

SPeNSE Fact Sheet



Study of Personnel Needs in Special Education
www.spense.org

Preschool Special Education Teachers

Consider these facts:



The typical work week for a preschool special education teacher, those serving children ages three to five, comprises 24 hours of teaching, 6 hours of paperwork, and 6 hours preparing lessons, in addition to hall duty, reading background material, communicating with parents, attending IEP and other meetings, consulting with general education teachers, and supervising paraprofessionals outside of class time.



The average preschool special education teacher serves 14 children, and almost 75% of preschool special education teachers serve children ages birth to 5 exclusively.



The most common disabilities preschool special education teachers encounter are developmental delay (71%), speech or language impairments (56%), autism (38%), mental retardation (30%), and other health impairments (20%).



Nearly 70% of preschool special education teachers plan to remain in teaching until retirement, and 4% plan to leave the field as soon as possible, which is lower than the percentage for all special education teachers.

Ninety-seven percent of preschool teachers feel successful in providing services for most of their children with individualized education programs (IEPs). Eighty-one percent believe to a great extent that they are making a significant change in the lives of their students, and 87% characterize their own overall job performance as very good or exceptional. While most preschool teachers perceive their job performance positively, they do face challenges of including children with disabilities in educational settings with their nondisabled peers and supervising paraprofessionals in preschool programs. How they meet these challenges is discussed below.

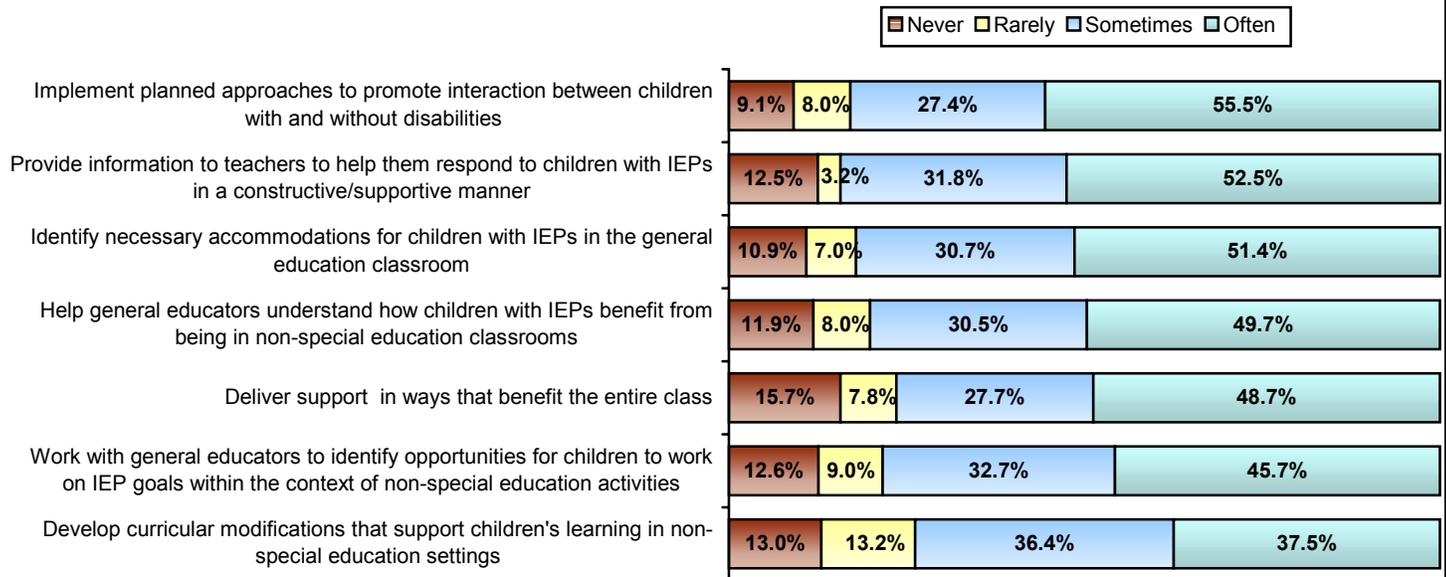
How are preschool teachers promoting inclusion?

