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Recruiting New Teachers: A Project to Promote Teaching Careers

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Recruiting New Teachers:

A Project to Promote Teaching Careers



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Most special education teachers, district administrators, and personnel preparation staff in districts and universities are aware of the data on teacher demand:

- Three of the top five shortages of Utah educators are special education teachers: #2 shortage- Severe, #3 shortage- Mild/Moderate, #5 shortage- Preschool (T. H. Bell Index of Criticality, 2006).
- According to the 2005 Utah Economic Report to the Governor, projections in growth in Utah children ages 5 -17 called for an increase in school population from 507,778 children to over 700,000 children in 2014, representing a 38% increase in 10 years.
- The demand for special education teachers will maintain or increase for at least the next seven years (Utah Economic Report to the Governor, 2005).

The data on teacher supply are important, because they indicate a decreasing trend in new career teachers. According to the Utah System of Higher Education report (Sperry, 2007), the number of graduates from

Utah colleges obtaining teaching licenses has decreased from 3000 in 2003 to less than 2500 in 2005. The report concluded that the supply of new educators in Utah is trending downward (about 8% per year) despite programs providing alternative routes to licensure and the addition of four new colleges of education.

Further, major discrepancies exist in teachers representing cultural, linguistic, and ethnic diversity compared to children representing diversity. Fifteen percent of Utah public school children represent diversity (Utah State Office of Education, 2005), yet, less than 10% of Utah teachers represent diversity. Nationally, individuals representing diversity have been successfully recruited into teaching careers. For example, at the University of Southern California in the Center for Multilingual, Multicultural Research (Genzuk & French, 2002), Hispanic, Latino, and African-American individuals have been recruited into teaching careers. Recruitment of individuals representing diversity requires local individuals who can explain teaching careers and answer questions. This requires local recruiters who understand the perceptions of teaching careers within the family structure, are knowledgeable about the motivations of recruits, and have access to needed supports to ensure success.

What Experiences Contribute to Decisions to Enter Teaching?

At Utah State University (USU), surveys of incoming special education teacher trainees from 2001 to the present indicate specific experiences as contributing to decisions to pursue teaching careers. For example, each year 30-50% of entrants report previous experience as paid district paraprofessionals in school districts, usually in special education classrooms. Further, 30-35% of entrants report previous experience as high school peer tutors. Smaller percentages of trainees report experience working for adult service providers (e.g., group homes, supported residences, supported employment), Special Olympics, or Best Buddies).

They No Longer Come to Us in Sufficient Numbers; We Must Go to Them

With so many career choices available and numerous competing priorities, the number of pre-service teacher trainees is decreasing in most traditional university teacher preparation programs in the U.S. The USU teacher preparation programs, which are offered in the student's home area along the Wasatch Front (e.g., Mild/Moderate and Severe Alternative Teacher Preparation Programs) or across Utah (e.g., Mild/Moderate Distance Program), have maintained or increased enrollment. However, in the on-campus program, numbers are decreasing. Even for those students interested in teaching careers due to experience as paraprofessionals or peer tutors, many reported that they selected other majors because they were not actively recruited into teaching. Some students indicated they received brochures or visited web sites on teacher education programs, but remained unconvinced. They preferred to talk to trusted individuals who could answer their questions about the pros and cons of a teaching career.

At USU, three recruitment efforts in local communities and schools are underway. Each effort targets specific individuals who might be interested in teaching careers.

Local teacher recruitment. First, a recruitment pilot project was conducted in Spring 2006. Project staff contacted 26 recent graduates of USU special education programs for assistance with recruitment. Of the 26 contacted graduates, 21 (81%) indicated they worked in school settings with paraprofessionals or peer tutors who were interested in teaching careers. Of 21 teachers, 60 potential recruits were contacted. These recruits are being advised by the USU Special Education Department Advisor as they consider their career options, and in some cases, work towards entry into teacher education. Additional USU graduates will be contacted soon to serve as recruiters.

Concurrent enrollment (high school-based) course in peer tutoring. Second, in 2001, USU developed a concurrent enrollment course, Special Education 1000 (Principles of Effective Peer Tutoring) for peer tutors at Mountain Crest High School in Cache Valley. High school students earn university credit by learning and applying tutoring skills with students in special education. In 2004 and 2005, new sections of the course were implemented at Sky View and Logan High Schools. To date, over 200 students have received concurrent enrollment credit while working as peer tutors in resource and self-contained classrooms. Of 200 students, about 20 have now entered USU as sophomores/juniors. One former peer tutor is now working towards a special education degree in the Severe Disabilities On-Campus Program, and three former tutors have been admitted to the USU on-campus program for 2007-2008.

Given a grant from the Utah State Office of Education, the peer tutoring course is now packaged and prepared for replication at selected sites throughout Utah. Eligibility criteria to become a site offering the peer tutoring course include:

- Availability of a high school special education teacher who will teach and supervise tutors,
- Receptivity of the teacher to receive training in how to teach the course,
- Maintenance of a strong working relationship with USU faculty, and
- Assistance in scheduling and coordinating visits among peer tutors, teachers, and USU special education faculty.

Project staff will develop samples of "model" course materials for high school teachers who supervise the courses. Additionally, staff will conduct training workshops for high school teachers and develop a web site for training purposes on how to carry out a course that increases the effectiveness of peer tutoring. High school teachers will supervise courses and receive compensation through tuition. Teachers will promote careers in special education, provide packets of information (tailored to the peer tutor), and arrange interactions between special education teachers, USU faculty, and tutors.

Local recruitment of individuals representing diversity. Third, given a grant from the Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education, USU faculty and staff are engaging in a targeted effort to promote teaching careers among individuals representing diversity. Project staff has established contacts with community leaders representing diverse groups throughout Utah and has engaged their assistance in recruiting teacher trainees, particularly paraprofessionals and high school peer tutors. Interested individuals will receive packets of information, advisement from the USU Special Education Department Advisor, and invitations to meet USU special education faculty and tour USU facilities.

Project staff will evaluate the three targeted recruitment efforts to determine whether increased numbers of recruits enter special education teaching programs at USU.

For Those Who Are Interested!

For information on special education teaching programs at USU, contact the USU Special Education Department Advisor, Ms. Darcie Peterson, at darcie.peterson@usu.edu.

To receive a packet of information about special education teaching programs at USU, email recruit.sped@gmail.com

To find out more about the USU concurrent enrollment (high school) course and whether your site meets eligibility criteria, email Bob Morgan at bmorgan@cc.usu.edu

To assist in recruitment of individuals representing diverse populations into teacher education at USU, email Erin Horrocks at ehorrocks@cc.usu.edu

To find out about special education teacher education programs in general, order the book entitled "Do You Want to Make a Difference in the Lives of Students with Special Needs? Careers in Special Education and Related Services" from the National Clearinghouse for Professions in Special Education, www.cec.sped.org/ncpse.htm or 1-800-641-7824. ■