

## Research Evidence Against Dismantling the U.S. Education Department: How to Support Students with Disabilities

# Implications of Loosening Federal Oversight for Special Education Teacher Preparation

## A RAPID EVIDENCE REVIEW

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## Why This Issue Requires Urgent Attention

Current debates about scaling back federal oversight of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) make this an especially critical moment for states to understand the implications of special education teacher preparation reforms. IDEA generally requires public school special education teachers to hold at least a bachelor's degree and full state special education certification or equivalent state licensure. As it stands now, states may not waive these requirements on an emergency, temporary, or provisional basis, and teachers in alternative preparation routes must still meet IDEA's standards within a defined period (Office of Special Education Programs, 2022).

However, many states are confronting significant and persistent teacher shortages, particularly in special education, where vacancies remain among the highest nationally (Sutcher et al., 2016).

- *During the 2022-23 school year, 21% of schools reported at least one vacancy in special education, and 55% of schools reported it was difficult to fill special education teacher positions (Gilmour et al., n.d.)*
- *A nationwide survey of schools in 2022 reported that vacancies in special education were nearly double that of other subject areas. This survey also found that 65% of public schools in the United States reported being understaffed in special education. (Bodenhamer, 2023)*
- *Data collected in August 2024 by IES found that 72% of public schools with vacancies in special education had difficulty filling the position with a fully certified teacher for the upcoming school year. (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2025)*

**If federal accountability mechanisms through IDEA diminish, states may face increased pressure to relax certification and licensure requirements to address special education workforce shortages.** Without strong guardrails, these shifts could accelerate inequities and leave students with disabilities disproportionately served by underprepared educators, making it more difficult to uphold the instructional and legal protections guaranteed under IDEA. In this context, state-level decisions about certification and licensure flexibility and teacher pipeline investments carry heightened and long-lasting consequences.

## Overview

**Year after year, nearly all states report to the U.S. Department of Education that they are experiencing special education teacher shortages, which challenge schools' ability to meet legal obligations under IDEA to provide a free appropriate public education for students with disabilities** (Learning Policy Institute, 2025). Special education teacher shortages arise from multiple factors: fewer candidates completing special-education preparation programs, high attrition among special educators, and growth in the number of students receiving special-education services (National Council on Teacher Quality, 2025). According to the American Association for Employment in Education's most recent *Educator Supply and Demand Survey*, colleges, universities, and school districts nationwide consistently report considerable shortages across nearly all 11 special education subfields (American Association for Employment in Education, 2024).

In July 2024, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) released a report based on site visits to 32 entities (state education agencies, school districts, and special education organizations) across four states, where they explored access to resources, including trained staff and educators, for students with disabilities (GAO, 2024). **All 32 entities said**

**personnel shortages were a key obstacle to educating students with disabilities.**

Districts reported shortages not just for special education teachers, but also speech-language pathologists, paraeducators, general/substitute teachers, bus drivers, and other related service roles (e.g., OTs, school psychologists). GAO reports stakeholders saying too few people are entering the field, with too few students pursuing special education preparation, and existing staff moving to general education or leaving education.

**Contributing factors include too few certification/degree programs, licensure reciprocity barriers, and the high cost of preparation/student debt relative to expected pay.** Districts reported these obstacles can result in students not receiving services, receiving delayed services, or receiving lower-quality supports (including delays in evaluations and make-up services pushed into summer).

With these chronic shortages, states are looking for ways to fill gaps, often focusing on barriers to entry to the field. **Federal law, however, sets clear boundaries for how states may define and use teacher certification or licensure in special education.** Under IDEA, special education teachers must hold at least a bachelor's degree and full state special education certification or equivalent state licensure. While states have flexibility to determine what full certification entails, IDEA does not permit states to rely on emergency, temporary, or provisional licenses to staff special education classrooms. In practice, this means states may innovate in how teachers are prepared, but they may not lower certification standards below the federal minimum.

