



**CRITICAL SHORTAGE AREA IN
EDUCATION – WHY AND HOW**

**MAY 15, 2024
SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY
PANEL**



Overview: Agenda

- Special Education Advisory Panel Purpose
- 2023-2024 Panel Efforts (Reports forthcoming)
- Special Focus: Critical Shortage Deep Dive in Vermont & Thoughts on Remedy



STATE OF VERMONT

State of the State in Vermont - 2023

- Over 15,000 children and youth identified as eligible for special education.
- At 17.2%, VT has the highest percentage of children in the Nation identified with emotional disturbance, which includes children with anxiety, depression, and externalizing behaviors.
- Thousands of children (29,000 families) receive treatment for longstanding medical conditions with conditions such as asthma, diabetes, cancer, blood disorders, and muscular dystrophy.
- Significant achievement gap between students with and without disabilities on statewide assessments, with students with disabilities often scoring in the single digits for percentage proficient in reading, math, and science.
- Extraordinary challenges due to staff shortages which result in children and youth not getting the services they are entitled to.
- Our youth with disabilities are not transitioning from high school with the knowledge and skills they need for post-secondary school or work.
- One of the highest % of states with children and youth in out of state placements.



HIGHLIGHTS

Re-established Partnership with AOE

Recruitment of Members

Advisement on Vermont P2P and Transition

SPP/APR Indicators Advisement

The role of the paraprofessional

Unmet Needs Document and Alignment with Indicators

Critical Shortage in Special Education

	Identified Areas	NEED
1	IEP Meeting Processes and Services	<p>Child Find procedures</p> <p>Trained LEAs at IEP meetings</p> <p>Timely Evaluations/ Need for Evaluators</p> <p>Reports given to team/family in timely fashion</p> <p>Improved transition processes/ ambitious goals</p> <p>Supportive IEP facilitation if needed</p> <p>Individualized ESY services/ not cookie cutter</p> <p>Adaptive programming</p>
2	Parent/ School Collaboration	<p>Opportunities to address power imbalance</p> <p>More opportunities to have a voice</p> <p>Included more as a stakeholder group</p> <p>Parents treated as equal members on the IEP team</p>
3	Teacher Training	<p>Gen Ed teachers AND special educators need to be trained together</p> <p>Making work/learning accessible/ UDL. District wide training and policy</p> <p>Gen ed teachers deferring to spec ed/ lack of ownership</p> <p>MTSS training - MTSS still inconsistent across the state/ sometimes delay eval referral</p>
4	Literacy	<p>Inconsistent literacy approaches across state</p> <p>Need for accessible resources for students</p> <p>Training regarding dyslexia</p>
5	Discipline/ Bias	<p>Families report stories of restraint/seclusion</p> <p>Reduction of "quiet rooms," sending kids home</p> <p>Tracking/separate programs in districts</p> <p>Training for teachers/schools - Bias training specifically related to disabilities needed for all school personnel</p>

PRE-COVID CONTEXT: CRITICAL SHORTAGE

- Forty-eight states and the District of Columbia currently report special education teacher shortages (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Tomas, 2016).
- Certain populations of students are more disadvantaged by shortages— students in high-poverty urban schools, remote rural schools, and students with serious emotional and behavioral disorders (Albrecht, Johns, Mounsteven, & Oloranda, 2009; McClesky, Tyler, & Flippin, 2003).
- The pipeline of novice special education teachers was never sufficient and dwindled further during America's Great Recession (Sutcher et al. 2016).
- Shortages are exacerbated by high rates of attrition of special education teachers found to be 2.5 times more likely to leave the profession as teachers in general education (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004).

PRE-COVID CONTEXT

- Stop-gap measures used in isolation are likely to exacerbate the shortage problem and contribute to poor student outcomes.
- States faced with the prospect of teacher shortages need a combination of short-term solutions and a multipronged, long-term strategic approach to ensure that every student with a disability has a fully prepared teacher.
- Addressing this problem immediately will require short-term solutions combined with intermediate- and long-term solutions that address the systemic nature of the problem.
- COVID-19? Districts report high rates of burn out and requests for leaves of absence as a result of a challenging school year in a pandemic and recovering from the pandemic. Teacher who are exiting are asking for a pause and reset.

