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ABSTRACT

Designed for high school students interested in careers in special education and related services, this guide outlines the different roles of special education and related services professionals who teach and provide specifically designed instruction and services to children with disabilities. It addresses the different disabilities that students may have and federal legislation that requires services to be provided. Profiles are provided of the different types of professionals, including adapted physical educators, art therapists, audiologists, educational diagnosticians, interpreters for students with deafness, music therapists, occupational therapists, orientation and mobility specialists, paraeducators, physical therapists, recreational therapists, rehabilitation counselors, school counselors, school nurses, school psychologists, school social workers, special education teachers, speech-language pathologists, and technology specialists. Professional preparation for becoming a special education or related services professional is addressed and a table provides information on the educational degrees required for these positions. The shortage of special education teachers and related services professionals and the resulting employment opportunities are also discussed and a chart is provided that illustrates the professionals needed for the different disabilities. A list is included of special education and related services professional associations. (CR)

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Do you want to make a difference in the lives of students with special needs?



CAREERS

IN SPECIAL EDUCATION AND RELATED SERVICES

ED 420 979

Do you want to make a difference in the lives of students with special needs? Do you like working with children and youth? Are you searching for a career that is rewarding and challenging? If you are interested in an opportunity to improve the lives of children and youth with disabilities, consider becoming a special education teacher or a related services professional.

Special education and related services professionals who teach and provide specifically designed instruction and services to children with disabilities have challenging yet rewarding careers. These professionals include special education and adapted physical education teachers, art therapists, audiologists, educational diagnosticians, interpreters, music therapists, occupational therapists, orientation & mobility specialists, paraeducators, physical therapists, recreational therapists, rehabilitation counselors, school counselors, school nurses, school psychologists, school social workers, speech-language pathologists, and technology specialists. Special education services may also be provided in hospitals, medical centers, private practice environments, correctional facilities and the child's own home.

The Students. Students who receive special instruction and services vary greatly in their needs. Like all children, they differ from one another in ability, age, learning style, and personality. Such students have unique learning needs that may require special teaching approaches, the use of adaptive materials, and other support services such as speech-language therapy. Students with disabilities come from all cultural backgrounds and may even speak another language.

Some students have cognitive impairments, such as mental retardation, which can range from mild to profound. Others have specific learning disabilities that can impact upon learning style. Yet other students may have physical disabilities that limit mobility and may require the use of wheelchairs or other assistive devices. Some students' impairments are strictly sensory, such as hearing loss and vision impairments. Chronic health problems and multiple disabilities can complicate learning potential for many of these youngsters.

The Law. Federal legislation, the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Amendments of 1997, P.L. 105-17*, requires that public schools provide appropriate instruction and supportive services to meet the education, social, emotional, and vocational needs of students with disabilities. To qualify for special education services, a student must have a unique learning need that differs from other similarly aged students. This need is individually determined through an interdisciplinary assessment. The student's educational program and the education and services to be provided are planned jointly by the child's parents, teachers, other school professionals, and the student if he/she is able.

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Consider a Professional Career in Teaching or Clinical Service Profession

The following information provides an introduction and overview of careers that involve working with children and youth with disabilities. For more detailed information on a given field or specialization, contact one of the professional associations indicated at the end of this career flyer. Even though these professions have been described separately, it is rare that these professionals work with students with special needs independently. All of these professionals work with families as a team to plan and implement the appropriate educational programs for their students.

Adapted Physical Educators conduct diversified programs of developmental activities, games, sports and rhythms suited to the needs, interests, capacities, and limitations of students with disabilities. Students with disabilities may not be able to safely or successfully engage in unrestricted vigorous activity typical in the general physical education program. Thus, specifically designed adapted physical education programs may be necessary.

Art Therapists help people understand their problems and guide them to solutions through the creative process and are concerned with the treatment and rehabilitation of persons with mental, emotional, medical, or physical disabilities. An art therapist uses art, as well as traditional means of therapy, to lessen an individual's frustration, promote healthy development and diminish the effects of a disability.

Audiologists identify, assess, and provide treatment for hearing, balance, and related disorders. Audiologists recommend and evaluate hearing aids and other types of assistive hearing devices. While the work is mainly diagnostic, some audiologists have experience with sign language and lip reading and can provide ongoing therapy/aural rehabilitation.

Educational Diagnosticians are part of a multi-disciplinary team who assess a student's academic ability, personality and behavior factors, and the student's ability to process information. Educational diagnosticians work with the special education team to ensure that goals and plans are consistent with the assessment findings.