## State efforts to address teacher shortages

**In response to teacher shortages, many states are investing in alternative teacher preparation routes.** Alternative routes offer accelerated, nontraditional pathways for individuals with a bachelor's degree to earn state teaching certification/licensure without completing a traditional teacher preparation program (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). As a result, alternative routes have become a common state policy lever for filling special education vacancies and stabilizing the teacher workforce (Peyton et al., 2020). While specific approaches vary across states, most alternative routes allow candidates to begin teaching under supervision while completing required coursework and training through apprenticeship or residency models (see Box 1). Some are abbreviated, fast-entry models that place candidates in classrooms while they complete coursework; others, such as residencies and registered teacher apprenticeships, are designed to pair paid clinical work with structured mentoring, supervised practice, and aligned coursework. Because these models differ so substantially, the relevant policy question is not simply whether a route is "alternative," but whether it provides sufficient clinical preparation,

mentoring, and oversight to support effective practice and progression to full certification (Office of Special Education Programs, 2022; Rosenberg & Sindelar, 2005).

**Changes to IDEA that weaken federal oversight may allow further flexibility for states in certification requirements.** For state leaders, the *current* policy question is not whether to allow alternative routes, but whether those routes reliably lead to full certification within a defined timeframe and ensure that teachers are adequately prepared to meet the needs of students with disabilities and comply with federal law. While federal law sets boundaries on what counts as acceptable alternative routes for special education, loosening oversight may risk states pursuing strategies to waive requirements to expand the pool of available teachers.

## State efforts to address shortages in the special education (SPED) workforce

- **“Learn while you earn” registered apprenticeships / paid residencies:** States are funding apprenticeship-style programs where paraprofessionals, long-term subs, or career-changers train on the job with mentoring while completing coursework toward SPED licensure/certification. [Pennsylvania’s state strategy](#) explicitly includes SPED-focused apprenticeships and paraprofessional-to-SPED pipelines. [California](#) boasts success in their “Grow Your Own” strategy for filling special education shortages through recruiting classified staff who currently serve as paraprofessionals or afterschool program staff.
- **Provisional entry licenses tied to preparation:** Several states issue time-limited certificates when a district hires someone who is already enrolled (or must enroll) in a state-approved SPED program, usually with supervision/mentoring requirements. Examples include [Washington’s conditional certificate rules](#) for a SPED endorsement and [Maryland’s district-requested conditional license](#). Some states have built explicit SPED alternative licenses for candidates enrolled in an approved alternative-route program (or who finished a program but need more time for exams), letting them serve as the teacher of record during the pathway. Indiana’s [“Alternative Special Education License”](#) is a clear example.

- **Emergency permits (with required progress toward full certification), used cautiously for SPED:** States sometimes lean on emergency permits to staff hard-to-fill roles, typically requiring enrollment in a prep program and credit completion for renewal (Pennsylvania lays out these obligations). These are used to fill vacancies temporarily. [Federal guidance](#) has warned states they can't simply waive SPED teacher qualification requirements on an [emergency/temporary basis under IDEA](#), so states, like [Texas](#), try to structure “stopgap” permits around compliant alternate-route preparation rather than blanket waivers.
- **Streamlined “add-on” / supplemental SPED endorsements for already-licensed teachers:** To move general educators into SPED faster, states are expanding add-on pathways, accelerated coursework, or “supplemental endorsement” options; for example, [Indiana’s I-SEAL](#) supports already-licensed teachers adding SPED via funded coursework.
- **Redesigning structures to reduce barriers:** Some states are adjusting the *structure* of SPED credentials—e.g., creating more **flexible/standalone SPED endorsements**. [Michigan](#) approved new standards for a standalone endorsement, rather than one in a particular content area, starting with implementation by prep programs in fall 2026. Others are **adjusting testing/requirements** that are bottlenecks (paired with alternative demonstrations of competency). [Mississippi’s recent changes](#) included shifting/loosening certain reading-test requirements for some SPED candidates while introducing an alternative course-based route for meeting reading expectations.

## Importance of Grounding Policy Decisions in Evidence

**As states weigh strategies to address educator shortages and respond to shifting federal oversight, grounding policy decisions in rigorous evidence is more critical than ever.** Research provides some guidance on which preparation models lead to stronger instructional practice, higher retention, and better outcomes for students with disabilities. When certification flexibilities or teacher preparation program features are implemented without attention to the evidence base, states risk adopting short-term solutions that may exacerbate inequities and reduce compliance with IDEA requirements. Evidence-informed

policymaking enables states to evaluate both the effectiveness and the unintended consequences of reforms, ensuring that staffing pressures do not come at the expense of students' legal rights or long-term educational quality.