While the majority of preschool special education teachers work in regular preschool or K-12 schools, services are often provided in segregated classes that include only preschoolers with disabilities. Eighty-eight percent of preschool teachers work in regular preschool or K-12 schools, while 12% work in special education schools. Meanwhile, 77% of preschool teachers' instructional time is spent in special education settings, 12% is in regular education settings, and 10% is in home or community-based settings. Those preschool teachers whose students spend part or all of their day in non-special education settings use a variety of techniques to support these children in inclusive settings, such as collaborating with non-special education teachers, identifying needed accommodations, and promoting interaction between children with and without disabilities.

Preschool special education teachers report using practices to promote the participation of children with disabilities in the general education program less often than other special education teachers. Moreover, 75% report that the practices they use to support inclusion are used throughout their school or district, so decisions about inclusive practices may not be within teachers' control. Inclusion efforts may also be hindered by a combination of factors: the lack of widespread, preschool programs for non-disabled children, and the absence of same-aged non-disabled peers in those facilities developed primarily to serve preschoolers with disabilities.

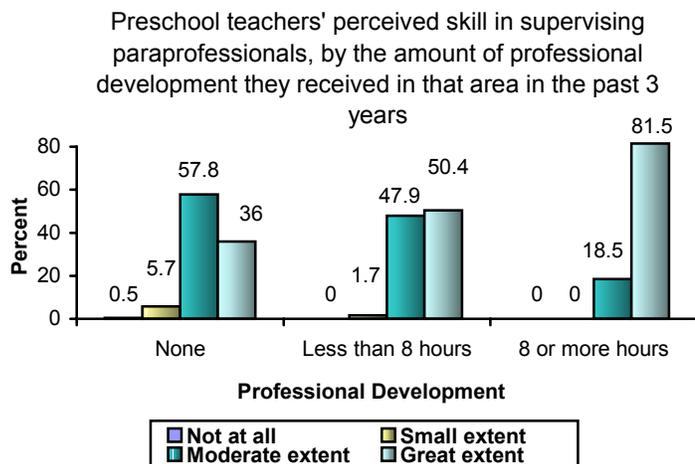
Use of practices to promote inclusion did not vary by geographical region, district size, or district wealth. However, preschool teachers who felt very skillful in collaborating with non-special education teachers used inclusive practices significantly more often than those who felt less skillful in collaboration. Furthermore, preschool special education teachers who had more hours of continuing professional development in collaboration perceived themselves as more skillful in collaborating with non-special education teachers.

How often preschool teachers use various methods to support children with IEPs in non-special education settings



How prepared are preschool teachers to supervise paraprofessionals?

Special education teachers supervise 74% of paraprofessionals who serve children ages 1 through 5. While preschool teachers spend an average of 1.5 hours per week supervising paraprofessionals outside of regular class time, only 24% received preservice training in this area, and 58% had no continuing professional development in this area in the past 3 years. While most preschool teachers felt moderately to greatly successful in supervising paraprofessionals, their preservice preparation and continuing professional development exposure were significantly associated with their perceived skill. For example, 82 percent of preschool teachers who had 8 or more hours of continuing professional development in supervising professionals felt skillful to a great extent in doing so. Only 50% percent of those with less than 8 hours and 36% of those with no professional development felt equally skillful. Similarly, those preschool teachers who received preservice preparation in supervising paraprofessionals were more likely than those who did not to feel skillful to a great extent.



SPeNSE, which was sponsored by OSEP and conducted by Westat, included telephone interviews with a nationally representative sample of local administrators, special and general education teachers, speech-language pathologists, and paraprofessionals in spring and fall 2000. All data presented in this document are national estimates derived from the SPeNSE sample. For more information, see www.spense.org. This project has been funded at least in part with Federal funds from the U.S. Department of Education under contract number ED-00-CO-0010. The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Education nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. government.