

SPeNSE Fact Sheet



Study of Personnel Needs in Special Education

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General Education Teachers' Role in Special Education

Consider these facts:

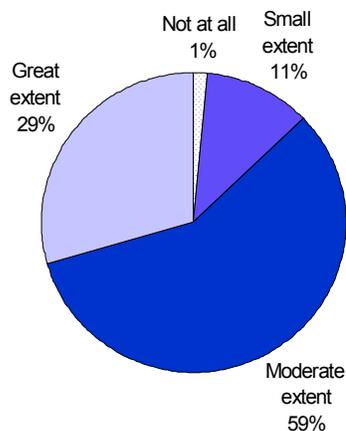
- 75% of all students with disabilities spend 40% or more of their day in general education (U.S. Department of Education, 2001);
- 96% of general educators currently teach students with disabilities or have done so in the past;
- General educators have an average of 3.5 special education students assigned to their caseload;
- The most common disabilities represented on general educators' caseloads are specific learning disabilities, speech or language impairments, and emotional disturbance; however, 1 in 10 general educators have caseloads that include students with other health impairments, mental retardation, hearing impairments, or developmental delay.

General educators make significant contributions to the educational outcomes of students with disabilities. How do they feel about this responsibility? What training and other support have general educators received to assist them in this endeavor? Results from SPeNSE help answer these questions.

How successful did they feel?

Eighty-seven percent of general education teachers felt successful in teaching most students with disabilities to a moderate or great extent, and a similar percentage felt somewhat or very confident in making educational decisions about special education students. Furthermore, their level of confidence

How successful general educators feel teaching most students with disabilities



was associated with the types of support they received. For example, 92% of general education teachers who had specific procedures to use with the special education students in their classes felt moderate or great success compared with 73% who had no such procedures. Similarly, general education teachers who received inservice training on the needs of students with disabilities and special materials to use with these students felt significantly more successful than those who did not. Responses to these items were generally consistent across grade levels.

General educators' confidence in serving students with disabilities seemed dependent upon their relationship with special education teachers. Those who often received instruction-related suggestions from special educators felt significantly more confident than those who did not in teaching students with disabilities and in making educational decisions about them.

What preparation did they receive?

Adapting instruction for students with disabilities, managing the behavior of students with and without disabilities, and collaborating with special education teachers are important skills for general educators. Yet many teachers completed their professional preparation at a time when few students with disabilities were taught in general education classes. Even among teachers who were recently prepared, some training gaps remained. Fewer than one-third of those who had been teaching 6 years or fewer received any preservice preparation in collaborating with special education teachers. Just over half received preparation in adapting instruction, and only two-thirds were taught how to manage student behavior.

However, some general educators were able to acquire these important skills through inservice programs. In the past 3 years, 70% of general education teachers received continuing professional development in adapting instruction for students with disabilities,

and 21% of these teachers received more than 8 hours of instruction. In managing behavior, 28% received more than 8 hours of inservice, and 46% received less than 8 hours. Far fewer general educators received training in collaborating with special education teachers, so it is perhaps not surprising that general educators rated their skills relatively low in this area.

General educators' professional development on teaching students with disabilities

	Amount in past 3 years		
	More than 8 hours	1-8 hours	No hours
Adapting instruction	21%	49%	31%
Managing behavior	28%	46%	26%
Collaborating with special educators	10%	38%	52%

Was professional development effective?

The professional development hours that general educators spent enhancing their skills in collaboration and in adapting instruction for students with disabilities were significantly associated with their perceived success. Of those who received more than 8 hours of professional development in the past 3 years on collaborating with special education teachers, only 1% felt not at all successful or successful to a small extent in teaching students with disabilities. This compares with 11% of those who received fewer than 8 hours of professional development and 14% of those who received none. Likewise, of those who spent 8 or more hours learning to adapt instruction for students with disabilities, only 3% felt not at all successful or successful to a small extent compared to 15% of those who did not have any professional development in that area. The relationship between professional development hours on behavior management and perceived success in teaching students with disabilities was less clear.

Did they receive adequate support?

Most general educators said they received the support they needed to teach students with disabilities to a moderate or great extent. This support included help from special education teachers, special procedures for working with students, continuing professional development on the needs of students with disabilities, and assistance from paraprofessionals.

Extent to which general educators received support to teach students with disabilities

