

# The Special Education Teacher Crisis

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## Introduction

California has a lack of special education teachers due to high attrition and turnover rates. Special education teachers are 72% more likely to change schools than other teachers, affecting students and staff (Espel). Low salaries are a major reason special education teachers leave, as funding issues make it hard to hire and retain qualified teachers (Contemporary Issues in Special Ed, Billingsley et al.). SPED teachers often work 15-20 unpaid hours weekly to complete mandatory paperwork (Education Minnesota Research Brief, Katkus). High turnover rates affect teacher quality 9% leave after the first year, and both highly trained and uncertified teachers are most at risk of leaving (Grant, Billingsley, Lambert, Miller et al). Training gaps remain an issue, as teachers need specialized skills beyond academics, yet only 60% of their training aligns with what they actually need in the field (Grant, Davis).

## Methodology

- This study took a **case study** approach
  - Collected **qualitative** and **quantitative**
  - Focused on **past training experiences** and **current challenges** in the field. With a goal to determine whether special education training needs improvement.
- Survey specifics:
  - Took around **5-10 minutes** to complete
  - Sent online through email
  - Shared by Michael Aviv and other **Bay Area** special education teachers
  - Survey itself was on Surveymonkey
- Participants were informed of their **anonymity** at the beginning of the survey.
- All data was stored in SurveyMonkey and a private Google Doc, accessible only to the researcher.
- Coding will identify key themes and important responses.
- Descriptive statistics will be used to quantify and interpret the data.

## What do you Think are the Most Important Skills That Special Education Teachers Need to Succeed?

Teacher #1	Classroom Management, Effectively working with parents and paraprofessionals
Teacher #2	Scaffolding
Teacher #3	Patience
Teacher #4	Flexibility, patience, goal-oriented, academic understanding of many subjects, time-management
Teacher #5	Communication, Organization, A desire to problem solve, a heart to serve and help others, and a sense of humor
Teacher #6	I think teachers need to know about multi-sensory teaching as well as developmental phases in learning.
Teacher #7	Empathy, logic, patience. And a credential, which requires competency in special education and disability laws
Teacher #8	Administrative skills (planning and executing paperwork/meetings) unfortunately seems to be the most important skill even though teaching should be the most important.
Teacher #9	Working in the field with special education students of all disability backgrounds.
Teacher #10	Knowledge of curriculum, experience with addressing behavioral challenges, classroom and curriculum organization



## Data and Findings

### General response summary:

- There were 11 total responses but one was not a certified SPED teacher so only 10/11 responses were included in the data summary

Question: How well did the credentialing process teach those skills? (Scale of 1-10)

