
Do States Have Certification Requirements for Preparing General Education Teachers to Teach Students with Disabilities? Experience in the Northeast and Islands Region

More than 6 million students with disabilities are served under the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) of 2004. Two-thirds of these students are in at least one course taught by general education teachers. Due to the increased inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms, it is essential for general education teachers to have the knowledge and skills needed to teach students with disabilities. This project will produce a report of the current certification requirements for general education teachers to teach students with disabilities in the Northeast and Islands Region.

— CANDICE BOCALA, DANIEL MELLO, CLAIRE MORGAN, AND SUSAN MUNDY
LEARNING INNOVATIONS AT WESTED, PROJECT TEAM

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

- Document the existing certification requirements in special education coursework and/or fieldwork for general education teachers in the nine jurisdictions of the Northeast and Islands Region (six New England states, New York, Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands).
- Analyze and describe the commonalities and differences in the certification requirements across jurisdictions in the region.

AUDIENCE & APPLICATION

- State education agency (SEA) staff responsible for reviewing and potentially updating their states' certification requirements general education teachers.
- Higher education institutions that prepare teachers in the region.

METHODOLOGY

- Collect and analyze data from publicly available documents and a web-based database related to special education requirements for general education teachers.
- Conduct face-to-face interviews with primary credentialing officials in the nine SEAs in the region.

FINAL PRODUCTS

- Issues & Answers Report to be published by the Institute of Education Sciences, which may be found at http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/northeast/pdf/REL_2010090.pdf

What Are Fast-Response Projects?

Fast-Response Projects are short-term projects that respond to regional and national needs and priorities and provide research-based knowledge to inform policy and practice. They use methods such as research syntheses, mining of existing data sets, and descriptive studies.



Do States Have Certification Requirements for Preparing General Education Teachers to Teach Students with Disabilities? Experience in the Northeast and Islands Region

Researchers found that eight of the nine jurisdictions in the region require some coursework in teaching students with disabilities for initial licensure for general education teachers. Only New Hampshire does not mandate coursework or fieldwork in this area, and its Department of Education is revising its regulations.

Researchers found commonalities and differences in how the jurisdictions require general education teacher candidates to develop special education knowledge and in the specific knowledge and skills within special education that they require candidates to know. Specifically:

- Four jurisdictions (Connecticut, Maine, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands) require teacher candidates to take an approved course in special education or teaching exceptional students.
- Four other jurisdictions (Massachusetts, New York, Rhode Island, and Vermont) require teacher candidates to demonstrate knowledge and skills in teaching students with disabilities but do not specify how teacher preparation programs meet this requirement.
- Two jurisdictions (New York and Rhode Island) require general education teacher candidates to spend part of their student teaching experience working in classrooms with students with disabilities.
- Five jurisdictions (Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York, Rhode Island, and Vermont) use professional teaching standards to outline the knowledge, skills, and practices required of general education teachers to teach students with disabilities.

Researchers identified eight special education content areas that teachers are required to learn by one or more jurisdictions in the region:

1. Understand growth and development of exceptional children (seven jurisdictions);
2. Master instructional design, including planning and methods (five jurisdictions);
3. Adapt, differentiate, accommodate, or modify instruction (five jurisdictions);
4. Participate in field experiences with students with disabilities (five jurisdictions);
5. Prepare, implement, or evaluate Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) (two jurisdictions);
6. Seek support or collaboration to assist students with disabilities (five jurisdictions);
7. Understand the legal and historical foundation of special education (two jurisdictions); and
8. Identify student learning differences (one jurisdiction).

Contact Information

For more information about this project, e-mail Rebecca Carey (rcarey@edc.org) or visit REL-NEI online (www.relnei.org).