## What does the research evidence say about strong teacher preparation, particularly for students with disabilities?

**States are on firmest empirical ground when licensing and credentialing policies emphasize the quality and structure of clinical experiences and encourage coursework that is tightly connected to instructional practice.**

High-quality preparation is essential for training teachers to select and implement evidence-based practices with fidelity, a core requirement given the wide variation in needs among students with disabilities (Scheeler, et al, 2016; O'Brien et al., 2023; Hagaman et al., 2017). But how does the research define “high quality?”

Research reviewed by Ronfeldt (2021) points to **clinical preparation** as the most consistently supported feature of teacher preparation linked to both teaching effectiveness and retention. Large-scale quantitative studies show that candidates who complete **longer, well-supervised student teaching experiences, work with effective cooperating teachers, and experience clear alignment between coursework and fieldwork** tend to demonstrate stronger early-career performance and are more likely to remain in the profession (Boyd et al., 2009; Ronfeldt et al., 2014; Ronfeldt et al., 2018).

For example, a statewide study finds that special educators whose programs emphasized **evidence-based literacy practices**—such as systematic phonics instruction, explicit comprehension strategies, and structured interventions for decoding difficulties—and provided **high-quality supervised field experiences** produced higher reading gains for students with high-incidence disabilities when classroom practices were aligned to their preparation (Theobald et al., 2022). A smaller study shows that students made measurable progress when special education teacher candidates learned to implement and then delivered evidence-based reading interventions like repeated reading, explicit vocabulary instruction, and multisensory phonics approaches (Heckaman et al., 2018). These findings build on earlier evidence showing that teachers with formal preparation in special education, including specialized coursework and supervised clinical experience, are more effective, particularly in reading (Feng & Sass, 2013). Coursework must explicitly address

IEP development and legal compliance, evidence-based practices for students with disabilities, assessment and progress monitoring, behavior management, and collaboration with general educators and related service providers (Rosenberg et al., 2023; Scheeler et al., 2016).

For state policymakers considering loosening special education credentialing requirements to address shortages, this evidence suggests caution: **reducing expectations for supervised clinical experience and specialized coursework may undermine teachers' ability to implement evidence-based practices with fidelity.**

## What do we know about alternative routes to certification?

Rosenberg and colleagues (2023) synthesize research on alternative routes for special education teachers and conclude that **many alternative routes compress or omit key elements of preparation that the broader literature identifies as important for effectiveness.** This research builds on earlier descriptive work, for example by Rosenberg and Sindelar (2005), who reported wide variation in program quality among alternative route models, with many programs providing limited coursework, minimal supervision, and little attention to evidence based instruction.

**Outcomes of alternative routes to certification are unclear.** Rigorous evaluations of teacher or student outcomes remain rare (Day, 2022), and comparative studies of outcomes across traditional and alternative routes are difficult to interpret because schools that can attract traditionally certified teachers may be better professional learning environments than those that cannot, thus comparing outcomes across the two could be conflating certification route with school context. These studies show that traditionally prepared special educators tend to be rated higher on measures of planning, instruction, and classroom environment than those who enter through emergency or very short alternative routes (e.g., Nougaret et al, 2005), though more rigorous research is needed to assess causality.

**Finally, while alternative routes have been effective in addressing immediate staffing needs, evidence suggests they are associated with higher teacher attrition compared to traditional preparation pathways.** Research indicates that special education teachers entering through alternative routes are approximately 25 percent more likely to leave the profession than their peers who completed traditional teacher preparation programs (Podolsky et al., 2016). Studies suggest that a key driver of attrition is inadequate

preparation, with **many alternatively certified special education teachers reporting that their programs did not sufficiently equip them with the skills needed to meet classroom demands** (Mason-Williams et al., 2020).

## Spotlight on teacher residencies and apprenticeships

Alternative teacher preparation models are those where candidates are recruited through more expedient and/or “learn while you work” pathways. Two popular structures are residencies and apprenticeships.

### What is the difference between apprenticeship and residency models?

- **Residency: A clinical, training-first model.** Candidates spend an extended period co-teaching alongside an expert mentor while completing aligned coursework; they may receive a stipend/salary, but they are less often the teacher of record during the training year. These programs are typically a year in length and require a BA to participate, resulting in licensure or a Master’s degree and license.
- **Apprenticeship: A job-first model.** Candidates are paid employees of the district from day one (often serving as a paraprofessional), complete a set of structured on-the-job competencies under the supervision of a mentor serving in a structured role, and must earn wages that can increase as they progress. The length of these programs vary depending on the degree or license being earned but are at least a year in length. Some programs support apprentices in earning a BA, some are licensure-only, and others may result in a Master’s.

