



2026

Filling the Gap

The Future of Special Education Staffing



2026

Special Education Staffing Industry Report

Staffing shortages remain a pressing issue for school districts across the country, particularly for special education and student support roles. This report presents current insights into the education talent landscape, highlighting key staffing trends, regional market dynamics, and practical considerations for district leaders navigating ongoing workforce challenges.

All data presented in this report is sourced from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), and Lightcast Analyst. These findings reflect up-to-date and comprehensive labor market trends affecting school-based roles.

Who is BlazerWorks?

BlazerWorks is an education-only Managed Service Provider (MSP) built to simplify education staffing, reduce compliance risk, and ensure your critical roles are filled so students receive the consistent, high-quality services they deserve.

With over **30 years of experience in special education staffing and leadership by former educators and administrators** who believe in student-first solutions, BlazerWorks is uniquely positioned to deliver unmatched recruiting power, expert guidance, and meaningful support for districts, school professionals, and the students they serve.

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A Quick Look Into

Special Education Staffing

The nation's education workforce is under increasing strain as demand for specialized student services continues to rise. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), and Lightcast Analyst reveal ongoing shortages across critical roles—including Special Education Teachers, Speech-Language Pathologists, School Psychologists, and Behavioral Specialists.

Diminishing Talent Pipeline

With nearly one in five education professionals nearing retirement within the next five years, schools are facing mounting challenges in sustaining and replenishing their workforce.

Adding to the pressure, the supply of new educators entering the field remains limited. U.S. universities produce only about 25,000–30,000 newly licensed special education teachers each year—far short of the roughly 46,000 needed annually to replace those leaving or retiring. This imbalance continues to deepen the strain on districts already struggling to meet rising student needs.

The Solution

To address these challenges, school districts are turning to Managed Service Providers (MSPs), like BlazerWorks.

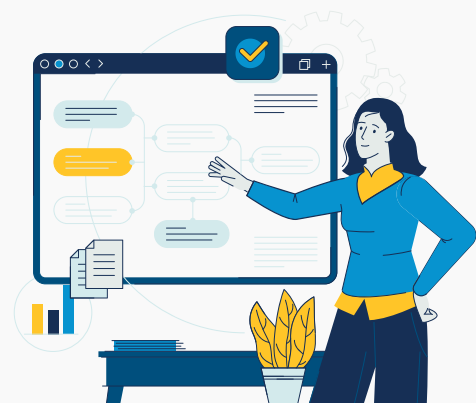
With a nationwide network of specialized education staffing partners, BlazerWorks helps districts maintain continuous special education support and services for their students.

Growing Demand for Specialized Support

The number of students needing special education services continues to rise nationwide. During the 2022–2023 school year, approximately 7.5 million U.S. students between the ages of 3 and 21 received services under IDEA—representing about 15% of the total student population.

Competitive Labor Market

Heightened competition for qualified professionals has created additional difficulties for school districts to fill specialized roles. During the 2022–2023 school year, 21% of schools reported at least one vacancy in special education, while more than half—55%—indicated significant challenges in hiring special education teachers.



Turnover and Vacancies

Increasing Turnover in Special Education Roles

Special education roles experience some of the highest attrition rates across the education sector. Approximately **15% of special education teachers leave their schools each year**—nearly double the turnover rate of their general education counterparts—and nearly half depart the profession within five years. This persistent turnover is driven by factors such as **burnout, challenging working conditions, inadequate compensation, and limited institutional support**.

The pattern extends beyond teachers; related service providers, including speech-language pathologists and school psychologists, also experience overwhelming workloads and burnout that lead to attrition.

Recurring Vacancies

At the start of 2023–2024, roughly **70% of schools reported at least one special education teacher vacancy**. Public schools began 2024–2025 with an average of six open teaching positions and filled only about 79% before the year began. Special education had one of the lowest fill rates—just 77% of roles were filled by fully certified teachers, leaving **nearly a quarter unfilled or staffed by less-qualified personnel**.

Specialized support positions often remain **open for months**, with job postings for SLPs, OTs/PTs, and school psychologists staying active far longer than general teaching roles.

Overall, special education positions have some of the **longest time-to-fill rates** in the education workforce, especially in underserved regions.



What is Driving This Turnover?

Across special education roles, several shared factors drive high turnover. Challenging working conditions and inadequate compensation create a continuous cycle of vacancies, especially among support staff (including aides, SLP assistants, and interpreters) where **low wages and limited training accelerate attrition**. Additional contributors include:

- Chronic burnout from **large caseloads and excessive paperwork**
- Insufficient administrative **support**
- Professional **isolation**
- High pressure to meet **legal compliance** requirements
- **Student loads** that exceed recommended ratios

Student Impact

Service and Evaluation Gaps

Federal reviews have shown that many students faced delays in their initial special education evaluations due to large backlogs. The U.S. Government Accountability Office also found that students often received IEP services late—or not at all—largely because of special education staffing shortages. These delays can lead to **missed early-intervention opportunities, widening academic gaps, and increased frustration** for students and families.

Behavioral Incidents

Understaffed schools often see more **classroom disruptions, disciplinary referrals, and even bullying or violence** due to limited supervision and support. With too few adults to address students' emotional and behavioral needs, small issues can quickly escalate.

In contrast, schools with adequate ratios of psychologists and counselors report better behavior and fewer suspensions—yet **only 8% of districts meet the recommended 1:500 psychologist-to-student ratio**, leaving most students without sufficient mental health support.



Compliance & Legal Risk Indicators

IEP Implementation Gaps

Many administrators acknowledge that staffing shortages have led to **delays or lapses in delivering services required** under students' Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), despite federal mandates. Advocacy groups caution that when a student's IEP cannot be fully implemented—such as when no interpreter or therapist is available—the district may be in violation of its obligation to provide a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). **Recent court rulings have reinforced this standard, confirming that personnel shortages do not exempt schools from meeting IEP requirements.**

Audit Findings & Federal Oversight

Recent federal audits, including those conducted by the U.S. Department of Education and the Government Accountability Office (GAO), have revealed that many schools serving students with disabilities **lack essential personnel**—such as school nurses, counselors, and psychologists. These persistent staffing and data gaps have drawn increased national attention. In 2024, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights held hearings on the nationwide shortage of special educators and support staff, concluding that these deficits **directly undermine students' due process rights** under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Speech-Language Pathologists

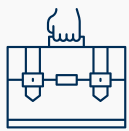
Speech-Language Pathologists (SLPs) play a vital role in supporting students' speech, language, and communication development within school settings. As demand continues to grow and qualified professionals remain in short supply, understanding the current dynamics of the SLP workforce has become increasingly critical.

Nationwide Overview



113,229

Active Job Seekers
(Matching Online Profiles)



171,773

SLPs Currently Employed



7,204

Competing Employers



186,942

Yearly Job Postings



~30,000

SLPs Approaching Retirement Age



13.4%

Projected Job Growth (2024-2029)

Staffing Challenges

Speech therapy roles are among the hardest to fill, with **high competition** from education and healthcare sectors. Extended vacancies can **delay speech evaluations**, disrupt IEP services, and contribute to literacy and social-emotional challenges, especially in early elementary students.

Approach to Hiring SLPs

Districts can strengthen their future SLP workforce by partnering with graduate programs and offering practicum opportunities that lead to full-time roles.

Retention improves with **manageable caseloads, protected administrative time, collaborative professional networks, and a balance of autonomy and support.**

BlazerWorks helps districts meet these needs by connecting them with qualified SLPs through its nationwide staffing network and reducing administrative burdens like credentialing, timesheets, compliance, and onboarding, allowing schools to focus on student support.