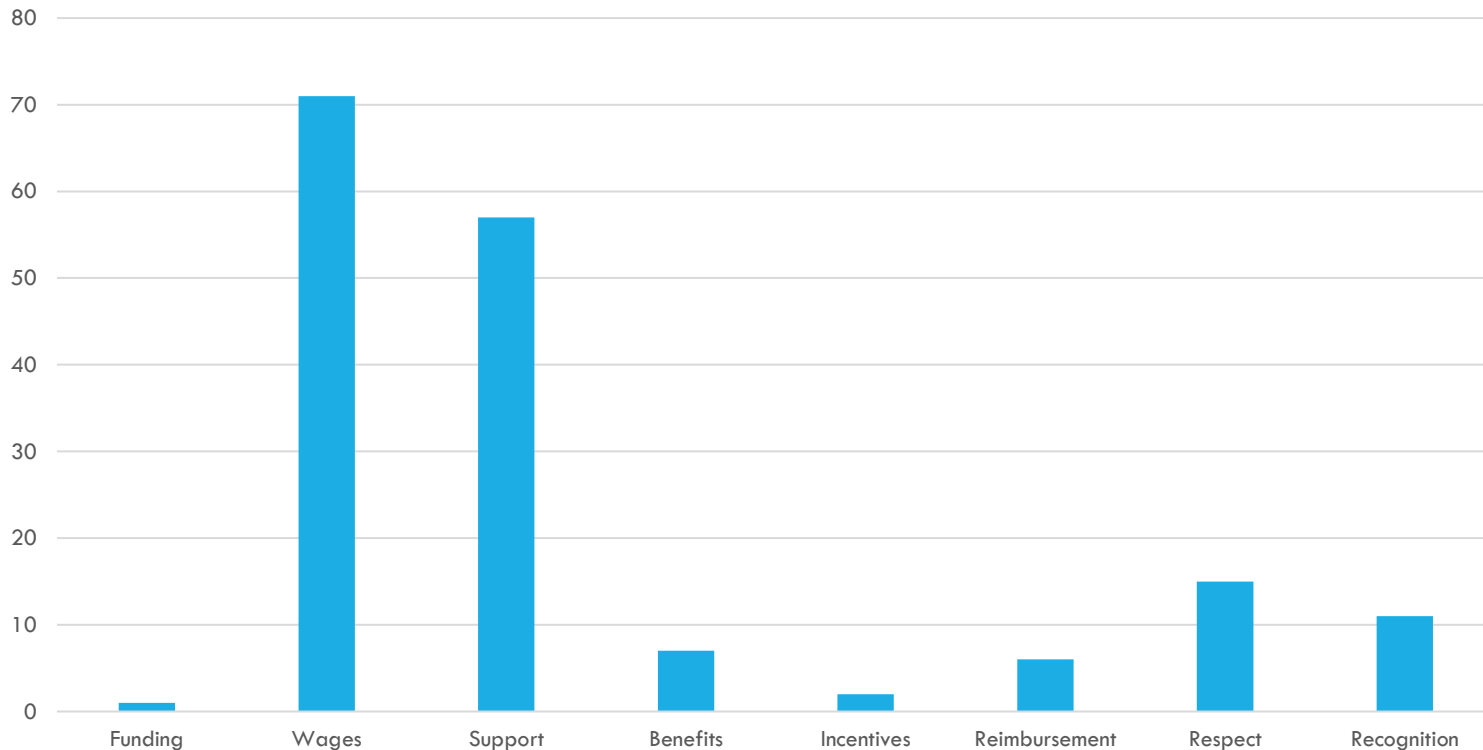
SAMPLING OF CONCERNS FROM VERMONT ADMINISTRATORS REGARDING SPECIAL EDUCATOR/PARA SHORTAGE IN 2022:

- One district reports a special educator with 80 students on her K-6 caseload. Impossible to implement the IEP as written.
- An SU reports the inability to ensure FAPE in the LRE because they cannot find anyone to work in their location - great vision for a collaborative co-taught model with a community of inclusion but cannot realize their goals with NO ONE willing to relocate or travel to their community. Posts and reposts. Given up. Will have to send students out of the district because they can't meet their needs.
- I am a little stressed. I had two openings I can not fill and just had another resign. Add to that I have 12 para openings. I don't know what to do and meet the requirements for this student without staff.