Interpreters for the Deaf who work in schools, sometimes called educational interpreters, serve as the communication link between deaf and hearing individuals in school settings. There are a variety of educational interpreting methods including translating spoken language into a signed system such as American Sign Language, silently mouthing the complete verbal message or its paraphrased equivalent, or using a cued speech method.

Music Therapists provide treatment for physical, psychological, cognitive, and social needs of individuals through the structured and specialized use of music. Music therapists assess emotional well-being, physical health, social functioning, communication abilities, and cognitive skills through musical responses and implement programs accordingly. These sessions may include music improvisation, receptive music listening, song writing, discussion of lyrics, music and imagery, music performance, and learning through music.



Occupational Therapists are concerned with an individual's ability to fully participate in desired life tasks and roles including school and/or work, self-care, and play/leisure. Using purposeful and age-appropriate activities the occupational therapist assists children with disabilities to achieve important life tasks.

Orientation & Mobility Specialists provide services to blind or visually impaired students to enable those students to attain systematic orientation to and safe movement within their environments in school, home, work, and community.

Paraeducators work under the supervision of a licensed teacher and assist in daily classroom tasks including performing instructional activities planned by the teacher, giving the teacher feedback on the student's progress, and assisting in reporting requirements mandated by law. The responsibilities of a paraeducator can vary widely depending on experience, training, and classroom characteristics.

Physical Therapists provide treatment to relieve pain, limit or prevent permanent physical disability, and improve the mobility of people who have an injury or a disease. Physical therapists evaluate a person's medical history; test and measure their strength, range of motion, and ability to function; and develop written treatment plans. Appropriate treatment could include therapeutic exercise, joint mobilization and range-of-motion exercises, therapeutic massage, ambulation training, traction, ultrasound, electrotherapy, hydrotherapy, or cold therapy.

Recreational Therapists use various interventions to treat and/or maintain the physical, cognitive, emotional, and social functions of persons with disabilities. Among these interventions are sports, drama, arts and crafts, play therapy and play skills, social skills training, sign language, sensory stimulation, and values clarification. The recreational therapist assesses a client's functional capacities and individual needs and develops an appropriate treatment program or plan.



Rehabilitation Counselors provide services in individual or group sessions that focus on career development, vocational skill development, employment preparation, and achieving independence. Rehabilitation counselors ensure that all services lead to full integration of the student in the postsecondary education setting, workplace, residential setting, and community.

School Counselors work with students, teachers, parents, and administrators to help ensure that students' educational, vocational, and emotional needs are being met. School counselors provide crisis intervention services and individual and group counseling to help all students develop their educational, social, career, and personal strengths and become responsible and productive citizens.

School Nurses promote and monitor the health status of children. They identify health-related problems that can be barriers to the learning process and assist in the removal of these barriers. School nurses focus on the prevention of illness and the early detection and correction of health problems. They provide health assessments and develop and implement health plans, such as initiating referral procedures and providing health counseling. They also implement school health protocols, such as administering medications to children with special health needs.

School Psychologists provide consultation to teachers and families, psychological counseling, student assessments, crisis intervention, and other direct services to children with learning, behavioral, and emotional problems, and their families. They also provide preventive services to improve the climate for learning. In many cases, psychologists work with classroom teachers to develop a behavior management plan for an individual student or for an entire class.

School Social Workers provide a link among home, school, and community. This service enables students and their families to overcome social and personal problems which impede learning. School social workers provide individual and group counseling, consultation to teachers, and other services which help students cope with their disabilities. They collaborate with community agencies and provide case management for students and families requiring multiple services.



“My greatest satisfaction...

is seeing the children in my class make real gains and knowing that I have helped them get to where they need to be.”

“The biggest challenge to me is working with so many different kids with such a variety of needs.”

—*Ibé Crawley, Preschool Special Educator*

Special Education Teachers provide instruction and adapt and develop materials to match the learning styles, strengths, and special needs of each student. They work to ensure that students with educational disabilities reach their learning potential. There are several specialty areas within special education. These areas of specialization, which vary across the country, are usually classified by disability category, such as teacher of students with learning disabilities or teacher of students with physical disabilities. In some places, special education teachers are categorized by the age of the child they serve, such as preschool special educator. In some schools, special education classes may be made up of students who have different disabilities; in others, the class may be designed for students who all have the same disability to varying degrees. Now that more children and youth with disabilities are in general education classrooms in their neighborhood school, special education teachers often work as co-teachers or work in teams with general education teachers. Special education professionals can also provide consulting services to general education teachers.