Top SLP Graduate Programs

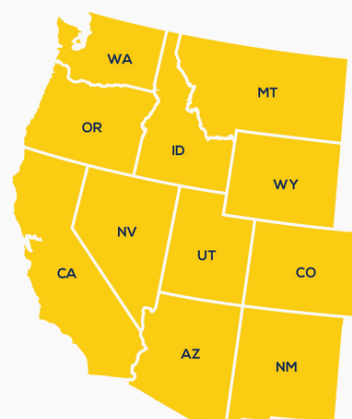
Baylor University
Emerson College
Utah State University

Geographic Workforce Trends

Speech-Language Pathologist

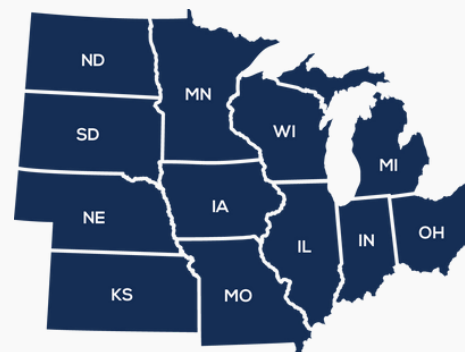
West Region

- Stands out for its competitive compensation, with California's average SLP wage being the highest in the U.S.
- Employment has continued demand and strong projected job growth, often exceeding the national projected growth rate.
- Demand far outpaces supply, creating steep competition.



Midwest Region

- Offers a more cost-effective labor market.
- Reduced competition for attracting candidates, as lower wages may discourage talent from relocating or staying within the region.
- Hiring landscape remains steady, yet growth is constrained by a limited supply of new professionals.



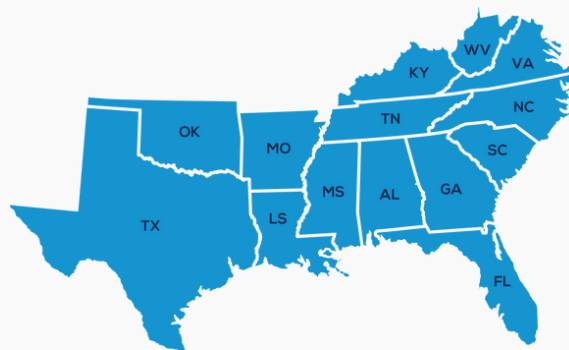
Northeast Region

- Presents a balanced combination of pay and opportunity with average salaries ranging from high \$80K to low \$90K.
- Concentrated hiring strength in New York and New Jersey, employing more than 16,000+ SLPs.
- Moderate job growth, though the talent pool is less extensive than in the South.



South Region

- Remains the largest market in terms of both available talent and hiring demand.
- Median salaries in the South remain well below those in the West
- Compensation gaps lead to retention challenges.



Speech-Language Pathology Assistants

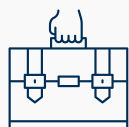
Speech-Language Pathologist Assistants (SLPAs) play a key role in school therapy teams, supporting licensed SLPs and helping deliver high-quality services to students. As demand for speech therapy grows, understanding SLPA workforce supply and employment trends is increasingly important for effective staffing and consistent service delivery.

Nationwide Overview



4,575

Active Job Seekers
(Matching Online Profiles)



107,483

SLPs Currently Employed



1,342

Competing Employers



19,476

Yearly Job Postings



23,000+

SLPs Approaching Retirement Age



5.9%

Projected Job Growth (2024-2029)

Staffing Challenges

SLPAs face high turnover risk due to **low pay, underutilization, and limited autonomy without supervision**. These roles are critical for extending services in districts with SLPA shortages, but underutilization limits their effectiveness. Many schools fail to fully leverage SLPAs' skills, contributing to service backlogs and impacting student support.

Approach to Hiring SLPAs

Districts can grow their SLPA workforce by partnering with **local colleges and implementing structured supervision** aligned with state requirements. Providing clear pathways to full SLP licensure, access to high-quality therapy resources, and inclusion in school-based teams supports long-term retention.

Additionally, investing in **professional development and recognition** fosters a sense of purpose and belonging, boosting job satisfaction and commitment.

BlazerWorks' MSP program supports these efforts by connecting districts with top Speech-Language Pathologist Assistants (SLPAs) through its nationwide network of specialized staffing partners and offering services that ensure high-quality, student-focused support.

Top SLPA Graduate Programs

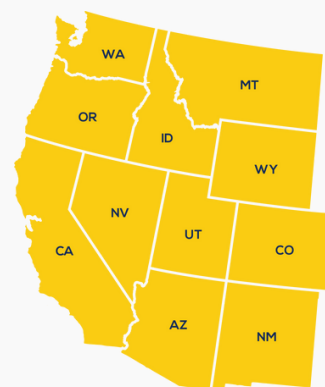
Ivy Tech Community College
Hillsborough Community College
Black River Technical College

Geographic Workforce Trends

Speech-Language Pathology Assistants

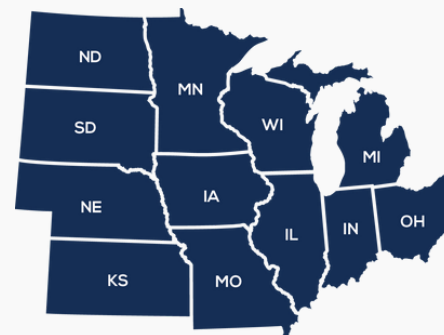
West Region

- High-demand region with rapid growth.
- Ranks highest in compensation and projected job growth.
- Competition for skilled talent is rising as services expand and supply remains tight.



Midwest Region

- Moderate job growth and compensation.
- Provides a steady candidate supply with lower competition compared to coastal regions.
- Predictable recruitment and retention with limited opportunities for expansion.



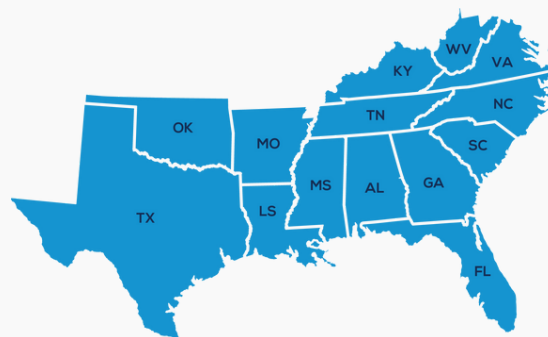
Northeast Region

- Moderate job growth and compensation.
- Supply and demand are well-matched, leading to a balanced hiring-market, though regional shortages still occur.
- Supports consistent staffing approaches, avoiding the unpredictability seen in high-growth regions.



South Region

- Largest employment volume nationwide.
- Despite strong demand, limited pay creates retention pressures, leading many SLPAs to seek opportunities in higher-compensating regions.
- Strong appeal for new hires, but retaining staff long-term proves difficult.



Special Education Teachers

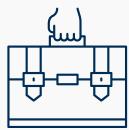
Special Education Teachers play a vital role in providing individualized instruction and support for students with diverse learning needs. Yet, the ongoing national shortage of qualified educators continues to challenge school districts, elevating recruitment and retention as critical priorities.

Nationwide Overview



5,145

Active Job Seekers
(Matching Online Profiles)



222,281

Special Education Teachers
Currently Employed



1,412

Competing Employers



4,709

Yearly Job Postings



47,000+

Special Education Teachers
Approaching Retirement Age



2.6%

Projected Job Growth (2024-2029)



15%

Annual Turnover Among K-12
Special Education Teachers



50%

Special Education Teachers Exit
Workforce Within 5 Years

Staffing Challenges

Special education roles face high turnover—about 15% annually, with 50% leaving within five years—and remain among the hardest to fill, with 74% of public schools reporting significant difficulty filling these vacancies before the start of the 2024–2025 school year. These gaps can lead to **unfulfilled IEPs and potential IDEA violations**.

