

PERFORMANCE AUDIT

Work in progress: Audit description

Improving Recruitment and Retention of Special Educators

Washington is facing a significant shortage of qualified people to work in special education. Many roles are involved in providing services to students eligible for special education, each of which can be critical to the academic success of students with disabilities. These roles include special education teachers, the paraeducators who assist teachers, and support specialists who help students learn by addressing their specific disabilities (for example, speech pathologist, audiologist or psychologist).

According to the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, turnover among special education staff is high, with vacancies roughly four times higher than in general education. Currently, nearly a thousand special education positions have been filled with educators that do not hold a special education endorsement. The combination of too few appropriately endorsed special education staff and high turnover in the field generally deprives students with the most complex education needs of quality instruction they need to succeed academically.

The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction is responsible for ensuring that school districts fulfill the educational needs of students with disabilities. School districts are responsible for recruiting and retaining special education staff.

Despite districts' efforts to attract and retain qualified special education staff, they can face many challenges in accomplishing these goals. Among the factors that can affect recruitment and retention are issues unique to the field, including heavy workloads and the complex nature of the work involved in creating and managing individualized student plans. Other factors might more directly affect an individual district, such as a small pool of qualified applicants in the area, the inability to pay competitive salaries, or the lack of robust mentorship and support programs.

Preliminary scope and objectives

This audit will identify factors contributing to the shortage and turnover of special education staff. It will also consider strategies that educational agencies can implement to improve recruitment and retention of these educators. The audit seeks to answer the following question:

- What opportunities exist to help school districts strengthen the recruitment and retention of special educators?



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