SAMPLES FROM CONCERNS FROM VERMONT ADMINISTRATORS REGARDING SPECIAL EDUCATOR/PARA SHORTAGE IN 2022:

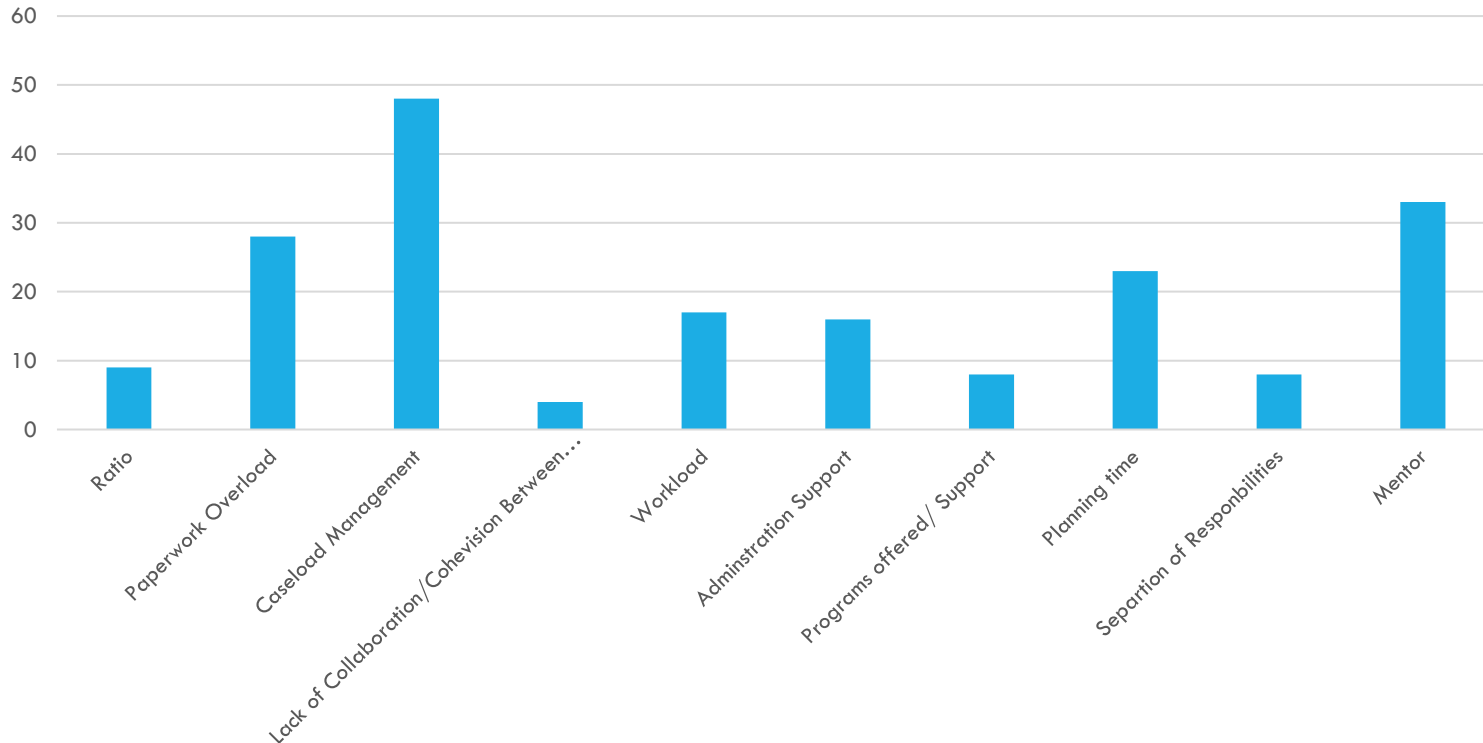
- Recruiting special education staff is super challenging to impossible. We don't know what to do for our kids. How can we get loan forgiveness?
- LEA: I am at Defcon 5 in need of a special ed teacher for X Elem....if by some miracle I can find someone with a teaching license..in anything...can I hire them and then supervise them under my special ed teaching license? If so, would they be reimbursed at the para rate for medicaid? Would they need to get a provisional if I am hiring them just to fulfill services in IEPs? I have looked into virtual contracted services through ProCare and it is over \$110,000 Which is obviously beyond budget...
- I currently have zero apps- any ideas on what to do for the Fall? Caseload of 13 kids- my other staff are maxed out in my other buildings