It is important to note that while there are some key differences between residencies and apprenticeships, they can also function the same way programmatically. Residencies may seek to modify their programs in ways that do not impact program quality to meet apprenticeship requirements in order to access workforce funding.

### What is the evidence that teacher residencies or apprenticeship models adequately prepare special education teachers?

#### *Residencies*

**The efficacy of teacher residency programs remains mixed, with stark challenges in funding and administrative needs that prevent some of the programs from reaching their full potential.** In the early 2000s, teacher residency programs like the Boston

Teacher Residency began, offering prospective teachers the opportunity to bypass the traditional certification process at a university and instead spend their training time in a classroom with a mentor teacher (Papay et al., 2012). Most of these programs only require a year of mentorship before the prospective teacher can become a teacher of record themselves. Many studies agree that teacher residency programs—when they are well-designed and well-implemented—are an effective way to recruit new teachers and increase teacher retention rates for high-turnover schools (Burstein et al., 2023; Mazzye et al., 2022). However, there are a plethora of challenges in the implementation of such programs, such as overinflated costs and a “prescriptive, compliance-focused regime” that does not respond quickly to new research (LiBetti and Trinidad, 2018).

**Major challenges facing teacher residency programs** include: cost/budgeting, the pressure of the state accountability system, difficulty in identifying appropriate residents and matching them with a mentor teacher, and institutional procedures (e.g., determining credit weights and faculty workload) (Afacan, 2022). Regular funding and committed personnel, amidst a multitude of other factors, are required for teacher residency programs to be both successful and sustainable (Afacan, 2022). Federal aid during the COVID pandemic helped alleviate the high costs of many teacher residency programs, including in Iowa, Nevada, and Oklahoma, where states used ESSER (Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief) funds to offer tuition assistance, student teaching stipends, and/or certification exam fee waivers to participants in teacher preparation programs (EdTrust, 2022). Without continued federal aid, teacher residency programs could prove too expensive to sustain (Worley & Zerbino, 2023).

## *Apprenticeships*

**The research base on apprenticeship models for special education teacher preparation is limited, making it difficult to draw evidence-based conclusions about their effectiveness.** Unlike teacher residencies, which have been studied more extensively, registered apprenticeship programs are newer and have received minimal attention in peer-reviewed research (Regional Educational Laboratory [REL] Northwest, 2025). As the model first emerged in 2022, the limited number of program graduates has made evaluation difficult so far. Emerging evidence suggests that they may offer meaningful recruitment advantages, particularly for paraeducators, career changers, and other nontraditional candidates who are already embedded in schools and communities (Kriha et al., 2025). These pathways may reduce financial barriers to entering teaching, create more accessible routes to licensure for working adults, and diversify the special education workforce (Camp et al., 2024; Kriha et al., 2025; RTI International, 2024). However, there are no studies examining whether students with disabilities taught by

apprenticeship-prepared teachers achieve IEP goals, make adequate academic progress, or receive appropriate evidence-based interventions.

If states pursue apprenticeship models, they should ensure that immediate staffing needs do not crowd out the components of preparation that research suggests matter most: supervised clinical practice, high-quality coursework, trained mentors, and clear pathways to full certification (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Pickett et al., 2025; Rosenberg & Sindelar, 2005). Importantly, states should ensure apprentices do not serve as the teacher of record before they are adequately trained. While apprentices may serve as teachers of record in some programs, leading organizations including the Pathways Alliance and the U.S. Department of Education have discouraged this practice. Placing novice teachers in full-time special education roles without a strong foundation may compromise their ability to implement evidence-based practices with fidelity—a particular concern given that students with disabilities require specialized, research-validated instruction (Feng & Sass, 2013; Theobald et al., 2022).

## Working Conditions: The Critical Driver of Special Education Teacher Attrition

Accelerating teacher preparation through residencies, registered apprenticeships, or other alternative routes addresses only one part of the special education staffing challenge: getting teachers into classrooms. However, research suggests that addressing the shortage requires a dual approach: (1) ensuring teachers receive adequate preparation to meet the complex demands of special education, and (2) improving the working conditions they will encounter once employed. **Policies that prioritize one without the other are unlikely to produce sustainable improvements in staffing** (Mason-Williams et al., 2020; Billingsley & Bettini, 2019).

