

Handbook of Early Childhood Special Education

How to Become a Special Education Teacher About this section

Special education teachers need to be able to explain concepts in terms students with learning disabilities can understand.

Special education teachers in public schools are required to have at least a bachelor's degree and a state-issued certification or license. Private schools typically require teachers to have a bachelor's degree, but the teachers are not required to be licensed or certified.

Education

All states require special education teachers in public schools to have at least a bachelor's degree. Some require teachers to earn a degree specifically in special education. Others allow them to major in education or a content area, such as mathematics or science, and pursue a minor in special education.

In a program leading to a bachelor's degree in special education, prospective teachers learn about the different types of disabilities and how to present information so that students will understand. Programs typically include a student-teaching program, in which prospective teachers work with a mentor and get experience instructing students in a classroom setting. To become fully certified, states may require special education teachers to complete a master's degree in special education after obtaining a job.

Private schools typically require teachers to have at least a bachelor's degree in special education.

Licenses, Certifications, and Registrations

All states require teachers in public schools to be licensed in the specific grade level that they teach. A license frequently is referred to as a certification. Those who teach in private schools typically do not need to be licensed.

Requirements for certification or licensure can vary by state but generally involve the following:

A bachelor's degree with a minimum grade point average

Completion of a student-teaching program

Passing a background check

Passing a general teaching certification test, as well as a test that demonstrates knowledge of the subject the candidate will teach

For information about teacher preparation programs and certification requirements, visit Teach.org or contact your state's board of education.

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All states offer an alternative route to certification or licensure for people who already have a bachelor's degree. These alternative programs cover teaching methods and child development. Candidates are awarded full certification after they complete the program. Other alternative programs require prospective teachers to take classes in education before they can start to teach. Teachers may be awarded a master's degree after completing either type of program.

Advancement

Experienced teachers may advance to become mentors who help less experienced teachers improve their instructional skills. They also may become lead teachers.

Teachers may become school counselors, instructional coordinators, and elementary, middle, and high school principals. These positions generally require additional education, an advanced degree, or certification. An advanced degree in education administration or leadership may be helpful.

Important Qualities

Communication skills. Special education teachers need to explain concepts in terms that students with learning disabilities can understand. They also must write Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and share students' progress with general education teachers, counselors and other specialists, administrators, and parents.

Critical-thinking skills. Special education teachers must be able to assess students' progress and use the information to adapt lessons.

Interpersonal skills. Special education teachers work regularly with a team of educators and the student's parents to develop IEPs. As a result, they need to be able to build positive working relationships.

Patience. Special education teachers must be able to stay calm instructing students with disabilities, who may lack basic skills, present behavioral or other challenges, or require repeated efforts to understand material.

Resourcefulness. Special education teachers must develop different ways to present information that meet their

students'™ needs. They also help general education teachers adapt their lessons to the needs of students with disabilities.

Reference

[Dissertations And Theses from Start to Finish: Psychology And Related Fields](#)

[Psychology Statistics For Dummies](#)