Approach to Hiring Special Education Teachers

Districts can strengthen their special education workforce with sustainable hiring and retention strategies. “Grow Your Own” programs, residencies, and alternate licensure pathways build long-term pipelines, while early contracts, mentorship, and reduced paperwork support retention. **Career growth and a supportive culture** help prevent burnout and keep staff engaged.

As a trusted Managed Service Provider, BlazerWorks helps districts meet immediate needs while building a more sustainable special education workforce.

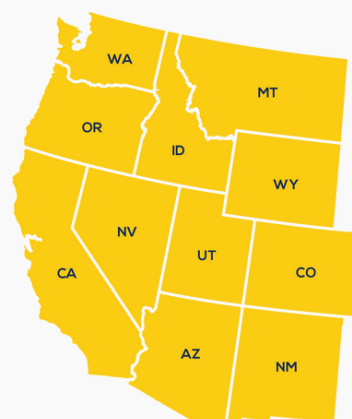
Top Special Education Graduate Programs

Grand Canyon State University
Arizona State University
Ball State University

Geographic Workforce Trends

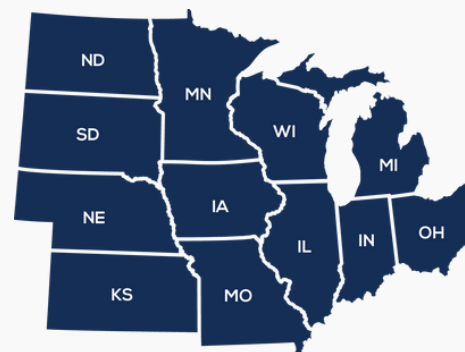
West Region

- Significant shortages persist, with only one-third of Western schools reporting complete staffing in special education roles in 2023.
- Despite offering attractive pay, high demand and limited workforce supply continue to cause chronic understaffing.
- Highly competitive recruitment, especially in rapid expanding urban areas.



Midwest Region

- A lower-cost environment where teachers salaries are commonly 20-30% below Northeast rates.
- Special education staffing remains moderate, with only 59.9% of schools fully staffed in 2023.
- A steady but smaller market, ideal for budget-conscious districts with thin talent supply.



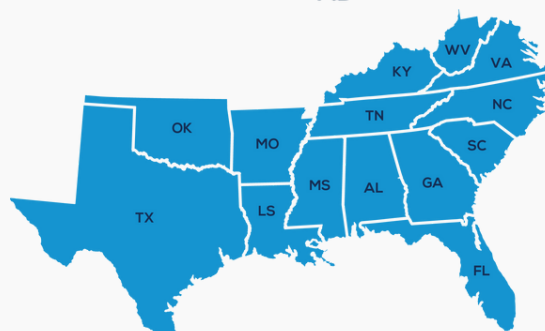
Northeast Region

- High compensation, with districts offering salaries 10-20% above the national median.
- Strong staffing levels, with 88.2% of schools fully staffed, although coverage gaps persist.
- Despite strong pay, talent shortages in the region continue to result in unfilled positions.
- Market is competitive, making early preparation or outside help essential.



South Region

- Largest employment volume, reflecting the region's large student population.
- Special education programs face strain due to high student-to-teacher ratios.
- Despite a large workforce, high-need areas face persistent turnover and staffing churn.



School Psychologists

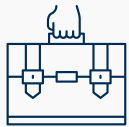
School Psychologists play a critical role in supporting students' emotional, behavioral, and academic growth, especially for those with complex needs. Ongoing nationwide staffing shortages, however, make it increasingly challenging for schools to provide these essential services.

Nationwide Overview



30,143

Active Job Seekers
(Matching Online Profiles)



62,124

School Psychologists
Currently Employed



2,378

Competing Employers



52,376

Yearly Job Postings



14,000+

School Psychologists
Approaching Retirement Age



3.8%

Projected Job Growth (2024-2029)

Top School Psychology Graduate Programs

Liberty University
Southern New Hampshire University
Capella University

Staffing Challenges

School psychologist shortages have left most schools operating well above the recommended **1:500 student-to-psychologist ratio**, with only 8% meeting the standard.

High caseloads lead to evaluation delays and missed early interventions. Isolation and heavy assessment demands drive **burnout and turnover**, worsening staffing challenges.

Approach to Hiring School Psychologists

To address school psychologist vacancies, districts should establish **recruitment pipelines with EdS or NASP-accredited programs** and consider flexible schedules or hybrid assessment models. Smaller districts can manage demand through itinerant or shared-service staffing arrangements.

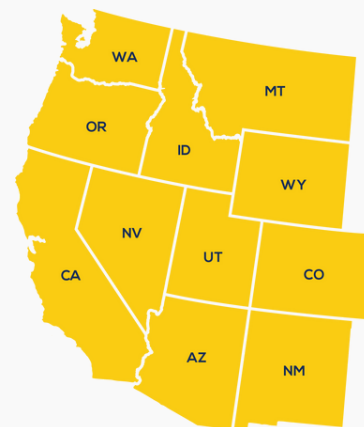
Retention is supported by maintaining recommended student-to-psychologist ratios, providing protected time for proactive mental health initiatives, and funding **continuing education and licensure renewal**.

As a trusted MSP, BlazerWorks helps districts fill critical school psychologist roles while building a stable, long-term mental health workforce.

Geographic Workforce Trends

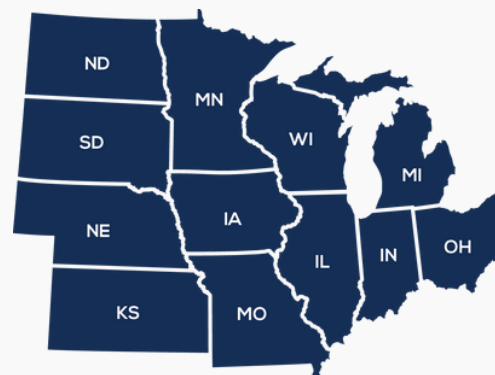
West Region

- Critical staffing gaps, with only 33% of schools employing a full-time school psychologist.
- High demand combined with low supply leads to challenges filling positions, despite strong compensation.
- Student-to-psychologist ratios often fall short of recommendations, placing additional strain on staff.



Midwest Region

- Expected growth is slow, reflecting smaller enrollments and limited budgetary resources.
- Flat candidate pipeline makes proactive hiring and succession planning essential.
- Moderate pay often falls below the national average, limiting appeal to out-of-area candidates.
- Stable workforce, but susceptible to retirement-driven gaps without planning.



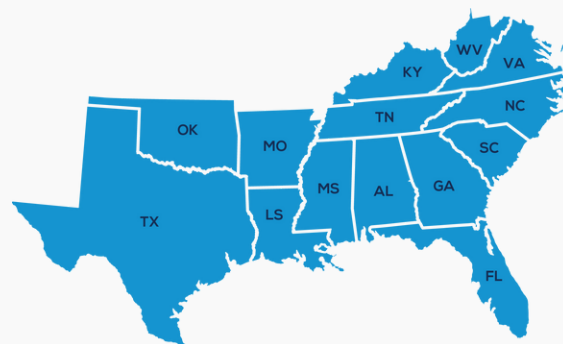
Northeast Region

- Student support ratios are strong, but the market has few candidates actively seeking employment.
- Demand is steady, but expansion lags behind the West.
- Highly competitive hiring, especially in urban areas or for specialized/bilingual roles.



South Region

- Highest employment volume, reflecting regional population and student numbers.
- Lower pay contributes to retention difficulties compared with private practice or higher-paying regions.
- Despite large workforce, underserved rural and urban areas face heightened turnover risk.