### The Evidence: Working Conditions Matter More Than Preparation Quality

Special education teachers face distinctly different, and more demanding, working conditions than their general education peers. In addition to classroom instruction, they must develop and monitor IEPs, consult with general educators, coordinate supports from related service providers, manage extensive compliance paperwork, and communicate regularly with families (Bettini et al., 2020; Brunsting et al., 2022). These responsibilities require both broader curricular knowledge and deeper pedagogical expertise than general education teaching (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019). Yet despite these additional demands, special educators often receive the same compensation as general education teachers

and frequently report having less planning time, fewer opportunities to collaborate with colleagues, and more overwhelming workloads (Bettini et al., 2017a).

**Research on special education teacher attrition consistently identifies working conditions, including role problems, administrative support, resources, and workload, as stronger predictors of retention than teacher preparation characteristics** (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Mason-Williams et al., 2020). A review of 30 studies from 2002-2017 found that the majority examined working conditions among special educators who left teaching, moved to other positions, or transferred to general education, with demands, supports, resources, and compensation emerging as the most salient factors (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019). Similarly, analysis of beginning special and general educators across 11 districts found that beginning special educators reported more overwhelming workloads yet had fewer opportunities for collegial interaction and support (Bettini et al., 2017b).

Teachers who view their school climate positively, receive adequate administrative support, have manageable caseloads, and feel integrated into their school community are significantly more likely to remain in special education, regardless of how they were prepared (Billingsley et al., in press; Cancio et al., 2013). Conversely, even highly qualified, well-prepared special educators are more likely to leave when faced with excessive paperwork, inadequate resources, role ambiguity, and isolation from colleagues (Brunsting et al., 2022).

## Financial Incentives Alone Are Insufficient

Recent research from Hawaii illustrates both the promise and limitations of policy interventions that do not address underlying working conditions. In 2019, Hawaii raised special education teachers' salaries by \$10,000, with additional bonuses of \$3,000-\$8,000 for teachers in historically hard-to-staff schools. The policy successfully reduced special education vacancies by encouraging general education teachers to move into special education roles and by reducing the flow of special education teachers into general education positions (Gilmour et al., 2024; Theobald et al., 2024). However, **the financial incentives did not significantly reduce overall special education teacher attrition rates** (Gilmour et al., 2024). These findings suggest that simply paying special education teachers more—while helpful for recruitment and lateral movement—is insufficient to compensate for more challenging working conditions.

# Evidenced-Based Policy Considerations for States

As changes to IDEA that potentially loosen federal accountability and oversight are being considered or enacted, states need to stay grounded in the best available evidence to ensure students with disabilities have access to well-prepared educators. To balance immediate staffing needs with long-term workforce stability while staying grounded in the best available evidence, states may consider these recommendations:

## **1. Protect core, evidence-based components of effective teacher preparation**

Because the causal evidence remains limited, states should avoid prescriptive statutory definitions of a single “best” model and instead require that all routes, including alternative ones, meet a set of minimum criteria: sufficient preservice coursework, supervised clinical practice, qualified mentor teachers, and clear timelines for achieving full certification, paired with ongoing evaluation of graduate outcomes.

## **2. Prioritize high-quality clinical placements and cooperating teacher qualifications**

Studies show that clinical placement quality strongly predicts teacher effectiveness. States can set guardrails requiring that clinical placements be supervised by experienced, effective cooperating teachers, particularly for teacher candidates who will serve students with disabilities.

## **3. Ensure preparation programs teach and assess evidence-based practices (EBPs)**

Effective instruction for students with disabilities relies fundamentally on teachers' ability to implement evidence-based practices (EBPs) with fidelity. States should require all preparation programs, especially alternative routes, to provide comprehensive training in core domains including: **evidence-based literacy instruction** (systematic phonics, explicit comprehension strategies, structured interventions for decoding difficulties); **positive behavior support** (functional behavior assessment, PBIS, self-monitoring strategies, reinforcement systems); **inclusive instructional practices** (differentiated instruction, UDL, co-teaching, accommodations aligned to IEP goals); **assessment and progress monitoring** (curriculum-based measurement, formative assessment, data-based instructional decisions); and **systematic instruction** for students with extensive support needs (task analysis, response prompting, error correction).

