Highlighting PIC Work...

The Personnel Improvement Center (PIC) has been working with state and local Early Intervention (EI) programs in Texas to improve recruitment and retention of EI personnel, including forming distance education cohorts for speech-language pathologists (SLPs), helping localities establish Facebook and Twitter accounts and developing a private online community facilitated by EI experts to support EI personnel throughout the state.

About Us...

We are the National Center to Improve Recruitment and Retention of Qualified Personnel for Children with Disabilities (Personnel Improvement Center), a federally funded technical assistance and dissemination project, created on October 1, 2008 and maintained through cooperative agreement, H325C080001 between the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) and the U.S. Department of Education.

IN THIS BRIEF...

You will learn recruitment and retention strategies that will enable your state and local programs to address shortages of EI personnel.

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF QUALIFIED EARLY INTERVENTION (EI) PERSONNEL

by Eve Müller, Ph.D.

The recruitment and retention of qualified early intervention (EI) personnel remains a challenge throughout many regions of the nation. In response to this challenge, states and localities are employing a range of innovative strategies. Based on examples drawn from around the country, including examples provided to us by the National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center (NECTAC) as part of a review of Part C Annual Performance Reports (APRs), as well as the Personnel Improvement Center’s (PIC) work in Texas, this practice brief provides suggestions for strategies to improve the recruitment and retention of EI personnel, including related service providers such as occupational therapists (OTs), physical therapists (PTs) and speech-language pathologists (SLPs).

RECRUITMENT

Financial Incentives

Studies show that money talks and financial incentives continue to be an effective means of attracting qualified EI personnel. Two of the most popular approaches are tuition reimbursement and loan forgiveness programs. For example:

- Delaware’s Speech/Language Incentive Program provides loan forgiveness for graduating students who work in public schools or EI programs.
- Florida First Steps offers a full-tuition reimbursement to students enrolled in the four course Infant Toddler Developmental Specialist (ITDS) certification program on the condition that they agree to work for one year per course in the First Step system.
- Several Texas EI programs offer tuition reimbursement for staff to obtain a Master’s degree and SLP license, provided they continue work for the program following graduation.

States and localities are also increasingly offering salary supplements for EI personnel as a way of competing with salary/benefits packages available in the private sector.

- Hawaii recently approved salary increases and recruitment bonuses for contracted EI programs serving more rural areas, areas with personnel shortages and programs serving “at risk” communities. The state is also working to use a “hire above minimum salary” option for EI programs with long-standing vacancies.
- Local Texas EI programs, with support from the state, are able to offer therapist salaries competitive with those of community home health agencies.
Other approaches include revamping pay scales for related service providers or revising the manner in which services are reimbursed. For example:

- Mississippi altered its rate structure to include a consultation rate, an evaluation rate and higher rates for services provided in natural environments. Rates for therapists were made equal across disciplines and the state provides interim reimbursement for providers waiting on third-party payment.
- California continues to use a specialized therapeutic service code to waive standard rates.
- South Carolina revised its fee schedule and reduced the interval between billing and payment.

Additional financial incentives include the following:

- California offers reduced interest rate or no-money-down mortgages on housing loans for SLPs who reside and teach in less desirable areas.
- Missouri recently initiated a two-part travel reimbursement where providers bill monthly for mileage and, if they travel more than 60 miles one way, they may also bill for up to one hour of service at the regular program rate.
- Mississippi offers per hour rates for travel, training and overnight travel expenses.
- The Virginia Department of Education offers signing bonuses for qualified SLPs and some districts pay professional dues, reimburse for professional development and cover relocation expenses.
- The EI program in San Antonio, Texas offers mini-laptops and cell phone stipends.

Florida’s Early Steps program is developing a recruitment insert to be included in a packet of materials sent to all newly licensed therapists in the state.

North Carolina’s state-level PT consultant speaks at higher education programs throughout the state and sponsors displays at state and regional conferences for related service providers.

Texas’ EI website has a section on career opportunities that includes information about what EI specialists do as well as a link to online job listings across the state.

Mississippi does direct mailings to pediatricians, licensed child care facilities, and licensed OTs, PTs, and SLPs; as well as placing periodic ads in local newspapers.

The PIC is working with several local EI programs in Texas to help them create Facebook and Twitter accounts to promote recruitment and retention of EI personnel.

### Expanding the Local Workforce

Some states and localities are addressing personnel shortages by attempting to expand the workforce.

