

## Teachers—Special Education

(All information, except UB degree program information, is from the US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics 2004-2005 Occupational Outlook Handbook.)

- **Significant Points**
- **Employment, Job Outlook & Earnings**
- **Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement**
- **UB Graduate Programs:**
  - [Special Education](#)
- **UB Undergraduate Programs:**
  - [BA or BS in the area which you hope to specialize \(such as Art, English, Geological Sciences, History, or Math\)](#)
  - [Minor in Education](#)

### Significant Points

- Excellent job prospects are expected due to rising enrollments of special education students and reported shortages of qualified teachers.
- A bachelor's degree, completion of an approved teacher preparation program, and a license are required to qualify; many States require a master's degree.
- Many States offer alternative licensure programs to attract people into these jobs.

### Employment

Special education teachers held a total of about 433,000 jobs in 2002. A great majority, almost 90 percent, work in public schools. Another 7 percent work at private schools. About half work in elementary schools. A few worked for individual and social assistance agencies or residential facilities, or in homebound or hospital environments.

### Job Outlook

Employment of special education teachers is expected to increase faster than the average for all occupations through 2012. Although slowdowns in student enrollments may constrain employment growth somewhat, additional positions for these workers will be created by continued increases in the number of special education students needing services, by legislation emphasizing training and employment for individuals with disabilities, and by educational reforms requiring higher standards for graduation. The need to replace special education teachers who switch to general education, change careers altogether, or retire will lead to additional job openings. At the same time, many school districts report shortages of qualified teachers. As a result, special education teachers should have excellent job prospects.

The job outlook varies by geographic area and specialty. Although many areas of the country report difficulty finding qualified applicants, positions in inner cities and rural areas usually are more plentiful than job openings in suburban or wealthy urban areas. Student populations, in general, also are expected to increase significantly in several States in the West and South, resulting in increased demand for special education teachers in those regions. In addition, job opportunities may be better in certain specialties—such as speech or language impairments and learning disabilities—because of large increases in the enrollment of special education students classified under those categories. Legislation encouraging early intervention and special education for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers has created a need for early childhood special education teachers. Bilingual special education teachers and those with multicultural experience also are needed to work with an increasingly diverse student population.

The number of students requiring special education services has grown steadily in recent years, a trend that is expected to continue. Learning disabilities will continue to be identified and diagnosed at earlier ages. In addition, medical advances have resulted in more children surviving serious accidents or illnesses, but with impairments that require special accommodations. The percentage of foreign-born special education students also is expected to grow, as teachers begin to recognize learning disabilities in that population. Finally, more parents are expected to seek special services for those of their children who have difficulty meeting the new, higher standards required of students.

## **Earnings**

Median annual earnings in 2002 of special education teachers who worked primarily in preschools, kindergartens, and elementary schools were \$42,690. The middle 50 percent earned between \$34,160 and \$54,340. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$28,680, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$67,810.

Median annual earnings in 2002 of middle school special education teachers were \$41,350. The middle 50 percent earned between \$33,460 and \$52,370. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$28,560, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$65,070.

Median annual earnings in 2002 of special education teachers who worked primarily in secondary schools were \$44,130. The middle 50 percent earned between \$35,320 and \$56,850. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$29,630, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$71,020.

In 2002, about 62 percent of special education teachers belonged to unions—mainly the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association—that bargain with school systems over wages, hours, and the terms and conditions of employment.

In most schools, teachers receive extra pay for coaching sports and working with students in extracurricular activities. Some teachers earn extra income during the summer, working in the school system or in other jobs.

### **Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement**

All 50 States and the District of Columbia require special education teachers to be licensed. The State board of education or a licensure advisory committee usually grants licenses, and licensure varies by State. In many States, special education teachers receive a general education credential to teach kindergarten through grade 12. These teachers then train in a specialty, such as learning disabilities or behavioral disorders. Some States offer general special education licenses, while others license several different specialties within special education, and still others require teachers to obtain a general education license first and an additional license in special education afterwards.

All States require a bachelor's degree and the completion of an approved teacher preparation program with a prescribed number of subject and education credits and supervised practice teaching. Many States require a master's degree in special education, involving at least 1 year of additional course work, including a specialization, beyond the bachelor's degree.

Some States have reciprocity agreements allowing special education teachers to transfer their licenses from one State to another, but many still require that the teacher pass licensing requirements for the State in which they work. In the future, employers may recognize certification or standards offered by a national organization.

Many colleges and universities across the United States offer programs in special education, at the undergraduate, master's, and doctoral degree levels. Special education teachers usually undergo longer periods of training than do general education teachers. Most bachelor's degree programs are 4-year programs that include general and specialized courses in special education. However, an increasing number of institutions are requiring a 5th year or other postbaccalaureate preparation. Among the courses offered are educational psychology, legal issues of special education, and child growth and development; courses imparting knowledge and skills needed for teaching students with disabilities also are given. Some programs require specialization, while others offer generalized special education degrees or a course of study in several specialized areas. The last year of the program usually is spent student teaching in a classroom supervised by a certified teacher.

Alternative and emergency licenses are available in many States, due to the need to fill special education teaching positions. Alternative licenses are designed to bring college graduates and those changing careers into teaching more quickly. Requirements for an alternative license may be less stringent than for a regular license. Requirements vary by State. In some programs, individuals begin teaching quickly under a provisional license

and can obtain a regular license by teaching under the supervision of licensed teachers for a period of 1 to 2 years while taking education courses. Emergency licenses are granted when States have difficulty finding licensed special education teachers to fill positions.

Special education teachers must be patient, able to motivate students, understanding of their students' special needs, and accepting of differences in others. Teachers must be creative and apply different types of teaching methods to reach students who are having difficulty learning. Communication and cooperation are essential traits, because special education teachers spend a great deal of time interacting with others, including students, parents, and school faculty and administrators.

Special education teachers can advance to become supervisors or administrators. They may also earn advanced degrees and become instructors in colleges that prepare others to teach special education. In some school systems, highly experienced teachers can become mentors to less experienced ones, providing guidance to those teachers while maintaining a light teaching load.