Behavior Specialists

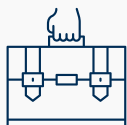
The need for behavioral specialists—including Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBAs), Registered Behavior Technicians (RBTs), and Applied Behavior Analysts (ABAs)—is growing as schools expand mental health and autism support. These positions continue to be among the most difficult to fill, highlighting the competitive nature of the education hiring landscape.

Nationwide Overview



44,307

Active Job Seekers
(Matching Online Profiles)



215,429

Behavior Specialists
Currently Employed



4,519

Competing Employers



36,599

Yearly Job Postings



33,000+

Behavior Specialists
Approaching Retirement Age



10.9%

Projected Job Growth (2024-2029)

Staffing Challenges

While a pool of RBT and ABA Therapist candidates exists, **few meet school-based requirements, and BCBAs remain scarce.** Traditional hiring often leads to vacancies, service gaps, and compliance risks.

Behavior specialists, while not required in all districts, are essential for managing complex behaviors and **reducing classroom disruptions.** Vacancies can lead to more incidents, restraints, and suspensions, as well as **noncompliance** with Functional Behavior Assessments (FBAs) or Behavioral Intervention Plans (BIPs).

Approach to Hiring Behavior Specialists

Prioritizing candidates with ABA, counseling, or social work backgrounds, using scenario-based interviews, and integrating specialists into MTSS frameworks helps clarify roles and maximize impact. With strong administrative support, these professionals can **improve school climate** and remain committed.

Partnering with an MSP like BlazerWorks gives districts increased access to qualified behavioral specialists, filling critical roles efficiently and keeping services uninterrupted.

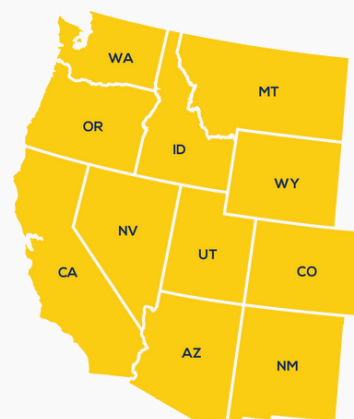
Top Behavior Specialist Graduate Programs

Grand Canyon State University
University of Southern California
Ivy Tech Community College

Geographic Workforce Trends

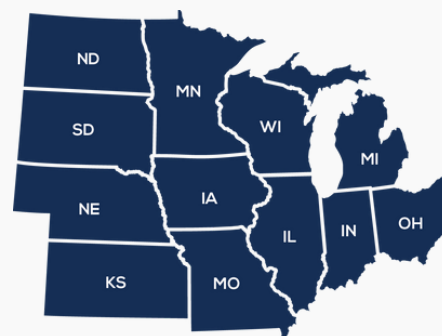
West Region

- Demand spiked sharply in California, with 19,500+ job postings in 2024—a 62% jump from the previous year.
- Even with competitive salaries, many positions remain unfilled due to limited candidate supply.
- A tight candidate pool drives strong competition between schools and clinics.



Midwest Region

- Despite fair pay, the region continues to face candidate shortages and low provider-to-student ratios.
- Job postings surged, with triple-digit increases in some states (133% in Washington, 153% in Utah).
- While the market is steady, competition is high as districts contend for limited specialists.



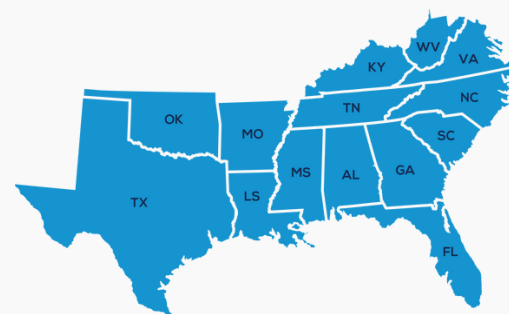
Northeast Region

- Job postings surged 45-70% in MA and NJ, reflecting rapidly increasing demand.
- With so few candidates, vacancies remain open longer and competition is fierce.
- Despite strong compensation, filling positions remains a challenge.



South Region

- Texas, Florida, and Georgia lead in behavior specialist employment.
- Southern BCBA's often earn well below coastal salary averages.
- Retention is impacted as professionals seek higher compensation or relocate to other states.
- High staff turnover and recruitment gaps frequently disrupt services.



Occupational Therapists

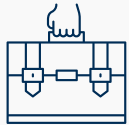
Occupational Therapists (OTs) help students with mental, developmental, and emotional challenges engage fully in daily school activities. As student needs increase, so does the demand for skilled OT professionals to deliver these essential services.

Nationwide Overview



122,773

Active Job Seekers
(Matching Online Profiles)



153,019

Occupational Therapists
Currently Employed



6,403

Competing Employers



137,819

Yearly Job Postings



~22,000

Occupational Therapists
Approaching Retirement Age



8.7%

Projected Job Growth (2024-2029)

Staffing Challenges

Occupational Therapists (OTs) are in high demand, with national job growth of 8.7% through 2033, and schools must compete with healthcare providers for talent. Vacancies can delay development of fine motor, sensory, and daily living skills and put IEP goals at risk, making adequate OT staffing essential for student progress and compliance.

Approach to Hiring Occupational Therapists

Recruitment of OTs is most effective when districts provide **competitive incentives** such as housing stipends, predictable schedules, and a focus on meaningful student outcomes.

Retention improves by **limiting travel between sites, managing caseloads, and promoting collaboration** with other providers. Opportunities for professional development and participation in cross-functional planning also enhance engagement and support long-term commitment to school-based positions.

BlazerWorks helps districts get access to and quickly hire and retain Occupational Therapists, connecting schools with qualified staffing partners and providing ongoing support to ensure **consistent, long-term service delivery** while easing administrative burdens.

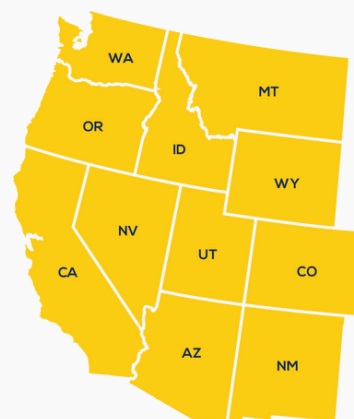
Top Occupational Therapy Graduate Programs

University of Southern California
University of St. Augustine for Health Sciences
New York University

Geographic Workforce Trends

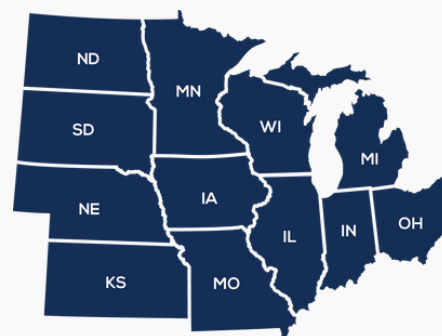
West Region

- Strong job growth is expected in California, with 1,000+ new OT positions.
- Schools face recruitment challenges as the demand for OTs remains elevated across school and medical sectors, competing directly with clinics and hospitals for talent.
- Candidate-driven market: multiple options for OTs, slowing hiring within schools.



Midwest Region

- Steady job growth projected, 8-12% across most states over 10 years.
- Regional occupational therapy programs contribute to maintaining workforce levels.
- Rural areas continue to encounter staffing gaps despite fewer vacancies than those seen in coastal or Sunbelt regions.



