

BREAKTHROUGH RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT

FILLING THE **TEACHER GAP** FOR STUDENTS WITH SEVERE DISABILITIES

The state of Illinois, and the nation, have a serious shortage of teachers prepared to teach students with severe disabilities. Here's a program that is preparing and placing such teachers in the areas they are most needed.

PROVIDING ACCESS WHERE IT IS NEEDED

There is a chronic shortage of teachers who are adequately prepared to teach students with severe intellectual disabilities, autism, and multiple disabilities. Special education ranks No. 1 in under-produced teachers in the state, and it has the greatest number of teacher vacancies—over half of them in Chicago. The College of Education, under the leadership of Special Education Professor Stacy Dymond, has been filling that sizeable gap for many years through two U.S. Department of Education grants totaling over \$2 million (2009-2018). The grants, *Accessing Curriculum in Educational Settings for all Students (Project Access)* and *Innovative ACCESS to Curriculum for Students with Severe Disabilities*, fund tuition costs and support the College's presence in the Chicago area by funding a grant coordinator to work with Chicago Public Schools with whom the College has partnered for many years on this funding. Since 2009, when Dymond assumed her role with the project, 90 full-time students (56 undergraduates and

34 graduate students) and 40 part-time students have taken part in the program.

INCREASING THE NUMBER OF TEACHERS

"We have increased the number of teachers who are qualified to work with kids with severe disabilities, filling the shortages in our state," Dymond says. "We have 30 teachers in Chicago Public Schools who have obtained their advanced preparation in severe disabilities, and we have nine others around the state who have done likewise. And we have 66 undergraduates and graduate students who have exited with their initial certification and added expertise in severe disabilities." The program includes a service-learning project in Champaign area high schools, where student teachers learn about teaching students with severe disabilities in a setting that includes kids without disabilities. Through an externship, students go to Chicago to work with students with severe disabilities in an urban, high-need school district. The part-



STACY DYMOND

Professor, Special Education
sdymond@illinois.edu

time students are made up primarily of CPS teachers who take part in a blended program that allows them to teach in Chicago, and take a combination of online and face-to-face classes from faculty based in Champaign and Chicago. "I hope this leads to improved instruction for kids with severe disabilities, and to improved learning for those kids," Dymond says. "We also hope that it leads to students being included in more education with their peers without disabilities. And we hope that teachers become more confident and are able to assume greater leadership roles in their schools related to educating students with severe disabilities."

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LEARN MORE

Learn more at education.illinois.edu/sped or contact Dymond at sdymond@illinois.edu.



EDUCATION AT ILLINOIS

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The College of Education, under the leadership of Professor Stacy Dymond, has been filling the special education teacher gap for many years now through over **\$2 million** in grants from the **U.S. Department of Education** (2009 - 2018). The grants, *Accessing Curriculum in Educational Settings for all Students (Project Access)* and *Innovative ACCESS to Curriculum for Students with Severe Disabilities*, fund tuition costs and support the College's presence in the Chicago area by funding a grant coordinator to work with teachers in the Chicago Public Schools

BUREAU OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AT ILLINOIS
1310 South 6th Street, Champaign, Illinois 61820
(217) 333-3023 | ber@education.illinois.edu

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