

Certification Central

ND's 1st Alternative Educator Preparation Program

Box 322, McVille, ND 58254

701.322.4429

www.certificationcentral.education



Written Testimony for HB 1188

Chair Schaible and Senate Education Committee,

For the record, my name is Dr. Katherine Terras and I represent Certification Central, which is ND's 1st Alternative Educator Preparation Program. We are in support HB 1188 to establish a certificate of completion for a Special Education Technician. This bill draft resulted from a Para-to-Practice Task Force consisting of 10 influential stakeholders from across the state who met regularly for one year. This Task Force was formed due to the concerns from unit special education directors trying to recruit and retain special education teachers. The number of positions remaining unfilled or being filled with less qualified personnel is alarming (see Appendix A for data from the 2020-21 school year).

The Special Education Technician would create a mid-level position who would have a knowledge and skill set beyond paraeducators who are only required to have 20-hours of training to work with our most vulnerable population of students. Special Education Technicians would be trained following the national Council for Exceptional Children's training standards. These standards and benchmarks are the curriculum. The Para-to-Practice Task Force's charge was to explore Grow Your Own initiatives that would begin a pathway for units and districts to invest in their own paraeducators who have demonstrated capacity and commitment to students and to North Dakota, especially in rural areas. The Special Education Technician would provide a robust pathway for investing in these paraeducators. This concludes my testimony, and I will now stand for questions.

Appendix A

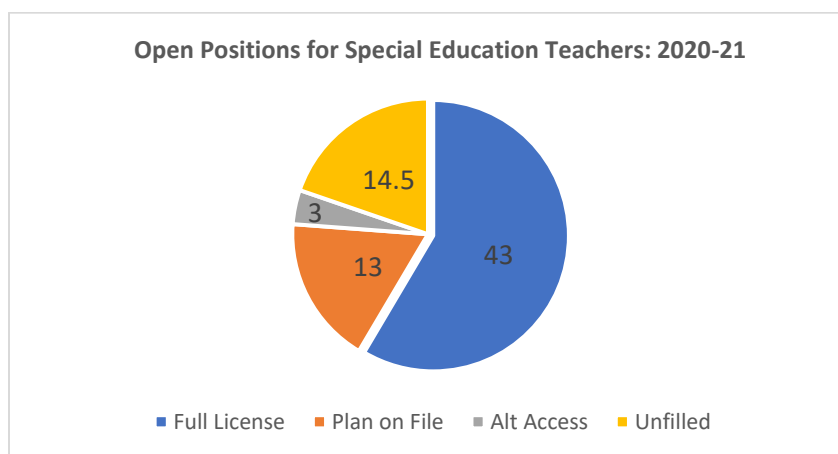
North Dakota Special Education Teacher Positions for 2020-2021

Overview

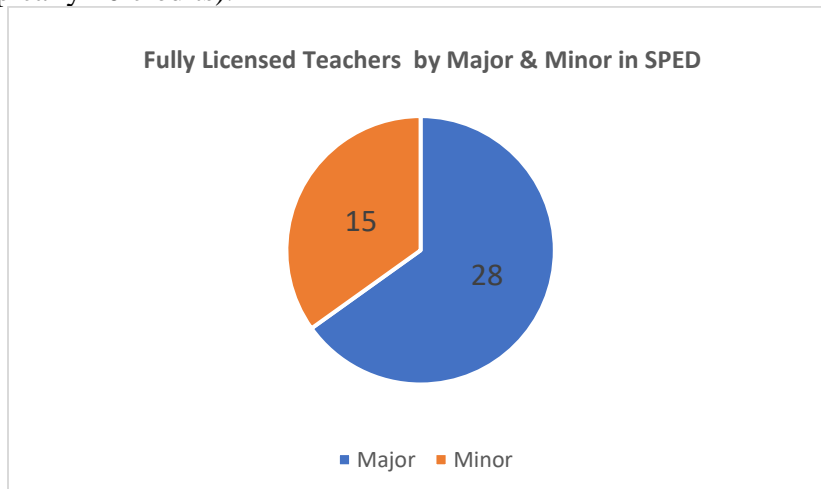
A survey was completed by 19 ND special education (SPED) directors to determine the following: 1) how many of their open SPED teacher positions were filled, 2) how many of these open positions went unfilled, and 3) what licensure pathways were used to fill these positions?

Results

There were 73.5 open special education teacher positions for the 2020-21 school year. SPED units were able to fill 43 of these positions with fully licensed special education teachers, 13 were filled with a Plan-on-File, 3 with an Alternate Access license, and 14.5 positions went unfilled. It was noted by one director that long-term substitute teachers are used when needed. Another director reported typically having 5 to 7 open positions each year that are mostly filled by plan-on-file and alternate access pathways, yet for the 2020-21 year, there were 6 open positions all filled with highly qualified individuals. The director reported this is very unusual and may skew the data.



Of the 43 positions filled with fully licensed special education teachers, 28 had a major in special education but only 15 had a minor (typically 20 credits).

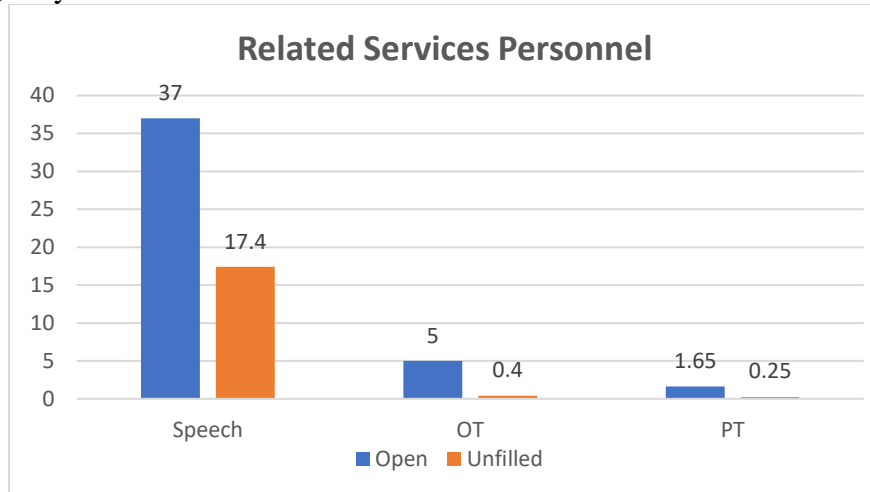


Conclusion

When considering the magnitude of the shortage of special education teachers in North Dakota, it is important to drill deeper than the number of filled and unfilled positions. There is a significant difference in training between those who have a major in special education and those who have a minor, yet they both lead to full licensure as a teacher. The pathways of plan-on-file and alternate access mean the individuals who filled these positions are currently enrolled in a special education training program.

Related Service Positions for 2020-2021

Data were also collected on related service personnel: speech language pathologists (Speech), occupational therapists (OT), and physical therapists (PT). For the 2020-21 school year there were 37 open speech pathologist positions and 17.4 of them were unfilled. There were 5 OT positions and only 0.4 went unfilled. Of the 1.65 PT positions, only 0.25 went unfilled.



It was noted by some directors that they have had to contract with outside agencies to provide these services, both face-to-face and telehealth.