

Virginia Department of Education News Release



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Wanted: Special Education Teachers ***Campaign Aimed At "Smart People with Big Hearts"***

The Virginia Department of Education is launching a campaign to recruit qualified special education teachers and provide information to persons interested in teaching students with special needs. The program is called "Become a Special Educator in Virginia" and will include a series of television and radio public service announcements.

"We are aggressively recruiting smart people with big hearts to teach students with disabilities," said H. Douglas Cox, assistant superintendent for special education and student services. "Teachers trained to work with students with learning disabilities and emotional disturbance are especially in demand."

Nearly 9 percent of the special education teacher positions in Virginia school divisions are either vacant or filled by licensed educators who do not hold the full special education endorsement, according to a department study.

A series of television and radio public service announcements (PSAs) will air on stations across the commonwealth. The PSAs, produced by the National Clearinghouse for Professions in Special Education, an initiative sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education and the Council for Exceptional Children, highlight the rewards of teaching in special education and encourage individuals to consider the field of special education with information provided through a hotline and Web site.

High school and college students, as well persons with college degrees seeking to change careers, may call toll-free 1-866-BECOME1 (1-866-232-6631) or visit the special Web site at www.teachvirginia.org for information concerning programs that prepare special educators in Virginia. In addition, a free information packet is available with details on how to start a career in special education.

(more)

The “Become a Special Educator in Virginia” packet and Web site include the following information:

- Virginia colleges and universities that prepare special education professionals for a variety of occupations;
- The rewards of teaching students with disabilities;
- Virginia's Statewide Mentor Teacher Program;
- Tuition and enrollment information for Virginia's colleges and universities;
- Licensing requirements, including alternative routes to licensure;
- Opportunities at colleges and universities with federal funding;
- The Virginia Teaching Scholarship Loan Program and other Virginia scholarships and financial aid programs; and,
- Current job opportunities in special education.

“Special educators give so much, but they get back even more,” said Dr. Thomas Elliott, assistant superintendent for teacher education and licensure. “The rewards of educating children and youth with disabilities are tremendous. We’re looking for those who take pleasure in seeing the pride of accomplishment when a child with autism learns to use an adaptive computer or the excitement of a child with learning disabilities as he or she writes a story for the first time.”

The U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Special Education Programs recently awarded eight grants, designed to improve special education training and offer student support to Virginia colleges and universities. Additionally, many Virginia colleges and universities offer other tuition assistance opportunities for special education teacher preparation programs.

Funds for the “Become A Special Educator in Virginia” Web-based recruitment service, the airing of public service announcements (PSAs), the informational Web site, and the toll-free call center come from the Virginia Special Education State Improvement Grant, awarded by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Special Education Programs,

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Become a Special Educator in Virginia

Media Ideas for Expanding the Story

- Highlight a successful local special education teacher.
- Feature a current special educator who was formerly employed in another profession.
- Visit a local school to find out how students with disabilities are being included in regular classroom learning activities.
- Visit a special education classroom to find out how students with severe disabilities are being taught independent living skills.
- Visit a college or university and feature the process of learning to become a teacher.
- Interview a parent of child with disabilities to highlight how teachers make a difference in the educational experience.
- Interview a special education administrator concerning the local need for special educators.
- Integrate information on the Virginia Department of Education's efforts to recruit special educators through the "Become a Special Education in Virginia" program with a general piece on job opportunities.
- Investigate and expand on other teaching areas with shortages.
- For TV, incorporate the PSAs in your report.
- For radio, incorporate PSAs in your report.
- Interview the spokesperson from the National Clearinghouse for Professions in Special Education for a national perspective on teacher recruitment needs.