VERMONT 2021 SPECIAL EDUCATOR/PARA SURVEY SUMMARY
SURVEY RESULTS FOR SURVEY QUESTION: IF YOU COULD CHANGE OR CREATE SOMETHING AT THE SCHOOL OR LEA LEVEL TO IMPROVE SPECIAL EDUCATOR RECRUITMENT OR RETENTION, WHAT WOULD IT BE?



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RECOGNITION

Recognition	
Funding	1
Wages	71
Support	57
Benefits	7
Incentives	2
Reimbursement	6
Respect	15
Recognition	11

WORKLOAD

Workload	
Ratio	9
Paperwork Overload	28
Caseload Management	48
Lack of Collaboration/Cohesion Between SPED and Gen Ed Teacher	4
Workload	17
Administration Support	16
Programs offered/ Support	8
Planning time	23
Separation of Responsibilities	8
Mentor	33

Words from the Field

One of the hardest parts of special education is managing very challenging behaviors in the school environment. The thresh-hold for recommending an alternative placement or even behavioral support (BI) remains very high, and parental buy-in is essential in this process. When students hover near this thresh-hold for a sustained period of time, despite intensive team engagement to support a child, the pressure is intense for all involved. Other staff who feel the impacts of this challenging behavior (classroom teachers and support staff) routinely vent frustration at the special educator, and other parts of the special educator's day are routinely canceled (to the detriment of other students) or postponed for after-school hours (evenings or weekends). I believe the bar for these levels of support is set too high, and the hiring challenges, high turnover and burnout you see is a clear indicator of this.



Words from the Field

[We need] More supportive LEAs. Hire a Case Manager to work with the Special Educators on students' needs. Hire a transition coach to work with Voc Rehab to best support students on skills for their career and next steps for high school students.

1- more individual support for new special educators. Mentor programs are too focused learning the district and how the school works, yet new hires are often more concerned on day-to-day functions and direct paperwork assistance.

2- more flexibility in case management structure and roles. If some special educators prefer doing the meetings and less teaching, but others prefer the teaching role, allow those educators to create a system that works for them (as long as it is fair, etc).

3- if educators are going to be taught VTMTSS models, schools also be open to moving in that direction as a system and with consistency (or whatever models are being encouraged by the state).

4- more course reimbursement. This would be motivating to retain special educators if they could receive the training they feel is necessary without having to use their own money.

5- programs for loan forgiveness if working as a special educator. New educators may be more inclined to enter the field if there was a chance it could help to pay off school debt.

6- pay being more level across the state. It is difficult to retain a teacher in one district when they can make significantly more just a few miles away.

Words from the Field

-Create a maximum caseload number as many special educators are overworked with caseloads

-recognize that students with intensive needs should be considered as managing 4-5 students (due to their time commitment)

-special education testing should be assigned to those not co-teaching; school districts should have more than one person to help with special education testing as this is a very time consuming part of the job

-special educators often work beyond school hours to meet family needs for IEP meetings- they should be compensated for their work and time outside of contracted hours; maybe provide flex schedules for special educators

-special education paperwork needs to be streamlined- there are many sections of the IEP where information is required to be repeated or duplicated- special educators should be part of team in designing DocuSped or GoalView and streamline these pieces to help decrease time needed to complete paperwork

-coteaching needs to be recognized as another time consuming piece of the job with planning, grading, accommodating, teaching, etc. There are many benefits to coteaching and should continue. However nothing was removed from the responsibilities of a special educator to allow room or time for this.

