

## SPECIAL EDUCATION

### DESCRIPTION OF SESSION

This session will provide participants an understanding about being a special education teacher and the unique environment in which special education teachers work.

### CATEGORY

- Exploring, Social Services
- US DOE, Education and Training

### OBJECTIVES

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Define special education.
- Understand what special educators do and where they work.
- Explain how to become certified to teach special education.
- Explain what to expect after becoming a special education teacher.

### SUPPLIES

- Laptop or personal device that can access the internet
- Pen and paper for each participant

**ADVISOR NOTE:** Text in italics should be read aloud to participants. As you engage your post in activities each week, please include comments, discussions, and feedback to the group relating to **Character, Leadership, and Ethics**. These are important attributes that make a difference in the success of youth in the workplace and in life.

### ACTIVITIES

#### Opening Activity

Select an activity from the Life Skills section of the Exploring Activity Library available at <http://www.exploring.org/activity-library/> or conduct a favorite opening activity of your own.

#### Activity 1

##### What Special Education Teachers Do

Initiate a discussion with the Explorers by asking: *What do you think the responsibilities of special education teachers are?* Be sure that all of the following have been addressed.

Special education teachers are responsible for a multitude of activities. These include but are not limited to the following:

- Working with students who have emotional, physical, learning, or mental difficulties
- Writing, maintaining, and monitoring an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for each student
- Collecting data to show growth and/or to develop goals for students
- Writing and presenting lesson plans based on state standards, IEP goals, and/or necessary life or job skills
- Training and/or working with aides or paraprofessionals

- Meeting with parents a minimum of once a year but maintaining open communication on a regular basis throughout the year
- Collaborating with regular education teachers
- Collaborating with other special education teachers
- Modifying the general curriculum to a level more appropriate for individual students
- Maintaining certification based on state requirements
- Attending professional development provided by the school, district, community, and/or state

### **Areas of Special Education**

Ask Explorers to name different areas of special education. These may include the following:

- Intervention specialist—mild to moderate or moderate to intensive (these may vary from state to state)
- Behavior specialist
- Special education (or pupil services) director, supervisor, or administrator
- Deaf or hard of hearing specialist
- Early childhood specialist
- Visual impairments specialist
- Educational aide/paraprofessional

### **Work Environment**

Ask if Explorers know what types of environments special education teachers work in. Begin a discussion, being sure to address the following:

- Generally, special education teachers, or intervention specialists, work in a school setting. They have daily classroom schedules with the same students each day.
- Intervention specialists can also be employed by a school district, a charter school, a private school, or a county board of developmental disabilities.
- Work generally occurs during a nine- to 10-month period, but some may work year-round.

### **Activity 2**

#### **How to Become a Special Education Teacher**

Tell Explorers: *In most cases, a minimum of a bachelor's degree is required to become any kind of teacher. There are some instances where work experience can help you become a teacher in a particular area, such as a business teacher, an automotive technology teacher, or even a science teacher. Someone who works in one of these fields would be able to use his or her work experience to skip some classes that would normally be required for certification. There are also many states that require teachers to earn their master's degree in order to continue teaching, but there is often a window of up to 10 years in order to earn the master's degree. But, to start, let's look at what our state requires for earning a license to teach special education.*

Have Explorers use a laptop or their own personal device to go to the state department of education website. They should search for "special education licensure" or "intervention specialist licensure." (Note that some states use the term "certification" rather than "licensure.") Another website where Explorers can find requirements for licensure by state is [www.specialeducationguide.com](http://www.specialeducationguide.com). (Sometimes state department of education websites are not easily navigable so the Special Education Guide website might be easier to decipher.)

After looking at their state’s requirements, Explorers should look online for colleges or universities that offer the licensure that interests them. Have Explorers record the specialized courses that are required for their area of interest. After they have had time to record courses, either have them tell the group what they found or, if it is a large group, have them pair up to share with at least one other person to compare any differences in requirements.

### **Activity 3**

#### **What to Expect After You Become a Teacher**

##### **Pay**

- Have Explorers use a laptop or their personal device to go to [www.bls.gov](http://www.bls.gov) and search for “special education teachers.” Take a few minutes to walk them through all the information that is provided.
- After sufficient time, have Explorers search the internet for the average teacher salary for their state. (A teacher salary should be the same for regular education teachers and special education teachers.) They can also search for a list of county or school district salaries in their state to compare different areas and search for a list of average teacher salaries by state to see which states pay more.

##### **Renewing Licenses**

- Explorers should return to the state department of education website and search for “license renewal” or “certificate renewal” information. This is where they should also be able to find out whether or not they are required to eventually get their master’s degree.

##### **Professional Organizations and Support in the Profession**

- Some Explorers could be overwhelmed at what being a special education teacher involves. As a closing activity, have the Explorers visit some of the following professional websites. Show them that there is assistance and support available in many different forms. You could also have them search for special education lesson plans so they can see that there are lots of resources available to help teachers so they don’t have to “reinvent the wheel” every time they plan a lesson.
  - [www.bls.gov](http://www.bls.gov)
  - [www.specialeducationguide.com](http://www.specialeducationguide.com)
  - <http://tea.texas.gov/> (or your state’s department of education site)

#### **ADVISOR NOTE**

Some sample questions are below. They are designed to help the participants apply what they have learned to their own interests. You are welcome to use these questions or develop your own questions that relate to your post or specific focus area.

#### **REFLECTION**

- *What was the purpose of these activities?*
- *Why did we do them?*
- *Which parts of today’s session did you most enjoy?*
- *What new things did you learn?*

- *How did your prior knowledge and ideas match with what you found as current practice?*
- *If you were interested in becoming a special education teacher before, are you still interested? Why or why not?*
- *What are some of the benefits and drawbacks to becoming a special education teacher?*
- *What aspects of special education would you like to learn more about?*
- *What subjects or electives in school do you think would help you prepare for a career in special education?*
- *What groups or organizations could you be involved with now that would help you prepare for a career in special education?*

### **ADVISOR'S PARTING THOUGHT**

The Advisor closes the meeting with a brief message that connects the meeting's activities with the post's area of interest and adds a note of inspiration or a positive challenge.

### **ADVISOR AND OFFICER REVIEW**

After the meeting, address the following:

- Identify what was successful about the meeting.
- Identify what needed improvement.
- Schedule an officer and Advisor planning meeting to prepare for the next post meeting or activity.

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