

Futures Project: Preparing Special Educators to Use Evidence-Based Practices to Support Desirable Futures for Students with Significant Disabilities

US Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services

Start date: 9/16/08

End date: 7/15/12 Grant #: H325K080217

Principal Investigator RUTH FALCO

Phone: 503-724-4486

Email: falcor@pdx.edu

Purpose: The Futures Project prepares 60 highly qualified special educators at the master's degree level, including at least 18 culturally and linguistically diverse special educators, to use research-based teaching strategies to improve progress for elementary and secondary school age children and youth with significant and multiple disabilities, including cognitive impairments (severe mental retardation), autism, orthopedic impairments, and traumatic brain injury. The Futures Project recruits diverse paraprofessionals and others who are committed to providing high quality instruction to students with significant disabilities. Mentoring of participants by Futures Project staff and cooperating professionals supports successful program completion for all.

More than 65 percent of grant funds will be used to support candidates to complete their special educator initial licensure and their master's degree. First, participants will complete PSU competencies required for all special educators, including competencies aligned with the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) Individualized General Curriculum Standards competencies and aligned with CEC Individualized Independence Curriculum Standards. Participants will also add specific competencies focused on serving students with significant and multiple disabilities through Futures Project seminars, advanced Futures Project coursework, field experience activities, and on-the-job activities.

Full-time participants will meet Oregon and Washington requirements for highly qualified special educators and be fully licensed at the end of four terms (full-time) or seven terms (part-time). Following their licensure, participants receive support in finding employment in a position serving students with significant disabilities. During their first year of teaching, graduates of the licensure program complete their master's degree, focusing on advanced competencies to serve students with significant and multiple disabilities, and complete an Action Research Project. The Action Research Project will demonstrate how the beginning teacher has applied research-based practices in serving students with significant disabilities and improved students' performance in both general and independent curriculum areas. After completing the master's degree, graduates will participate in an on-going, Futures Project Collaborative Learning Community to support research-based practices in serving children and youth with significant and multiple disabilities.

Methods: Futures Project involves collaboration with local education agencies (LEAs) who are committed to the use of research-based practices, effective instruction in core academic areas,

and high quality access to all aspects of the general education curriculum for students with significant disabilities. The LEAs are located in urban, suburban, and rural communities in Oregon and Southwest Washington. Futures Project collaborates with these LEAs to provide effective field experiences and student teaching experiences, to prepare current teachers serving students with significant disabilities who are not fully qualified, and to place all graduates in positions to serve students with significant disabilities after they complete licensure. Futures Project will also collaborate with LEAs to provide extensive mentoring during participants' first year of teaching students with significant disabilities, as well as provide ongoing mentoring and an online, Collaborative Learning Community to support graduates during their subsequent years of teaching. The Collaborative Learning Community will also provide ongoing support to personnel in collaborating LEAs, in order to support their knowledge and skills in research-based practices for students with significant and multiple disabilities and thus maintain high-quality field experiences and employment settings for Futures Project participants.