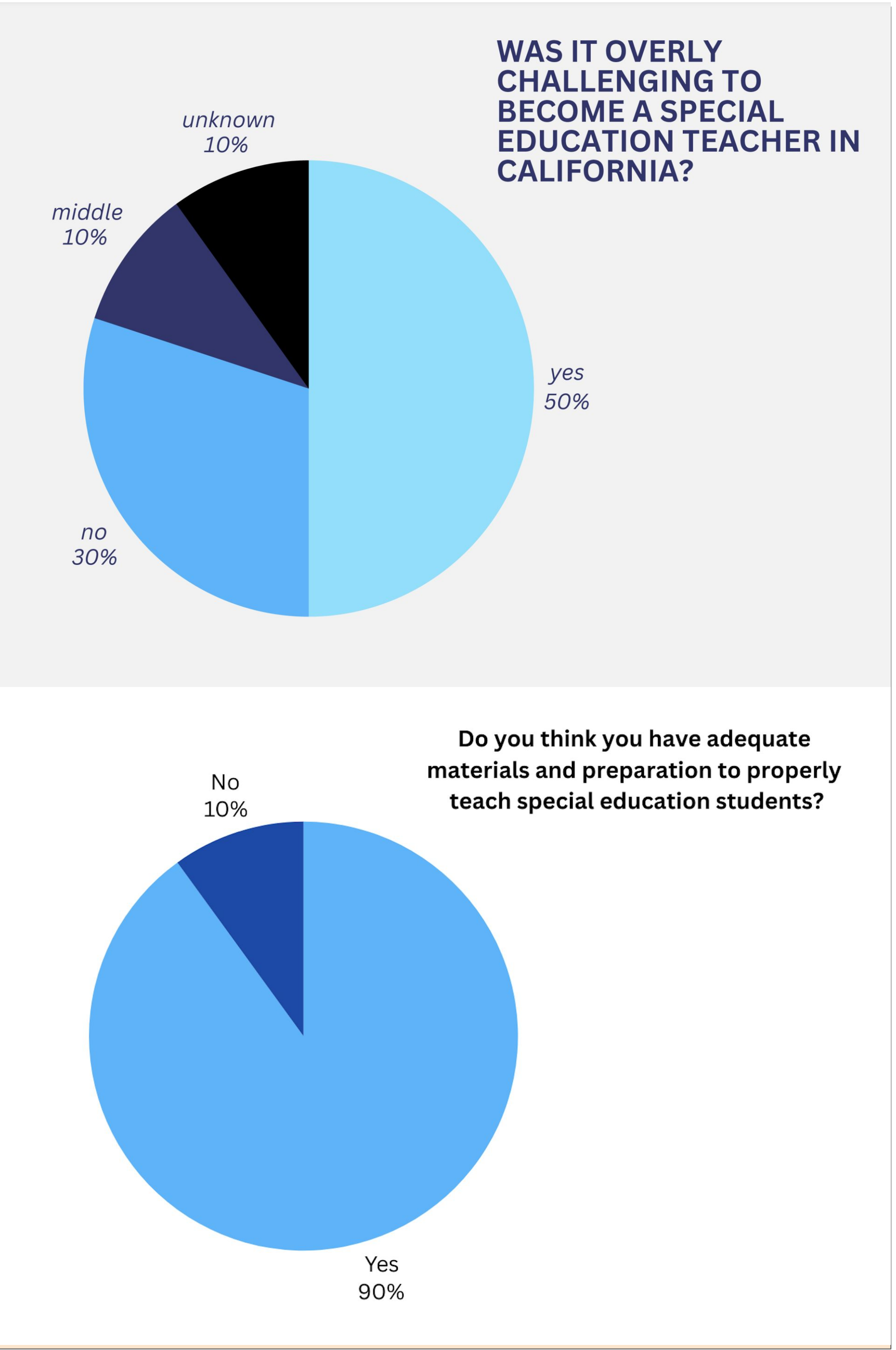
- Most common responses:
  - 5/10 with 3 responses and 7/10 also with 3 responses
  - The highest rating a 9/10 was given by a non SPED teacher so it should be ignored from the data

Question: “Are there any topics or skills that should receive more emphasis in training?”

- Most common responses:
  - Time management, preparation, and collaboration between staff

Question: “What materials and preparation could be improved?”

- Responses:
  - 2 teachers suggested more money for materials and activities



## Analysis and Next Steps

Although no decisive conclusion can be made due to the small sample size, we can still speculate using the data.

The survey responses show:

- SPED teachers believe they are somewhat prepared by the credentialing programs
- Most Teachers said they were either 50% or 70% prepared
- Improvement can be made with:
  - Clearer guidelines
  - support systems
  - Emphasis on communication and organization skills
- 90% of the SPED teachers surveyed reported that they did have adequate materials
- This implies that in the Bay Area teachers are given adequate resources and funding to run their classrooms.

For anyone intending to explore if teacher training is a reason for the special education teacher shortage:

- Expand on the **sample size**.
- Get a more **diverse** set of people
- Furthermore a **long term study** tracking teachers over their **first five years** could prove helpful.
- Asking teachers their opinions on credentialing during and after those five years could also provide a greater insight into California's credentialing program as a whole.

## Citations and Acknowledgments