## **4. Maintain licensure safeguards for special education to comply with IDEA**

Evidence shows that candidates entering through emergency or abbreviated pathways often receive less supervision, have weaker instructional skills, and are more likely to leave the profession (Nougaret et al., 2005; Podolsky et al., 2016; Rosenberg et al., 2023). Federal law requires full certification and prohibits states from relying on emergency or provisional licensure for special education teachers. If federal oversight and accountability weakens, states should avoid policies that place unprepared teachers in special education roles and should ensure alternative routes provide a clear, time-bound path to full certification aligned with IDEA's personnel standards.

### **5. Consider apprenticeship models as experimental and mandate relevant data collection to establish effectiveness.**

States considering apprenticeships must acknowledge that they are implementing an untested model with potentially high-stakes consequences for students with disabilities. Without rigorous evaluation data on teacher effectiveness, student outcomes, IEP quality, or legal compliance, apprenticeships should be considered experimental. At minimum, states should mandate data collection on graduate retention, instructional quality using validated observation instruments, student achievement and IEP goal attainment, implementation fidelity of evidence-based practices, and equity impacts to determine whether apprenticeships concentrate underprepared teachers in high-need schools. Until this evidence base develops, states should proceed cautiously and ensure apprenticeship programs include the intensive support structures and comprehensive preparation requirements that research suggests are necessary for teacher effectiveness.

### **6. Couple certification reforms with equally robust investments in working conditions**

States should consider the following practices to support the special education workforce:

- **Reduced caseloads for novice special educators**, particularly those entering through abbreviated preparation routes, to allow time for learning on the job while managing reasonable workloads;
- **Protected planning time** sufficient for IEP development, progress monitoring, and coordination with related service providers;
- **Structured collaboration opportunities** with experienced special educators and general education colleagues to reduce isolation and promote professional learning;
- **Adequate training for leadership:** Administrative leadership trained in special education compliance, instructional practices, and the unique demands of special educators' roles.

- **Adequate instructional resources and materials** aligned to evidence-based practices;
- **Manageable compliance systems** that streamline paperwork without sacrificing legal protections for students;
- **Ongoing professional development** that builds expertise in evidence-based practices, behavior management, and collaboration.

## Conclusion

As federal oversight of IDEA potentially weakens, states face critical decisions about special education teacher preparation and licensure that will shape educational opportunities for students with disabilities for years to come. The evidence reviewed in this brief points to a clear path forward: states must resist the temptation to view loosening certification requirements as a simple solution to workforce shortages. While alternative pathways to certification can play a role in addressing immediate staffing needs, research consistently demonstrates that the quality of clinical preparation—including supervised field experiences, evidence-based coursework, and mentorship from effective cooperating teachers—matters significantly for teacher effectiveness and student outcomes. Apprenticeship models, despite their growing popularity, lack sufficient empirical evidence to justify widespread adoption without robust safeguards and rigorous evaluation. The evidence on registered teacher apprenticeships in special education is still emerging: these models appear promising as recruitment strategies, particularly for paraeducators and other community-rooted candidates, but they are not yet supported by a robust impact literature demonstrating superior effectiveness or student outcomes. States that prioritize speed of entry over comprehensive preparation risk placing underprepared teachers in special education classrooms, potentially compromising students' legal rights to appropriate services and evidence-based instruction.

Equally important, this evidence review underscores that improving teacher preparation alone will not solve the special education staffing crisis. Research overwhelmingly shows that working conditions—manageable caseloads, adequate planning time, administrative support, collaborative opportunities, and sufficient resources—are stronger predictors of retention than preparation pathway. States that invest in faster routes to the classroom while neglecting the structural conditions that drive experienced teachers out of the profession are simply accelerating turnover rather than building a sustainable workforce. Moving forward, state leaders must ground their policy decisions in rigorous evidence, maintain meaningful licensure standards that comply with IDEA's personnel requirements, treat untested approaches like apprenticeships as experimental with mandatory

evaluation, and couple any certification reforms with equally robust investments in the working conditions that enable special educators to remain in the profession. For students with disabilities, the stakes are too high, and the consequences too lasting to proceed otherwise.

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