

# Recruitment and Retention of Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Educators (EI/ECSE)

## What We Know:

**Shortages of EI/ECSE personnel are growing:** Data reported by Part C coordinators and Part B state special education directors continue to document personnel shortages across disciplines (IDEA Infants & Toddlers Coordinators Association, 2021; U.S. Department of Education, 2021).

**The recruitment of a diverse workforce is an important priority:** The EI/ECSE workforce continues to be predominantly white, in contrast to a growing diversity among infants and young children with disabilities and their families (Zero to Three, 2022; U.S. Department of Education, 2021).

**Negative public perceptions contribute to workforce shortages:** Public opinion about the value of the early childhood profession contributes low salary, poor working conditions, and a lack of respect and professional autonomy (Allen & Kelly, 2015).

## What Can We Do:

EI/ECSE programs, states and other stakeholders must address shortages by identifying and implementing evidence-informed strategies to attract, recruit, and retain special education personnel.

A variety of resources have been curated by the Office of Special Education: Attract, Prepare, Retain: Effective Personnel For All ([IDEAS That Work: Attract, Prepare, Retain](#)), and by the National Coalition on Personnel Shortages in Special Education and Related Services ([specialshortages.org](#)).

Based on a review of these resources in combination and other existing sources of evidence, this brief provides a short summary of evidence-informed approaches and strategies that EI/ECSE programs and other stakeholders can use to effectively attract, prepare and retain a highly-qualified workforce.

## Attracting EI/ECSE Candidates:

### **Develop Grow Your Own Programs**

[Grow Your Own \(GYO\)](#) develops the pipeline of EI/ECSE to meet specific workforce needs, relevant local programs. GYO programs have demonstrated effectiveness by attracting and preparing members of the local communities they serve. Examples of GYO strategies include:

- Educational entities partner with local educator preparation programs to create GYO programs for high school students interested in EI/ECSE disciplines.
- Community colleges develop on-site local courses for paraprofessionals working toward certification in shortage areas.

### **Offer financial incentives to enter the field**

- Work with states and districts to increase beginning EI/ECSE salaries.
- Work with state legislators to offer loan forgiveness programs.

### **Establish credential reciprocity**

- Establish reciprocity agreements across states.
- Acknowledge tenure status and years of experience worked in other states.
- Establish cross-state teacher pension portability.
- Participate in the Interstate Agreement of the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification.

## Attracting EI/ECSE Candidates (Cont.):

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### **Revise and improve recruitment and hiring practices**

- Conduct and disseminate supply-and-demand studies to identify shortages and areas of need.
- Collect data to identify how hiring practices support or constrain the development of a diverse workforce, and to identify parity gaps in composition of student and teacher populations.
- Offer incentives for retired teachers to return without reductions in SS and Medicare.
- Provide housing assistance for public school EI/ECSEs in shortage areas.
- Offer state income tax credits.
- Offer college tuition assistance for children of EI/ECSEs.
- Provide state-level technological supports for recruitment and hiring processes (websites that provide overviews of district and school characteristics, employment opportunities).

## Preparing EI/ECSE Candidates:

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### **Develop flexible career pathways**

Establish a career pipeline for EI/ECSE/SPED teachers and providers beginning in high school to community college to university.

### **Offer residencies**

[Residency](#) programs recruit candidates to work as paid apprentices while completing integrated coursework. Residency models embed clinical experiences throughout every level of preservice preparation. Most residencies last the equivalent of one school year, with a candidate working with a mentor (or several different mentors) throughout the program. Residency programs are typically created through partnerships between preparation programs and local education agencies (LEAs) or Early Intervention Programs.

### **Offer Microcredentials**

A [microcredential](#) is a self-directed and competency-based demonstration of expertise in a single target area. Candidates are assessed through a portfolio of evidence which is submitted through an online system, and evaluated by a qualified assessor. This process is supported by ongoing coaching and collaboration, and includes the use of evidence-based practices.

### **Use Simulations**

[Simulation](#) technology can provide low-risk opportunities for teacher candidates to practice evidence-based teaching skills throughout their preparation without the challenges associated with in-person field placements. When incorporating simulation into a special education preparation program, stakeholders will want to consider the following components: the platform, the simulation scenarios, the participants (e.g., preservice candidates, paraprofessionals), and the population of students served (e.g., students with disabilities).

## Retaining EI/ECSE Candidates:

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### **Create and support positive school climates**

Research has shown that retention rates rise when teachers work in [positive school climates](#) where general and special education teachers share responsibility for student progress, are provided with adequate administrative support, and work collaboratively with colleagues who are committed to inclusive practice. Positive school climates also can mitigate the impact of role overload for beginning special education teachers.

## Retaining EI/ECSE Candidates (Cont.):

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### Ensure manageable workloads

Administrators must be clear about roles beginning teachers hold in the workplace, and intentionally protect their preparation time. This is especially true for special education teachers who are balancing diverse student caseloads with administrative duties.

### Plan and implement formal and informal induction strategies

Strong [induction programs](#) that rely on well-trained mentors, planned orientation processes, systematic professional learning opportunities, and introduce new teachers into a collaborative school culture promote retention in the field and effective teaching. Beginning EI/ECSEs need to have access to special education mentors who understand the unique needs of the students they are serving.

### Provide Systematic and Ongoing Professional Learning

Beginning EI/ECSEs benefit from having access to evidence-based curriculum, combined with [high-quality professional development](#) that supports them in delivering effective instruction. It is critical for all EI/ECSEs to engage in professional learning and capacity building over time. EI/ECSEs, like all professionals, learn throughout their careers, and the types of learning and support they need changes based on their experience, the needs of the population they serve, changing professional standards, and the emergence of new research that must inform their practice. This ongoing learning must be intentionally supported through linked systems in which theories and practices grounded in professional standards (e.g., [EI/ECSE standards](#)) carry through from preservice into professional development across career phases and leadership roles.

### Promote and Support Professional Leadership

[Promoting professional leadership](#) is a strategy that recognizes individuals who influence, mobilize, and guide personnel in the field itself. To energize and develop professional leaders, districts and agencies should develop ways to encourage, incentivize, and develop pathways for EI/ECSEs to take on leadership roles. Leaders can be given special titles: content experts, professional development leads, master teachers, mentors or coaches, or other specialty designations.

## References:

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