

Chapter 14

Sustaining in the Profession: Developing University–School Partnerships to Diversify the Special Education Teacher Workforce

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ABSTRACT

This chapter will detail how one university in the United States was funded by the federal government through the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) to partner with local school districts and community agencies to address the shortage of teachers of color in the special education profession. This chapter will detail how the authors co-constructed a project through which historically minoritized educators, who have often been systematically excluded from the teaching profession, are fully funded and mentored as they complete a master's degree and educator

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certification in special education.

INTRODUCTION

Teacher shortages in special education have long impacted countries around the world (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; UNESCO, 2023). This chapter will examine how one university in the United States is leveraging federal funding to diversify the special education teaching profession. Project SUSTAIN (**S**upporting **S**pecial Education **T**eachers toward **A**ccess & **I**nclusion **N**etwork) is a multi-agency project with a particular focus on recruiting and sustaining personnel from historically minoritized backgrounds, based on race, ethnicity, disability status, sexual orientation, and/or immigration status, who currently or seek to support underrepresented student populations. Focusing on teacher identity development and evidence-based strategies for supporting teachers from historically minoritized backgrounds within the context of the special education teacher shortage in the United States, university faculty collaborating with Project SUSTAIN leveraged relationships with local organizations and school districts to co-create a partnership aimed to ensure special education teachers are prepared to serve youth with disabilities while meeting state and national regulations. Our chapter will present relevant literature related to the teacher identity development of special education teachers from historically minoritized groups, present practical steps we took in the first year of planning Project SUSTAIN and offer resources for engaging in strategies to diversify the special education profession.

Educator Shortage

Around the globe countries are reporting a teacher shortage (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; UNESCO, 2023). In European nations, there have been significant educator shortages noted in Germany, France, Portugal, Sweden, and Italy in recent years (UNESCO, 2023). Germany, the most populous nation in the European Union, reported wide-spread national shortages in grammar and comprehensive schools (Seeliger & Håkansson Lindqvist, 2023). In the United States, a local, regional, and national shortage exists in specific content areas (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Levin et al., 2015) with evidence that the shortage is worsening in some geographic areas (Nguyen et al., 2022). The areas in most dire need of recruiting educators into the profession include mathematics, sciences, multilingual educators, and special education teachers (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). The shortage of special education teachers has been a persistent issue within the United States in many geographic areas of the country

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