North Carolina*

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*North Dakota*

- Mary McCarvel-O'Connor, Regional and SPDG Coordinator, North Dakota Department of Public Instruction-Special Education Office

*South Carolina*

- Barbara Turner, Teacher Recruitment and Retention Coordinator, South Carolina Department of Education
- Ann Marie Taylor, Special Education Mentoring Coordination, CERRA

*Utah*

Bruce Schroeder, Director, Utah Personnel Development Center

**APPENDIX – STATE-LEVEL APPROACHES TO RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION ABOUT WHICH STATES WERE INTERVIEWED**

States	Recruitment to the Field				Recruitment to Specific Jobs			Retention		
	Information Sessions	Grow Your Own Programs	Support for Personnel Preparation Program Partnerships	Outreach to Diverse Groups	Financial Incentives	New Technologies	Recruiters	Mentoring	Administrative Support	Improved Working Conditions
Arizona		x		x		x	x			
California			x	x				x		x
Kansas						x	x		x	x
Louisiana	x				x			x	x	
North Carolina		x					x	x		x
North Dakota	x	x			x			x		
South Carolina			x		x	x			x	
Utah	x		x			x	x			
Totals =	3	3	3	2	3	4	3	4	3	3

Note: Although we asked each state about only the four strategies identified for each as part of this table, all reported using additional strategies to recruit and retain qualified special education personnel.