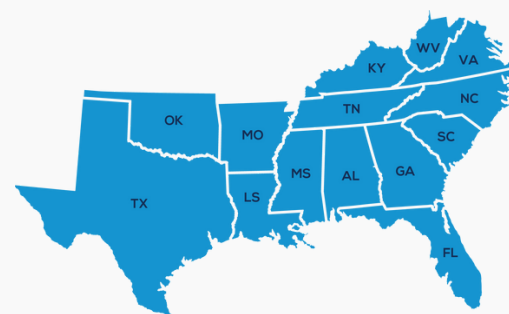
Northeast Region

- Demand for new hires is especially strong in densely populated urban and suburban areas.
- Employment projections indicate high growth consistent with national trends.
- Persistent shortages are driven by limited candidate availability and competition from the healthcare sector, even with substantial funding.



South Region

- Texas and Florida have the largest OT workforces in the U.S., with ~11,000 and ~7,500 positions, respectively, across all settings.
- OTs often leave for higher-paying regions or sectors.
- Burnout and turnover are influenced by large caseloads and limited pay.



Certified Occupational Therapy Assistants (COTAs)

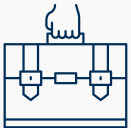
Certified Occupational Therapy Assistants (COTAs) play a crucial role in delivering therapy services that promote students' functional independence and daily participation. Gaining insight into this in-demand workforce is essential for ensuring consistent, high-quality care in schools.

Nationwide Overview



13,613

Active Job Seekers
(Matching Online Profiles)



48,897

COTAs Currently Employed



2,179

Competing Employers



21,414

Yearly Job Postings



~8,200

COTAs Approaching
Retirement Age



13.8%

Projected Job Growth (2024-2029)

Top COTA Graduate Programs

Keiser University
Herzing University
Pima Medical Institute

Staffing Challenges

Recruitment and retention of Certified Occupational Therapy Assistants (COTAs) vary regionally, with Western districts offering higher pay but facing strong competition, while Southern districts hire more frequently but struggle to retain staff.

COTAs are essential in delivering therapy under an OT's supervision, but underutilization can slow student progress. Attrition often stems from limited advancement, lower pay, and misaligned expectations, pushing many out of school-based roles.

Approach to Hiring COTAs

Districts can expand their COTA workforce by partnering with community colleges, offering mentorship, and clearly defining roles as hands-on contributors to student progress.

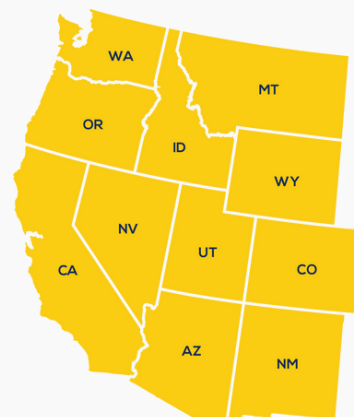
To support retention, regular check-ins, inclusion in team meetings, and recognition during IEP planning help COTAs feel valued and motivated to remain in school-based positions.

BlazerWorks supports districts by connecting them with qualified COTAs and providing ongoing support for consistent, high-quality therapy while easing administrative tasks.

Geographic Workforce Trends

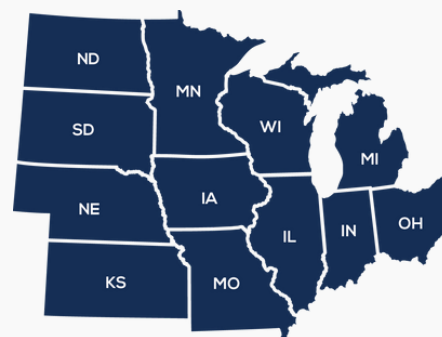
West Region

- Western states see rising demand for school therapy, with rapid growth in regions like Arizona.
- COTAs experience fast hiring timelines with hospitals and private providers.
- Cross-sector competition makes it difficult to attract and retain qualified candidates.



Midwest Region

- Compensation matches cost of living.
- While modest growth prevents large-scale shortages, staffing gaps remain a concern in rural areas.
- While hiring is stable, proactive workforce planning is needed to address retirements and growth in responsibilities.



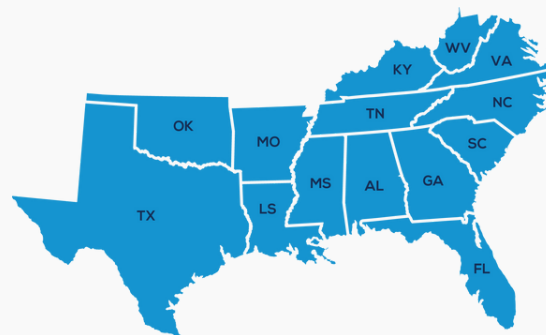
Northeast Region

- While job growth is moderate, recruitment conditions are relatively balanced, with vacancies less severe than those in the West or South.
- Competition for talent persists, most notably in urban and suburban school systems.



South Region

- Largest workforce nationwide, though compensation remains relatively low.
- Despite nominally high wages in certain Southern states (e.g., Arkansas, Louisiana), real earnings are diminished when factoring in cost-of-living differences.
- High student needs drive hiring, but turnover remains a challenge.



School Nurses

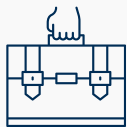
School-based Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs) and Registered Nurses (RNs) are essential to student health and safety, providing vital care and wellness support throughout school campuses. With consistent demand across the country, maintaining reliable staffing is crucial to safeguarding student well-being.

Nationwide Overview



1,684,043

Active Job Seekers
(Matching Online Profiles)



3,336,597

School Nurses
Currently Employed



45,639

Competing Employers



2,314,425

Yearly Job Postings



~838,000

School Nurses
Approaching Retirement Age



5.7%

Projected Job Growth (2024-2029)

Staffing Challenges

With demand consistently outpacing supply, hiring qualified school nurses remains a challenge, and shortages can impact both student health and school operations.

Understaffing among school nurses can lead to serious challenges, including delayed emergency response, medication errors, and reduced chronic care support. With many nurses covering multiple campuses, **care gaps** and **compliance risks**—such as 504 plan or state health violations—become more likely.

Approach to Hiring School Nurses

To attract and retain school nurses, districts can target candidates with pediatric or public health experience and highlight benefits like **predictable schedules** and the academic calendar. Flexible or part-time roles can also appeal to nurses coming from hospital settings.

Retention is strengthened when nurses are engaged in **professional networks**, supported in **maintaining certifications** like NCSN, and involved in school wellness initiatives.

Partnering with an MSP like BlazerWorks helps districts secure qualified nurses and ensure consistent student care.

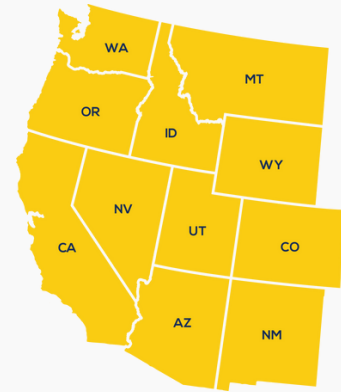
Top School Nurse Graduate Programs

Western Governors University
Chamberlain University
University of Phoenix

Geographic Workforce Trends

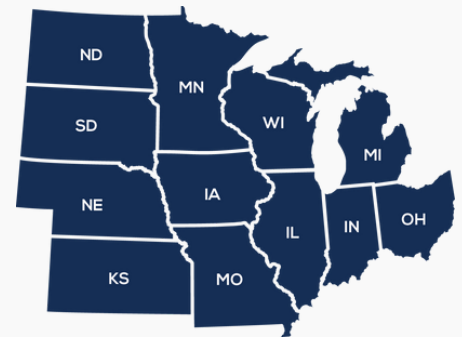
West Region

- Critical shortages persist despite high pay—only 33.3% of Western schools have a full-time nurse.
- High demand for RNs, with intense competition in fast-growing and urban areas.
- Among the lowest in the country, nurse-to-student ratios leave major service gaps.