Speech-Language Pathologists identify, assess, and provide treatment for communication and swallowing function and their disorders. They evaluate overall speech, and receptive and expressive language communicative abilities. Speech-language pathologists provide early speech-language intervention as well as speech, language, and voice therapies.

Technology Specialists work as part of a team to evaluate students and recommend devices and equipment to improve or maintain the functional abilities of the students. Technology specialists can use sophisticated equipment such as computers, keyboards, and communication devices or devices as simple as non-mechanical items such as pencil grippers or eye glasses.

Employment Opportunities Are Excellent

There are shortages of special education teachers and related services professionals across the nation. In most states the demand for qualified teachers and related services professionals exceeds the available supply. These shortages are projected to grow over the next decade.

Figure 1 shows the number of teachers needed as of 1994-95 (the most current data available) to work with students with various disabilities. As can be seen, the most serious shortages are for teachers of children and youth with specific learning disabilities, teachers of children with serious emotional disturbance, and teachers in cross-categorical programs. These shortages can vary significantly within a state.

Figure 2 shows the number of related services professionals needed as of 1994-95 to work with children and youth with disabilities. Shortages occur across all professional specialties. The greatest shortages are for teacher aides/paraeducators, school psychologists, occupational therapists, school social workers, and physical therapists.

Shortages of special educators and related services personnel have continued to rise over the last few years, including shortages of qualified professionals available to provide services to young children (ages birth to 5). Vacancies vary by state, according to the type of teacher-professional needed and the regions within the state. Generally, rural and urban areas have a need for professionals across all areas of special education and related services. There is a need in all areas for culturally and ethnically diverse professionals, particularly in urban areas; there is also a high need for professionals who are bilingual. To try to minimize personnel shortages, many states operate employment clearinghouses or placement services that match professionals looking for jobs with educational settings that have positions available. Information about these services is available from the National Clearinghouse for Professions in Special Education.

Figure 1. Special Education Teachers Employed and Needed for Children and Youth with Disabilities Ages 6-21 (50 States, District of Columbia & Puerto Rico) During 1994-95 School Year.

Disability/Other Classification	Employed	Needed (not fully certified & vacant positions)	Total Positions
Specific Learning Disabilities	46,866	3,910	50,776
Speech or Language Impairments	14,292	1,116	15,408
Mental Retardation	26,144	2,301	28,445
Serious Emotional Disturbance	13,498	2,320	15,818
Multiple Disabilities	4,121	348	4,469
Hearing Impairments	3,614	229	3,843
Orthopedic Impairments	1,575	191	1,766
Other Health Impairments	998	147	1,145
Visual Impairments	1,427	162	1,589
Autism	775	120	895
Deaf-Blindness	68	8	76
Traumatic Brain Injury	78	11	89
Cross-Categorical	24,853	2,180	27,033
Other Classification ^a	161,060	16,703	177,763
Total Teachers^b	299,369	29,746	329,115

^a States are allowed to use their own classification scheme in identifying special education teachers. Currently, twenty-six states used schemes other than the Federal categorical classification system.

^b The figure associated with the total number of teachers may not equal the sum of the individual categories because of rounding.

Source: Taken and modified from data tables provided in the *Nineteenth Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* by Office of Special Education Programs, 1997, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

Figure 2. Related Services Professionals Needed in the (50 States, District of Columbia & Puerto Rico) During 1994-95 School Year.

Disability/Other Classification	Employed	Needed (not fully certified & vacant positions)	Total Positions
School Social Workers	11,951	819	12,770
Occupational Therapists	6,273	952	7,225
Recreational & Therapeutic Recreation Specialists	318	69	387
Physical Therapists	4,077	616	4,693
Teacher Aides	179,520	29,748	209,268
Physical Education Teachers	5,219	479	5,698
Supervisors/Administrators	13,832	505	14,337
Psychologists	21,555	1,272	22,827
Diagnostic & Evaluation	11,399	339	11,738
Audiologists	969	52	1,021
Counselors	8,405	578	8,983
Rehabilitation Counselors	293	24	317
Interpreters	2,912	955	3,867

Source: Taken and modified from data tables provided in the *Nineteenth Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* by Office of Special Education Programs, 1997, Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

If you have never worked with an individual who has a disability, you may want to test your interest through volunteer activities that can provide hands-on experience.

Working With Young Children— The Multidisciplinary Team

A variety of professionals provide services to children with disabilities from birth to age five. They include early childhood special education teachers, physical therapists, occupational therapists, speech-language pathologists, nutritionists, psychologists, physicians, and nurses. These professionals work together as a team with young children who have early developmental delays and their families. Early intervention aims to prevent or lessen the educational impact of these disabilities.

