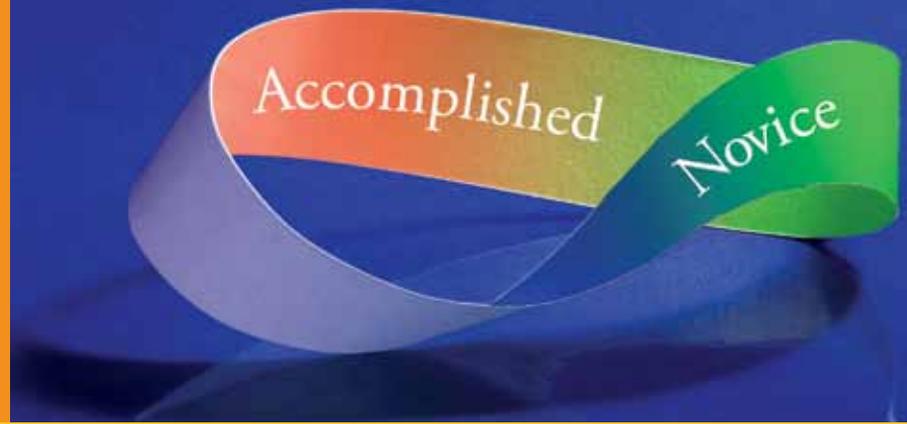


# Induction Insights



## Supporting Special Education Teachers—Policymakers [PII-3]

### Strengthening Partnerships Between Special Education Teacher Educators and Schools

#### *Briefly...*

*Special education preservice teachers benefit from participating in programs where there is a strong partnership between school district and university faculty. Learn more about two programs—Alternative Route Certification and Professional Development Schools—that offer promising opportunities for partnerships and what policymakers can do to support them.*

Partnerships among institutions of higher education and school districts are desirable. Partnerships enable organizations to leverage their resources as well as expand and enhance their capabilities. They also provide opportunities for personnel with specialized areas of expertise to address shared challenges.

Partnerships take considerable time, effort, flexibility, consensus building, and political acumen if they are to succeed. For many districts, the strongest motivation to become involved in a partnership with special education teacher educators comes from a critical shortage in the number and quality of special education teachers. Institutions of higher education may form partnerships to increase the number of students in their teacher preparation programs as well as to enhance their programs.

This Brief looks at two areas of partnering in special education teacher preparation for institutions of higher education and school districts—Alternative Route Certification (ARC) programs and Professional Development School (PDS) programs. These programs are among the most widely employed teacher preparation partnerships. They exemplify the range of partnerships, from the idealized, multifaceted, and

high-maintenance PDS to the goal-focused and pragmatic ARC. Read on to learn more about the challenges and opportunities associated with these partnerships.

#### **ARC Partnerships—Opportunities and Challenges**

The number of individuals seeking special education certification through alternative routes is increasing. Most ARC programs are designed to fill personnel needs in either discipline (e.g., special education teachers) or in specific geographic areas (e.g., rural, urban). ARC programs provide access to a teaching credential by circumventing traditional preservice preparation.

Partnerships between higher education teacher preparation faculty and school faculty can enhance the efficacy of ARC programs. In fact, there is some evidence that teacher retention is greater in programs that are characterized by strong partnerships between districts and higher education than those in stand-alone district-sponsored programs. In general, these ARC teachers report feeling prepared to teach, and principals give them high marks.

ARC programs typically require both teacher educators and school faculty

to change the way teacher training is conducted (e.g., selection of interns, selection of mentors, etc.). Also, ARC programs may necessitate a change in how each partner performs traditional functions. For example, teacher education programs might recruit students from a different pool of applicants. Districts might hire special education teachers through different processes.

## PDS Partnerships— Opportunities and Challenges

The PDS is a well-established type of partnership in which university and school faculty provide school-based preparation experiences for preservice teachers. Ongoing professional development also is a focus of a PDS. Such partnerships are designed to close the theory-to-practice gap and to bring more rigor to teachers' initial preparation and ongoing professional development. PDSs promote school and teacher improvement reform by including K-12 educators in the design and implementation of preparation programs, producing teachers with classroom experience, increasing field-based opportunities to work with diverse students, and enhancing opportunities for feedback and evaluation.

To date, special education has not been an integral part of most PDS efforts. Yet, preservice special education teachers who participate in a PDS—especially those who have had capable mentors and concrete field experiences and coursework—report feeling well prepared. Participating students appear to maintain or make gains in achievement, motivation, and attendance. Partnership schools and districts also tend to hire these preservice teachers upon graduation.

A major challenge involves finding a PDS that includes students with disabilities. A PDS that focuses only on general education classroom teaching limits opportunities for special education preservice teachers to work with students with disabilities. In such cases—especially when institutions of higher education partner with a limited number of schools—there may be insufficient opportunities for preservice teachers to interact with special education teachers and students with disabilities. This makes it difficult for these preservice teachers to acquire the skills they need. Yet, partnering with multiple schools presents enormous logistical and resource challenges.

## How Policymakers Can Support Partnerships

Having sufficient funding is a significant challenge. Both types of partnerships require similar and extensive start-up and maintenance efforts. Collaborative program design takes time and effort. When external dollars are available, partners often are more willing to work together.

About 57 percent of ARC programs receive some form of state funding for start-up costs; about 40 percent of start-up costs are borne exclusively by districts. When external funding ends, however, many programs may not continue.

Policymakers also may consider providing other forms of support, including:

- Resources for mentors (e.g., training, financial incentives, acknowledging work in the PDS as ongoing professional development, etc.).
- Resources for teacher candidates (e.g., tuition, scholarships for books, stipends for internships, etc.).

## ◎◎ Sightings

PDS efforts tend to be more expansive and conceptual than the mostly goal-focused ARC preparation programs. PDS efforts are based frequently on the need for comprehensive and systemic school reform, and traditional relationships among stakeholders are restructured to improve collaboration. Although some ARC initiatives have a reform agenda, the majority are designed to fill personnel needs in either discipline or geographic areas of shortage.

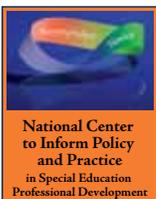


- Development and maintenance of an infrastructure for distance education.
- Resources for school-based research in which university faculty and school personnel collaborate.
- Encouragement of different types of teacher education arrangements (e.g., dual certification programs in elementary and special education, elementary education programs that integrate some special education coursework, etc.).

**Learn More.** This Brief summarizes select findings from a comprehensive review of the literature:

Rosenberg, M. S., Brownell, M., McCray, E. D., deBettencourt, L. U., Leko, M., & Long, S. (2009). *Development and sustainability of school-university partnerships in special education teacher preparation: A critical review of the literature.* (NCIPP Doc. No. RS-3). Gainesville, FL: University of Florida, National Center to Inform Policy and Practice in Special Education Professional Development (NCIPP).

It is available on the NCIPP website at [www.ncipp.org](http://www.ncipp.org).



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