Preparing Future Educators to Meet the Needs of
Children with Disabilities

SUMMARY POINTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- The *Individual’s with Disabilities Act* (IDEA) Personnel Preparation Program provides financial assistance to some 8,000 future special educators in exchange for service in a high-need school. Funding cuts have hurt the program.

- The reauthorization of the Higher Education Opportunity Act must require teacher preparation programs to train all future educators to address the needs of students with disabilities.

- Teacher preparation programs should emphasize high-quality clinical experiences for teaching candidates to demonstrate their content and pedagogical knowledge prior to program completion (i.e. edTPA).

- Chronic shortages in special education must be addressed through student loan forgiveness and scholarship programs, such as the TEACH Grant Program.

- Accountability measures for teacher preparation programs must not rely on value-added measures of teachers once in the classroom as they are not valid or reliable.
BACKGROUND

More than 6 million children and youth with disabilities across the nation rely on the expertise of professionals who are fully prepared to provide individualized instruction, which is the heart of special education.

Research has demonstrated that the quality of a teacher is the most important school-based factor for improving student outcomes. Since the passage of IDEA in 1975, it has been difficult to recruit and retain special educators. In fact, 49 states continue to report a shortage of special educators and 90% of high-poverty school districts report difficulty in attracting highly-qualified special education teachers.

Unfortunately, the challenges continue in the classroom as special educators leave the profession at nearly twice the rate of general educators. The cost of teacher turnover is estimated to be more than $4 billion per year to school districts, not to mention the cost to students and communities. The national shortage of special educators, coupled with their high attrition and low retention rate, require a federal response.

To further address chronic shortages, IDEA’s Personnel Preparation Program provides financial assistance to some 8,000 students studying special education, who then provide two years of service in a high-need school for every year of financial support. Increasing the pipeline of special educators is critical to meeting the needs of students with disabilities. Federal funding has been cut from this program since 2010, when it was funded at $90.6 million, and must rebound in order to increase the number of future special educators.

49 states continue to report a shortage of special educators, a trend that has spanned decades.