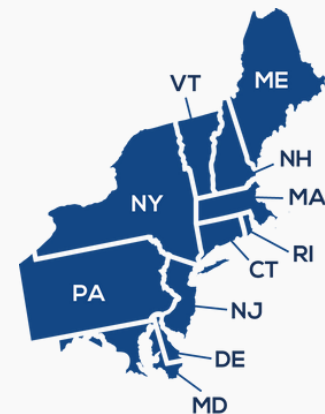
Midwest Region

- Full-time nurse coverage remains inconsistent, with 59.9% of schools staffed.
- Rural areas face the greatest impact from staff shortages and limited applicants.
- More stable staffing than in the West and South, but still under strain.



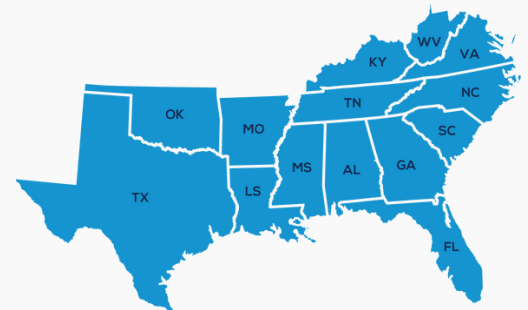
Northeast Region

- Strongest regional coverage: roughly 88.2% of schools have a full-time nurse.
- Well-funded programs and strong healthcare networks support improved hiring and retention.
- Fewer staffing gaps overall, though urban areas remain competitive.



South Region

- Largest workforce size due to the region's greater number of schools and students.
- Retention challenges arise as many nurses move to higher-paying hospital positions.
- Nurse coverage is still lacking, with one in five schools without a full-time nurse.



Physical Therapists

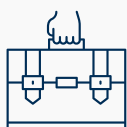
Physical Therapists (PTs) are essential in promoting students' mobility, physical development, and participation in everyday school activities. However, many districts continue to struggle with persistent shortages, making it challenging to meet increasing service demands.

Nationwide Overview



133,010

Active Job Seekers
(Matching Online Profiles)



251,549

Physical Therapists
Currently Employed



7,300

Competing Employers



268,364

Yearly Job Postings



~39,000

Physical Therapists
Approaching Retirement Age



10.1%

Projected Job Growth (2024-2029)

Staffing Challenges

Schools face persistent challenges hiring physical therapists, as **many choose higher-paying** private practice roles. Prolonged vacancies **disrupt student mobility goals and classroom access**, especially for those with physical disabilities, while competition from the healthcare sector further limits available talent.

Approach to Hiring Physical Therapists

Offering relocation assistance and transparent role expectations supports hiring, while fostering stability, professional collaboration, and inclusion within student support teams promotes long-term retention.

When districts partner with an education-only MSP like BlazerWorks, they will be connected with qualified physical therapists, streamlining recruitment and onboarding to ensure **consistent, high-quality student therapy with minimal disruption.**

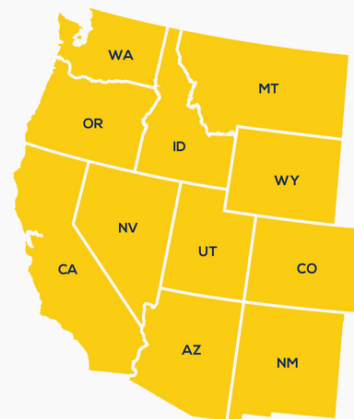
Top Physical Therapy Graduate Programs

University of Southern California
University of Pittsburgh
Northwestern University

Geographic Workforce Trends

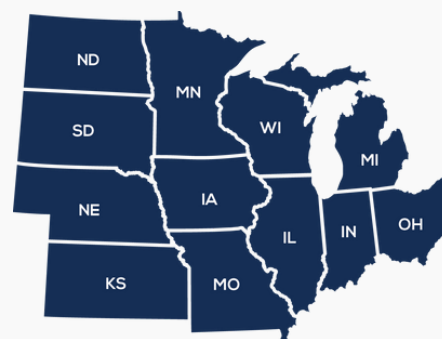
West Region

- Strong hiring demand: over 24,000 PTs work in California, with 19% growth projected by 2030.
- Strong private-sector options for PTs makes school recruitment difficult.
- Districts face difficulty filling PT roles, particularly in regions with higher living costs.



Midwest Region

- Anticipated growth of approximately 10-15%, slightly less than the national average.
- Relatively steady market, yet rural areas continue to struggle with shortages.
- A balanced region for staffing, with stable supply and demand conditions.



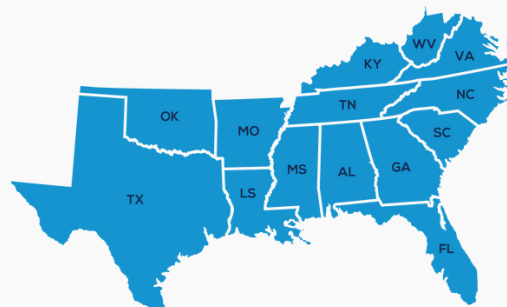
Northeast Region

- Fewer new graduates and moderate growth (~13%) create a constrained talent pipeline.
- Schools and healthcare systems compete intensely for candidates.
- Finding qualified candidates can take time due to persistent vacancies.



South Region

- Texas (~17,170 PTs) and Florida (~16,150 PTs) lead the nation in the PT workforce size.
- Retention is difficult as experienced PTs pursue higher pay in other states or private roles.
- High demand for positions, yet long-term staffing stability is difficult to maintain.



Physical Therapist Assistants

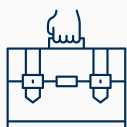
Physical Therapist Assistants (PTAs) work alongside licensed PTs to provide hands-on support that enhances students' mobility and overall well-being. As demand for school-based therapy increases, understanding PTA workforce trends is key to effective staffing and service continuity.

Nationwide Overview



60,136

Active Job Seekers
(Matching Online Profiles)



109,084

Physical Therapist Assistants
Currently Employed



7,979

Competing Employers



76,480

Yearly Job Postings



~15,000

Physical Therapist Assistants
Approaching Retirement Age



15.6%

Projected Job Growth (2024-2029)

Staffing Challenges

Districts can strengthen recruitment by partnering with PTA education programs and establishing clear **supervisory structures** under licensed PTs.

Defining PTA roles around measurable student outcomes enhances **effectiveness**. **Retention** improves when PTAs receive **training** in adaptive and assistive technologies, consistent feedback, and the resources needed to deliver high-quality interventions in school settings.

Approach to Hiring Physical Therapist Assistants

Turnover among PTAs remains high due to competition from outpatient clinics and hospitals, with southern districts facing the greatest **retention challenges** despite employing large numbers of staff. Their **support** is essential for meeting IEP mobility goals, particularly in districts where PTs are shared across multiple campuses.

Partnering with a Managed Service Provider like BlazerWorks helps districts meet growing service demands by connecting them with qualified Physical Therapist Assistants and maintaining continuity of mobility and physical support for students across all school settings.

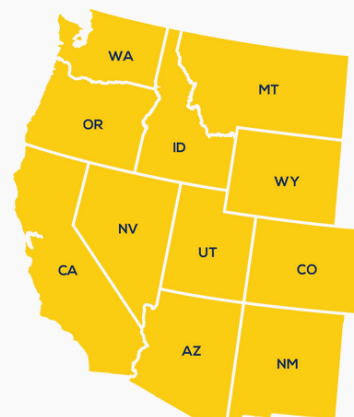
Top PTA Graduate Programs

Keiser University
Herzing University
Pima Medical Institute

Geographic Workforce Trends

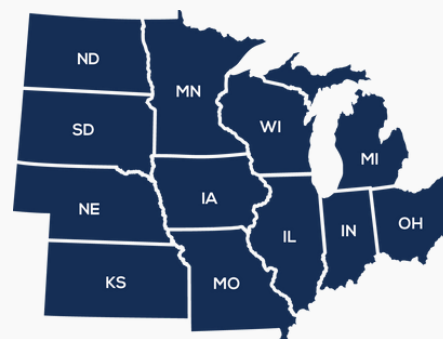
West Region

- Leading compensation and the fastest growth.
- Job growth far exceeding average, with many states anticipating 19%+ growth by 2033.
- Recruitment efforts in schools are hindered by competitive hiring from private clinics and hospitals.
- High demand and limited supply lead to frequent vacancies.



