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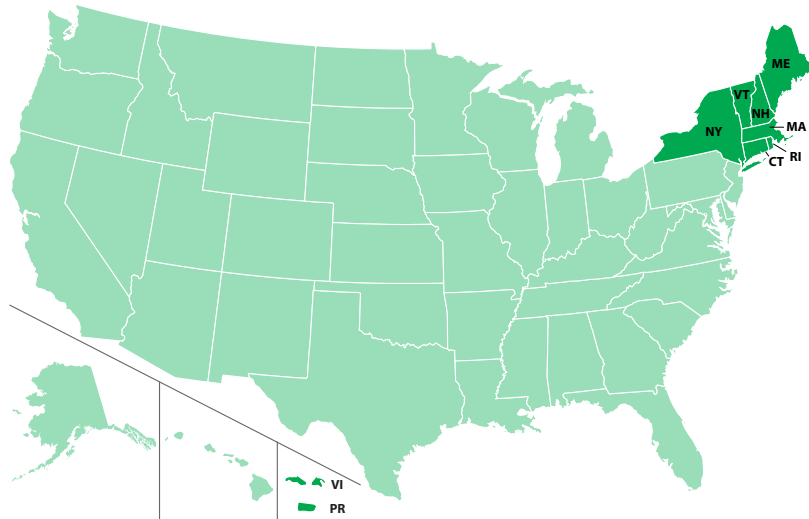
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Issues & Answers is an ongoing series of reports from short-term Fast Response Projects conducted by the regional educational laboratories on current education issues of importance at local, state, and regional levels. Fast Response Project topics change to reflect new issues, as identified through lab outreach and requests for assistance from policymakers and educators at state and local levels and from communities, businesses, parents, families, and youth. All Issues & Answers reports meet Institute of Education Sciences standards for scientifically valid research.

July 2010

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This report is available on the regional educational laboratory web site at <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs>.

Do states have certification requirements for preparing general education teachers to teach students with disabilities? Experience in the Northeast and Islands Region

This report on teacher certification requirements in the Northeast and Islands Region finds that eight of the nine jurisdictions require some coursework in teaching students with disabilities for initial licensure of general education teachers.

With more than half of children with disabilities being educated in the general education classroom, and with federal education law requiring improved learning outcomes for these students, preparing general education teachers to work effectively with all students is critical. This report on teacher certification requirements in the nine Northeast and Islands Region jurisdictions finds that eight of them require some coursework in teaching students with disabilities for initial licensure of general education teachers. It finds commonalities and differences both in how jurisdictions require general education teacher candidates to develop knowledge in special education and in the specific knowledge and skills required as part of teacher preparation.

Specifically:

- Four of the nine jurisdictions require teacher candidates to take a prescribed number of credit hours focused on special education or teaching students with exceptionalities; four others require approved professional preparation programs to demonstrate that teacher candidates develop knowledge and skills in this area, but do not specify how to meet the requirements.
- Two jurisdictions require general education teacher candidates to spend at least part of their student teaching experience working in classrooms with students with disabilities.
- Five jurisdictions use professional teaching standards to outline the knowledge, skills, and practices required of general education teachers to teach students with disabilities. All beginning and continuing teachers are expected to meet specific standards for teacher preparation, some of which address teaching students with disabilities.
- Eight special education content areas for teacher preparation were required by one or more jurisdictions in the region: understand the growth and development of

exceptional children; understand instructional design; adapt, differentiate, accommodate, or modify instruction; participate in field experiences with students with disabilities; prepare, implement, or evaluate Individualized Education Programs;¹ seek support or collaboration to assist students with disabilities; understand the legal and historical foundations of special education; and identify student learning differences.

Researchers used three data sources for the study: publicly available state education agency documents related to certification requirements for general education teachers, the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification's web-based database of state certification requirements, and interviews with a state certification official in each of the nine jurisdictions.

State education agencies continue to review and update policies on teacher certification in teaching students with disabilities in the general education classroom. All the jurisdictions examined either have some requirements in place or are adopting such policies. Further research on how institutions of higher education interpret and apply state policy guidance

and on the extent to which state requirements are effective in ensuring adequate preparation of general education teachers to teach students with disabilities could be beneficial to state policymakers.

The study was requested by education policymakers and practitioners in the Northeast and Islands Region, who expressed interest in learning more about teacher preparation requirements for initial licensure of general education teachers that prepare educators to teach students with disabilities. Specifically, education officials from Maine and Puerto Rico requested information on current policies and pending changes to requirements, along with more detail on the specific content or program of study required by state education agencies.

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Note

1. An Individualized Education Program is a written statement for each child with a disability that includes the child's current levels of academic achievement and functional performance, measurable annual goals, the services to be provided, an explanation of how the child will participate in the general education classroom, and a statement of accommodations for measuring achievement.