



PERSONNEL SHORTAGES PERVADE OUR NATION'S SCHOOLS

Is there a shortage of special education and related services professionals?

Yes! The American Association for Employment in Education (AAEE) has reported shortages of special education teachers, speech-language pathologists, school psychologists, vision and hearing specialists, school nurses, physical therapists and occupational therapists, with many regions of the country reporting considerable shortages for several years in a row (AAEE, 1996-2010). Additionally, there are not enough funded positions to serve the growing number of students in need; shortages of funded positions particularly impact school counselors, school social workers, audiologists, occupational and physical therapists, school nurses and school psychologists. The requirements to meet the “highly qualified” standard for special education teachers has resulted in uncertified special educators entering classrooms as highly qualified teachers. As a result of shortages of fully certified personnel and unfunded positions, it is becoming increasingly challenging to provide quality services consistent with professional standards.

Consider these statistics:

- There are wide disparities in school nurse staffing ratios; some exceed 1: 4,000. Only seventy-five percent of schools have a full or part time nurse; 25% have no registered nurse. Seventeen percent of schools with more than 750 students have no registered nurse on duty. ¹
- Fewer than 1 in 5 children in need of mental health services actually receive the needed services. ²
- In North Carolina, the therapy professions, including physical therapist assistants, occupational therapy assistants, physical therapists and occupational therapists demonstrate significantly higher demand relative to other professions. Physical therapists had the greatest number of vacancies (n=523) and represented 30% of overall vacancies. Physical therapist assistants had 274 vacancies (16%) followed by occupational therapists (n=214, 12%).³
- There will be a shortage of almost 9,000 school psychologists in the US by 2010, with a cumulative shortage of almost 15,000 by 2020. ⁴
- The ratio of students to school counselors (457:1) is almost twice the recommended ratio (250:1). ⁵
- In the most recent ASHA Schools Survey (2010) 55% reported shortages in schools. That was a decrease compared to 71% of schools in 2008, 68% in 2006, and 62% in 2004. Anecdotal reports indicate that the decline in reported shortages may be temporary and may reflect the recent economic downturn. Respondents indicated that the greatest impact of the shortage was increased caseload/workload (81%) followed by decreased opportunities for appropriate service delivery (52%). Reported shortages were greatest in the Pacific and Mountain regions of the country (78.9%; 60.3%) and least reported in the Mid-Atlantic region (36.7%). ⁶
- As of 2008 there were 1374 audiologists reported to OSEP; as of 2009 there were 49,293,000 kids enrolled in public schools (http://www.edreform.com/Fast_Facts/K12_Facts/). Therefore there is a ratio of 1 audiologist for every 35,875 students in public schools.
- The ratio of students to audiologists (71,555:1) is more than 7 times the recommended number (10,000:1).⁶
- Special education teachers are leaving at a higher rate than other teachers. The highest attrition rates are in urban areas (50%) and occur during the first 5 years of teaching.
- Forty-eight states and the District of Columbia identified special education teaching and/or at least one of the related service provider categories as an official “shortage area” for the 2011-2012 school year. ⁷
- The demand for occupational therapists should continue to rise as a result of the increasing number of individuals with disabilities or limited function who require therapy services. Employment growth in schools will result from the expansion of the school-age population and the federally funded extension of services for disabled students. ⁸

For further information, contact either co-chair of the National Coalition on Personnel Shortages in Special Education and Related Services:

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¹ National Association of School Nurses (NASN)

² Mental Health America (MHA)

³ Allied Health Job Vacancy Tracking Report (May 2011)

⁴ National Association of School Psychologists (NASP)

⁵ National Center for Education Statistics (2008)

⁶ American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (2010). SLP workforce/workload conditions Rockville, MD: Author.

⁷ Teacher Shortage Areas Nationwide Listing, U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, March 2011

⁸ US Department of Labor (2008)