Midwest Region

- Balanced pay and steady growth, creating a cost-effective hiring environment.
- Projected growth of 10–15% over the decade.
- Stable recruitment, though rural shortages persist.
- Lower competition supports predictable, long-term workforce planning.



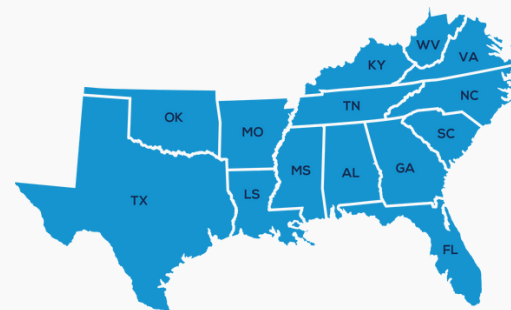
Northeast Region

- Stable hiring environment with competitive compensation.
- Growth similar to the Midwest, limited by a smaller talent pool.
- Fewer acute shortages, but forward planning remains important.
- Strong potential for long-term staffing stability with proactive HR practices.



South Region

- Texas and Florida have the largest PTA workforces in the U.S., with 10,110 and ~9,000 positions, respectively.
- Retention is a challenge as PTAs pursue higher-paying regions.
- Investing in retention strategies is essential for schools to compete with private sector and out-of-state opportunities.



Sign Language Interpreters

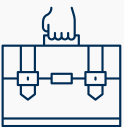
Sign Language Interpreters (SLIs) are vital in supporting communication for deaf and hard-of-hearing students, ensuring they have equal access to educational opportunities. As schools place greater emphasis on inclusivity, the demand for qualified interpreters continues to rise.

Nationwide Overview



2,241

Active Job Seekers
(Matching Online Profiles)



60,706

Sign Language Interpreters
Currently Employed



585

Competing Employers



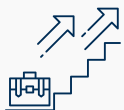
2,639

Yearly Job Postings



~13,000

Sign Language Interpreters
Approaching Retirement Age



6.8%

Projected Job Growth (2024-2029)

Staffing Challenges

Sign Language Interpreters are in particularly short supply, especially in rural districts and low-population states. Their absence can **violate FAPE under IDEA** for deaf and hard-of-hearing students, as other roles cannot legally substitute for qualified interpreters.

Recruitment is further challenged by the limited number of preparation programs and **lower pay** compared to freelance or video relay positions.

Approach to Hiring Sign Language Interpreters

Hiring and retaining Sign Language Interpreters starts with strong relationships. **Districts should establish pipelines** with interpreter training programs and use national registries to fill hard-to-staff roles. Retention goes beyond placement—supporting NIC renewals, involving interpreters in student planning, and **recognizing them as essential team members** of the educational team fosters long-term commitment.

With SLIs in high demand, partnering with an MSP like BlazerWorks gives districts access to a vetted network of credentialed interpreters, helping ensure students and families receive consistent, reliable support across the entire school year.

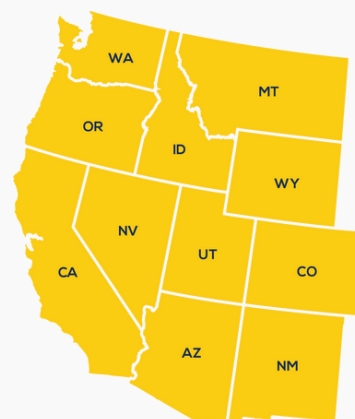
Top Sign Language Interpreter Graduate Programs

Gallaudet University
Western Oregon University
Rochester Institute of Technology

Geographic Workforce Trends

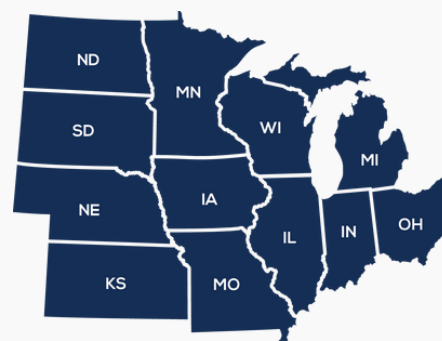
West Region

- Well above the national average pay for interpreters.
- Strong demand fueled by growing populations and active Deaf community advocacy.
- Despite competitive wages, many districts continue to face challenges filling certified interpreter positions.



Midwest Region

- Steady growth and moderate compensation.
- Compared to coastal regions, the market is more balanced, yet rural areas remain underserved.
- Recruitment conditions are steady, but rising demand may create shortages in smaller districts.



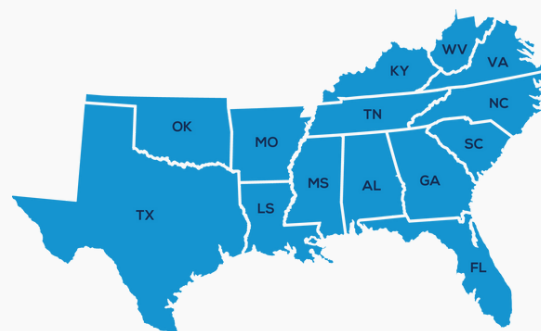
Northeast Region

- Salaries vary widely by state.
- Demand remains steady, without the high growth of the South or the staffing challenges of the West.
- Strong salaries in metro districts, but staffing consistency requires advance planning.



South Region

- Project job growth for SLIs is the highest, reaching approximately 24% in some regions.
- Retention is a challenge as lower pay drives certified interpreters toward freelance or video roles.
- Schools face potential gaps in interpreter coverage due to growing need and modest salaries.



Should Your District Partner with a Managed Service Provider (MSP)?

A Strategic Comparison for Education Leaders

With growing student needs, workforce shortages, and administrative strain, many districts are rethinking how they build and sustain their teams. While internal hiring remains important, staffing agencies and Managed Service Providers (MSPs) offer flexible, scalable solutions for filling critical roles. **Here's how they compare:**

	BlazerWorks' MSP	Staffing Agency	Internal Hiring
Time-to-Fill	Rapid—leverages multiple staffing agencies	Fast—often days to weeks	Longer—typically weeks to months
Access to Talent	Nationwide network of staffing agencies	Nationwide pool from a single agency	Limited to candidates who apply directly
Credentialing & Compliance	Extra oversight with centralized credentialing team managing all staffing agencies	Managed by the staffing agency	Requires internal HR oversight
Cost Structure	Transparent, consolidated billing; flexible pricing models	Fixed hourly and contract rates with admin included	Salary + benefits + hiring + onboarding costs
Flexibility	Highly scalable for short- or long-term needs across multiple positions	Scalable for individual roles or short-term needs	Fixed FTE model; harder to adjust mid-year
Administrative Burden	Greatly reduced—handles sourcing, onboarding, staffing agency management, timekeeping, & reporting	Reduced—agency handles onboarding & documentation	Managed internally by HR & administrative teams
Staff Retention	Long-term partnerships offering stability, professional advisory, & wraparound support	Professionals often receive agency support & development	Retention dependent on district resources
Workforce Groups	Optimized—coordinates coverage across agencies to prevent service disruption	Ideal for covering short-term leave, mid-year exits, & virtual roles	Challenging to backfill quickly without disruption

Why Choose BlazerWorks

When it comes to special education and student support staffing, BlazerWorks delivers more than service—we provide a true partnership built on insight, efficiency, and results. With over 30 years of experience in special education staffing, our education-only MSP program has helped districts nationwide streamline staffing operations and strengthen support for their students.