Words from the Field

In order to change things to improve our Paraeducator recruiting, we need to receive better wages and offer vacation days and other incentives to enhance the position. Currently I am paid \$16.72 an hour after 23 years with no vacation time and other than a yearly low percentage wage I get nothing more. I am grateful for the health insurance and my 2 personal days as well as the 7 sick days we have had to fight for to get. I know of several teachers who have more than 30 days or more that they continue to add to if they need them. They are allowed to use them for whatever they need to use them as where a para has only 2 personal days.

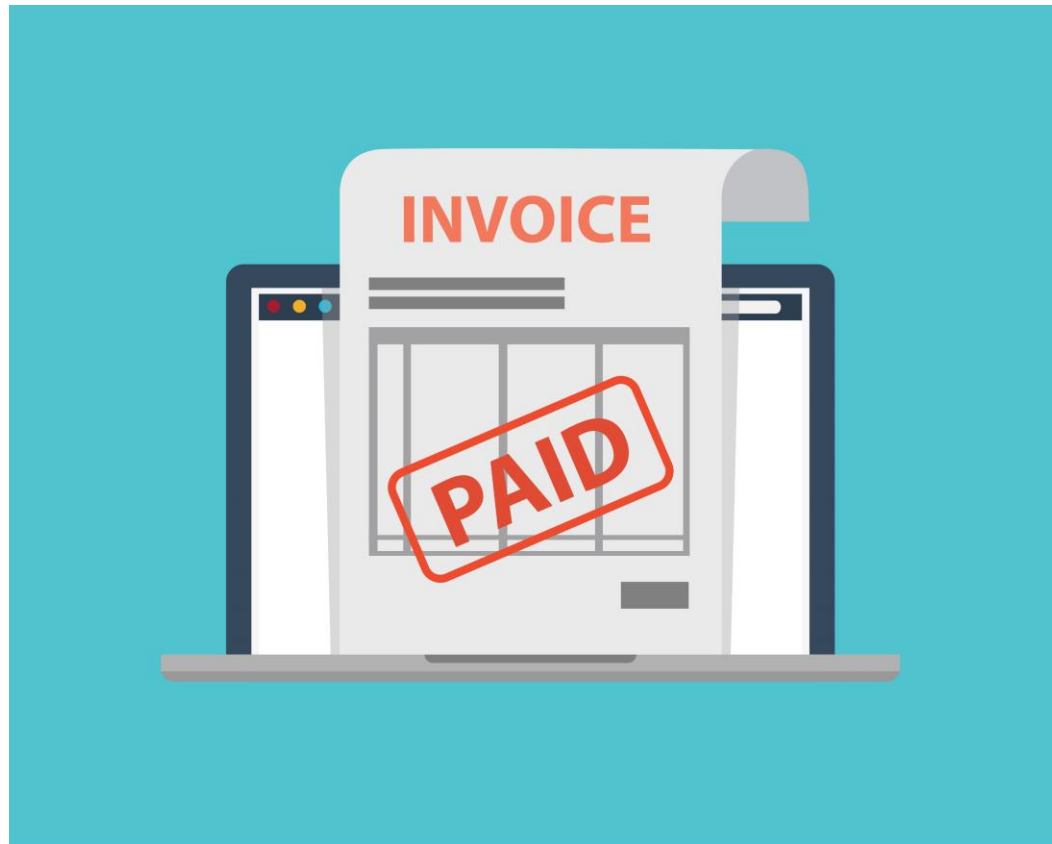
Improve respect for IA's by training and teaching the teachers what our jobs are and how difficult they can be.

Treat paras with respect. Stop referring to teachers as “professional staff” and paras only “support staff”. Again, offer more college credits so paras don't have to quit in order to pursue a teaching degree.