Working With Older Students— Preparing for Life After High School

Some school personnel work with secondary school students with disabilities to prepare these students to transition into life after high school. Career education, vocational education, work-study programs, transition planning, college planning, and community-based training are all programs designed to help students with disabilities be successful following their exit from high school. Federal legislation mandates that all eligible students have transition services as part of their individual education program no later than age 14.

Preparation

Becoming a special education or related services professional requires specialized professional education and skills. At least a bachelor's degree is required to become a special education teacher. To be licensed in some states, a graduate (master's) degree may also be required. Professional preparation includes course work, clinical and field experience with children with disabilities, and student (practicum) teaching. The types of professional preparation programs offered in colleges and universities can vary widely but generally lead to eligibility for special education teacher licensure in the state where the program is offered. Information about specific programs can be obtained from the National Clearinghouse for Professions in Special Education. You should also contact the Department of Special Education at the college or university of your choice to discuss course and career options open to you.

Professional preparation requirements for any of the related services professions varies somewhat. Table 1 lists the degrees required for some of these professions. Preparation includes course work and extensive clinical practicum experience in providing services to children and adults. Interested persons should contact the professional association(s) directly (See listing at end of this career flyer.)

Some special education and related services specialties have "paraprofessional" level positions available for those individuals who want to work in a supervised capacity with children and youth with disabilities. Paraprofessionals work under the supervision of the specialist, supporting and providing selected services to the children. In some professions, paraprofessional positions may be the first step on a career ladder, and with further education and training, may lead to full licensure as a professional.

Deciding on a Career

The best way to learn more about careers in special education and related services professions is to talk to professionals already practicing in the field. You should feel free to contact special education and related services professionals in your local school system as well as faculty at nearby colleges and universities. The National Clearinghouse maintains a list of recruiters who volunteer their time to speak with career information seekers. Ask professionals in the field questions about what they do, why they chose their professions, and what they find challenging and rewarding about their work. The more you know about careers focused on children and youth with disabilities, the better able you will be to make an informed career choice.

If you have never worked with an individual who has a disability, you may want to test your interest through volunteer activities that can provide hands-on experience. Depending on your availability and interests, you may choose to become involved in a one-time event, a short-term project, or a long-term commitment. For example, you may choose to tutor students in the classroom or after school. Or you may want to be a "buddy" to someone with a disability by going out to lunch or dinner, seeing a movie, or just visiting with each other.

Contact your local school district or special education consortium to participate in special events and to provide volunteer services. Volunteers are often needed for play groups, individual tutoring assistance, after school care programs, etc. The volunteer bureau for organizations in your area may also be contacted to obtain information about organizations and agencies that offer volunteer experiences. The National Clearinghouse for Professions in Special Education also has lists of national organizations seeking volunteers.

Careers That Make a Difference

Professionals who teach and provide services to students with disabilities have challenging yet rewarding careers. A career in special education or one of the related services professions offers an opportunity to work in partnership with students, parents, professional colleagues, and the community. It is an opportunity to have a positive, lasting impact on the lives of children and youth with special needs.

Table 1. Degrees Required for Various Professions

Adapted Physical Education Teacher	Bachelor's degree in physical education with course work and practicum in adapted physical education
Art Therapist	Master's degree in art therapy; master's degree with an emphasis in art therapy; or 21 semester units in art therapy with a master's degree in a related field
Audiologist	Master's degree in communication sciences and disorders/audiology from an accredited university program and one clinical fellowship year of supervised employment
Educational Diagnostician	Requirements vary from state to state. Most states require educational diagnosticians to have a master's degree and require several years of teaching experience
Interpreter for the Deaf	Requirements vary from state to state
Music Therapist	Bachelor's or master's degree from an approved music therapy program
Occupational Therapist	Bachelor's or master's degree in occupational therapy from an accredited occupational therapy program
Orientation & Mobility Specialist	Requirements vary from state to state. Some states do have a professional credential in orientation & mobility and require education and/or experience beyond a bachelor's level
Paraeducator	Some states have a licensure procedure and most require a high school diploma
Physical Therapist	Bachelor's or master's degree in physical therapy from an accredited physical therapy program
Recreational Therapist	Bachelor's degree in therapeutic recreation (or in recreation with an emphasis in therapeutic recreation)
Rehabilitation Counselor	Usually requires master's degree in rehabilitation counseling
School Counselor	Bachelor's degree; requirements vary from state to state
School Nurse	Requirements vary from state to state, usually requires at least a bachelor's degree
School Psychologist	Master's degree from an accredited school psychologist program and one-year internship
School Social Worker	Master's degree in social work required for license in most states
Special Education Teacher	Bachelor's degree in special education; some states require a master's degree in special education to be licensed
Speech-Language Pathologist	Master's degree in communication sciences and disorders/speech-language pathology from an accredited university program and one clinical fellowship year of supervised employment
Technology Specialist	Requirements vary from state to state. Currently, no licensing exists for profession. Those persons with computer related experience combined with experience in special education or teaching are most likely to be hired in entry level jobs