- A rural EI program in Missouri conducted a pilot program that included agreements between the EI agency and local hospitals to share OTs, PTs and SLPs. The state reimbursed the EI agency to hold monthly team meetings to coordinate resources and ensure the quality of services provided in natural environments.
- Texas local EI programs provide placement sites for therapy and EI specialist interns as a means of promoting recruitment to local EI programs.
- Virginia recruits therapists with full-time jobs in other arenas to work evenings, weekends and summers.

### Contracted Recruitment Services

Sometimes it makes more sense to contract with a private recruitment service than to handle recruitment “in house.” States and localities report that contracted recruitment services are often an effective means of reaching both EI specialists and related service providers.

### Outreach and Media

States and localities rely on both traditional means of outreach as well as newer methods employing the Internet and new social media. For example:

- Florida’s Early Steps program is developing a recruitment insert to be included in a packet of materials sent to all newly licensed therapists in the state.
- North Carolina’s state-level PT consultant speaks at higher education programs throughout the state and sponsors displays at state and regional conferences for related service providers.
- Texas’ EI website has a section on career opportunities that includes information about what EI specialists do as well as a link to online job listings across the state.
- Mississippi does direct mailings to pediatricians, licensed child care facilities, and licensed OTs, PTs, and SLPs; as well as placing periodic ads in local newspapers.
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Texas purchased a subscription to an online recruiting service, Absolutely Healthcare (www.healthjobsusa.com), a large web-based healthcare job site. This subscription allows all local EI programs to post their job openings.

Maine purchased subscriptions to www.Jobsinme.com so that local EI programs can access the service at a reduced cost.

**RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF QUALIFIED EARLY INTERVENTION PERSONNEL**

**RETENTION**

**Mentoring and Induction**

Mentoring and induction programs are an effective means of improving retention of education personnel and EI programs are increasingly offering mentorship opportunities in addition to training and orientation programs. For example:

- The Texas EI program requires staff to complete a comprehensive training module. Texas is in the process of developing online trainings and offering more webinars as alternatives to face-to-face professional development. All EI specialists (excluding the licensed staff) are required to have mentors and receive one hour of supervision per week while they are completing their training program.

With support from the PIC, eight local EI programs in Texas are developing a private online community for EI personnel, including related service providers, so that EI personnel can share challenges and solutions to issues they encounter while providing home based services. This community will be facilitated by several experts in the delivery of EI services. Once the pilot is complete, the online community will be expanded to include all of Texas’ EI programs.

**Addressing Working Conditions**

Addressing working conditions is an important way of increasing retention of EI personnel. EI programs are placing limits on caseloads and/or adopting a primary service provider model of service delivery as a way of using personnel more efficiently.

- Mississippi is promoting the use of a “transdisciplinary” or primary service provider model.
- In an effort to reduce workload, Richardson, Texas’ EI program recently converted to a service coordination model so staff can provide either service coordination or direct services, but not both.
- Virginia is working on getting all EI providers qualified as Medicaid providers in order to promote a team-based model and enable third-party funding.

Another means of extending services to rural areas without overtaxing EI personnel is telepractice/telehealth. For example:

- Alaska recently piloted a telepractice program to provide speech and language therapy to young children in remote parts of the state. The state plans to pilot a second telehealth program that will include an OT and EI Specialist as well as an SLP.

Other ways of addressing working conditions include reducing paperwork, providing administrative support for scheduling appointments, organizing and filing medical records and handling data entry for all clinical activities.

**STATE-LEVEL INFRASTRUCTURE**

A comprehensive approach to recruitment and retention is always preferable to a piecemeal approach and some states have created mechanisms to develop and implement a systematic response to shortages of qualified EI personnel.

- In 2008, the Alaska Infant Learning Program established the Early Intervention Professional Development Committee with the goal of developing an EI professional development plan. This comprehensive plan, which identifies strategies for recruiting and retaining EI personnel, can be found at [http://www.hss.state.ak.us/ocs/InfantLearning/resources/pdf/2009-developmentplan.pdf](http://www.hss.state.ak.us/ocs/InfantLearning/resources/pdf/2009-developmentplan.pdf). In response to this plan, the Alaska legislature provides $300,000 each year in scholarships to help EI service providers become fully qualified.
- Delaware’s former governor requested that a taskforce conduct a study of shortages of licensed SLPs in special education and EI and develop recommendations to address that shortage.
This practice brief is part of a series intended to provide examples of how states and localities throughout the nation are employing recruitment and retention strategies to address personnel shortages in the area of special education, early intervention and related services. The series is produced by the Personnel Improvement Center (PIC) and highlights recruitment and retention efforts in states and localities supported by the PIC. There are no copyright restrictions on these practice briefs, but the PIC requests that proper citation be used.

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