QUESTIONS



RECOMMENDATIONS — GOING BEYOND BUDGET



Recommendations

Opportunities other States are seeking

- **Mentoring - responsive mentoring/special skills - retirees? Mentoring standards - model project developed - Support the newly formed VMSEE**
- Paid year long internship - district pays discounted rate and student in the school community - less than long term sub
- **Grow Your Own**
- CTE...bolster early career educators in high school through CTE
- Address concerns with leadership and effective communication and collaboration
- Different tiers of para - salary based on demands and on the different trainings they have attended
- Better supports for Co-Teaching
- Attract teachers from other states with financial or unique incentives (i.e. free ski passes, Vermont sign on bonus to move here and work in special education)
- **Statewide anonymous suggestion box/teacher satisfaction survey/focus groups - listening tours across state**

Long Term Solutions

- **Alternative routes can be effective. Alternate route programs that involve district and university partnerships and provide more comprehensive training produce teachers who stay in the field longer**
- Financial incentives can help. Adjusted for cost of living, average teacher salaries in the lowest shortage states are nearly \$7,000 greater than salaries in the highest shortage states. Districts paying beginning teachers more than \$45,000 a year are more likely to recruit and retain them. Loan forgiveness and tuition remission programs that provide \$2,500 or more in financial relief yield more prepared and effective special education teachers.
- Positive school climates retain special education teachers. Research has shown that retention is fostered when teachers work in positive school climates where general and special education teachers share responsibility for students' achievement, have administrative support, and work with collaborative colleagues who value inclusive practice. Positive school climates also can mitigate the impact of role overload for beginning special education teachers (Bettini, Jones, Brownell, Conroy, & Leite, 2018; Miller et al., 1999).

Long Term Solutions

- **Formal and informal induction strategies retain beginning teachers. Strong induction programs that rely on well-trained mentors, provide systematic professional learning opportunities, and introduce new teachers into a collaborative school culture promote retention in the field and effective teaching, particularly when provided over a 2-year period (Billingsley, Grifn, Smith, Kamman, & Israel, 2009; Brownell et al., 2018). In special education, specific attention must be paid to ensuring beginning teachers have access to special education mentors who understand the unique needs of the students they are serving.**
- **Leadership matters. Special education teachers are more likely to stay in schools with supportive administration (Albrecht, Johns, Mounstevan, & Olorunda, 2009; Jones, Youngs, & Frank, 2013).**
- **Access to quality curriculum. Beginning teachers benefit from having access to curriculum, combined with high-quality professional development that supports them in delivering effective instruction (Leko & Brownell, 2011). It is important to note that many beginning special education teachers feel that they do not have the necessary curriculum materials to support them in their jobs (Youngs et al., 2011)**

Long Term Solutions

Require schools, colleges and governments to work together to boost teacher salaries and improve recruitment, preparation, working conditions and on-the-job support.

Continue, expand, and resource the state-supported Vermont special education mentoring program.

Host a multi-part think tank series, one with paraprofessionals and one with special educators (perhaps one with general educators regarding educating students with disabilities) - ongoing listening sessions on the shortage, which will help to identify solutions.

Allocate funding for paraprofessional pathways.

Statewide communication and messaging of the importance of teachers and paraprofessionals; incentivize this as a first choice profession. Devote more time and resources for intentional recruitment.

Housing incentives

Tutoring for Praxis exams

Long Term Solutions

Ensure teacher and paraprofessional training is listed in the IEP so that it happens, targets the needs, and leads to successful implementation of the IEP.

Ensure that general educators, special educators, and paraprofessionals receive training on and time for effective communication and collaboration.

Promote the requirement of Parent Training & Counseling as a related service as an important component of the IEP so parents are equitable partners and team members; this will strengthen outcomes and build respectful, powerful relationships.

Ensure there are clear expectations of roles and responsibilities regarding the IEP which includes general educators and paraprofessionals.

Grant funding to support Grow Your Own Models within LEAs.

Higher education improvements - scenarios and simulations.

Local Data Resource mapping

DISCUSSION