Nationwide Network

BlazerWorks connects districts with a nationwide network of education staffing partners—supported by regional and local teams who understand the unique dynamics of your schools and community.



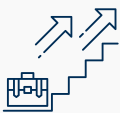
Specialized Talent On-Demand

We help districts secure hard-to-find special education and related service providers, including therapists, school nurses, behavioral health specialists, and more. All professionals sourced through our staffing partner network are licensed, experienced, and prepared to make an immediate impact.



Single Dedicated Point of Contact

Your dedicated BlazerWorks point of contact is supported by talent management and clinical advisory teams who provide guidance and consultation to ensure that we customize the right MSP program to meet the staffing needs of your district.



Speed & Scalability

Our MSP infrastructure enables you to address critical staffing gaps and scale quickly and confidently. With access to thousands of pre-vetted education professionals across our staffing partners, we ensure you get the right professionals—right when you need them.



Full-Service Workforce Support

BlazerWorks centralizes and manages credentialing, compliance, onboarding, timesheet management, and contractor support—removing administrative strain from your team so you can stay focused on student outcomes.

Proven Support for Every District

From rural districts to large metropolitan systems, education leaders rely on BlazerWorks to deliver an MSP solution that adapts and scales with their evolving needs. **When it's time to streamline staffing, reduce administrative load, and ensure you have the staff to support every student's needs, BlazerWorks is the partner districts trust.**

160+ Special Education Roles Filled Through Strategic MSP Partnership

Our Partner

The 2nd largest and most diverse school district in Missouri with **30+ schools and serving 21,000+ students** and families.

Key Results

Since becoming the district's sole Managed Service Provider in 2024, BlazerWorks has:

- Successfully managed **160+ special education placements**
- **98% fulfillment rate**
- **24-48 hours average** from requisition to interview
- **Eliminated redundant administrative tasks**, allowing district staff to focus on student outcomes
- **Streamlined** job order fulfillment, invoicing, and timekeeping, reducing billing errors and reconciliation delays
- Provided **full visibility** across all staffing agency partners, enabling better oversight, compliance, and benchmark reporting
- Implemented **tailored professional development** for the district's internal staff

“BlazerWorks ensures we have the right talent to fill our roles. They have also provided tailored professional development for our staff. The training equipped them with valuable knowledge and practical strategies they can immediately apply to their daily work, enhancing their ability to support students effectively and confidently.”

HR Director of Wellness and Development

The Challenge

As a district with diverse and evolving needs, the client depended on multiple staffing agencies to fill critical roles in special education. While this approach ensured broad coverage, it created significant administrative strain and roles still went unfilled. District personnel were spending excessive time managing open jobs, timesheets, tracking multiple invoices, and coordinating communication across multiple agencies and contacts — often at the expense of other mission-critical responsibilities. The complexity of using multiple agencies made it difficult to achieve efficiency, consistency, or clear oversight.

Our Solution

Several of our staffing partners, already working with the district, recommended BlazerWorks' Managed Service Provider (MSP) program as a option to create more efficiency. Our team conducted a thorough needs assessment to understand the district's goals and opportunities. Following a competitive evaluation, BlazerWorks was awarded the contract as the sole MSP for the district. Through implementing a customized MSP program, we assumed full responsibility for coordinating and overseeing all education staffing leveraging our nationwide network of staffing partners. This partnership has transformed the district's contract staffing program, turning a previously fragmented process into a unified, transparent, and efficient program ensuring critical roles are filled.

How a Minnesota School District Filled 170+ Special Education Positions

Our Partner

One of the largest Minnesota school districts serving more than **30,000 students** and families through **35+ schools**.

Key Results

Since becoming the district's sole MSP in 2024 BlazerWorks has:

- Managed **170+ placements**, including special education teachers, paraprofessionals, BCBAs, COTAs, SLPs, SLPA's, virtual IEP writers, and captionists.
- Implemented a paraprofessional program to **reduce turnover and increase retention**.
- Supported their **Para to Teacher Program hiring initiatives**.
- **Simplified contract staffing** for principals and directors while aligning with the district's complex structure.

"I have enjoyed collaborating with you and have appreciated all BlazerWorks has done for our schools over these past 8 years."

*Director of Special Education
for Secondary Schools*

The Challenge

Our partner was spending significant time managing multiple staffing agencies to support their district's special education staffing needs. From tracking multiple timesheets and invoices to coordinating communication across agencies, the complexity of this approach made it difficult to maintain efficiency, consistency, and clear oversight of their contract staffing usage.

Our Solution

BlazerWorks partnered with the district beginning in 2018 to implement a streamlined managed services program (MSP), consolidating all staffing agencies under a single point of contact.

Through this program:

- All timesheets and invoices are managed in one easy-to-use vendor management system (VMS), eliminating the need to track and reconcile multiple and varied systems.
- BlazerWorks coordinates directly with school principals reducing the administrative burden on Special Education Directors and district leadership.
- The district gains clear visibility and consistency across its contract staffing agencies while maintaining flexibility.

Kansas City School District Secures **137+** Critical Roles with BlazerWorks MSP

Our Partner

Our partner is a diverse, urban district in Kansas City serving approximately **22,000 students** across **44 schools**.

Key Results

- Average Fill Rate: **83%**
- Average Time to Fill: **48–72 hours**
- **137 positions** filled and managed
- Positions include:
 - School RBT, RN, LPN, CNA, Paraprofessional, Teacher, Special Education, and School Social Worker

The Challenge

Prior to partnering with BlazerWorks, the district was managing a large number of staffing agencies, creating significant operational strain for the special education team and making it difficult to ensure consistency, accountability, and compliance. At the same time, the district was required to adopt a Board-approved universal rate sheet, adding further complexity to vendor coordination and cost control.

The district needed a more efficient, centralized approach for its staffing program - one that could align all agencies to new pricing requirements, reduce administrative burden, and ensure students continued receiving uninterrupted, high quality services.

“Your partnership is a blessing, providing us with the human capital we require to serve our community.”
Coordinator, Special Education

Our Solution

BlazerWorks was selected as the district’s Managed Service Provider (MSP) in 2024 to centralize and streamline its staffing providers. We implemented a single point of contact to manage all staffing agencies, eliminating fragmented communication and creating clear, consistent processes across the district.

BlazerWorks rolled out the Board-approved universal rate sheet to all existing vendors and managed compliance conversations on the district’s behalf. We also identified gaps in agency capabilities and brought in additional staffing partners to improve fill rates, ensuring uninterrupted services for students.

Our partnership has enabled district leaders to focus more on supporting students and staff rather than navigating staffing logistics. Over time, our dedicated Account Manager has become deeply integrated into the district’s culture, building trust by understanding their values, priorities, and people.

As an invested partner in the community, BlazerWorks sponsored the district’s local charity golf event benefiting education services, providing on-site support and an additional monetary contribution. Today, BlazerWorks is the exclusive MSP for the district’s Special Education department, while also supporting their Health Services and Early Childhood departments.

Your Next Step Toward Stronger Staffing

As districts navigate evolving staffing demands—whether immediate vacancies or long-term planning—BlazerWorks offers a streamlined path to support. Our customizable MSP Solution gives you direct access to expert guidance and a coordinated network of local, regional, and national education staffing partners.

When you connect with BlazerWorks, our team takes the time to understand your goals, evaluate your needs, and recommend a tailored approach that keeps your focus where it belongs: supporting students and empowering your staff.



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info@blazerworks.com



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