Resources

National Clearinghouse for Professions in Special Education, 1920 Association Drive, Reston, VA 20191-1589, 800/641-7824 or 703/264-9476 (Voice), 703/264-9480 (TTY) E-mail: ncpse@cec.sped.org URL: <http://www.cec.sped.org/ncpse.htm>

Free information is available regarding financial aid resources, colleges and universities that prepare special educators and related services professionals, salaries, organizations that offer volunteer opportunities, job search, licensure, and geographic areas with the greatest need for professionals.

Special Education and Related Services Professional Associations

The professional associations listed below can be contacted for more information about careers working with children with disabilities:

Adapted Physical Education Teacher

American Association for Active Lifestyles and Fitness
American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance
1900 Association Drive, Reston, VA 20191
800/213-7193 URL: <http://www.aahperd.org>

Art Therapist

American Art Therapy Association
1202 Allanson Road, Mudelein, IL 60060
847/949-6064 URL: <http://www.arttherapy.org>

Audiologist

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association
10801 Rockville Pike, Rockville, MD 20852
800/638-8255 URL: <http://www.asha.org>

Educational Diagnostician

Council for Educational Diagnostic Services
The Council for Exceptional Children
1920 Association Dr., Reston, VA 20191-1589
888-232-7733 URL: <http://www.cec.sped.org>

Interpreter for the Deaf

National Information Center on Deafness,
Gallaudet University
800 Florida Avenue, NE, Washington, DC 20002-3695
202/651-5051 URL: <http://www.gallaudet.edu/~nicd>

Music Therapist

American Music Therapy Association
8455 Colesville Road, Suite 1000, Silver Spring, MD 20910-3392
301/589-3300 URL: <http://www.namt.com/namt/>

Occupational Therapist

American Occupational Therapy Association
4720 Montgomery Lane, Bethesda, MD 20824-1220
301/652-2682 URL: <http://www.aota.org>

Orientation & Mobility Specialist

The National Federation of the Blind
1800 Johnson Street, Baltimore, MD 21230
410/659-9314 URL: <http://www.nfb.org>

Paraeducator

National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals in Education
CASE/CUNY
25 West 43rd Street, Suite 620, New York, NY 10036
212/642-2948 URL: <http://web.gc.cuny.edu/dept/case/nrcp>

Physical Therapist

American Physical Therapy Association
1111 North Fairfax Street, Alexandria, VA 22314-1488
800/999-2782 URL: <http://www.apta.org>

Recreational Therapist

American Therapeutic Recreation Association
P. O. Box 15215, Hattiesburg, MS 39404
800/553-0304 URL: <http://www.atra-tr.org/>

Rehabilitation Counselor

American Rehabilitation Counseling Association
5999 Stevenson Avenue, Alexandria, VA 22304-3300
800/347-6647 URL: <http://www.counseling.org>

School Counselor

American School Counselor Association
801 North Fairfax Street, Suite 310, Alexandria, VA 22314
888/306-4722 URL: <http://www.schoolcounselor.org>

School Nurse

National Association of School Nurses, Inc.,
P.O. Box 1300, Scarborough, ME 04070-1300
207/883-2117 URL: <http://www.vrmedia.com/nurses>

School Psychologist

National Association of School Psychologists
4340 East West Highway, Suite 402, Bethesda, MD 20814
301/657-0270 URL: <http://www.naspsweb.org>

School Social Worker

National Association of Social Workers
750 First Street, NE, Washington, DC 20002
800/638-8799 URL: <http://www.naswdc.org/>

Special Education Teacher

National Clearinghouse for Professions in Special Education
1920 Association Drive, Reston, VA 20191-1589
800/641-7824 URL: <http://www.cec.sped.org/ncpse.htm>

Speech-Language Pathologist

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association
10801 Rockville Pike, Rockville, MD 20852
800/638-8255 URL: <http://www.asha.org>

Technology Specialist

Technology & Media Division, The Council for Exceptional Children
1920 Association Drive, Reston, VA 20191-1589
888-232-7733 URL: <http://www.ucc.uconn.edu/~tam/>

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